

# The Looking-Glass

By J. D. Beresford

This was the first communication that had come from her aunt in Rachel's lifetime.

"I think your aunt has forgiven me, at last," her father said as he passed the letter across the table.

Rachel looked first at the signature. It seemed strange to see her own name there. It was as if her individuality, her very identity, was impugned by the fact that there should be two Rachel Deanes. Moreover there was a likeness between her aunt's autograph and her own, a characteristic turn in the looping of the letters, a hint of the same decisiveness and precision. If Rachel had been educated fifty years earlier, she might have written her name in just that manner.

"You're very like her in some ways," her father said, as she still stared at the signature.

Rachel's eyelids drooped and her expression indicated a faint, suppressed intolerance of her father's remark. He said the same things so often, and in so precisely the same tone, that she had formed a habit of automatically rejecting the truth of certain of his statements. He had always appeared to her as senile. He had been over fifty when she was born, and ever since she could remember she had doubted the correctness of his information. She was, she had often told herself, "a born sceptic; an ultra-modern." She had a certain veneration for the more distant past, but none for her father's period. "Victorianism" was to her a term of abuse. She had long since condemned alike the ethic and the æsthetic of the nineteenth century as represented by her father's opinions; so, that, even now, when his familiar comment coincided so queerly with her own thought, she instinctively disbelieved him. Yet, as always, she was gentle in her answer. She condescended from the heights of her youth and vigour to pity him.

"I should think you must almost have forgotten what Aunt Rachel was like, dear," she said. "How many years is it since you've seen her?"

"More than forty; more than forty," her father said, ruminating profoundly. "We disagreed, we invariably disagreed. Rachel always prided herself on being so modern. She read Huxley and Darwin and things like that. Altogether beyond me, I admit. Still, it seems to me that the old truths have endured, and will—in spite of all—in spite of all."

Rachel straightened her shoulders and lifted her head; there was disdain in her face, but none in her voice as she replied:

"And so it seems that she wants to see me."

She was excited at the thought of meeting this traditional, this almost mythical aunt whom she had so often heard about. Sometimes she had wondered if the personality of remarkable relative had not been a figment of her father's imagination, long pondered, and reconstructed out half-forgotten material. But this letter of hers that now lay on the breakfast table was admirable in character. There was something of condescension and intolerance expressed in the very restraint of its tone. She had written a kindly letter, but the kindness had an air of pity. It was all consistent enough with what her father had told her.

Mr. Deane came out of his reminiscences with a sigh.

“Yes, yes; she wants to see you, my dear,” he said. “I think you had better accept this invitation to stay with her. She—she is rich, almost wealthy; and I, as you know, have practically nothing to leave you—practically nothing. If she took a fancy to you . . .”

He sighed again, and Rachel knew that for the hundredth time he was regretting his own past weakness. He had so foolish in money matters, frittering away his once considerable capital in aimless speculations. He and his sister had shared equally under their father’s will, but while he had been at last compelled to sink the greater part of what was left to him in an annuity, she had probably increased her original inheritance.

“I’ll certainly go, if you can spare me for a whole fortnight,” Rachel said. “I’m all curiosity to see this remarkable aunt. By the way, how old is she?”

“There were only fifteen months between us,” Mr. Deane said, “so she must be,—dear me, yes;—she must be seventy-three. Dear, dear. Fancy Rachel being seventy-three! I always think of her as being about your age. It seems so absurd to think of her as *old* . . .”

He continued his reflections, but Rachel was not listening. He was asking for the understanding of the young; quite unaware of his senility, reaching out over half a century to try to touch the comprehension and sympathy of his daughter. But she was already bent on her own adventure, looking forward eagerly to a visit to London that promised delights other than the inspection of the mysterious, traditional aunt whom she had so long known by report.

For this invitation had come very aptly. Rachel pondered that, later in the morning, with a glow of ecstatic resignation to her charming fate. She found the guiding hand of a romantic inevitability in the fact that she and Adrian Flemming were to meet so soon. It had seemed so unlikely that they would see each other again for many months. They had only met three times; but they *knew*, although their friendship had been too green for either of them to admit the knowledge before he had gone back to town. He had, indeed, hinted far more in his two letters than he had ever dared to say. He was sensitive, he lacked self-confidence; but Rachel adored him for just those failings she criticised so hardly in her father. She took out her letters and re-read them, thrilling with the realisation that in her answer she would have such a perfectly amazing surprise for him. She would refer to it quite casually, somewhere near the end. She would write:

“By the way, it’s just possible that we may meet again before long as I am going to stay with my aunt, Miss Deane, in Tavistock Square.” He would understand all that lay behind such an apparently careless reference, for she had told him that she “never went to London,” had only once in her life ever been there.

