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ARLO BATES

A PROBLEM IN PORTRAITURE

I

“It does not look like him,” Celia Sathman said, moving aside a little that the afternoon light might fall more fully upon a portrait standing unfinished upon the easel; “and yet it is unquestionably the best picture you ever painted. It interests me, it fascinates me; and I never had at all that feeling about Ralph himself. And yet,” she added, smiling at her own inconsistency, “it is like him. It is n’t what I call a good likeness, and yet—”

The artist, Tom Claymore, leaned back in his chair and smiled.

“You are right and wrong,” he said. “I am a little disappointed that you don’t catch the secret of the picture. I knew Ralph would n’t understand, but I had hopes of you.”

A puzzled look came into Celia’s face as she continued to study the canvas. Her companion smoked a cigarette, and watched her with a regard which was at once fond and a little amused.

The studio was a great room which had originally been devoted to no less prosaic an occupation than the painting of oil-cloth carpeting, great splashes of color, which time and dust had softened into a pleasing dimness, remaining to testify to its former character. It stood down among the wharves of old Salem, a town where even the new is scarcely to be distinguished from the old, and Tom had been delighted with its roomy quiet, the play of light and shadow among the bare beams overhead, and the ease with which he had been able to make it serve his purpose. He had done comparatively little toward furnishing it for his summer occupancy. He had hung a few worn-out seines over the high beams, and placed here and there his latest acquisitions in the way of bric-à-brac, while numerous sketches were pinned to the walls with no attempt at order. On the door he had fastened a zither, of which the strings were struck by nicely balanced hammers when the door was moved, and in the still rather barn-like room, he had established himself to teach and to paint through the summer months.

“I cannot make it out at all,” Celia said at last, turning away from the easel and walking toward Claymore. “It looks older and stronger than Ralph, as if— Ah!” she interrupted herself suddenly, a new light breaking in her face. “Now I see! You have been painting his possibilities. You are making a portrait of him as he will be.”

“As he may be,” Claymore corrected her, his words showing that her conjecture was in

truth the key to the riddle. “When I began to paint Ralph, I was at once struck by the undeveloped state of his face. It seemed to me like a bud that had n’t opened; and I began at once to try and guess what it would grow into. I did n’t at first mean to paint it so, but the notion mastered me, and now I deliberately give myself up to the impulse. I don’t know whether it’s professional, but it is great fun.”

Celia went back and looked at the picture once more, but she soon returned to stand leaning upon the tall back of the chair in which her betrothed was sitting.

“It is getting too dark to see it,” she remarked; “but your experiment interests me wonderfully. You say you are painting what his face may be; why not what his face must be?”

“Because,” the artist replied, “I am trying to get in the best of his possibilities; to paint the noblest there is in him. How can I tell if he will in life realize it? He may develop his worst side, you know, instead of his best.”

Celia was silent a moment. The darkness seemed to have gathered quickly, rising clouds cutting off the light of the after-glow which had followed the sunset with delusive promise. She leaned forward and laid her finger-tips lightly upon Tom’s forehead with a caressing motion.

“You are a clever man,” she said. “It is fortunate you are a good one.”

“Oh,” he returned, almost brusquely, though he took her hand and kissed it, “I don’t know that I can lay claim to any especial virtue. Are you remembering Hawthorne’s story of ‘The Prophetic Pictures,’ that you think my goodness particularly fortunate in this connection?”

Instead of replying, she moved across the studio with her graceful, firm walk, which had won Tom’s deep admiration before he knew even her name. She took up a light old-fashioned silk shawl, yellow with time, and threw it across her arm.

“I must go home,” she remarked, as if no subject were under discussion. “I am sure I don’t know what I was thinking of to stay here so late.”

“Oh, there is no time in sleepy old Salem,” was his response, “so it can’t be late; but if you will go, I shall be proud to walk up with you.”

