

THE SHADOW HAND

The Story of a Wonderful Mother

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A WONDERFUL day framed in the Paris spring—Paris of five years ago, when no hint of war disturbed the careless gaiety of the Latin Quarter; a day vivid with colour which sent artists scampering to their palettes; a day murmurous with harmony, inspiring musicians to linger over their instruments trying to transmute bird notes and the whispering of tender leaves into an immortal Summer song. Even journalists, sleuth-like in their ceaseless search for the bizarre, the unusual, turned their minds from plots and crimes and took frank delight in a day pregnant with promise, of ambitions almost realized, when the Key to the Secret of Life seemed to hang within reach—just around the next corner.

Jeanette Lacy turned her back to the window, lest she should be tempted to look out at the trees bursting into bud and blossom, lest she should fall a-dreaming and scorch the finely pleated shirt which steamed gently beneath her iron.

Her hand passed back and forth, not because she was intent upon her work, but with the dexterity of long practice. True, she had blotted out the sight of azure sky, bursting flower, and swift darting bird, but she could not blot out her dreams by simply turning her back upon the window. They rose magically life-like and centred, now as ever, around Gerald, her son—Gerald, but yesterday a chubby, tyrannical young autocrat in pinafores, to-day a twenty-two-year-old pupil of the great Victor Dessart.

Those twenty-two years were not divided into meagre periods, each containing three hundred and sixty-five days; they were a-throb with absorbing episodes "when Gerald was—" or "before Gerald had—" or "after Gerald did—" He was the axis on which her world revolved.

The first vivid happening in Gerald's life—passing tenderly over the breathless surprises of early babyhood—dated from his fifth birthday. Amongst his gifts was a somewhat advanced drawing book, a presentation from a relative of his dead father. This well-meaning lady knew little about children and nothing about drawing, but the book cost ten cents less than the amount she had set aside to pay, it had a pretty cover, and—she bought it!

Gerald took it and disappeared. After a little, he came to his mother, flushed and angry.

"I can't make him look walking," he said, the tragedy of uncrowned effort quivering in his voice.

With a faithfulness of outline which amounted to the wizardly, the child had copied a dog supposed to be running, but he had failed to catch that subtle something which made the animal "look walking."

For a moment Jeanette stared at her son with a sort of awe; then choking back a joyous sob, she gathered him into her arms, muttering incoherent things against his hair. What mother of us has not looked at the artistic efforts of our children and thought pityingly of Reynolds, Turner, Valasquez?

HE never marvelled at her ability to make the dog "look walking"; he accepted it just as the child accepts superior physical strength, the cunning by which broken toys are made whole, torn garments mended, bread, milk, sugar and eggs converted into a toothsome pudding. Had his baby mind reasoned out the circumstances at all, he might have felt that the few strokes his mother added were totally unimportant; he had drawn the dog. So presently he forgot that she had contributed to the picture at all, and both he and she exhibited it as his work. It is impossible to say which enjoyed the speechless admiration and generous prophecies of their friends the more.

That episode formed the key note of all those which crowded into the following years; it was a basic theme upon which Gerald's largos, andantes, allegros and dolorosos were built. He drew many, many dogs, but his mother, unrealized by him, made them "look walking."

If she missed a hot, quivering little body pressed close against her while she held the baby fingers and guided the pencil's strokes; if she saw that, as the child grew older, he resented her criticism and denied the help she gave, she made no sign. She went on helping, but in subtler, less apparent ways. Hers was the creative mind behind Gerald's technical skill, hers the breath which gave his creations life. For years, her days and nights were spent in devising means by which he might learn this trick without realizing that he did not know it!

She discovered early that self-confidence was a potent factor in Gerald's work, that any harsh criticism, any aspersion cast upon his ability not only enraged, but wounded and depressed him, so that the hurt showed for weeks in his faltering brush.

"Appallingly ambitious," he overheard a woman remark at one of the "private exhibitions" his mother frequently gave. "Isn't it a pity he is allowed to attempt anything so far beyond his powers? The poor child should be told

what to draw—something simple which he could accomplish without any help."

"What should a child draw?" he cried rudely. "Bowls of pansies, or vases or tea cups? Look! I shall draw something simple without any help," and, seizing a pencil, Gerald made on the wall an excellent caricature of the offending lady, herself!

When she realized that her remark was responsible for a fit of hysterics, she apologized handsomely—and bought the picture; but weeks elapsed before Gerald's self-confidence was restored. For days at a time he would not touch a brush, and then, when he did, it was in a half-hearted manner.

"What's the use?" he would complain bitterly. "If I can't paint better than those in the vase and tea cup class, I might as well stop now and learn to do cooking or to take care of somebody's furnace."

Is it any wonder that, with this ever present in her mind,



"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? Beside, any one could have guessed—that is, any one except John Gerald's son!"

Jeanette could not curb his ambitious flights nor bring herself to say: "Well, darling, you know I have helped you, after all?"