She was in her own room, and she stood, now, before the cheval glass and studied herself; raising her chin and slightly pursing her lips, staring superciliously at her own image under half-lowered eyelids. Candidly, she admired herself; but she could not help that assumption of a disdainful criticism. It seemed to give her confidence in her own integrity; hiding that annoying shadow of doubt which sometimes fell upon her when she caught sight of her reflection by chance and unexpectedly.

But no thought of doubt flawed her satisfaction this morning. A sense of power came to her, a tranquil realisation that she could charm Adrian as she would. With a graceful, habitual gesture she put up her hand and lightly touched her cheek with a soft, caressing movement of her finger-tips.

The elderly parlour-maid showed Rachel straight to her bedroom when she arrived at Tavistock Square, indicating on the way the extensive-looking first-floor drawing-room, in which tea and her first sight of the wonderful aunt would await Rachel in half an hour. She had been eager and excited. The air and promise of London had thrilled her, but she found some influence in the atmosphere of the big house that was vaguely repellent, almost sinister.

Her bedroom was expensively furnished and beautifully kept; some of the pieces were, she supposed, genuine antiques, perhaps immensely valuable. But how could she ever feel at home there? She was hampered by the necessity for moving circumspectly among this aged delicate Stuff; so wonderfully preserved and yet surely fragile and decrepit at the heart. That spindling *escritoire*, for instance, and that mincing Louis Quinze settee, ought to be taking their well-earned leisure in some museum. It would be indecent to write at the one or sit on the other. They were relics of the past, foolishly pretending an ability for service when their life had been sapped by dry-rot and their original functions outlived.

“Well, if ever I have a house of my own,” Rachel thought regarding these ancient splendours, “I’ll furnish it with something I shan’t be afraid of.”

With a gesture of dismissal she turned and looked out of the window. From the square came the sounds of a motor drawing up at a neighbouring house; she heard the throbbing of the engine, the slam of the door, and then the strong, sonorous tones of a man’s voice. That was her proper *milieu*, she reflected, among the strong vital things. Even after twenty minutes in that bedroom she had begun to feel enervated, as if she herself were also beginning to suffer from dry-rot.

She was anxious and uneasy as she went slowly downstairs to the drawing-room. Her anticipations of this meeting with her intimidating, wealthy aunt had changed within the last half-hour. Her first idea of Miss Deane had been of a robust, stout woman, frank in her speech and inclined to be very critical of the newly found niece whom she had chosen to inspect. Now, she was prepared rather to expect a fragile, rather querulous old lady, older even than her years; an aunt to be talked to in a lowered voice and treated with the same delicate care that must be extended to her furniture.

Rachel paused with her hand on the drawing-room door, and sighed at the thought of all the repressions and nervous strains that this visit might have in store for her.

She entered the room almost on tiptoe, and then stood stock-still, suddenly shocked and bewildered with surprise. Whatever she had expected, it was not this. For a moment she was unable to believe that the sprightly, painted and bedizened figure before her could possibly be that of her aunt. Her head was crowned with an exuberant brown wig, her heavy eyebrows were grotesquely blackened, her hollow cheeks stiff with powder, her lips brightened to a fantastic scarlet. And she was posed there, standing before the tea-table with her head a little back, looking at her niece with a tolerant condescension, with the air of a superb young beauty, self-conscious and proud of her

“So you’re my semi-mythical niece,” she said, putting up her lorgnette. “I’m glad at any rate to find that you’re not, after all, a fabulous creature.” She spoke in a high, rather thin voice that produced an effect of effort, as if she were playing on the top octave of a flute.

Rachel had never in her life felt so gauche and awkward.

“Yes—I—you know, aunt, I had begun to wonder if you were not fabulous, too,” she tried, desperately anxious to seem at ease. She was afraid to look at that, to her, grotesque figure, afraid to show by some unconscious reflex her dislike for its ugliness. As she took the bony, ring-bedecked hand that was held out to her, she kept her eyes away from her aunt’s face.

Miss Deane, however, would not permit that evasion.

“Hold your head up, my dear, I want to look at you,” she said, and when Rachel reluctantly obeyed, continued, “Yes, you’re more like my father than your own, which means that you’re like me, for I took after him, too, so every very one said.”

Rachel drew in her breath with a little gasp. Was it possible that her aunt could imagine for one instant that there was any likeness between them?

“Our—our names are the same,” she said nervously.

Miss Deane nodded. “There’s more in it than that,” she said with a touch of complacency; “and there’s no reason why there shouldn’t be. It’s good Mendelism that you should take after an aunt rather than either of your parents.”

“And you really think that we are alike?” Rachel asked feebly, looking in vain for any sign of a quizzical humour her aunt’s face.

Deane looked down under her half-lowered eyelids with a proud air of tolerance. “Ah, well, a little without doubt,” she said, as though the advantages of the difference were on her own side. “Now sit down and have your tea, dear.”

Rachel obeyed with a vague wonder in her mind as to why that look of tolerance should be so familiar. It seemed to her as if it was something she had felt rather than seen; and as tea progressed she found herself half furtively studying the raddled ugliness of her aunt’s face in the search for possible relics of a beautiful youth.