He flung away the end of his cigarette, locked the studio, and together they took their way out of the region of wharves, along the quaint old dinginess of Essex Street. It is a thoroughfare full of suggestions of the past, and they both were susceptible to its influences. Here of old the busy life of Salem flowed in vigorous current, laden with interests which embraced half the globe; here sailors from strange lands used to

gather, swarthy and bold, pouring into each other's ringed ear talk of adventure wild and daring; here merchants walked counting their gains on cargoes brought from the far Orient and islands of which even the names had hardly grown familiar to the Western World.

Hawthorne has somewhere spoken of the old life of New England as all too sombre, and declared that our forefathers "wove their web of life with hardly a single thread of rose-color or gold;" but surely the master was misled by the dimness gathered from time. Into every old web of tapestry went many a bright line of scarlet and green and azure, many a woof of gold that time has tarnished and the dust of years dulled until all is gray and faded. Along the memory-haunted streets of Salem, from the first, went, side by side or hand in hand, the happy maiden and her lover; stepped the bridal train; passed the young wife bearing under her heart with fearful bliss the sweet secret of a life other than her own; or the newly made mother bore her first-born son through a glory half sunlight and half dreams of his golden future. In later days all the romance of the seas, the teeming life which inspired the tongue of the prophet's denouncing lyre to break into rhapsodies of poetry, the stir of adventurous blood, and the boldness of daring adventurers have filled these old streets with vivid and undying memories.

The artist and his companion were rather silent as they walked, he studying the lights and shadows with appreciative eye, and she apparently absorbed in thought. At length she seemed to come in her reverie to some doubt which she needed his aid to resolve.

"Tom," she asked, rather hesitatingly, "have you noticed any change in Ralph lately?"

"Change?" repeated Claymore interrogatively, with a quick flash of interest in his eyes despite the studied calmness of his manner.

"Yes. He has n't been the same since—since—"

"Since when?" the artist inquired, as she hesitated.

"Why, it must be almost ever since we came home and you began to paint him," Celia returned thoughtfully; "though I confess I have noticed it only lately. Has n't it struck you?"

Her companion, instead of replying directly, began carefully to examine the carving on the head of his walking-stick.

"You forget how slightly I knew him before," he said. "What sort of a change do you mean?"

"He has developed. He seems all at once to be becoming a man."

“He is twenty-eight. It is n’t strange that there should be signs of the man about him, I suppose.”

“But he has always seemed so boyish,” Celia insisted, with the air of one who finds it difficult to make herself understood.

“Very likely something has happened to sober him,” Tom answered, with an effort to speak carelessly, which prevented him from noticing that Celia flushed slightly at his words.

They had reached Miss Sathman’s gate, and he held it open for her.

“It was very good of you to come this afternoon,” he told her. “When will you take your next lesson?”

“I can’t tell,” she replied. “I’ll let you know. Won’t you come in?”

The invitation was given with a certain faint wistfulness, but he declined, and lifting his hat, bade her good-night. She turned on the doorstep and looked after him as his strong, resolute figure passed down the street, and a sigh escaped her.

“I wonder if Tom will seem to me so reserved and cold after we are married,” was her thought.

II

People in general thought Tom Claymore’s nature cold and reserved because his manner was so. He was reticent perhaps to a fault, but the reticent man who is cold is a monster, and Tom was far from being anything so disagreeable as that. His was the shy artistic temperament, and the circumstances of his rather lonely life had fostered a habit of saying little while he yet felt deeply, and since he took life seriously, he seldom found himself disposed to open his heart in ordinary conversation.

Even with his betrothed he had not yet outworn the reserve which every year of his life had strengthened, and Celia, despite her betrothal, was not wholly free from the common error of supposing that, because he did not easily express his sentiment, he lacked warmth of feeling. She had been his pupil in Boston, and it was for the sake of being near her that he had established himself at Salem for the summer, making a pretext of the fact that he had promised to paint the portrait of her cousin, Ralph Thatcher.

