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# THE CHOICE

A Story of the Royal Academy

From the little window one could see the gray muffled stars showed on the sky. Lights like muffled stars showed on the sky. Below-for the flat lay under the roof with a climb of five flights of stairs up-below and a little to the left the placid length of Chenevix Walk was dotted with lamps. At the upright grand set Estelle Trevor, a fire blinked in the grate, now illuminating the silver set out on the black oak table, now lighting up the blue china on the quaint old dresser, now bringing into sudden prominence the old prints on the walls, but oftenest caressing the red-gold of the singer's hair. The artist sat, clasping his knees, staring out at the twilight. "Beautiful," he murmured, as Estelle finished. "Brahma-I love him," she answered. "He makes the heart sing. You are tired, Paul?" Paul Warden smiled into the fire-light. "Luxuriously tired. I have worked hard the last fortnight, and now the picture is finished-think of it, Estelle, finished! It was a grand- finished-to-day by superhuman energy, and to-morrow is sending-in day. A race against time, eh? But I am satisfied. I shall never do better work. It is really good. I have no conceit-you know that, Estelle-but a man must be conscious of the worth of his work, so why not declare it? This was an inspiration." "And you will not let me see it?" "No." "You shall see it in Burlington House or not at all. . . If it's on the line-I really don't see why it shouldn't be if I have fair play-if it's on the line and a success it will mean so much to me." He turned and looked at her. He had never spoken plainly-he had little money, and she had none beyond what she earned as a fairly successful singer-but had hinted so markedly that she was fully aware of his admiration. "It is sure to be a success," she said. "The Burlington gang encourage mediocrity-it is their safeguard," he answered. "But I have hopes. I want it to be a success, a big, unmistakable success, because"-he did not finish his sentence. As a matter of fact there was no need for it. Estelle could easily supply the unspoken words. In the pause that followed the door opened and a man was ushered in by a servant. Estelle welcomed him warmly. Paul rose stiffly. Hugh McWhinnie was the youngest academician. Rather a sound painter than a brilliant one, his indomitable perseverance had been early rewarded. He was now only a little over forty years of age, a big, strong-faced man, growing a little gray at the temples. A year or so before Warden, as a student, had painted in his studio, but now both men were conscious of something approaching rivalry. McWhinnie had been a friend of Estelle's father, and when Estelle, flustered with the possession of a certificate of merit from the Royal Academy of Music, commenced her career as a contralto, his friendship and energetic aid smothered many difficulties. "Ah, Warden," McWhinnie, R.A., said. "Resting after your labors? You are sending in, of course?" "One canvas. I cannot expect to have more than one accepted. I am unknown and you academicians and associates monopolize so much space." "Much better occupied by others, eh? We do not all exercise our prerogative, though. I am sending in one only." "Only one?" Estelle asked, in some surprise. "I have sent three to Germany, and two sitters-portraits-objected to exhibition. I gave in. They are unlovely, and such common sense in women was to be encouraged." Warden drifted away quickly. He invariably did when McWhinnie was present. He was a little intolerant of the elder man's material prosperity, and viewed his intimacy with Estelle unfavorably. Paul Warden was as common to youth-Sultanic in his attitude toward woman. That his wife should earn money for herself and not be entirely dependent upon him was an intolerable thought. It was that attitude which made him refrain from speaking to Estelle. In the meantime the presence of a wealthy man-McWhinnie made an excellent income from portrait-painting was disconcerting

It was almost inconceivable that youth and beauty should choose mediocrity and middle age, but Paul acknowledged the power of money with the frank cynicism of youth. Even might it weigh against him and his genius in the eyes of Estelle. McWhinnie smiled rather sadly as Warden left. Of late, Estelle remembered with wonderment, some ghost of sorrow lay hid in his whimsical smile. "Ambition holds our friend in thrall," he said. "A colossal ambition! When he sets it forth in such palaces in Spain, why envy me my little Burlington House? But rave and roar at us for mere foot- rules of art as they will, sending-in day sees all the revolutionaries represented. Paul Warden has talent, though." "More than that, Gurdy," she said, enthusiastically. He winced a little at her affectionate name. Two years ago, when he first buttonholed acquaintances and insisted upon their helping Estelle for the sake of his dead friend, her father, the playful adoption of him as guardian was pleasant. Now it measured a chasm of years between them. "Yes, more than that," he acknowledged. "He is full of imagination," she continued eagerly. "He has the immortal fire of genius! He is untrammelled by tradition." "It really is remarkable how heroically he discards all rules." The spirit of the classical school showed in the acid tones. "You will not see," she complained. "I think your judgment is unduly harsh towards him. Are not rules made merely for the guidance of mediocrity?" "The informing spirit of the Academy?" He smiled again with that ghost of sorrow lurking in it. "You are an ardent disciple. That sentence smacks of Warden. Young spirits would plunge us into chaos-surely above all others painting should not be formless? Besides, when you are master of all rules you may venture to break them-not before." He was horribly conscious that he was dogmatizing in a thoroughly middle aged way. "He has youth and the eagerness of youth," she insisted. "Yes," the fire flicker played on her hair, her eyes shone luminously, in the twilight, her eager face was now illuminated, now in the shadow, a state of sweet tantalization. And all its eagerness was for Paul Warden. "I am so anxious for Paul to succeed. It means so much to him, so very much." "Yes. But to no one else?" The sentence was almost interrogatory. "I don't know," she answered. It was truthful enough. She was not sure herself. Her small triumphs, her serious worship, could not continue if- These shadowy thoughts framed her answer, although she saw in McWhinnie's sentence only a reference to Paul's lack of relatives. "I am on the hanging committee," McWhinnie said abruptly. "Then- Oh, Gurdy, if Paul could realize his dreams? No, no, I am not trying to suborn you. You are adamant, I know. So are you all, all adamant men." But-you will cry out upon me again for discipleship-but he is so fearful of not getting fair play. He is quite sure of the merit of his picture." "He would be," McWhinnie said grimly.