“Ah, I think you’re beginning to see it, too,” Miss Deane said, marking her niece’s scrutiny. “It grows on one, doesn’t it?”

Rachel shivered slightly. “Yes, it does,” she said experimentally, watching her aunt’s face for some indication of a malicious teasing humour. It seemed to her so incredible that this hideous parody of her own youth could honestly believe that any physical likeness *still* existed.

Miss Deane, however, was faintly simpering. “I have been told that I’ve changed very little,” she said; and Rachel suppressed a sigh of impatience at the reflection that she was expected to play up to this absurd fantasy.

“Of course, I can’t judge of that,” she said, “as we met for the first time five minutes ago.”

“No, no, you can’t judge of *that*,” her aunt replied, with the half-bashful emphasis of one who awaits a compliment.

Rachel decided to plunge. “But you do look extraordinarily young for your age still,” she lied desperately.

Miss Deane straightened her back and toyed with a teaspoon. “I have always taken great care of myself,” she said.

Unquestionably she believed it, Rachel decided. This was no pose, but a horrible piece of self-deception. This raddled, repulsive creature had actually persuaded herself into the delusion that she still had the appearance of a young girl. Heaven help her if that delusion were ever shattered!

Yet outside this one obsession Miss Deane, as Rachel soon discovered, had a clear and well-balanced mind. For, now that she had received her desired assurance from this new quarter, she began to talk of other Things. Her boasted "modernism," it is true, had a smack of the stiff, broadcloth savour of the eighties, but she had a point of view that coincided far more nearly with Rachel's own than did that of her father. Her aunt, at least, had outlived the worst superstitions and inanities of the mid-Victorians

Indeed, by the time tea was finished Rachel's spirits were beginning to revive. She would have to be very careful in her treatment of her aunt, but on the whole it would not perhaps be so bad; and presently she would see Adrian again. She would almost certainly get a letter from him by the last post, making some appointment to meet her, and after that she would introduce him to Miss Deane. She had a feeling that Miss Deane would not raise any objection; that she might even welcome the visit of a young man to her house.

The time was passing so easily that Rachel was surprised when she heard the gong sound.

"Does that mean it's time to dress already?" she asked.

Miss Deane nodded. "You've an hour before dinner," said, "but I'll go up now. I like to be leisurely over my toilet."

She rose as she spoke, but as she crossed the room, she paused with what seemed to be a little jerk of surprise as she caught sight of her own reflection in a tall mirror above one of the gilt-legged console tables against the wall. Then she deliberately stopped, turned and surveyed herself, half contemptuously, under lowered eyelids, with a set of her head and back that belied plainly enough the pout of her critical lips. And having admired that haggard image, she lifted her wasted hand and delicately touched her whitened, hollow cheeks with the tips of her heavily jewelled fingers.

Rachel stared in horror. It seemed to her just then as if the reflection of her aunt in the mirror was indeed that of herself grown instantly and mysteriously old. For now, whether because the reversal of the image by the mirror or because of that perfect duplication of her own characteristic pose and gesture, the likeness had flashed out clear and unmistakable. She saw that her father had been right. Once, incalculable ages ago, this repulsive old woman might have been very like herself.

She slipped quickly out of the room and ran upstairs. She felt that she must instantly put that question to the test; search herself for the signs of coming age as she had so recently searched her aunt's face for the indications of her former youth.

But when, with an effect of challenge, she scrutinised her reflection in the tall cheval glass, the likeness appeared to have vanished. She saw her head thrust a little forward, her arms stiff, and in her whole pose an air of vigorous defiance. She was prepared to admit that she was ugly at that moment, if the ugliness was of another kind than that she had seen downstairs. No! She drew herself up, more than a little relieved by the result of her test. The likeness was all a fancy, the result of suggestions, first by her father and then by Miss Deane herself. And she need at least have no fear that she was ugly. Why . . .

She paused suddenly, and the light died out of her face. Her image was looking back at her stiffly, superciliously, with, so it seemed to her, the contemptible simper of one who still fatuously admires the thing that has long since lost its charm. She caught her breath and clenched her hands, drawing down her rather heavy eyebrows in an expression of

angry scorn. "Oh! never, never, never again, will I look at myself like that," Rachel vowed fiercely.

She was to find, however, before this first evening was over, that the mere avoidance of that one pose before the mirror would not suffice to lay the ghost of the suspicion that was beginning to haunt her.

At the very outset a new version of the likeness was presented to her when, during the first course of dinner, Miss Deane, with a lowering frown of her blackened eyebrows, found occasion to reprimand the elderly parlour-maid. For a moment Rachel was again puzzled by the intriguing sense of the familiar, before she remembered her own scowl at the looking-glass an hour before. "Do I really frown like that?" she thought. And on the instant found herself *feeling* like her aunt.