Tom Claymore could not have told at what stage of his work upon this portrait he became possessed of the idea that he had been unconsciously painting rather the possibilities than the realities of his sitter’s face. At first he smiled at the thought as a

mere fanciful notion; then he strove against it; but he ended by giving his inspiration, or his whim, free rein, and deliberately endeavoring to portray the noblest manhood of which Ralph Thatcher's face seemed to him to contain the germs. He felt a secret impatience with the young man, who, with wealth, health, and all the opportunities of life, seemed still too much a boy properly to appreciate or to use them; and as the portrait advanced, the belief grew in Claymore's mind that, when it was completed, some effect might be produced upon Thatcher by its showing him thus vividly the possibilities of character he was wasting. The artist did not, it is true, attach much importance to this notion, but when once he had given himself up to it, he at least found much interest in following out his endeavor. The idea of a sitter's being influenced by a portrait is by no means a novel one among painters, and Claymore took pains to have Thatcher see the picture as soon as it got beyond its early stages. He wanted it to have to the full whatever influence was possible, and he was eager to discover how soon its departure from an exact likeness would become apparent to the original.

A curious complication followed. It was not long before it began to seem to Tom that Ralph was growing up to the ideal the portrait showed. At first he rejected the idea as utterly fanciful. Then he recalled an experience a brother artist had related to him in Paris, where a girl who had been painted in the dress of a nun worn at a fancy ball, came, by brooding over the picture, to be so possessed with a belief in her vocation that she ended by actually taking the veil. The cases were not exactly parallel, but Claymore saw in them a certain similarity, in that both seemed to show how a possibility might be so strongly expressed on canvas as to become an important influence in making itself an actuality. He became intensely interested in the problem which presented itself. He had before this time remarked to Celia that Ralph only needed arousing to develop into a noble man, and he began to speculate whether it could be within his power to furnish the impulse needed—the filament about which crystallization would take place all at once. He worked slowly and with the utmost care, taking pains to have Thatcher at the studio as much as possible even on days when he was not posing, so that the picture might be constantly before his eyes; and of one thing at least he was sure beyond the possibility of a doubt— Ralph was certainly developing.

"Post hoc sed non ergo propter hoc," he said to himself, in the Latin of his school debating-society days; but secretly he believed that in this case the effect was no less "because" than "after."

On the morning after Celia had talked with her betrothed about the picture, Ralph gave the artist a sitting. The young man seemed so preoccupied that Tom rallied him a little on his absence of mind, inquiring if Thatcher wished his portrait to have an air of deep abstraction.

"I was not thinking of that confounded old picture at all," the young man responded,

smiling. “I was merely—well, I do not know exactly how to tell you what I was doing. Do you ever feel as if the reflective part of you, whatever that may be, had gone into its office for private meditation and shut your consciousness outside?”

“Yes,” Tom answered; “and I always comfort myself for being excluded by supposing that at least something of real importance must be under consideration or it would n’t be worth the trouble to shut the doors so carefully.”

“Do you?” returned the sitter. “I had a jolly old clerical uncle who used to lock the door of his study and pretend to be writing the most awe-inspiring sermons, when he really was only having a well-fed nap. I am afraid,” he went on, with a sigh and a change of manner, “that there is little of real importance has ever gone on in my mind. Do you know, I am half inclined to hate you.”

The artist looked up in surprise.

“Hate me?” he echoed. “Why should you hate me?”

“Because you are everything that I am not; because you succeed in everything and I never did anything in my life; because at this poker-table of life you win and I lose.”

A strange tinge of bitterness showed itself in Ralph’s voice, and puzzled Claymore. It was not like Thatcher to be introspective, or to lament lost possibilities. The artist rubbed his brush on his palette with a thoughtful air.

“Even if that were so,” he said, “I don’t see exactly why you should vent your disappointment on me. I’m hardly to blame, am I? But of course what you say is nonsense anyway.”