"You know that he is clever-that was harsh, Gurdy." She rebuked him freely on many occasions, conscious of her power, and, woman-like, eager to exercise it. "The history of Burlington House is not without taint. You are slaves to tradition-oh, that is too sweeping, I know, but there is some truth in it. And he is what you term a revolutionary. So were the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood." "He shall have fair play," McWhinnie said soberly. He spoke with more solemnity than his words seemed to demand. It was possible that he thought of something beyond the judgment of art. "And now," he added, in lighter manner, "tell me of your doings and your goings, your successes and your engagements." It was characteristic of him that he was readily interested in her work and welfare. He rarely spoke of himself. Going home to his studio-it was a large one now, built out from a handsome house in quite a fashionable quarter of Kensington-he mused somewhat bitterly on the selfishness of youth. "God knows I want no thanks," ran his thoughts, "but if she did not take everything for granted-if her smile of thanks were less perfunctory! I work for her-a sincere pleasure-but- Her glance has no warmth for me as it has for Paul. Youth to youth-it is the natural law, and I am too old to rebel. If-" He trailed off in visionary glories, iridescent but nebulous, and alas! in the very moment of their conceiving palpably unsubstantial. Paul Warden came to Estelle with the news that his picture was accepted. He was excited, full of anticipatory triumphs, suggesting much adopting proprietary airs which half thrilled her but which also awoke some slight feeling of resentment. He had not spoken, she had consented to nothing, he was too sure of her. He might be right-catching fire at his enthusiasm she felt her heart traitorously to her and turning in surrender to him-but her womanliness demanded some concession of distrust on his part. "It may not be hung," he suggested suddenly. The idea had not crossed his mind before. It came now as a cold douche. She saw with a pang that his fears were quick enough over his picture. "It will be hung," she said quietly. "You don't understand, Estelle," he answered. "More pictures are accepted than they can hang. Some must come back, mine may. It is a large canvas. I-I am almost afraid to hope. It means-shall I say that I think you know what it means to me?" She held her head lower. "It means freedom to me to choose my own way. It means life, and ease-and I dare not say-not yet. If it should come back! The hanging committee"-He stopped and stared at her with frightened eyes. "I forgot-McWhinnie is on the hanging committee!" "Yes," Estelle smiled. "It will not be hung," he said, in rather a hushed voice. "You were his pupil-he is kind," she protested. "It will not be hung," he repeated, dire conviction in his voice. "He is kind-to you." "You are wronging him, Paul." "Don't you know?" He looked at her wonderingly. "Estelle, you are not so blind that you do not see that he loves you?" "He? Gurdy? Paul, you-you have no right to say-" "Oh, there is no question of right now. We are beyond conventionalities. I have been a fool. I forgot that he was on that committee. He is in love with you. Do you see the position? If I am hung and make a success-I shall if I get fair play-it means- Oh, Estelle, what does it not mean to me-to us? He is to judge my work-and he loves you!" "It is preposterous!" she said, holding up her shamed face. Even as she spoke she knew it was not preposterous. She had been unconscious before, now she was in possession of the secret which explained his awkwardness, his care of her, his tongue-tied tenderness. "It is not," he said. "I have known it for a long time." "I have no fear of him. You will have fair play. Hugh is an honest man-there is no room in his soul for any meanness." "But you don't know"- He broke off abruptly. "What is your picture called?" she asked, more to break an intolerable silence than in any hope of hearing what he had before scrupulously refrained from telling her. "You have not told me purposely so, I think." "Yes, purposely so." His voice

