

Tarrant or Miss Chancellor would make her appearance. 'Every seat in the Hall is sold; the crowd is expected to be immense. When our Boston public *does* take an idea!' Mr. Pardon exclaimed.

Ransom only wanted to get away, and in order to facilitate his release by implying that in such a case he should see her again, he said to Mrs. Luna, rather hypocritically, from the threshold, 'You had really better come to-night.'

'I am not like the Boston public—I don't take an idea!' she replied.

'Do you mean to say you are not going?' cried Mr. Pardon, with widely-open eyes, clapping his hand again to his pocket. 'Don't you regard her as a wonderful genius?'

Mrs. Luna was sorely tried, and the vexation of seeing Ransom slip away from her with his thoughts visibly on Verena, leaving her face to face with the odious newspaperman, whose presence made passionate protest impossible—the annoyance of seeing everything and every one mock at her and fail to compensate her was such that she lost her head, while rashness leaped to her lips and jerked out the answer—'No indeed; I think her a vulgar idiot!'

'Ah, madam, I should never permit myself to print that!' Ransom heard Mr. Pardon rejoin, reproachfully, as he dropped the *portière* of the drawing-room.

XLI.

HE walked about for the next two hours, walked all over Boston, heedless of his course, and conscious only of an unwillingness to return to his hotel and an inability to eat his dinner or rest his weary legs. He had been roaming in very much the same desperate fashion, at once eager and purposeless, for many days before he left New York, and he knew that his agitation and suspense must wear themselves out. At present they pressed him more than ever; they had become tremendously acute. The early dusk of the last half of November had gathered thick, but the evening was fine and the lighted streets had the animation and variety of a winter that had begun with brilliancy. The shop-fronts glowed through frosty panes, the passers bustled on the pavement, the bells of the street-cars jangled in the cold air, the newsboys hawked the evening-papers, the vestibules of the theatres, illuminated and flanked with coloured posters and the photographs of actresses, exhibited seductively their swinging doors of red leather or baize, spotted with little brass nails. Behind great plates of glass the interior of the hotels became visible, with marble-paved lobbies, white with electric lamps, and columns, and Westerners on divans stretching their legs, while behind a counter, set apart and covered with an array of periodicals and novels in paper covers, little boys, with the faces of old men, showing plans of the play-houses and offering librettos, sold orchestra-chairs at a premium. When from time to time Ransom paused at a corner, hesitating which way to drift, he looked up and saw the stars, sharp and near, scintillating over the town. Boston seemed to him big and full of nocturnal life, very much awake and preparing for an evening of pleasure.

He passed and repassed the Music Hall, saw Verena immensely advertised, gazed down the vista, the approach for pedestrians, which leads out of School Street, and thought it looked expectant and ominous. People had not begun to enter yet, but the place was ready, lighted and open, and the interval would be only too short. So it appeared to Ransom, while at the same time he wished immensely the crisis were over. Everything that surrounded him referred itself to the idea with which his mind was palpitating, the question whether he might not still intervene as against the girl's jump into the abyss. He believed that all Boston was going to hear her, or that at least every one was whom he saw in the streets; and there was a kind of incentive and inspiration in this thought. The vision of wresting her from the mighty multitude set him off again, to stride through the population that would fight for her. It was not too late, for he felt strong; it would not be too late even if she should already stand there before thousands of converging eyes. He had had his ticket since the morning, and now the time was going on. He went back to his hotel at last for ten minutes, and refreshed himself by dressing a little and by drinking a glass of wine. Then he took his way once more to the Music Hall, and saw that people were beginning to go in—the first drops of the great stream, among whom there were many women. Since seven o'clock the minutes had moved fast—before that they had dragged—and now there was only half an hour. Ransom passed in with the others; he knew just where his seat was; he had chosen it, on reaching Boston, from the few that were left, with what he believed to be care. But now, as he stood beneath the far-away panelled roof, stretching above the line of little tongues of flame which marked its junction with the walls, he felt that this didn't matter much, since he certainly was not going to subside into his place. He was not one of the audience; he was apart, unique, and had come on a business altogether special. It wouldn't have mattered if, in advance, he had got no place at all and had just left himself to pay for standing-room at the last. The people came pouring in, and in a very short time there would only be standing-room left. Ransom had no

definite plan; he had mainly wanted to get inside of the building, so that, on a view of the field, he might make up his mind. He had never been in the Music Hall before, and its lofty vaults and rows of overhanging balconies made it to his imagination immense and impressive. There were two or three moments during which he felt as he could imagine a young man to feel who, waiting in a public place, has made up his mind, for reasons of his own, to discharge a pistol at the king or the president.