“Nonsense? It is n’t nonsense. I’ve done nothing. I know nothing. I’m good for nothing; and the worst of it is that the girl I’ve wanted all my life realizes it just as well as I do. She is n’t a fool; and of course she does n’t care a rap about me.”

The confession was so frankly boyish that Claymore had a half-impulse to smile, but the feeling in it was too evidently genuine to be ignored. One thing at least was clear: Ralph was at last beginning to be dissatisfied with his idle, purposeless life. He had come to the enlightenment of seeing himself as he might look to the eyes of the woman he cared for. The reflection crossed Claymore’s mind that some disappointment in love might have brought about whatever change he had observed in his sitter, and that any influence which he had ascribed to the portrait had in reality come from this. The thought struck him with a ludicrous sense of having befooled himself. It was as if some gorgeous palace of fancy, carefully built up and elaborated, had come tumbling in ruins about his head. He made a gesture, half comic, half deprecatory, and laid down his palette.

“The light has changed,” he said. “I can’t paint any more to-day.”

III

Claymore was intensely imaginative, and he possessed all the sanguine disposition of the artistic temperament, the power of giving himself up to a dream so that it for the time being became real. Matters which the reason will without hesitation allow to be the lightest bubbles of fancy are to such a disposition almost as veracious fact; and often the life of an imaginative man is shaped by what to cold judgment is an untenable hypothesis. The artist had not in the least been conscious how strong a hold the idea of awakening Ralph Thatcher had taken upon his mind, until the doubt presented itself whether the portrait had in reality possessed any influence whatever. He was not without a sense of humor, and he smiled inwardly at the seriousness with which he regarded the matter. He reasoned with himself, half petulantly, half humorously; sometimes taking the ground that his theory had been merely a fantastic absurdity, and again holding doggedly to the belief that it was founded upon some fragment at least of vital truth. He recalled vaguely a good many scraps of modern beliefs in the power of suggestion; then he came back to the reflection that if Ralph was in love, no suggestion was needed to cause a mental revolution.

Wholly to disbelieve in its own inspirations is, however, hardly within the power of the genuinely imaginative nature. Whatever his understanding might argue, Tom, in the end, would have been false to his temperament had he not remained convinced that he was right in believing that to some degree, at least, the picture he was painting had influenced his sitter. Without any consciously defined plan, he got out a fresh canvas, and occupied himself, when alone in the studio, by copying Ralph’s head, but with a difference. As in the other picture he had endeavored to express all the noblest possibilities of the young man’s face, in this he labored to portray whatever potentiality of evil might be found there. Every introspective person has experienced the sensation of feeling that a course of action is being followed as if by some inner direction, yet without any clear consciousness of the reason; and much as might have come a hint of the intentions or motives of another person, came to Tom the thought that he was painting this second portrait that its difference from the first might show him upon what foundations rested his fanciful theory. He wished, he told himself, at least to see how far he had expressed a personality unlike another equally possible.

As a faint shade on the artist’s inner consciousness rested, however, a feeling that this explanation was not completely satisfactory. He would have been shocked had he even dreamed of the possibility that artistic vanity, aroused by the doubt that it possessed the power of moulding the life and destiny of Ralph, had defiantly turned to throw its influence into the other scale, to prove by its power of dragging the sitter down that its dominance was real. Had any realization of such a motive come to Claymore, he would have been horrified at a thought so evil; yet he failed to push self-investigation

far enough to bring him to an understanding of his real motives.

The painter worked steadily and with almost feverish rapidity, and before the end of the week he was able to substitute the second portrait for the first when Ralph, who had been out of town for a few days, came for his next sitting. Tom was not without a good deal of uneasy secret curiosity in regard to the effect upon Thatcher of the changed picture. He appreciated how great the alteration really was, a difference so marked that he had lacked the courage to carry out his first intention of exhibiting the new canvas to Celia. He excused himself for hesitating to show her the portrait by the whimsical pretext that it would not be the part of a gentleman to betray the discreditable traits of character he believed himself to have discovered as among the possibilities of her cousin's nature. What Ralph would himself say, the painter awaited with uneasy eagerness, and as the latter, after the customary greetings, walked up to the easel and stood regarding his counterfeit presentment, Tom found himself more nervous than he would have supposed possible.