That, indeed, was the horror that, despite every effort of resistance, deepened steadily as the evening wore on. Miss Deane had, without question, lost every trace of her beauty; but her character, her spirit was unchanged, and it was, so Rachel increasingly believed, the very spit and replica of her own.

They had the same characteristic gestures and expressions; the look of kindly tolerance with which her aunt regarded Rachel was precisely the same as that with which Rachel regarded her father. When her aunt's voice dropped in speaking from the rather shrill, strained tone that was obviously not natural to her, Rachel heard the inflexions of her own voice. And as her knowledge of Miss Deane grew, so, also, did that haunting unpleasant feeling of looking and speaking in precisely the same manner. It seemed to her as if she were being invaded by an alien personality; as if the character she had known and cherished all her life were no longer her own, but merely casual inheritance from some unknown ancestor. Her very integrity was threatened by her consciousness of that eness, her pride of individuality. She was not, after all, a unique personality, but merely another version—if she were even that?—of a Miss Rachel Deane born in the middle of the previous century.

Moreover, with that growing recognition of likeness in character, there came the thought that she in time might look even as her aunt looked at this present moment. She also would lose her beauty, until no facial resemblance could be traced between the hag she was and the beauty had once been. For, through all her torment, Rachel proudly clung to the certainty that, physically at least, there was no sort of likeness between her aunt and herself.

Miss Deane's belief in that matter, however, was soon roved to be otherwise; for when they were alone together the drawing-room after dinner, and the topic so inevitably present to both their minds came to the surface of conversation, she unexpectedly said: "But we're evidently the poles apart in character and manner, my dear."

"Oh! do you think so?" Rachel exclaimed. "I—it's a queer thing to say perhaps—but I curiously feel like you, aunt; when you speak sometimes and—and when I watch the way you do things."

Miss Deane shook her head. "I admit the physical resemblance," she said; "otherwise, my dear, we are utterly different."

Did she too, Rachel wondered, resent the aspersion of her integrity?

By the last post Rachel received her expected letter from Adrian Flemming. Her aunt separated it from the others brought in by her maid and passed it across to her niece with a slight hint of displeasure in her face. "Miss Rachel Deane, *junior*," she said. "Really, it

hadn't occurred to me how difficult it will be to distinguish our letters. I hope my friends won't take to addressing me as Miss Deane, *senior*. Properly, of course, I am Miss Deane, and you Miss Rachel, but I'll admit there's sure to be some confusion. Now, my dear, I expect you're tired. You'd better run up to bed."

Rachel was willing enough to go. She was glad to have an opportunity to read her letter in solitude; she was even more glad to get away from the company of this living echo of herself. "I believe I should go mad if I had to live with her," she reflected. "I should get into the way of copying her. I should begin to grow old before my time."

When she reached her bedroom, she put down her letter unopened on the toilet-table and once more stared searchingly at her own reflection in the mirror. Was there any least trace of a physical likeness, she asked herself; and began in imagination to follow the possible stages of the change that time would inevitably work upon her. She shrugged her shoulders. If there were indeed any sort of facial resemblance between herself and her aunt, no one would ever see it except in Miss Deane, and she was obsessed with a senile vanity. Yet was it, after all, Rachel began to wonder, an unnatural obsession? Might she not in time suffer from it herself? The change would be so slow, so infinitely gradual; and always one would be cherishing the old, loved image of youth and beauty, falling in love with it, like a deluded Hyacinth, and coming to be deceived by the fantasy of an unchanging appearance of youth. Looking always for the desired thing, she would suffer from the hallucination that the thing existed in fact, and imagine that the only artifice needed to perfect the illusion was a touch of paint and powder. No doubt her aunt—perhaps searching her own image in the mirror at this moment—saw not herself but a picture of her niece. She was hypnotized by the suggestion of a pose and the desire of her own mind. In time, Rachel herself might also become the victim of a similar illusion!

Oh! it was horrible! With a shudder, she picked up her letter and turned away from the looking-glass. She would forget that ghastly warning in the thought of the joys proper to her youth. She would think of Adrian and of her next meeting with him. She opened her letter to find that he had, rather timorously, suggested that she should meet him the next afternoon—at the Marble Arch at three o'clock, if he heard nothing from her in the meantime.

For a few minutes she lost herself in delighted anticipation, and then slowly, insidiously, a new speculation crept into her mind. What would be the effect upon Adrian if he saw her and her aunt together? Would he recognise likeness and, anticipating the movement of more than half a century, see her in one amazing moment as she would presently become? And, in any case, what a terrible train of suggestion might not be started in his mind by the impression left upon him by the old woman? Once he had seen Miss Deane, Rachel's every gesture would serve to remind him of that repulsive image of raddled, deluded age. It might well be that, in time, he would come to see Rachel as she would presently be rather than as she was. It would be a hideous reversal of the old romance; instead of seeing the girl in the old woman, he would foresee the harridan in the girl!