The place struck him with a kind of Roman vastness; the doors which opened out of the upper balconies, high aloft, and which were constantly swinging to and fro with the passage of spectators and ushers, reminded him of the *vomitoria* that he had read about in descriptions of the Colosseum. The huge organ, the background of the stage—a stage occupied with tiers of seats for choruses and civic worthies—lifted to the dome its shining pipes and sculptured pinnacles, and some genius of music or oratory erected himself in monumental bronze at the base. The hall was so capacious and serious, and the audience increased so rapidly without filling it, giving Ransom a sense of the numbers it would contain when it was packed, that the courage of the two young women, face to face with so tremendous an ordeal, hovered before him as really sublime, especially the conscious tension of poor Olive, who would have been spared none of the anxieties and tremors, none of the previsions of accident or calculations of failure. In the front of the stage was a slim, high desk, like a music-stand, with a cover of red velvet, and near it was a light ornamental chair, on which he was sure Verena would not seat herself, though he could fancy her leaning at moments on the back. Behind this was a kind of semicircle of a dozen arm-chairs, which had evidently been arranged for the friends of the speaker, her sponsors and patrons. The hall was more and more full of premonitory sounds; people making a noise as they unfolded, on hinges, their seats, and itinerant boys, whose voices as they cried out 'Photographs of Miss Tarrant—sketch of her life!' or 'Portraits of the Speaker—story of her career!' sounded small and piping in the general immensity. Before Ransom was aware of it

several of the arm-chairs, in the row behind the lecturer's desk, were occupied, with gaps, and in a moment he recognised, even across the interval, three of the persons who had appeared. The straight-featured woman with bands of glossy hair and eyebrows that told at a distance, could only be Mrs. Farrinder, just as the gentleman beside her, in a white overcoat, with an umbrella and a vague face, was probably her husband Amariah. At the opposite end of the row were another pair, whom Ransom, unacquainted with certain chapters of Verena's history, perceived without surprise to be Mrs. Burrage and her insinuating son. Apparently their interest in Miss Tarrant was more than a momentary fad, since—like himself—they had made the journey from New York to hear her. There were other figures, unknown to our young man, here and there, in the semicircle; but several places were still empty (one of which was of course reserved for Olive), and it occurred to Ransom, even in his preoccupation, that one of them ought to remain so—ought to be left to symbolise the presence, in the spirit, of Miss Birdseye.

He bought one of the photographs of Verena, and thought it shockingly bad, and bought also the sketch of her life, which many people seemed to be reading, but crumpled it up in his pocket for future consideration. Verena was not in the least present to him in connection with this exhibition of enterprise and puffery; what he saw was Olive, struggling and yielding, making every sacrifice of taste for the sake of the largest hearing, and conforming herself to a great popular system. Whether she had struggled or not, there was a catch-penny effect about the whole thing which added to the fever in his cheek and made him wish he had money to buy up the stock of the vociferous little boys. Suddenly the notes of the organ rolled out into the hall, and he became aware that the overture or prelude had begun. This, too, seemed to him a piece of claptrap, but he didn't wait to think of it; he instantly edged out of his place, which he had chosen near the end of a row, and reached one of the numerous doors. If he had had no definite plan he now had at least an irresistible impulse, and he felt the prick of shame at having

faltered for a moment. It had been his tacit calculation that Verena, still enshrined in mystery by her companion, would not have reached the scene of her performance till within a few minutes of the time at which she was to come forth; so that he had lost nothing by waiting, up to this moment, before the platform. But now he must overtake his opportunity. Before passing out of the hall into the lobby he paused, and with his back to the stage, gave a look at the gathered auditory. It had become densely numerous, and, suffused with the evenly distributed gaslight, which fell from a great elevation, and the thick atmosphere that hangs for ever in such places, it appeared to pile itself high and to look dimly expectant and formidable. He had a throb of uneasiness at his private purpose of balking it of its entertainment, its victim—a glimpse of the ferocity that lurks in a disappointed mob. But the thought of that danger only made him pass more quickly through the ugly corridors; he felt that his plan was definite enough now, and he found that he had no need even of asking the way to a certain small door (one or more of them), which he meant to push open. In taking his place in the morning he had assured himself as to the side of the house on which (with its approach to the platform), the withdrawing room of singers and speakers was situated; he had chosen his seat in that quarter, and he now had not far to go before he reached it. No one heeded or challenged him; Miss Tarrant's auditors were still pouring in (the occasion was evidently to have been an unprecedented success of curiosity), and had all the attention of the ushers. Ransom opened a door at the end of a passage, and it admitted him into a sort of vestibule, quite bare save that at a second door, opposite to him, stood a figure at the sight of which he paused for a moment in his advance.