Ralph studied the picture a moment in silence.

"What in the devil," he burst out, "have you been doing to my picture?"

"What is the matter with it?" the artist asked, stepping beside him, and in turn fixing his gaze on the portrait.

"I'm sure I don't know," Ralph replied, with a puzzled air; "but somehow or other it seems to me to have changed from a rather decent-looking phiz into a most accursedly low-lived one. Do I look like that?"

"I suppose a mirror would give a more disinterested answer to that question than I could."

Claymore glanced up as he spoke, and hardly repressed an exclamation of surprise. Ralph's whole expression was changing to correspond with that of the portrait before him. Who has not, in looking at some portrait which strongly impressed him, found in a little time that his own countenance was unconsciously altering its expression to correspond with that portrayed before him; and the chances that such a thing will occur must be doubly great when the picture is one's own image.

A portrait appeals so intimately to the personality of the person represented, human vanity and individuality insist so strongly upon regarding it as a part of self, that it stands in a closer relation to the inner being than can almost any other outward thing. It is, in a sense, part of the original, and perhaps the oriental prejudice against being portrayed, lest in the process the artist may obtain some sinister advantage, is founded upon some subtle truth. It can hardly be possible that, with the keen feeling every man must have in regard to his portrait, any one should fail to be more or less

influenced by the painter's conception of him, the visible embodiment of the impression he has made upon another human mind; and since every picture must contain something of the personality of the artist, it follows that a portrait-painter is sure to affect in some degree the character of his sitters. It would rarely happen that this influence would be either intentional or tangible, but must it not always exist?

Claymore stood for a little time watching Ralph's face; then he walked away, and returned with a small mirror which he put in the latter's hand. Thatcher looked at the reflection it offered him, and broke into a hard laugh.

"By George!" he said; "it does look like me. I never realized before that I was such a whelp."

"Fiddlesticks!" Claymore rejoined briskly, taking the glass from him. "Don't talk nonsense. Take your place and let's get to work."

IV

On the afternoon of the same day Celia came into the studio with her face clouded. She received her lover's greetings in an absent-minded fashion, and almost before the musical tinkle of the zither on the door which admitted her had died away, she asked abruptly:—

"What in the world have you been doing to Ralph?"

"I? Nothing but painting him. Why?"

"Because he came down here this morning in a perfectly heavenly frame of mind. He has been in Boston to see about some repairs on his tenement-houses at the North End that I've been teasing him to make ever since the first of my being there last winter; and he came in this morning to say he thought I was right, and he was going to take hold and do what I wanted."

"Well?" questioned Tom, as she broke off with a gesture of impatience.

"And after he 'd been down here for his sitting, he came back so cross and strange; and said he'd reconsidered, and he did n't see why he should bother his head about the worthless wretches in the slums. I can't see what came over him."

"But why should you hold me responsible for your cousin's vagaries?"

"Oh, of course you are not," Celia replied, with a trace of petulance in her tone; "but I am so dreadfully disappointed. Ralph has always put the whole thing off before, and now I thought he had really waked up."

“Probably,” Claymore suggested, “it is some new phase of his ill-starred love affair.”

Miss Sathman flushed to her temples.

“I do not know why you choose to say that,” she answered stiffly. “He never speaks to me of that now. He is too thoroughly a gentleman.”

“What!” Tom burst out, in genuine amazement. “Good heavens! It was n’t you?”

Celia looked at him in evident bewilderment.

“Did n’t you know?” she asked. “Ralph has been in love with me ever since we were in pinafores. I did n’t speak of it because it did n’t seem fair to him; but I supposed, of course, that was what you meant when you spoke. I even thought you might be jealous the least bit.”