That picture presented itself to Rachel with a quite appalling effect of conviction. She suddenly remembered a case she had known that had remarkable points of resemblance—the case of a rather pretty girl with an unpleasant younger brother who, so she had heard it said, "put men off his sister" because of the facial likeness between them. She was pretty and he was ugly, but they were unmistakably brother and sister.

Oh! it would be nothing less than folly to let Adrian and her aunt meet, Rachel decided. In imagination, she could follow the process of his growing dismay; she could see his puzzled stare as he watched Miss Deane, and struggled to fix that tantalising suggestion of likeness to some one he knew; his flash of illumination as he solved the puzzle and turned with that gentle, winning smile of his to herself; and then the progress of his disillusionment as, day by day, he realised more plainly the intriguing similarities of expression and gesture, until he felt that he was making love to the spirit of an aged spinster temporarily disguised behind the appearance of beauty.

### III

Rachel had believed on the first night of her arrival in Tavistock Square that, so far as her love affair was concerned, she would be able to avoid all danger by keeping her lover and her aunt unknown to each other. She very soon found, however, that the spell Miss Deane seemed to have put upon her was not to be laid by any effect of mere distance.

She and Adrian met rather shyly at their first appointment. Both of them were a little conscious of having been overbold, one for having suggested, and the other for having agreed to so significant an assignation. And for the first few minutes their talk was nothing but a quick, nervous reminiscence of their earlier meetings. They had to recover the lost ground on which they had parted before they could go on to any more intimate knowledge of each other. But for some reason she had not yet realised, Rachel found it very difficult to recover that lost ground. She knew that she was being unnecessarily distant and cold, and though she inwardly accused herself of "putting on absurd airs," her manner, as she was uncomfortably aware, remained at once stilted and detached.

"I suppose it's because I'm self-conscious before all these people," she thought, and, indeed, Hyde Park was very full that afternoon.

And it was Adrian who first, a little desperately, tried to reach across the barrier that was dividing them.

"You're different, rather, in town," he began shyly. "Is it the effect of your aunt's grandeurs?"

"Am I different? I feel exactly the same," Rachel replied mechanically.

"You didn't think it was rather impudent of me to ask you to meet me here, did you?" he went on anxiously.

She shook her head emphatically. "Oh! no, it wasn't that," she said.

"But then you admit that it was something?" he pleaded.

"The people, perhaps," she admitted. "I—I feel so exposed to the public view."

"We might walk across the Park if you preferred it," he suggested; "and have tea at that place in Kensington Gardens? It would be quieter there."

She agreed to that willingly. She wanted to be alone with him. The crowd made her nervous and self-conscious this afternoon. Always before, she had delighted in moving - among a crowd, appreciating and enjoying the casual glances of admiration she received. Today she was afraid being noticed. She had a queer feeling that these smart, clever people in the Park might see through her, if they too closely. Just what they would discover she did not know; but she suffered a disquieting qualm of uneasiness whenever she saw any one observing her with attention.

They cut across the grass and, leaving the Serpentine on their left, found two chairs in a quiet spot under the trees. Here, at least, they were quite unwatched, but still Rachel found it impossible to regain the relations that had existed between her and Adrian when they had parted a month earlier. And Adrian, too, it seemed, was staring at her with a new, inquisitive scrutiny.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she broke out at last. "Do you notice any difference in me, or what? You—you've been staring so!"

"Difference!" he repeated. "Well, I told you just now, didn't I, that you were different this afternoon?"

"Yes, but in what way?" she asked. "Do I—do I look different?"

He paused a little judiciously over his answer. "N—no," he hesitated. "There's something, though. Don't be offended, will you, if I say that you don't seem to be quite yourself to-day; not quite natural. I miss a rather characteristic expression of yours. You've never once looked at me with that rather tolerating air you used to put on."

"It was a horrid air," she said sharply. "I've made up my mind to cure myself of it."

"Oh! no, don't," he protested. "It wasn't at all horrid. It was—don't think I'm trying to pay you a compliment—it was, well, charming. I've missed it dreadfully."

She turned and looked at him, determined to try an experiment. "This sort of air, do you mean?" she asked, and with a sickening sensation of presenting the very gestures and appearance of her aunt, she regarded him under lowered eyelids with an expression of faintly supercilious approval.

His smile at once thanked and answered her.

"But it's an abominable look," she exclaimed. "The look of an old, old, painted woman, vain, ridiculous."

He stared at her in amazement. "How absurd!" he protested. "Why, it's *you*; and you're certainly not old or painted nor unduly vain, and no one could say you were ridiculous."

"And you want me to look like that?" she asked.

"It's—it's so *you*," he said shyly.

"But, just suppose," she cried, "that I went on looking like that after I'd grown old and ugly. Think how hateful it would be to see a hideous old woman posturing and pretending and making eyes. And, you see, if one gets a habit, it's so hard to get rid of it. Think of me at seventy, all painted and powdered, trying to seem as if I hadn't altered and really believing that I hadn't."

