

She gave one glance at me, and two at Percy, and pushed forward an easy chair for her husband. The young man reclined for a moment luxuriantly, then sprang up to get me a seat, which I accepted stolidly enough.

"And what are you doing?" I inquired.

"Doing?" he echoed, looking in his easy, careless attitude the impersonation of graceful idleness. "Oh, you mean for a living? Why, I am not able to work. My wife has a little income, and we are living on that for the present."

Mrs. Winthrop evidently objected to this piece of candour, for the corrugation on her brows did not disappear until her husband had leaned forward and looked teasingly and quizzically at her. Then he resumed: "A man who has a long life before him may try to achieve fame and fortune—for me, I am satisfied to attain fame alone. I'm on the straight high road to that, and—by Jove!" he exclaimed, suddenly springing to his feet, and running his hand through his hair until his thin, eager face beneath it looked like an enlarged exclamation point, "I have it—the very thing! What a piece of luck!"

"Don't excite yourself so much, Percy," said Mrs. Winthrop, without a shade of curiosity in face or voice.

"Don't you see," he cried, "Donald is the very fellow we want? He wouldn't deviate from the strict truth not to save his everlasting—why, Donald," he broke off, turning to me, "I'll never learn to call you Dr. Magruder in the world—haven't I told you? I'm a poet."

"Oh, you're a poet!" I said, with a laugh, trying to enter into what I supposed was a mocking mood; but in the next moment I perceived my mistake. This young fellow who took life as a joke was taking himself seriously.

"It was a revelation to me at first," he said simply and earnestly. "Without egotism I may say that I always knew there was something in me, something different from common, but I never knew what it was till the little child of a neighbour of ours died, and the day after the funeral I saw its mother sitting on the back door-step, in the unconscious attitude of heart-broken grief. Lax limbs, you know, listless arms clasped about them, bowed shoulders, drooping head, neglected hair and dress, eyes half blind with tears. I thought first, What a study for a painter! Then I thought, What a study for a poet! The bare notion set my heart to beating, and a voice within seemed to urge me to give that poor woman's grief form and body. I seized my pen as though inspired—I am sure I was inspired—and wrote half a dozen verses in perhaps the same number of minutes. Then I took them over and read them to the poor creature. Under the emotion roused by those lines she swayed and shrank like a sail boat in a storm. Talk of the thrill that a great actor or pianist feels in the thundering applause of a raptured and worshipping multitude! I tell you, Magruder, it is nothing, less than nothing, compared to the wave of feeling that nearly threw me off my feet at this overpowering and incontestable proof of my own hitherto undiscovered genius. The poet who builds upon primitive human emotions cannot escape immortality."

I listened to this, and a great deal more of the same sort, in mingled stupefaction and amaze. I had always given the boy credit for common perception. Surely he must know that, to a mother recently bereaved, the slightest or most prosaic reference to the cause of her suffering is sufficient to rouse her to a passion of anguish. The proof that he was a heaven-descended poet amounted to simply nothing. It was in my mind to tell him so, but I was restrained by a peculiar look in the deep gray eyes of the woman who sat opposite me.

Percy brought me several copies of verses cut from the corners of newspapers, and signed by his initials. They exhibited various commendable sentiments, arranged for the most part in picturesque attitudes, but they had a fatal defect. Intended for effect, they were not effectual. There was no life, vitality, depth, soul, inspiration in them. They lacked the Divine essence that stirs blood and brain, and swells out the breast and wings of imagination. They were as cheap and pretty as glass beads.

"Why I am so particularly glad to see you, Donald," said the young poet, who had his back turned to me, as he was looking for manuscript, "is because I know you to be as honest as a window-pane. My poems have been, well—darned with faint praise about long enough. What I want now is a strong, sincere verdict."

What he meant by a strong, sincere verdict was but too evidently praise that was not faint.

Again I opened my lips, and again they were held by the magnetic gray eyes sternly bent upon them. "You shall not speak," they said, in language as a blow. "You shall not!"

I felt curiously shaken and confused. "I have no time to do justice to your work to-day, Percy," I said, rising to take my departure. "Another time I will look at it again."

He looked disappointed, grieved and wondering, like a child whose pleasure is deferred. His old effrontery seemed to have disappeared with the wane of his physical powers, and the discovery of his gift.

But it returned again as I was taking leave of him on the porch. "What do you think of my wife?" he asked, at the last moment.

"I have no doubt she is a charming woman," I responded.

"I wouldn't try to be conventional, if I were you, Magruder," said the young man, kicking his slippered toes against the railing. "You'll not succeed. She's more charming than you are. I married her because she's like

you—the same rigidly, frigidly honest sort of a person, you know. But inside she has a heart of gold."

