

1 EXT. BRANSHAW HOUSE - DAY.

The camera approaches over miles of green English land. We see the lush, generous slopes of Hampshire, an unspoiled vision of peace. It is the summer of 1914.

A large country house can be seen in the distance and we come closer and closer, swooping over the trees into the valley which holds Branshaw House.

We follow the path of the grand drive up to the gravelled exterior of the building with its tall gothic windows and turreted roof.

2 INT. BRANSHAW HOUSE - DAY

The dining hall.

DOWELL and NANCY are sitting at either end of a huge dining table. A servant stands over to one side of the room.

The room is silent apart from a slow tapping noise which echoes significantly within the huge room.

NANCY sits perfectly upright, her plate empty and knife and fork neatly centred. She looks straight ahead of her, silent and unseeing. She has a shock of thick, black hair and her motionless face is beautifully angular. She is a disturbing vision. She is 21.

At the other end of the table, DOWELL sits back in his chair, looking towards NANCY. His plate of food is half-eaten and it has been pushed away from him.

DOWELL is 45, his dark hair has greyed at the sides. He wears a tailored tweed suit. He is handsome, dapper, emotionless. He stares at NANCY.

In his right hand, he holds a badminton racket and we realise the tapping noise is that of a shuttlecock being slowly bounced up and down on his racket.

3 INT. DINING ROOM, THE HOTEL EXCELSIOR, NAUHEIM IN GERMANY - EVENING

**Three years earlier. The Hotel Excelsior, The Nauheim Sanitorium for Heart Ailments, Germany.**

The dining room is three-quarters full. It is a lavish affair, candelabra from the ceilings, silver candle stick holders on the tables, smartly dressed waiters and wealthy turn-of-the-century residents seated at tables.

The residents are all at Nauheim to take the cure for heart ailments. It is 1911.

DOWELL is seated on his own at a table. A prosperous, respectable American gentleman, he scans the room idly. He spots a new arrival seated at another table:

ASHBURNHAM is seated at another less advantageous table where the evening sun is casting blinding rays. He has fair hair, extraordinarily ordered in a wave from left to right, brick-red complexion, yellow moustache stiff as a toothbrush. His eyes look steadily ahead, not catching anyone's glance.

There is a low hum of polite conversation. This is interrupted by the arrival around the entrance screen of LEONORA and FLORENCE, arm in arm. LEONORA is wearing a black evening dress, her revealed shoulders startlingly white. Her luxurious blonde hair glints in the evening light. She moves with a confident physicality. She is 29.

FLORENCE is not as tall as LEONORA but the two, arm in arm, present a dazzling sight. FLORENCE is little and fair and radiant as the track of sunlight along the sea, her hair copper-coloured, her dress a blue silk Chinese print. She is 28.

LEONORA spots ASHBURNHAM alone at his table the other side of the room beside the window.

LEONORA

(Loud enough so the whole  
room looks up)

Don't stop over by that stuffy old  
table, Teddy. Come and sit by these  
nice people!

LEONORA approaches an empty table next to DOWELL's and sits down triumphantly. FLORENCE sits down at DOWELL's table.

The Head Waiter scurries over to whisper to LEONORA.

HEAD WAITER

I am so sorry, Madame, this is the  
table reserved for the  
Guggenheimers...

LEONORA smiles beautifully at him and ignores him, beckoning ASHBURNHAM to join her. He does so.

FLORENCE

Why shouldn't we all eat out of the  
same trough? That's a nasty New  
York saying.

(MORE)

FLORENCE (CONT'D)

But I'm sure we're all nice quiet people and there can be four seats at our table.

LEONORA looks up.

LEONORA

Well, why ever not?

LEONORA and ASHBURNHAM get up and seat themselves at DOWELL's table. DOWELL stares at LEONORA, the skin of her bare shoulders catching the rays of the setting sun. Her arms too are bare and her wrist twists a silver bracelet.

FLORENCE smiles prettily at ASHBURNHAM as he sits down opposite her.

