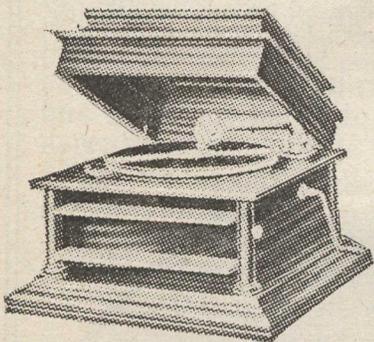


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The Money-Prize

By ELIZABETH FLORENCE WEST

THE cold daylight of winter streamed into the upper room where the art class met. It fell in a slanting beam through the high windows, shaded half-way up, and lay upon white plaster casts with blank eyes, upon an assortment of models of feet and hands and on the agonizing group of the Laocoon placed in the centre of the floor: it penetrated the forest of easels, touching with various shades of copper and gold the coiled or braided hair of the girl students gathered around.

There were no young men in the afternoon class; a few attended the morning lessons in painting, and more came in the evening to draw; but the artist instructor was the only male present at the afternoon session.

The silence had remained unbroken so long that the school mouse had glided out to nibble the used-up bread crumbs dropped from the hands of the workers in "black and white." He sat on his haunches to investigate, nose and whiskers a-quake, but darted back to his hole in dismay as a resonant voice announced: "I have news for you charcoal-smudgers."

All eyes turned towards the shaggy-browed, black-bearded, swarthy face; the purposely-cynical scowl veiled, as everyone knew, the workings of a singularly tender heart.

"The Board has decided to offer a money prize of thirty dollars for the best drawing from a cast submitted at the next examination. I hope the competition will have the effect of furthering good-fellowship."

Nobody ventured to speak though a thrill of interest stirred the class; it even affected Ellen Brown with the pretty auburn hair, who was always displaying her pearls of teeth in a faint smile, and who never showed a trace of charcoal on her slim fingers or on her blue overall apron; it plainly agitated little Marjory Lane of the tousled locks, who was never without a smear on nose or cheek, and who worked feverishly with flushed brow, though she seemed to be chiefly employed in rubbing out.

One dark head was bent lower as its owner blackened a deep shadow and picked out the neighbouring high light; then it was lifted until the brown eyes gazed up steadily. A giddy young married woman, in the security of a far corner, and behind the shelter of her drawing-board, whispered to her neighbour:

"It's easy to guess where the prize will go. What chance have the rest of us? When an instructor spends most of the time over the drawings of one pupil—well, it's an old story; such things are always happening."

"But the men will be competing, too," answered her companion. "If George Leslie tries, Elinor Burke will have no chance."

"If Leslie keeps sober, you mean?" "Do you really believe those stories?" "Leslie is clever, no doubt; but he's erratic," was the evasive reply.

As Elinor left the school and turned to walk west towards the red sunset where the car tracks converged in a haze of sanguinous-looking dust her temples were throbbing. On reaching her destination she looked round at the dingy carpet and cheap furniture of the lodging-house back-bedroom, and wondered whether she would be able to call it her own for another winter. Living in town had cost more than she had anticipated. If she could win the money-prize it would help to pay for her next season's lessons. She mentally reviewed the competitors and found that she feared none except George Leslie; and he did not need the money; he was fairly well-to-do, and was already earning something by his pen-and-ink sketches. Illustrating was the goal of Elinor's ambition; her eye for the form of things, for line and curve, was good; her sense of colour was not so well developed; moreover, painting lessons were expensive, and the life classes she could not afford at all.

Leslie excelled in all these—when he was at work; but he was often absent. Some said that, on these occasions, he was tramping off on sketching expeditions or was locked in his room working upon some conception of his own. Others recounted other tales. Elinor could not judge him: he was different from any young men she had known. She felt to-

night the disproportion of his advantages over her. He had always had the best of teachers; she, before coming to town, had taken lessons from an itinerant drawing-master whose pencil studies of sheep and cows were hung on view in the village post-office. She soon outstripped her tutor—not such a very great feat, she now reflected.

Since her coming to the city and joining the art-class the artist in charge, Mr. Crowleigh, had shown great interest in her (so much indeed as to set the other girls gossiping, he being unmarried, but Elinor was not aware of this). She had always gone early to class and completed an hour's work before the instructor arrived.

She decided that, during the remaining months before the examination, she would give up painting altogether, concentrate her efforts in one line, and await the outcome.

One evening the students were called upon to enroll their names for the competition. Leslie was not then present, but later he sauntered in, lazily displaying his tall form and broad shoulders. Would he place his name on the list? Elinor wondered. He strolled across the room, studied the column of signatures lying upon the table, and carelessly inscribed his own.

Elinor contrived to steal surreptitious glances at his work. She perceived that what she attained by dint of utmost endeavour he overpassed with grace and ease. She recognized that ease to be the result of past labour.

THE day and hour arrived. Elinor found her nerve cool and her brain in working order. Not until she was handing in her completed drawing, at the end of the proscribed three hours, did she observe that Leslie was not in the examination room. From some feeling of self-consciousness she refrained from asking her fellow-students concerning him, but a scrap of conversation reached her ear—"under the influence of liquor." Elinor shivered. The words hummed like wasps about to sting. With his genius—how dreadful! A mist of tears dazzled her sight and emotion constricted her throat.

One afternoon she was told there was a visitor in the parlor asking for her. She went down. It was Mr. Crowleigh. "Well, child, I will just detain you one moment."

She met the gaze of his deep-set eyes wondering at their intensity.

"I wanted to tell you first. You will get a notice to-morrow. You have won the prize for the best charcoal drawing."

Elinor never remembered what she answered. A few moments later the artist was gone. She was dazedly sitting in her room when she was again summoned to the parlour. To her amazement she found her hand clasped by George Leslie.

"I just met Crowleigh and made him tell me—regularly made him tell—he pretended it was against the rules. I congratulate you! But, I say, Miss Burke, I don't want you to believe what they've been putting out about me. I never bother to contradict them—and it's none of their business why I stayed away from the exam. But I don't want you to listen to any of those silly stories they gabble concerning me. I want you to believe me when I tell you they are not true."

Looking into his face Elinor realized that she would believe whatever he said.

SEND YOUR PHOTOGRAPH

We want to remind all the young people who are readers of The Canadian Courier that it is time to send their photographs if they wish to see them in the Christmas Number. It is our intention to publish three hundred or more, and the first three hundred received will be used. Snapshots will do, and we prefer to have them unmounted. Address to "Editor, Canadian Courier, Toronto," and put your full name, address, and age on the back of each picture. No photograph will be returned.



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