I reflected, as I went away, that it would be lucky for my young man if his wife had had a purse of gold to match her heart. She eked out her scanty income, so I afterwards discovered, by selling fancy work. The next time I called he returned as eagerly as before to the subject of his poetry.

"I know you will tell me the truth," he said, "and I don't want you to fear that the truth will unduly puff me up. A poet should be able to look as tranquilly into the face of his own genius as an eagle may look at the sun."

"Tell me first," I said, "what others say about your work."

"Oh, of course the majority are as oblivious to it as a herd of cattle grazing in a meadow are to the wealth of music poured from the trees. Editors invariably speak kindly of it, but I don't want kindness. What I want is recognition. It's pure, impenetrable dullness on the part of the public. Why, even children recognize the subtle quality of my best work. There was little Arthur Rodney, who was here the other day. I read him my long poem, called 'The Spirit of the Woods.' Half-way through he leaned against my chair, and said: 'I like that piece.' 'Do you, dear?' I returned. 'Yes,' he responded; 'it makes me feel so nice and sleepy.' For a moment I thought the child was saucy, and I wanted to whip him. Then I thought: See here! Wait a minute. Is not the chief effect of a vast assemblage of trees lulling, delicious, soothing, tending to induce drowsiness? That was the spirit of the woods, sure enough, and the boy had the gift of perception."

So far in his career the young poet had encountered but one adverse opinion, conveyed in an anonymous note. The bare recollection of this insult worked him up into a rage, for he was as sensitive as a butterfly. He paced the room, heaping hot words together until his frail strength gave out. One of his violent coughing fits came on, and the blood gushed from his lips. I caught him in my arms, for he was as light as a child, and carried him upstairs. For the few moments while he lay against my breast I thought of how tenderly I loved the boy. He put his face to my neck, and whispered, "What does it matter, Donald, what anyone says against me, so long as I know that you believe in my genius. You recognize my power; you are assured of my immortality?"

Now, I neither believed, nor recognized, nor was assured of any of these things. I laid him on the bed, and I could not look him in the face. I felt like a dastard.

A few weeks later I was astounded by this announcement in our local paper:

"The many friends of our gifted young townsman, Mr. Percy Winthrop, will be gratified, but not surprised, to learn, that he has recently received the distinction of having two poems accepted by magazines as well known as *The Century* and *Harper's*. We are proud to say that the first brilliant products of his muse were given to the world through the columns of this paper."

The Winthrops received my congratulations with entire self-possession. It was evidently no more than they had expected. Percy himself tossed into my hands the two letters from the editors of the respective magazines. They were written on a type-writer, and oozed out flattery at every syllable.

"Twenty-five dollars in each," said Percy. "Fifty dollars at a lick—no, two licks. I scrawled them both off before breakfast one morning. Who says that I can't help to support this family?" He caught his wife's hand as she was passing him, and leaned his flushed, transparent cheek against her shoulder for a moment. It struck me that she looked rather haggard and worn by contrast, but her eyes beamed radiantly into his.

"Oh, Mr. Winthrop," exclaimed one of the three young ladies, who, like myself, had called in to congratulate him, "to think of a real, genuine, great poet in this little, humdrum town? It doesn't seem possible." This was followed by a chorus of adulation from the other two. They surrounded his chair, and arranged his pillows with caressing touches, and petted him with their eyes. I felt sick and disgusted. I got up to go.

"Going, Donald?" inquired the poet. "I meant to show you the rustic seat that I've just finished hammering together under the chestnut tree."

"I will show Dr. Magruder the rustic seat," said Mrs. Winthrop, hastily. I knew she was glad to get me away from her husband. I knew she was glad to leave him surrounded by those foolish, flattering, fawning girls.

It was a warm summer night, moonlit. I said nothing to my companion as we strolled toward the chestnut tree. I was very much displeased with her, and I had a mind to show her my displeasure. At my invitation she sat down very reluctantly on the bench her husband had made. I took her hand, and put my finger on her pulse. "Well, young lady," I enquired, pretty grimly, "how long do you intend to keep this farce up?"

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"You know perfectly well what I mean. You forged those letters from the magazines. You worked while that silly boy slept to earn the money to pay him for the emptiest twaddle that ever was put into print."

"How dare you say such a thing?"

"Simply because it's the truth."

"My husband has not long to live," said the lady, trying to control herself. "Along with his exalted belief in himself, he has the keenest capacity for suffering. Hitherto I have not allowed you to offer him the slightest unkindness, and I will not permit it in the future."