He laughed that pleasant, kind laugh of his which had been one of the first things in him that had so attracted her.

"Oh! I'll chance the future," he said. "Besides if—if it could ever happen that—that your growing old came to me gradually, that I should be seeing you every day, I mean, I shouldn't notice it. I should be old too; and *I* should think you hadn't altered either." He was afraid, as yet, to be too plain spoken, but his tone made it quite clear that he asked for no greater happiness than that of seeing her grow old beside him.

She did not pretend to misunderstand him. "Would you? Perhaps you would," she said. "But, all the same, I don't think you need insist on that particular—pose."

He passed that by, too eager at the moment to claim the concession she had offered him. "Is there any hope that I may be allowed to—to watch you growing old?" he asked.

"Perhaps—if you'll let me do it in my own way," Rachel said.

Adrian shyly took her hand. "You mean that you will—that you don't mind?" He put the question as if he had no doubt of its intelligibility—to her.

She nodded.

"When did you begin to know?" he asked, awed by the wonder of this stupendous thing that had happened to him.

"From the beginning, I think," Rachel murmured.

"So did I, from the very beginning—" he agreed, and that they dropped into sacred reminiscences and comparisons concerning the innumerable things they had seen in each other and had had as yet no opportunity to glory in.

And in the midst of all these new and bewildering, embarrassing, delightful revelations and discoveries, Rachel completely forgot the shadow that was haunting her, forgot how she looked or felt or acted, forgot that there was or had ever been a terrible old woman who lived in Tavistock Square and whose hold on life was maintained by her horrible - mimicry of youth. And then, in a moment, she was lifted out of her dream and cruelly set down on the hard, unsympathetic earth by the sound of her lover's voice.

"I suppose I'll have to meet your aunt?" he was saying. "Shall we go back there now, and tell her?"

Rachel flushed, as if he had suggested some startling invasion of her secret life. "Oh! no," she ejaculated impulsively.

Adrian looked his surprise. "But why not?" he asked. "I'm—I'm a perfectly respectable, eligible party."

"I wasn't thinking of that," Rachel said.

"Is she a terrible dragon?" he inquired with a smile. Rachel shook her head, rejecting the excuse offered in favour of a more probable modification. "She's odd rather. She might prefer my giving her some kind of notice," she said.

He accepted that without hesitation. "Will you warn her then?" he replied. "And I'll come and do my duty to-morrow. I understand she's a lady to be propitiated."

"Not to-morrow," Rachel said.

The irk and disgust of it all had returned to her with renewed force at the first mention of her aunt's name. The thought of Miss Deane had revived the repulsive sense of acting, speaking, looking like that aged caricature of herself. Yet she wanted strangely enough, to get back to Tavistock Square; for only there, it seemed to her, was she safe from the examination of an inquisitive stare that might at any moment penetrate her secret and reveal her as a posturing hag masquerading in the alluring freshness of a young girl.

"I ought to be going back to her now," she said.

"But you promised that we should have tea together," Adrian remonstrated.

"Yes, I know; but please don't pester me. I'll see you again to-morrow," Rachel returned with a touch of elderly hauteur. And, despite all his entreaties, she would not be persuaded to change her mind. Already he was looking at her with a touch of suspicion, she thought; and as she checked his remonstrances, she was aware of doing it with the air, the tone, the very look that were her inheritance from endless generations of precisely similar ancestors.

If she could but have lived a double life, Rachel Thought, her present position might have been enduring, and then, in a few months or even weeks, the problem would be solved for ever by her marriage with Adrian and the final obliteration of Miss Deane from her memory. But she could not live a double life. Day by day, as her intimacy with her aunt increased, Rachel found it more difficult to forget her when she was away from Tavistock Square. In the deepest and most beautiful moments of her intercourse with Adrian, she was aware now of practising upon him a subtle deception, of pretending that she was other than she was in reality—an awareness that was constantly pricked and stimulated by the continually growing consciousness of her likeness to Miss Deane.

Miss Deane on her part evidently took a great pleasure in her niece's society. The fortnight of her original invitation had already been exceeded, but she would not hear 'of Rachel's return to Devonshire.

"Why should you go back?" she demanded scornfully. "Your father doesn't want you—Richard is one of those slipshod people who prefer to live alone. I used to try to stir him up, and he ran away from me. He'll run away from you, my dear, in a few years' time. He hasn't the courage to stand up to women like us."

Miss Deane unquestionably wanted her niece to stay with her. She was even beginning to hint at the desirability of making the present arrangement a permanent one.

