



# THE SHADOW HAND

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arms about him and confess the whole wretched business, to tell him how necessity drove "John Gerald" into the field, ultimately to score over him. But blind fear kept her silent. Gerald would never forgive her the trick she had played upon him all these years—there would be a breach between her and her only son.

A brooding desire to reinstate him in the kingdom of self-respect from which she had driven him, resulted in over-zealous suggestions of help on her part. These Gerald promptly resented.

"I am going to take a room, outside," he announced. "I think I could do better work, alone, in a perfectly strange place."

"But, my dearest boy—" began his mother in a panic. If he shut the door of his studio upon her, how could she ever help to make his dogs "look walking?"

"No use arguing, Madre," he said. "I have the feeling that you are antagonistic to my work. 'Silly,' of course, you will say but that doesn't change my feeling. You think I am going to fail, because of those cursed sketches—and it makes me unsure, myself. When I am working alone, I am confident that I shall have swarms of inspirations."

Mrs. Lacy made good use of the abandoned studio. She no longer had to sketch, sitting hunched on the foot of her bed, or sprawled across the kitchen table, one eye on the door and the other on the gas burner. She spread out her materials like a real artist, and, like a female Bluebeard, she kept her secret under lock and key.

BUT one day Miriam caught her and laughed at the sight of her guilty face.

"Why, you blessed angel, I have known it for months," cried the girl, "ever since the day Gerald's sketches were returned. What are a journalist's eyes for but to worm out other people's secrets? Besides, any one could have guessed—that is, any one except John Gerald's son!"

"And you'll never tell him, Miriam—oh, promise!" Jeanette Lacy was almost hysterical. "I could not bear to have him know. You see to what he has been driven already by my interference." She indicated the studio.

"But do you think you are honest with yourself or Gerald?" scolded stern justice of nineteen.

"It all began so long ago, there didn't seem to be any question of honesty," replied the older woman. "You help your child, just naturally, and do not expect him to say, 'Yes, I can feed myself now, Mother taught me.' When I discovered how much it meant to Gerald to think he was unaided, I just let him think it. It was all a part of a mother's hardest lesson—to teach her child to do without her."

"But you haven't taught him that, have you?" Miriam persisted. "He merely doesn't know he can't do without you; there's an awful difference."

"You *mustn't* tell him," urged the mother. "I forbid it! He will learn it unconsciously, in time," she concluded feebly.

"Nonsense!" retorted the girl. "One doesn't learn to do without one's mother unconsciously. Every step is a bitter struggle, every failure a descent into Hades, every triumph a flight to Olympus. What Gerald needs is struggle, conscious effort, and the sooner you let him know it, the better. Look at his picture for the competition!"

"He won't let me see it. A girl he has known a few months means more to him than his mother." Jealousy prompted her to remark.

"Of course! He recognizes in me the ability to help, the power to criticize. He is a little afraid of my independence, and therefore likes me to lean on him. He thinks you couldn't stand alone, and he takes you for granted."

"BUT I can't tell him. He would never forgive me."

"Then you will never make an artist of him. I could. Although I don't know ultramarine from indigo, I could improve his work."

The protective instinct of the animal prompted Mrs. Lacy to say, "You don't mind hurting him—you don't love him."

Miriam smiled. The light which shone behind her eyes denied the accusation.

"It would seem as though I loved him more than you," she said gently. "I am willing to suffer, myself, that he may be benefitted. You shrink from giving yourself pain."

And young Wisdom of nineteen gathered sobbing Ignorance of forty-two into her loving arms.

Jeanette Lacy would never have

dreamed of entering a picture in the competition had not her expenses taken another sky-rocketing flight when Gerald decided that he must have private lessons from Victor Dessart. She entertained no hope of winning a prize but thought the chances of finding a purchaser might be good. When she turned her back upon the beautiful Paris spring and bent over the finely pleated shirt, the prayer in her heart was for Gerald. "Dear Lord, let him win a prize," she repeated monotonously.

"Put such an idea out of your head" warned Miriam. "I tell you the picture is not good."

"What is it?"

"Oh, a foggy, gray thing, showing an old woman, grim with a sort of stoic philosophy, watching a child who is crying. But somehow, the lump which ought to rise in your throat, doesn't rise. The child doesn't look crying."

Mrs. Lacy groaned as she hung the shirt over the back of a chair, but her groan turned into a cry of welcome, as Gerald burst into the room.

"Well, Madre," he said, "the great day is at hand. If I get first prize, my fortune's good as made. The picture's bound to command a lot of attention, if they hang it in the proper light."

"I wish I had seen it before you sent it off, darling," sighed his mother.

"What good would that have done, good old Madre?" he asked laughing.

The crush in the big salon was frightful. Gerald forgot as soon as he got to the doorway, that he was responsible for the safety of his mother and Miriam. His eyes swept the walls for his painting, and Jeanette Lacy eagerly followed his glance. But Miriam was looking for something else.

Moving along the line of least resistance, they presently found themselves part of the dense mass of people trying to get a peep at the picture which had been awarded First Prize. A glimpse dashed Gerald's hopes to the ground, but in that glimpse he saw something indescribable which caught the artist in him and held him spellbound.

A sunset—a blood-red sunset, the warmth and glow from which seemed to reach right out into the group of spectators. Several of them held out their hands toward the picture to assure themselves that, by some clever trickery, a light was not shining behind the canvas. In the foreground, lying just within the crimson radiance, lay the marble figure of a youth, whose veins were filling with red blood, whose body was becoming infused with life, drained, as it were, from the dying sun. It seemed as though one would presently see him breathe and rise, if one watched long enough.

"ONE thing dies that something else may live," muttered Gerald, impressed with the thought for the first time.

"Is it really good?" whispered Miriam. People were not talking. They were just looking. A few were wiping their eyes.

"It is—divine," answered the boy. "Of course it has some faults, brush faults"—he closed his eyes and peered between his lashes—"but it breathes, it pulses, it lives. Miriam," he broke off suddenly, "look! Do you see the name—John Gerald!"

She nodded and held her breath.

"Fancy my being enraged because my stuff was said to be like his," murmured Gerald, with the first real humility he had ever known. "Why, I would give ten years of my life to sit at that man's feet, and learn to paint a picture like that!"

The girl squeezed his arm and pretended not to see the tears twinkling on his lashes.

"Would you like to know John Gerald?" she asked.

His look of incredulous eagerness answered her.

"Then, come!"

She pulled him from the crush and started toward a deserted corner of the room. There, gazing raptly at a picture which had been sky-ed in an inconspicuous place, stood a solitary person. The picture was a foggy, gray thing, showing an old woman, grimly philosophic, who watched a child crying.

"Remember, you said you would sit at his feet," said Miriam, between laughter and tears.

For a moment he did not understand. Then, as myriads of lights burst upon the darkness of his mind, he *did* receive an inspiration. He ran swiftly across the room, and there, before them all, he dropped on one knee and kissed the woman's hand.

"Madre—oh, Madre!" he said.

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