The figure was simply that of a robust policeman, in his helmet and brass buttons—a policeman who was expecting him—Ransom could see that in a twinkling. He judged in the same space of time that Olive Chancellor had heard of his having arrived and had applied for the protection of this functionary, who was now simply guarding the ingress and was prepared to defend it against all comers. There

was a slight element of surprise in this, as he had reasoned that his nervous kinswoman was absent from her house for the day—had been spending it all in Verena's retreat, wherever that was. The surprise was not great enough, however, to interrupt his course for more than an instant, and he crossed the room and stood before the belted sentinel. For a moment neither spoke; they looked at each other very hard in the eyes, and Ransom heard the organ, beyond partitions, launching its waves of sound through the hall. They seemed to be very near it, and the whole place vibrated. The policeman was a tall, lean-faced, sallow man, with a stoop of the shoulders, a small, steady eye, and something in his mouth which made a protuberance in his cheek. Ransom could see that he was very strong, but he believed that he himself was not materially less so. However, he had not come there to show physical fight—a public tussle about Verena was not an attractive idea, except perhaps, after all, if he should get the worst of it, from the point of view of Olive's new system of advertising; and, moreover, it would not be in the least necessary. Still he said nothing, and still the policeman remained dumb, and there was something in the way the moments elapsed and in our young man's consciousness that Verena was separated from him only by a couple of thin planks, which made him feel that she too expected him, but in another sense; that she had nothing to do with this parade of resistance, that she would know in a moment, by quick intuition, that he was there, and that she was only praying to be rescued, to be saved. Face to face with Olive she hadn't the courage, but she would have it with her hand in his. It came to him that there was no one in the world less sure of her business just at that moment than Olive Chancellor; it was as if he could see, through the door, the terrible way her eyes were fixed on Verena while she held her watch in her hand and Verena looked away from her. Olive would have been so thankful that she should begin before the hour, but of course that was impossible. Ransom asked no questions—that seemed a waste of time; he only said, after a minute, to the policeman:

'I should like very much to see Miss Tarrant, if you will be so good as to take in my card.'

The guardian of order, well planted just between him and the handle of the door, took from Ransom the morsel of pasteboard which he held out to him, read slowly the name inscribed on it, turned it over and looked at the back, then returned it to his interlocutor. 'Well, I guess it ain't much use,' he remarked.

'How can you know that? You have no business to decline my request.'

'Well, I guess I have about as much business as you have to make it.' Then he added, 'You are just the very man she wants to keep out.'

'I don't think Miss Tarrant wants to keep me out,' Ransom returned.

'I don't know much about her, she hasn't hired the hall. It's the other one—Miss Chancellor; it's her that runs this lecture.'

'And she has asked you to keep me out? How absurd!' exclaimed Ransom, ingeniously.

'She tells me you're none too fit to be round alone; you have got this thing on the brain. I guess you'd better be quiet,' said the policeman.

'Quiet? Is it possible to be more quiet than I am?'

'Well, I've seen crazy folks that were a good deal like you. If you want to see the speaker why don't you go and set round in the hall, with the rest of the public?' And the policeman waited, in an immovable, ruminating, reasonable manner, for an answer to this inquiry.

Ransom had one, on the instant, at his service. 'Because I don't want simply to see her; I want also to speak to her—in private.'

'Yes—it's always intensely private,' said the policeman. 'Now I wouldn't lose the lecture if I was you. I guess it will do you good.'

'The lecture?' Ransom repeated, laughing. 'It won't take place.'

'Yes it will—as quick as the organ stops.' Then the policeman added, as to himself, 'Why the devil don't it?'

'Because Miss Tarrant has sent up to the organist to tell him to keep on.'

'Who has she sent, do you s'pose?' And Ransom's new acquaintance entered into his humour. 'I guess Miss Chancellor isn't her nigger.'

'She has sent her father, or perhaps even her mother. They are in there too.'

'How do you know that?' asked the policeman, consideringly.

'Oh, I know everything,' Ransom answered, smiling.

'Well, I guess they didn't come here to listen to that organ. We'll hear something else before long, if he doesn't stop.'

'You will hear a good deal, very soon,' Ransom remarked.