Claymore turned away and walked down the studio on pretense of arranging a screen. He felt as if he had stabbed a rival in the back. Whether by his brush he had really an influence over Thatcher, or the changes in his sitter were merely coincidences, he had at least been trying to affect the young man, and since he now knew Ralph as the lover of Celia, his actions all at once took on a different character, and the second portrait seemed like a covert attack.

“Ralph is so amazingly outspoken,” Celia continued, advancing toward the easel and laying her hand on the cloth which hung before her cousin’s portrait, “that I wonder he has not told you. He is very fond of you, though, he naively says, he ought not to be.”

As she spoke, she lifted the curtain which hid the later portrait of Ralph. She uttered an exclamation which made Claymore, whose back had been turned, spring hastily toward her, too late to prevent her seeing the picture.

“Tom,” she cried, “what have you done to Ralph?”

The tone pierced Claymore to the quick. The words were almost those which Celia had used before, but now reproach, grief, and a depth of feeling which it seemed to Tom must come from a regard keener than either gave them a new intensity of meaning. The tears sprang to Miss Sathman’s eyes as she looked from the canvas to her lover.

“Oh, Tom,” she said, “how could you change it so? Ralph does not look like that.”

“No,” Claymore answered, his embarrassment giving to his voice a certain severity. “This is the reverse of the other picture. This is the evil possibility of his face.”

He recovered his composure. Despite his coldness of demeanor, there was a vein of intense jealousy in the painter's nature, which tingled at the tone in which his betrothed spoke of her cousin. He had more than once said to himself that, despite the fact that Celia might be more demonstrative than he, his love for her was far stronger than hers for him. Now there came to him the conviction, quick and unreasonable, that although she might not be aware of it, her deepest affection was really given to Ralph Thatcher.

"Why did you paint it, Tom?" Celia pursued. "It is wicked. It really does not in the least resemble Ralph. I suppose you could take any face and distort it into wickedness. Where is the other picture?"

Without a word Tom brought the first portrait and set it beside the second. Celia regarded the two canvases in silence a moment. Her color deepened, and her throat swelled. Then she turned upon Claymore with eyes that flashed, despite the tears which sprang into them.

"You are wicked and cruel!" she said bitterly. "I hate you for doing it."

Tom turned pale, and then laughed unmirthfully.

"You take it very much to heart," he remarked.

The tears welled more hotly in her eyes. She tried in vain to check them, and then with a sob she turned and walked quickly from the studio, the zither tinkling, as the door closed after her, with a gay frivolity that jarred sharply on Tom Claymore's nerves.

V

It was nearly a fortnight before Tom saw Celia again. For a day or two he kept away from her, waiting for some sign that her mood had softened and that she regretted her words. Then he could endure suspense no longer and called at the house, to discover that she had gone to the mountains for a brief visit. He remembered that he had been told of this journey, and he reflected that Celia might have expected him to come and bid her good-by. His mental attitude toward her had been much the same as if there had been some actual quarrel, and now he said to himself that, after all, there had been nothing in their last interview to justify this feeling. He alternately reproached himself and blamed her, and continually the condition of things became more intolerable to him.

His temper was not improved when Ralph, at one of the sittings, which continued steadily, mentioned in a tone which seemed to the artist's jealous fancy rather boasting, that he had received a letter from his cousin. Tom frowned fiercely, and

painted on without comment.

Claymore was working steadily on the second portrait, which was rapidly approaching completion. He said to himself that if his theory was right, and the reflection of his worst traits before a man's eye could influence the original to evil, he would be avenged upon Ralph for robbing him of Celia, since this portrait of Thatcher was to have a place in the young man's home. He also reflected that in no way else could he so surely wean Celia from an affection for her cousin, as by bringing out Ralph's worst side. He despised himself for what he was doing, but as men sullenly yield to a temptation against which all their best instincts fight, he still went on with his work.

