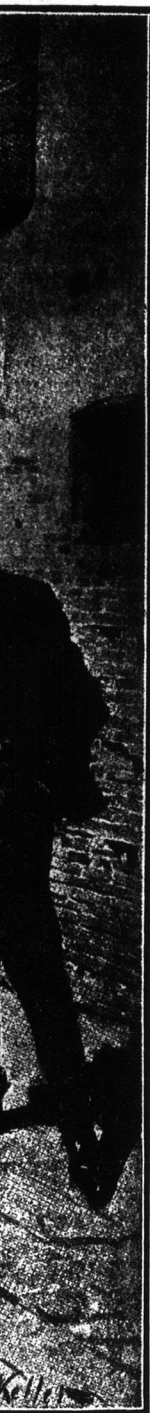


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"I thank you for your kindness, ma'am," said the colonel humbly, and went to bed sad but hopeful.

III.

In the brilliance of the morning he followed her shrinkingly down narrow side streets into broader thoroughfares. She paused to point out to him various famous sights, and he was too courteous to show the anguished impatience that racked him. Then a sudden turn brought his heart and his feet to a standstill.

Straight towards them on the narrow sidewalk came Lena with a guide book. Maudy with a parasol—and Will. The cheerful little Italian led on with her encouraging chatter, and he went forward to meet what must happen, numb and helpless. When they were almost abreast Lena closed her guide book and lifted her eyes, and the colonel braced himself for the scene to come.

"Oh, look, you can see St. Peter's from here," Will suddenly exclaimed, and the two women turned to look back.

"That isn't St. Peter's, silly," said Maudy, and while they argued a tall and covering man and an unconscious contadina went by unnoticed.

When they were safe the colonel could not resist a glance back—and his gaze fell squarely into two articulate gray eyes. Before he could drag it away or make sign or move of any kind, one of the young man's eyelids drooped, slowly and intentionally. It was not a jovial wink; rather a grave and disapproving signal of recognition. An instant later he had turned and followed his companions, and the colonel stumbled blindly on, trying to think he had imagined the incident. But the quiet gesture haunted and enraged him.

"Confound him—how dare he!" stormed the colonel under his breath, the more angry for the consciousness of a craven gratitude, a relief in escape at any cost.

IV.

The second cousin did his best. By noon the colonel's hair was a pink drab, shading to mauve, and his make-up had changed from Eighth Ward heeler to dissolute and ghastly rake. He sneaked home and spent a desperate afternoon. Three times he rose to go straight to Lena with the whole truth; three times the mirror sent him back cowering under his heliotrope locks. His little blue eyes grew pitiful and haggard with mortification and loneliness.

"Pretty rough, when a man hasn't seen his own wife for four months," he muttered, staring down through the blinds into the drowsy white street below. Tourists came and went at the cafe opposite eating ices under its broad awnings.

At dinner time the landlady, poignantly sympathetic, brought him his meal with her own hands. She insisted that he must see something of her beautiful city. She would herself guide him to the Pantheon as soon as the moon was right. All Americans loved the Pantheon when the moon was over the opening at the top.

The colonel assented gladly, and at nine they set out, he almost gay in the consciousness that the moonlight tempered his pink aureole to modest gray. What the Pantheon stood for was vague to him, but its cavernous shadows and the white shaft of moonlight impressed him deeply.

"My!" he breathed. "If that don't beat the Dutch!" She led him into the patch of moonlight with a plump hand on his arm, and they were standing so, looking up in silent awe, when a masculine voice from the entrance jarred the colonel back to dismal consciousness of his plight. As he started back into the shadow, the words came to him clearly:

"There seem to be people here. Shan't we come back later, Maud?"

"But we'll miss the moon; it's perfect now," he heard his daughter protest, and then three dim figures came forward.

"Say—suppose we go," stammered the colonel, sliding rapidly back towards the wall, where the shadows were deepest. "I—I've seen enough, I guess."

His unconscious guide led boldly to the entrance while he fearfully skirted the wall, passing so close behind his wife

that he could have touched her dress; and his heart was wrung by her words:

"Dear me, Maudy, I wish your father could see this!"

"It is a pity he's missing it"; Will's voice had a dryness only one person present understood.

Once outside, the colonel wiped his forehead, and ran his forefinger round inside his collar.

An abrupt "Say, Colonel!" checked his steps with an unpleasant shock. He smiled nervously and put out his hand as Will came up, but the young man ignored the movement.

"I am not going to meddle with your business," the youth began curtly, "but while we are in Rome couldn't you—amuse yourself somewhere else? These meetings are bound to happen, and sooner or later they will—you can realize that it won't be pleasant!" And he shot a quick glance at the little landlady waiting demurely at a distance.

The colonel's jaw slowly dropped. It was not until that moment that the full blasting significance of the look he had caught that morning dawned on him, and he was too stunned to speak. He, church-goer, tax payer, loyal American husband and father—and the dyed hair, and the pretty Italian—oh, merciful Lord!

"I simply wish to spare them," went on the severe young voice. "And if you have any sense of fitness left you will do the same. You shouldn't travel with your full name on your bag," he added as he turned away.

"Say—wait! You're all balled up. It's a mistake," stammered the colonel, coming a step after him. The young man shrugged and disappeared.

V.

The next morning, after several laborious attempts at a written explanation, the colonel sent off a note asking the young man to come to his lodgings. The messenger brought back a curt refusal. Will considered that while he was in the position of protector to the two women loyalty forbade that he should know any more than he could avoid about the colonel's—he implied escapades.

The colonel looked in the glass, then went to the barber with tears of entreaty in his eyes. As a result, intervals of saffron and orange appeared in the mauve pink. The colonel now looked like nothing but a bad dream. The barber suggested shaving; but total baldness would be as disconcerting as these rainbow effects, and might take longer to overcome. One lock of dim whiteness gave him a glimmer of encouragement as he sat behind his blinds that afternoon, watching the loiterers at the cafe opposite.

Towards five a little group of three, with guide book and parasol, brought his face close to the dusty paint of the shutters. They had been sightseeing, evidently, and dropped down at a table with a pantomime of weariness. The colonel watched them with a beating heart. How pale and tired Lena looked—keeping up with those two, of course, and never a word about herself. She wasn't eating her ice, and she put her hand to her head occasionally with a familiar little gesture that set the colonel breathing hard. One of her blind headaches, poor little soul—and those selfish young folks too absorbed in each other to discover it. She'd go till she dropped, without him to—Two tears ran down the colonel's cheeks, and he clenched his hands.

Now, Will and Maud were getting up, evidently with a new purpose, and Lena was saying that she would wait there till they came back. They had no business to leave her alone, white as that!

Then they were gone, and the poor thing relaxed and dropped her smile and leaned her head on her hand. Presently she lifted her head and look about in a way that frightened him. Then she rose, putting her hand out in front of her, and turned an appealing white face up to the very blind that sheltered her husband.

Before the public had had time to realize that some one had fainted, a tall and strange looking man had dashed out of a door opposite, whirled aside a couple of waiters, gathered the inert form in his arms, and gone striding

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