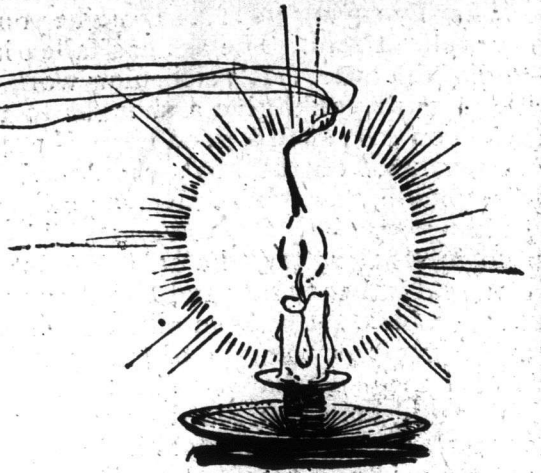
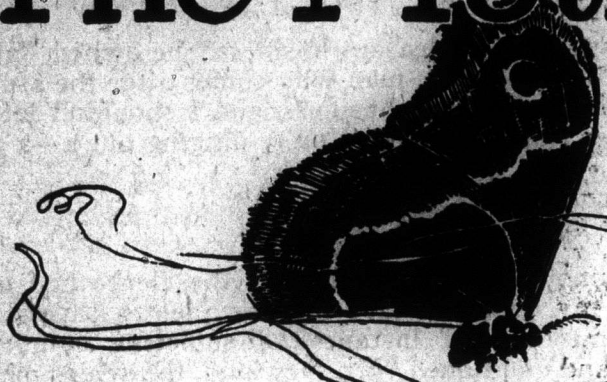


The Moth and the Candle



by Joanna Gingle

Illustrated by Walter Whitehead

JANET was ushered into a dim hall so perfect that entering it seemed part of a rite. A trim maid showed her up the carved stairway, and into the room where soft voiced women were laying aside their wraps, and discussing the recital of chamber music about to begin in the rooms below. A momentary hush followed Janet's entrance, and as the maid took her hat and coat she was conscious that these women of her world had been speaking of her. Henri Reaux' manifest and ardent wooing had not passed unnoticed.

Janet smiled and bowed her greetings to her friends, and went down without even a glance at the mirror. Her dark hair was parted from brow to neck and rolled behind her ears in a fashion that lent an odd Japanese appearance to her pale oval face and long gray eyes. She was small but slender, with a distinction of carriage that made her seem tall. Her dress was so perfect that the casual observer would only have known that it was gray, with soft lace draped on the bodice, and that she was very beautiful in it. At the stair's foot her hostess greeted her, a pretty child handed her a program, and she seated herself near a little candle-stand in the music room doorway facing the musicians.

The music room was even more shrine-like than the hall and, like the larger rooms opening from it, gave a marvellous effect of simplicity, considering the wealth of rich detail. The general color-feeling was that of still green relieved by jars of red roses set carelessly about. Soft oriental draperies were drawn back from the doorways and in a niche over the piano stood a great, white-winged Victory. All the curtains were close-drawn, and many shaded candles lighted the soft gloom, for it was Henri Reaux' caprice to think himself unable to play by daylight. He said the glare destroyed his mood and irritated him.

Janet sat watching the little orchestra of four pieces. For all that his appearance told, the second violinist might have been a clerk or a broker; the 'cellist was a fat, common-place-looking man, who suggested much beer. But the sixteen-year-old boy with the violin might have fittingly worn a halo; his face, though not perfect of feature, was of expression beautiful, and very fair. His eyes sought Janet's face with respectful adoration.

Then the first violinist rose to touch the key-note on the piano. While the others tuned their instruments and as he returned to his place, he took a long-stemmed rose from a vase and, passing Janet dropped it in her lap. He was the observed of all eyes. Henri Reaux was the city's newest musical idol; for three months society had adored and feted him for his music, his perfect manners, his peculiar foreign charm and distinction. He was a new sensation. He was of medium height and graceful, though rather thick-set with dark hair only a mere thought too long, and a pale complexion offset by his carefully curled black moustache. He could not have been forty. Always a favorite with women, men shrugged their shoulders and laughed at the women who surrounded him, though they had no definite objection to him. As he tuned his instrument a preliminary ecstasy shone in his fine dark eyes and, meeting Janet's glance, his face almost lit to beauty.

Janet sat fingering her rose, which was a splash of crimson against her gray gown. This afternoon he was to play for her and to her, and afterwards she was to say whether she would go to Paris with him when he returned thither in a week. He told her she alone could make him play as a god, could through him pour the beauty of her pure spirit into his music. He could do nothing without her now; she had taken from him his own power and must not deny him the gift of her more perfect strength.

Roused by his devotion to what she thought was an answering love in herself, she intended to go with him. She hardly understood

just why she had postponed her answer till now. Perhaps an indefinable wistfulness in her widowed mother's face had stayed her—a reluctance to leave her alone. Was it some instinct that said "Wait?" She was sure it was no thought of Ellis Field whom she refused because she was not sure of more than a comradely affection for him, and who had temporarily left town just before the musician came. She had hardly thought of Ellis; certainly had not missed him. What made her remember him now?

The tuning ended; and a Beethoven Adagio thrilled so softly into the room that its beginning was felt rather than heard. And as if in answer to a call, Ellis Field quietly entered and took a seat in front of Janet and just to one side. For a moment every head turned toward him; not entirely because his return to the city was unknown and unexpected, or because he was more often found at his law office than at afternoon functions; nor even because he was an open lover of Janet; but because he was disturbingly definite and vital—the wild note where tameness prevailed. His strong and lovable personality pervaded any company where he appeared, and never retreated into the polite colorlessness of mere convention. Other men loved him; children sought him; old ladies told him their troubles. He was tall and a blonde, with the smile of a boy, and stern righteousness lay beneath the kindness in his blue eyes.

Ellis Field's proximity troubled Janet and disturbed her mood. He had placed one long arm across the back of the vacant chair before her and she found herself watching the fine tenseness of his hand which, without actually moving, yet seemed to vibrate to every tone of the music. She remembered that he was no mean pianist himself. His face was turned to look past her, and she could see his eyes narrow a little in evident contemplation of Reaux. She had a momentary indignant impulse, half motherly, to shield the artist from the pitiless scrutiny of this balanced young man of the world, in whom the judge never slept. She felt nervously that Ellis would not understand the musician's temperament. Never before had she felt a throb of apology for the man she intended to marry; it surprised and hurt her.

Then the caressing passion of the violin's singing laid its spell upon her, and she joyed in the thought that she was inspiring it—that she was stirring Reaux' interpretative life to new vitality. She felt the woman's pleasure of giving all that she has, and found a finer generosity in the man's ability to receive without any thought of recompense. Ellis would not have accepted any sacrifice from any

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"Monsieur, I never forget. I have nothing to tell you."