The serenity of his self-confidence appeared at last to make an impression on his antagonist, who lowered his head a little, like some butting animal, and looked at the young man from beneath bushy eyebrows. 'Well, I *have* heard a good deal, since I've ben in Boston.'

'Oh, Boston's a great place,' Ransom rejoined, inattentively. He was not listening to the policeman or to the organ now, for the sound of voices had reached him from the other side of the door. The policeman took no further notice of it than to lean back against the panels, with folded arms; and there was another pause, between them, during which the playing of the organ ceased.

'I will just wait here, with your permission,' said Ransom, 'and presently I shall be called.'

'Who do you s'pose will call you?'

'Well, Miss Tarrant, I hope.'

'She'll have to square the other one first.'

Ransom took out his watch, which he had adapted, on purpose, several hours before, to Boston time, and saw that the minutes had sped with increasing velocity during this interview, and that it now marked five minutes past eight. 'Miss Chancellor will have to square the public,' he said in a moment; and the words were far from being an empty profession of security, for the conviction already in possession of him, that a drama in which he, though cut off, was

an actor, had been going on for some time in the apartment he was prevented from entering, that the situation was extraordinarily strained there, and that it could not come to an end without an appeal to him—this transcendental assumption acquired an infinitely greater force the instant he perceived that Verena was even now keeping her audience waiting. Why didn't she go on? Why, except that she knew he was there, and was gaining time?

'Well, I guess she has shown herself,' said the door-keeper, whose discussion with Ransom now appeared to have passed, on his own part, and without the slightest prejudice to his firmness, into a sociable, gossiping phase.

'If she had shown herself, we should hear the reception, the applause.'

'Well, there they air; they are going to give it to her,' the policeman announced.

He had an odious appearance of being in the right, for there indeed they seemed to be—they were giving it to her. A general hubbub rose from the floor and the galleries of the hall—the sound of several thousand people stamping with their feet and rapping with their umbrellas and sticks. Ransom felt faint, and for a little while he stood with his gaze interlocked with that of the policeman. Then suddenly a wave of coolness seemed to break over him, and he exclaimed: 'My dear fellow, that isn't applause—it's impatience. It isn't a reception, it's a call!'

The policeman neither assented to this proposition nor denied it; he only transferred the protuberance in his cheek to the other side, and observed:

'I guess she's sick.'

'Oh, I hope not!' said Ransom, very gently. The stamping and rapping swelled and swelled for a minute, and then it subsided; but before it had done so Ransom's definition of it had plainly become the true one. The tone of the manifestation was good-humoured, but it was not gratulatory. He looked at his watch again, and saw that five minutes more had elapsed, and he remembered what the newspaper-man in Charles Street had said about Olive's guaranteeing Verena's punctuality. Oddly enough, at the moment the image of this gentleman recurred to him, the

gentleman himself burst through the other door, in a state of the liveliest agitation.

'Why in the name of goodness don't she go on? If she wants to make them call her, they've done it about enough!' Mr. Pardon turned, pressingly, from Ransom to the policeman and back again, and in his preoccupation gave no sign of having met the Mississippian before.

'I guess she's sick,' said the policeman.

'The public 'll be sick!' cried the distressed reporter. 'If she's sick, why doesn't she send for a doctor? All Boston is packed into this house, and she has got to talk to it. I want to go in and see.'

'You can't go in,' said the policeman, drily.

'Why can't I go in, I should like to know? I want to go in for the "Vesper"!'

'You can't go in for anything. I'm keeping this man out, too,' the policeman added genially, as if to make Mr. Pardon's exclusion appear less invidious.

'Why, they'd ought to let *you* in,' said Matthias, staring a moment at Ransom.

'May be they'd ought, but they won't,' the policeman remarked.

'Gracious me!' panted Mr. Pardon; 'I knew from the first Miss Chancellor would make a mess of it! Where's Mr. Filer?' he went on, eagerly, addressing himself apparently to either of the others, or to both.

'I guess he's at the door, counting the money,' said the policeman.

'Well, he'll have to give it back if he don't look out!'

'Maybe he will. I'll let *him* in if he comes, but he's the only one. She is on now,' the policeman added, without emotion.

His ear had caught the first faint murmur of another explosion of sound. This time, unmistakably, it was applause—the clapping of multitudinous hands, mingled with the noise of many throats. The demonstration, however, though considerable, was not what might have been expected, and it died away quickly. Mr. Pardon stood listening, with an expression of some alarm. 'Merciful

fathers! can't they give her more than that?' he cried. 'I'll just fly round and see!'