Rachel, however, was not flattered by this display of pleasure in her society. She knew that it was due to no individual charm of her own, but to the fact that she had become her aunt's mirror. For Miss Deane no longer, in Rachel's presence at least, gazed at herself in the looking-glass; she gazed at her niece instead. And as Rachel endured the posings and simperings, the alternate adoration and fond contempt with which her aunt regarded her, she was unable to resist the impulse to reflect them. Every day she fell a little lower in that weakness, and however slight the likeness had once been, she knew that now it must be patent to every observer. She copied her aunt, mimicked, duplicated her. It was easier to do that than fight the resemblance, against her aunt's determination; and so, by unnoticed degrees, she had permitted herself to become a lay figure upon which was dressed the image of Miss Deane's youth. She had even come to desire the look of almost sensual gratification on her aunt's face when she saw her niece so perfectly reflecting her own well-remembered airs.

And Rachel, too, had come to avoid the looking-glass, dreading to see there the poses and gesticulations of the old, repulsive woman whose every feature and expression had become so sickeningly familiar.

And, in all that time, Adrian had not once been to the house in Tavistock Square. Rachel had kept him away by what she felt had become all too transparent excuses. That terror, at least, she felt must be kept at bay. For she could not conceive it possible that, once he had seen her and her aunt together, he could retain one spark of his admiration. He would, he must, see her then as she was, see that her contemptible vanity was the essential enduring thing, all that would remain when time had stripped her of youth's allurements.

Nevertheless, the day came when Rachel could no longer endure to deceive him. He had challenged her, at last, with hiding something from him. Inevitably, he had become increasingly curious about her strange reticences concerning the Miss Deane whom he, in turn, had grown to regard as almost mythical; and all his suppressed suspicions had suddenly found expression in a question.

“What are you hiding? Do you really live with your aunt in Tavistock Square?” he had asked that day, with all the fierce intensity of a jealous lover.

Rachel had been stirred to a quick response. “Oh, if you don’t believe me, you’d better come and see for yourself,” she had said. “Come this afternoon—to tea.” And afterwards, even when Adrian had humbly sought to make amends for his unwarrantable jealousy, she had stuck to that invitation. The moment that she had issued it, she had had a sense of relief, a sense of having gratefully confessed her weakness. Adrian’s visit would consummate that confession, and thereafter she would have no further secrets from him. And if he found that he could no longer love her after he had seen her as she was, well, it would be better in the end than that he should marry a simulacrum and make the discovery by slow degrees.

“Yes, come this afternoon. We’ll expect you about four” had been her last words to him. And, now, she had to tell her aunt, who was still unaware that such a person as Adrian Flemming existed. Rachel postponed the telling until after lunch. Her knowledge of Miss Deane, though in some respects it equalled her knowledge of her own mind, did not tell her how her aunt would take this particular piece of news. She might possibly, Rachel thought, be annoyed, fearful lest her beloved looking-glass should be stolen from her. But she could wait no longer. In half an hour Miss Deane would go upstairs to rest, and Adrian himself would be in the house before she appeared again.

“I’ve something to tell you, aunt,” Rachel began abruptly. Miss Deane put up her lorgnette and surveyed her lovely portait with an interested air.

“Aunt—I’ve never told you and I know I ought to have,” Rachel blurted out. “But I’m—I’m engaged to a Mr. Adrian Flemming, and he’s coming here to call on you—call on us, this afternoon at four o’clock.”

Miss Deane closed her eyes and gave a little sigh.

“You might have given me *rather* longer notice, dear,” she said.

“It isn’t two yet,” Rachel replied. “There are more than two hours to get ready for him.”

Miss Deane bridled slightly. “I must have my rest before he comes,” she said, and added: “I suppose you’ve told him about us, dear?”

“About *you*?” Rachel asked.

Miss Deane nodded, complacently.

“Well, not very much,” Rachel admitted.

Miss Deane’s look, as she playfully threatened Rachel with her long-handled lorgnette, was distinctly sly.

“Then he doesn’t know yet that there are two of us?” she simpered. “Won’t it be just a little bit of a shock to him, my dear?”

Rachel drew a long breath and leaned back in her chair.

“Yes,” she said curtly, “I expect it will.”

Never before had the realisation of that strange likeness seemed so intolerable as at that moment. Even now her aunt was looking at her with the very air and gesture which had once charmed her in her own reflection, and that she knew still charmed and fascinated her lover. It was an air and gesture of which she could never break herself. It was natural to her, a true expression of something ineradicable in her being. Indeed, one of the worst penalties imposed upon her during the past month had been the omission of those pleasant ceremonies before the mirror. She had somehow missed herself, lost the sweetest and most adorable of companions!

Miss Deane got up, and holding herself very erect, moved with a little mincing step towards the tall mirror over the console table. Rachel held her breath. She saw that her aunt, suddenly aroused by this thought of the coming lover, was returning mechanically to her old habit of self-admiration. Was it possible, Rachel wondered, that the sight of the image she would see in the looking-glass, contrasted now with the memories of the living reflection she had so intimately studied for the past four weeks, might shock her into a realisation of the starkly hideous truth?