DOWELL recovers.

DOWELL

John Dowell of Philadelphia, PA. And this is my wife, Florence.

ASHBURNHAM

Captain Ashburnham, Fourteenth Hussars. My wife, Leonora.

LEONORA

From Hampshire.

She leans forward and takes a hyacinth stem from the vase in the middle of their table, breathes its fragrance. She looks at Dowell.

LEONORA (CONT'D)

Such a heady fragrance, isn't it?

FLORENCE

And so the whole round table is begun.

4 INT. SANITARIUM HALLS, NAUHEIM - DAY

The marbled entrance hall of the baths at Nauheim. DOWELL is escorting FLORENCE to the Ladies Door.

FLORENCE

You will be here in two hours?

DOWELL

Of course my dear.

She glances almost flirtatiously back at him as she heads to the doors, a tiny smile on her face.

FLORENCE

Don't be late.

DOWELL

I shall be here at midday and we will take a light lunch before your afternoon rest. Everything is in order.

As FLORENCE disappears into the steam of the baths, DOWELL turns to go and sees ASHBURNHAM heading towards the exit.

DOWELL (CONT'D)

Ashburnham.

ASHBURNHAM

Dowell.

DOWELL

You have already had your treatment?

ASHBURNHAM

Just the cold baths. Rather like being at school. Does wonders for the circulation.

DOWELL

You are walking back to the hotel, I take it. Might I join you? I have a couple of hours before I collect my wife.

ASHBURNHAM

Most certainly.

They exit the building and walk side by side down one of the long gravelled paths.

ASHBURNHAM glances at his companion.

ASHBURNHAM (CONT'D)

Where do you buy your blue ties?

DOWELL

I pick a dozen up once a season at Bloomingdales on 59th and Lexington.

ASHBURNHAM

Go to my man in Burlington Arcade in London. You'll get a better price and they'll last you three seasons.

DOWELL

That's most kind. I very certainly will.

They walk a while.

DOWELL (CONT'D)

This is your first season at Nauheim?

ASHBURNHAM

Yes. Dashed inconvenient, the old pump needs a service.

(He bangs his chest)

Silly nonsense. My wife insisted. Got it into her head last year in India. Insisted we call in here on our way back home. You play polo?

DOWELL

Why no. Should I?

ASHBURNHAM

What? No idea. Probably. There is a match on Saturday. When I was introduced to the Duke yesterday, he invited me to put up a team against his Prussian officers. You and your wife might like to accompany Leonora. It will no doubt be a decent sort of day out but I shall be too occupied to be able to entertain. I should appreciate your presence.

DOWELL

We will most certainly attend. Thank you Captain Ashburnham.

ASHBURNHAM grunts.

DOWELL (CONT'D)

This is our second year here. I know the place like the back of my hand, if you excuse the expression.

(MORE)

DOWELL (CONT'D)

Why, I even know - I have walked this path so many times - that it is exactly 420 paces from the Baths to the Fountain at the centre. And from the Fountain, a further 335 paces to the Hotel.

ASHBURNHAM

(looks a little askance)  
Numbers fellow, eh? Never mastered blasted algebra. Too busy on the field.

DOWELL

Of course.

5 EXT. THE GARDENS OF THE SPA AT NAUHEIM - DAY

It is a glorious day. The residents of the spa are all dressed finely and strolling in pairs and groups about the ordered gardens.

ASHBURNHAM walks with FLORENCE down a formal path, followed by DOWELL alongside LEONORA.

We can see that FLORENCE is talking enthusiastically to ASHBURNHAM.

LEONORA

Your wife is quite the enthusiast.

DOWELL

She is a slave to knowledge. A Vassar graduate.

LEONORA

Ah.

DOWELL

One of the many advantages owing to the daughter of a wealthy Connecticut family.

LEONORA

I'm sure. But she has a heart?

DOWELL

Oh yes.

LEONORA

Edward too. Or so I told him.