was dejected. "You may know now. It is called 'The Choice.'" "The Choice!" she whispered. There was a world of suggestion in the title. She caught at it quickly-it was curious that she had been so fully aware of Paul's devotion and yet blind to McWhinnie's love. Now there was to be a choice. Was there? Paul's handsome face, glowing with feeling, with life, with passion, blotted out the stronger, plainer features of the elder man. "Paul Warden's picture, 'The Choice,' was hung on the line, to the astonishment of many. It is not often that a young artist is so distinguished. A hundred reasons were assigned, all wrong. Influence was hinted at darkly. Success left loose a flood of jealousies. But Paul heeded nothing, treading on air. All was right for him in the best of all possible worlds. Estelle stood before the picture at the Private View, jostled by the well-dressed crowd, who were busily employed in taking an acute interest in each other's frocks and a perfunctory one in the exhibits. Paul would not go with her. "I want you to see it alone. Why? A whim-you will understand when you see it. I shall go away now-I must walk. I'm in a fever. And this afternoon I will come to the little black and silver room and have tea with you. This afternoon, Estelle! It is my day-it must be crowned." "Your day?" "Yes, yes. There are days when everything goes right. To-day is my day. I am invulnerable to Fate to-day. The secretary tells me of a tentative offer from Lord Ferroll-there are whispers of the Chantry-too previous, too impossible-but even a whisper of it is good. It is my day-and I want you to crown it. I may come?" There was no eagerness in his question, he spoke assured of his answer. "You may come," she said in a level voice, and left him, to search for "The Choice." It was a large canvas. A young girl with red-gold hair stood looking out of the frame. Before her knelt two men holding up gifts to her upon velvet cushions. One was a young man, the other was middle-aged. On the white cushion of the young man lay a single rose, blood-red. The elder man offered a casket of jewels, and his cushion was imperially purple. But that which held her as in a trance was the personal meaning in forming it. The girl, although no portrait, subtly suggested her own self; the two men, for all their mediaeval costuming, were Paul and Hugh. So deftly was the work done that the likenesses were faint enough to escape general remark. The elder man was the nearest to portraiture-it was not impossible that McWhinnie's friends might even notice it-but the others were hardly possible of recognition. But to her all three likenesses were real. One hand of the young girl was half stretched as though unconsciously toward the rose. Estelle noticed that with some stir of her old resentment. He was so sure-and this was his day. He was invulnerable to Fate that day, he had said. She felt caught in an impalpable net. "It is a fine work, Estelle," said a quiet voice. "Paul has made strides. An allegorical subject-perhaps a little trite." "Yes," she assented, wondering



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that McWhinnie did not see. "I am glad that he has had fair play," McWhinnie continued, with a smile. "And I am glad that you are glad." "One has natural sympathy with enthusiasm." "And youth." He spoke gravely. "Now, take me to see your picture," she said hurriedly, anxious to take him away before he recognized the picture's meaning. "I am not exhibiting." "You said you were sending one?" "It was a landscape. At the last moment I determined not to exhibit. I-I shall send it to one of the galleries. By the way, I am going abroad." "Soon?" "To-morrow. I have one or two commissions-portraits, you know-in Vienna." "To-morrow. It is sudden." "It is rather sudden." With her new knowledge she detected a note of weariness in his voice. "You will come to say goodbye to me?" "If you wish." "Of course, Gurdy. I shall require a huge dose of good advice. I don't know that I shall follow it, but it is always comforting to have it." "I shall come this afternoon," he said. "After tea-I am promised to the Ferroll's for tea. About 7." He was claimed by an art critic before she could name another time. She thought it did not matter-Paul would come before tea. She wondered what she would say to McWhinnie.

### HEROIC BISHOP

When the Italian steamer *Sirio* sank off Cape Palos, Spain, and at least 400 persons were drowned; when men who acted more like maniacs than normal beings cut and slashed women and children in their wild efforts to secure lifeboats and life belts, there was one hero who stood alone and did everything in his power to alleviate the conditions and to extend spiritual comfort and the last rites of the Church to the drowning and dying, who were trampled upon the deck. This man was the Bishop of Sao Paulo, Brazil, who was returning home from a pilgrimage to Rome. Although a powerful man and well able to care for himself, he devoted every one of the precious moments in comforting the helpless, giving absolution and praying for the salvation of the dying. He remained on board until all hope was abandoned and sank with the ship. He was not seen again.

### COULD SCARCELY WALK.

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### CAUGHT COLD ON THE C.P.R.

A. E. Mumford tells how Psychine cured him after the Doctors gave him up

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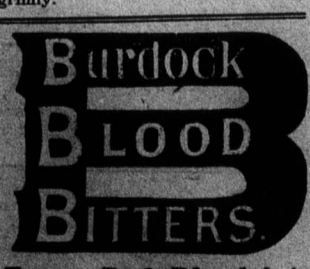
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