But it seemed that the aged woman must be blind. She gave no start of surprise as she paused before the glass; she showed no sign of anxiety concerning the vision she saw there. Her left hand, in which she held her lorgnette, had fallen to her side, and with the finger-tips of her right she daintily caressed the hollows of her sunken cheeks. She stayed there until Rachel, unable to endure the sight any longer, and with some vague purpose of defiance in her mind, jumped to her feet, crossed the room and stood shoulder by shoulder with her aunt staring into the glass.

For a moment Miss Deane did not move; then, with a queer hesitation, she dropped her right hand and slowly lifted her lorgnette.

Rachel felt a cold chill of horror invading her. Something fearful and terrible was happening before her eyes; her aunt was shrinking, withering, growing old in a moment. The stiffness had gone out of her pose, her head had begun to droop; the proud contempt in her face was giving way to the moping, resentful reminiscence of the aged. She still held up her lorgnette, still stared half fearfully at the glaring contrast that was presented to her, but her hand and arm had begun to tremble under the strain, and, instant by instant, all life and vigour seemed to be draining away from her.

Then, suddenly, with a fierce effort she turned away her head, straightened herself, and walked over to the door, passing out with a high, thin cackle of laughter that had in it the suggestion of a vehement, petulant derision; of a bitterness outmastering control.

Rachel shivered, but held her ground before the mirror. She had nothing to fear from that contemplation. As for her aunt, she had had her day. It was time she knew the truth.

"She *had* to know," Rachel repeated, addressing the dear likeness that so proudly reflected her.

## V

She found consolation in that thought. Her aunt *had* to know and Rachel herself was only the chance instrument of the revelation. She had not *meant*, so she persisted, to do more than vindicate her own integrity.

Nevertheless, her own passionate problem was not yet solved. Her aunt would not, so Rachel believed, give way without a struggle. Had she not made a gallant effort at recovery even as she left the room, and would she not make a still greater effort while Adrian was there; assert her rivalry if only in revenge?

She must meet that, Rachel decided, by presenting a contrast. She would be meek and humble in her aunt's presence. Adrian might recognise the admired airs and gestures in those of the old woman, but he should at least have no opportunity to compare them. . . .

And it was with this thought and intention in her mind that Rachel received him, when he arrived with a lover's promptness a little before four o'clock.

“Are you so dreadfully nervous?” he asked her, when were alone together in the drawing-room. “You’re like you were the first day we met in town—different from your usual self.”

“Oh! What a memory you have for my looks and behaviour,” she replied pettishly. “Of course, I’m nervous.”

He tried to argue with her, questioning her as to Miss Deane’s probable reception of him, but she refused to answer. “You’ll see for yourself in a few minutes,” she said; but the minutes passed and still Miss Deane did not come.

At a quarter to five the elderly parlour-maid brought in tea. “Miss Deane said you were not to wait for her, Miss Rachel,” was the message she delivered. “She’ll be down presently, I was to say.”

Rachel could not suppress a scornful twist of her mouth. She had no doubt that her aunt was taking very special pains with her toilet; trying to obliterate, perhaps, her recent vision before the console glass. Rachel saw her entrance in imagination, stiff-necked and proud, defying the criticisms of youth and the suggestions of age.

“Oh! why doesn’t she come and let me get it over?” she passionately demanded, and even as she spoke she heard the sounds of some one coming down the stairs, not the accustomed sounds of her aunt’s finicking, high-heeled steps, but a shuffling and creaking, accompanied by the murmurs of a weak, protesting voice.

Rachel jumped to her feet. She knew everything then—before the door opened, and she saw first of all the shocked, scared face of the elderly parlour-maid who supported the crumpled, palsied figure of the old, old woman who, three hours before, had been so miraculously young, magically upheld and supported then by the omnipotent strength of an idea.

She only stayed in the drawing-room for five minutes; a querulous, resentful old lady, malignantly jealous, so it seemed, of their vigour and impatient of their sympathy.

When the parlour-maid had been sent for and Miss Deane had gone, Rachel stood up and looked down at Adrian with all her old hauteur.

“Can you realise,” she asked, “that once my aunt was supposed to be very, very like me?”

He smiled and shook his head, as if the possibility was too absurd to contemplate.

Rachel turned and looked at herself in the glass, raising her chin and slightly pursing her lips, staring superciliously at her own image under half-lowered eyelids.

“Some day I may be as she is now,” she said, with the superb contemptuous arrogance of youth.

Adrian was watching her with adoration. “You will ever grow old,” he said.

“So long as one does not get the idea of growing old into one’s head,” Rachel began speculatively. . . .

\* \* \*

But Miss Deane had got the idea so strongly now that she died that night.

Rachel was with her at the last.

The old woman was trying to mouth a text from the Bible.

“What did you say, dear?” Rachel murmured, bending over her, and caught enough of the answer to guess that Miss Deane was mumbling again and again: “Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face.”