"And I am determined not to keep up this fantastic foolery any longer," I retorted angrily. "You will not permit me to speak my mind? Pray, how will you prevent it?"

"By forbidding you to enter my house."

"Very well, madam," I replied, rising at once to leave her. "The next time I do so it will be at your very urgent invitation."

This invitation came a few months later. The boy was mourning and longing for me. She feared he was in a dying condition. Would I come at once? I did so.

She met me in the small parlour—a strange-looking little person, with close, shut lips, faded complexion, and eyes that had in them the strength and spirit of a span of wild horses. "Can I trust you?" were her first words.

I experienced a momentary masculine feeling of revolt against being thus openly manipulated. "You may trust my integrity, madam," I replied, with a slight smile.

She uttered a low exclamation, and, much as she hated me, she came close to me, clutching the front of my coat in her hands and looking me earnestly in the face. I steadied myself with the thought that she was playing her trump card. But with the curious power she had she poured her heart into her face, and I saw, as in a clear glass, the record of her unfaltering loyalty, her struggles and privations, her arts and defences, her overmastering love for the weak combination of egotism and fantasy that ruled her life. She guarded him as if he were a watch of exceedingly fine workmanship, set with countless gems of fabulous value—something to be carried close to one's pillow by night; and one's heart by day. And now, through this piece of delicate and priceless mechanism, I was proposing to drive the huge rusty nail of an old and terrible truth. I had told her she could trust my integrity.

"Oh," she gasped, unconsciously beating my breast with her hands, "I thought"—her light frame was convulsed with sobs—"I thought I could trust your love for him."

"And so you may," I responded earnestly, and at once she led me to him. He had wasted away to ghostly proportions. I saw that he had not many more minutes to live. He spent no time in reproaching me for my long absence. He was too full of his just published volume of poems, the first copy of which had reached him by that morning's mail, to talk of any lesser topic. It seems that the publisher had written him letters of profuse thanks and praise, marking out for special commendation, strange to say, the very poems in it that were his own favourites. It was a prettily bound volume, and must have cost Mrs. Winthrop a good deal of close figuring to bring out.

"I can die content," he said to his wife, "now that I know I am not leaving you unprovided for. The sale of these poems"—he indicated the beloved book tightly clasped in his hands—"will make you a rich woman." He smiled as though bestowing a kingdom upon her. She leaned over and kissed the pretty little volume, and then she kissed him. Suddenly his eye caught mine. "Donald," he cried, "do you know you have never yet told me what you thought of my poetry? There it is—all the wealth of my nature compressed between those crimson covers. And now for your opinion?"

I could put him off no longer. My time had come, and I could feel the cold perspiration forming on my brow. He leaned forward, with his old eager impetuosity. His wife held her breath. I turned the pages of those rapid rhymes, hunting desperately for the poetry. In my heart I was praying, "Oh Lord, help me to find a line, a phrase, a single gleam of true poetry, that I can honestly praise." Suddenly his frail grasp on my wrist relaxed; his head fell backward. It was beyond the power of any words of mine to help or hurt him.

That was some years ago. I have never regretted practising hypocrisy in moderation for the sake of my friend. And yet, when I am sitting over my pipe in the evening, realizing that the boy has probably learned since he left this world all about my lumbering attempts to deceive him, and that he is doubtless immensely amused by the way I bungled at the business, I seem to hear a mocking voice exclaim. "Oh, Donald, Donald, when you try to act in any way different from the simple, honest straightforward fellow I know you to be, you are sure to make fifteen different kinds of a donkey of yourself."

PARISIAN LITERARY NOTES.

REMARQUES SUR L'EXPOSITION DU CENTENAIRE. By Vicomte de Vogué. (Plon.) Of the making of many books about the late Exhibition, there is no end. Yet no single volume of an all round character has yet appeared capable of meeting all requirements. This is due to the fact that the public view the late Exhibition from different stand-points. As a general remark, the great attraction of the show, in the eyes of foreigners, was the Eiffel Tower. The fact that no single volume could deal with all the elements of the big fair is evidenced by the Exhibition Commissioners dedicating 150 volumes to the encyclopædic task—a literary undertaking next to Chinese in its vastness.

In the long run, perhaps, the Eiffel Tower is all that will remain of the 1889 fairy spectacle. It will serve as a cross, or grave-stone, to mark the site of a great tomb. Parisians will conserve the souvenir of agreeable hours passed at the Champ de Mars and its annexes, where work and pleasure were alike feted. For provincials who witnessed the show, and saw Paris for the first time, they will retain the memory of a grand and confused daze of