

Matthew Strang knows, with the same secret assurance that sent him out to fight, and strengthened him in the long struggle, that this picture will live, that the gods have answered his boyish prayer for immortality. But at moments when Billy is moping or in pain, or when the artist foresees the gabble of magazines and drawing-rooms about his work, the chatter of fashionable parrots, and the analysis of his "second manner" by glib, comfortable critics, he wonders whether the picture or the immortality is worth the price.

But, stronger than those driven by their Over-Consciousness to express in artistic shapes the futility of life, he does not dwell eternally on the tears of things; and his picture simply entitled "A Woman" is perhaps his masterpiece. For when he painted it that sunrise in Paris was still vivid to him, and the light in Ruth Hailey's eyes, and that fire of love in Eleanor Wyndwood's; these things were in the eternal order, too, as truly as the ugliness and the sordid realities. The simplest human life was packed with marvels of sensation and emotion, haloed with dreams and divine illusions. To have been a child, to have sung and danced, to have eaten and played, to have seen woods and waters, to have grown to youth and to manhood, to have dreamed and aspired, to have labored and hoped—all this happiness had been his while he was looking for happiness, just as Art had been his in Nova Scotia, while he had been struggling to get to it in England.

And so to-day he yearns to paint the poetry of the Real—not with the false romantic glamour which had witched his youth, though even his youth had had a hankering after the Real, just as his maturity retains a love for the mystic. That gilded unreality to which his Art would have gravitated, had he found happiness with the sentimental Eleanor in her atmosphere of fashion, will be replaced by the beauty that even when mystic is based on Truth. He needed no woman's inspiration, nor the stimulus of cultured cliques. Alone he faces the realities of life and death without intervening veils of charming illusion, no longer craving to filter the honest sunlight through stained cathedral windows or to tarnish the simplicity of the grave with monumental angels, Aspiring now to paint London, he wanders