Instead, she denied her share in his work; to him, to the world, and even to herself. Her's was "The Shadow Hand" above his palette. She never obtruded herself by forcing him, denying him, scolding him, not even when, to gratify a passing whim, he squandered money which they needed badly.

There was the particular instance of the moonstones. Gerald was on his way to pay the grocer's bill and fatten up a very lean larder, when he saw several moonstones in a jeweller's window. Unable to resist the temptation to possess the stones, he bought them.

"Oh, look, Madre," he cried, bursting into the room, "look at the present I bought you! Aren't they wonderful? See the moon in this one—and this, against your black dress! Oh, Madre," he breathed, with half closed eyes, his sluggish mind groping after an idea, "perhaps I could do a picture with moonstones."

"Of course you can, darling," responded his mother, instantly as eager as he. "An ink-blue sky, a shaft of light, a water-fall, the beads of spray flung against moss-covered rocks—moonstones! Yes, yes, you must get straight at it!"

Already she associated him with those distant relatives of pearls; already she saw him like a Tadema with marble. "Lacy's Moonstones," people would say, and she smiled happily as she prepared a very meagre supper.

He painted the picture, and "Moonstones" sold for more than all his previous efforts combined, thus giving rise to the belief in his mother's breast—in his own, certainly—that at fourteen he had "arrived." There would be no more backslidings, there would be steady advance. He suddenly found the small town in which they lived too small. In fact, the thought of a city did not make much of an appeal to him.

"It must be Paris," he announced, "and let us go quickly while I feel the fever of inspiration."

Gerald Lacy was always trying to put salt on the tail of his (mother's) inspirations!

So they went to Paris in a large steamer and took an apartment in a very good hotel. Gerald could never work in uncomfortable surroundings. Ugliness, barrenness, squalor, depressed him. Because he was not creative, he was not oblivious to externals—quite the reverse—but it was with unconscious selfishness that he made so many demands upon his mother's pigmy income. He was always repeating the episode of the moonstones in various ways, but he knew nothing of their financial resources.

Thinking of money fretted him; he merely spent what he considered necessary and left the bother to his mother, who forebore to shackle him with eternal pleas for economy.

WHEN Gerald was made comfortable

—oh, quite luxuriously comfortable—he sat down to wait for the divine message which is called Inspiration, while his mother performed all menial tasks for him. Duty to Jeanette Lacy spelled itself in the letters of L-O-V-E; it was not a round of irksome tasks, and she was distinctly humble in thanking her Maker for the privilege of helping to fashion anything so perfect as her son.

She was not the first woman to whom the fallacy of cheap living in Paris came as an icy douche; nor will she be the last. But that did not minimize her frantic worry when she made the discovery that, according to six weeks' expenditure, after six months at the same rate, she would have little or no use for her bank book.

Uprooting Gerald just when he was settled, especially when he declared that the "atmosphere" of the place suited him, was out of the question, yet obviously something had to be done. She tried to secure a few pupils in English, but was astonished to find how many people already spoke English, and those who did not were willing to pay so little or wanted her at such inconvenient hours that she reluctantly abandoned the idea, save as a last resource. She would have taken any kind of a position which would have allowed her some time at home, so that Gerald would not discover in her regular absences just that which she was anxious to keep from him. He must be spared worry at any cost.

She dropped exhausted on a park bench one morning after a discouraging series of interviews, and almost without realizing it began to sketch the people about her. Here, an old man, squeezed nearly through the hourglass of life, obviously indifferent to everything save the friendly warmth of the Spring sunshine on his aged body; there, a younger man, loose-hanging across a bench in an attitude which argued a too intimate acquaintance with the jade, Absinthe; a mother with a peevish child; a maid with a pampered dog; a student; a gardener—all of these appeared in crisp,

sharp lines upon Jeanette Lacy's piece of paper.

You may marvel over that which the five-year-old child took for granted, but, after all, the circumstance held nothing unusual. From early childhood, Gerald's mother had cherished the hope that some day she might make an eddy, though it be ever so small, upon the artistic pool. She had absorbed all the advantages offered in the village where she lived and had looked frankly upon marriage as a step to broader things. But marriage, instead of widening her opportunities, suddenly crushed them, for a serious accident rendered John Lacy not only a helpless invalid, but a harmless idiot, who demanded her constant attention. She laid aside her drawing board and gave herself up to the care of her husband and the nurture of something which lay very near her heart.

JOHN Lacy died before Gerald was born, and then all the mother's thoughts were concentrated upon her baby. Perhaps the old longing to create had been satisfied now that there lay in her arms the flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone; however that was, Jeanette Lacy had given but scant thought to her latent talent until the day when the boy's genius had been revealed. It then seemed to her like a re-incarnation—something which had died in her only to be re-born in her son—and she asked no more than to add what was hers to give to that which he already possessed. Sometimes, it is true, after accompanying Gerald to a lesson, she would put into effect, in secret, the

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