When he had hurried away again, Ransom said to the policeman—'Who is Mr. Filer?'

'Oh, he's an old friend of mine. He's the man that runs Miss Chancellor.'

'That runs her?'

'Just the same as she runs Miss Tarrant. He runs the pair, as you might say. He's in the lecture-business.'

'Then he had better talk to the public himself.'

'Oh, *he* can't talk; he can only boss!'

The opposite door at this moment was pushed open again, and a large, heated-looking man, with a little stiff beard on the end of his chin and his overcoat flying behind him, strode forward with an imprecation. 'What the h—— are they doing in the parlour? This sort of thing's about played out!'

'Ain't she up there now?' the policeman asked.

'It's not Miss Tarrant,' Ransom said, as if he knew all about it. He perceived in a moment that this was Mr. Filer, Olive Chancellor's agent; an inference instantly followed by the reflection that such a personage would have been warned against him by his kinswoman and would doubtless attempt to hold him, or his influence, accountable for Verena's unexpected delay. Mr. Filer only glanced at him, however, and to Ransom's surprise appeared to have no theory of his identity; a fact implying that Miss Chancellor had considered that the greater discretion was (except to the policeman) to hold her tongue about him altogether.

'Up there? It's her jackass of a father that's up there!' cried Mr. Filer, with his hand on the latch of the door, which the policeman had allowed him to approach.

'Is he asking for a doctor?' the latter inquired, dispassionately.

'You're the sort of doctor he'll want, if he doesn't produce the girl! You don't mean to say they've locked themselves in? What the plague are they after?'

'They've got the key on that side,' said the policeman, while Mr. Filer discharged at the door a volley of

sharp knocks, at the same time violently shaking the handle.

'If the door was locked, what was the good of your standing before it?' Ransom inquired.

'So as you couldn't do that;' and the policeman nodded at Mr. Filer.

'You see your interference has done very little good.'

'I dunno; she has got to come out yet.'

Mr. Filer meanwhile had continued to thump and shake, demanding instant admission and inquiring if they were going to let the audience pull the house down. Another round of applause had broken out, directed perceptibly to some apology, some solemn circumlocution, of Selah Tarrant's; this covered the sound of the agent's voice, as well as that of a confused and divided response, proceeding from the parlour. For a minute nothing definite was audible; the door remained closed, and Matthias Pardon reappeared in the vestibule.

'He says she's just a little faint—from nervousness. She'll be all ready in about three minutes.' This announcement was Mr. Pardon's contribution to the crisis; and he added that the crowd was a lovely crowd, it was a real Boston crowd, it was perfectly good-humoured.

'There's a lovely crowd, and a real Boston one too, I guess, in here!' cried Mr. Filer, now banging very hard. 'I've handled prima donnas, and I've handled natural curiosities, but I've never seen anything up to this. Mind what I say, ladies; if you don't let me in, I'll smash down the door!'

'Don't seem as if *you* could make it much worse, does it?' the policeman observed to Ransom, strolling aside a little, with the air of being superseded.

XLII.

RANSOM made no reply; he was watching the door, which at that moment gave way from within. Verena stood there—it was she, evidently, who had opened it—and her eyes went straight to his. She was dressed in white, and her face was whiter than her garment; above it her hair seemed to shine like fire. She took a step forward; but before she could take another he had come down to her, on the threshold of the room. Her face was full of suffering, and he did not attempt—before all those eyes—to take her hand; he only said in a low tone, 'I have been waiting for you—a long time!'

'I know it—I saw you in your seat—I want to speak to you.'

'Well, Miss Tarrant, don't you think you'd better be on the platform?' cried Mr. Filer, making with both his arms a movement as if to sweep her before him, through the waiting-room, up into the presence of the public.

'In a moment I shall be ready. My father is making that all right.' And, to Ransom's surprise, she smiled, with all her sweetness, at the irrepressible agent; appeared to wish genuinely to reassure him.

The three had moved together into the waiting-room, and there at the farther end of it, beyond the vulgar, perfunctory chairs and tables, under the flaring gas, he saw Mrs. Tarrant sitting upright on a sofa, with immense rigidity, and a large flushed visage, full of suppressed distortion, and beside her prostrate, fallen over, her head buried in the lap of Verena's mother, the tragic figure of Olive Chancellor. Ransom could scarcely know how much Olive's having flung herself upon Mrs. Tarrant's bosom testified to the convulsive scene that had just taken place behind the