He naturally watched closely to see what effect the portrait was already having on his sitter. Whether from its influence or from other causes, Ralph had grown morose and ungracious after Celia's departure, and Tom was certainly not mistaken in feeling that he was in the worst possible frame of mind. Even the fact that his cousin had written to him did little to change his mood, a fact that Tom, sore and hurt at being left without letters, noted with inward anger.

The two men were daily approaching that point where it was probable that they would come into open conflict. Ralph began to devise excuses for avoiding the sittings, a fact that especially irritated the artist, who was anxious to complete the work. The whole nature of their relations toward each other had undergone a change, and all frankness and friendliness seemed to have gone out of it. Sometimes Claymore felt responsible for this, and at others he laughed at the idea that he had in any way helped to alter Ralph. He was uneasy and unhappy, and when a couple of weeks had gone by without a word from Celia, he resolved that he would follow her to the mountains, and at least put an end to the suspense which was becoming intolerable.

He sent word to Thatcher that he was going out of town for a few days, packed his valise, and went down to his studio to put things to rights for his absence. He arranged the two or three matters that needed attention, looked at his watch, and found that he had something over an hour before train time. He started toward the door of the studio, hesitated, and then turned back to stand in front of the easel and regard the nearly completed portrait of Ralph Thatcher.

It was a handsome face that looked out at him, and one full of character; but in the full lips was an expression of sensuality almost painful, and the eyes were selfish and cruel. The artist's first feeling was one of gratified vanity at the cleverness with which his work had been done. He had preserved the likeness, and scarcely increased the apparent age of his sitter, while he had carried forward into repulsive fullness the worst possibilities of which he could find trace in the countenance of the original. As he looked, a cruel sense of triumph grew in Claymore's mind. He felt that this portrait was the sure instrument of his revenge against the man who had robbed him of the love of his betrothed. He considered his coming interview with Celia, and so

completely was he possessed of the belief that he had lost her, that he looked forward to the meeting as to a farewell.

At the thought a sudden pulse of emotion thrilled him. He saw Celia's beautiful, high-bred face before him, and there came into his mind a sense of shame, as if he were already before her and could not meet her eyes. The sting of the deepest humiliation a high-minded man can know, that of standing condemned and degraded in his own sight, pierced his very soul.

"It is myself and not Ralph that I have been harming," ran his thought. "It has never occurred to me that, even if I was dragging him down, I had flung myself into the slime to do it. Good heavens! Is this the sort of man I am? Am I such a sneak as to lurk in the dark and take advantage of the confidence he shows by putting himself into my hands! Celia is right; she could not be herself and not prefer him to the blackguard I have proved myself."

However fanciful his theory in regard to the effect of the portrait upon Thatcher might be, Tom was too honest to disguise from himself that his will and intention had been to do the other harm, and to do it, moreover, in an underhanded fashion. Instead of open, manly attack upon his rival, he had insidiously endeavored to work him injury against which Ralph could not defend himself.

"The only thing I have really accomplished," groaned poor Tom to himself, "is to prove what a contemptible cur I am."

He took from his pocket his knife, opened it, and approached the canvas. Then that strong personal connection between the artist and his work which makes its defense almost identical with the instinct of self-preservation, made him pause. For an instant he wavered, moved to preserve the canvas, although he hid it away; then with desperate resolution, and a fierceness not unlike a sacred fury, he cut the canvas into strips. So great was the excitement of his mood and act that he panted as he finished by wrenching the shreds of canvas from the stretcher.

Then he smiled at the extravagance of his feelings, set the empty stretcher against the wall, and once more brought to light the original portrait.

"There," he said to himself, as he set the picture on the easel, "I can at least go to her with a decently clean conscience, if I am a fool."

VI

It was well on toward sunset when Claymore reached the mountain village where Celia was staying with a party of friends. All the hours of his ride in the cars he had been reviewing his relations toward her. With his imaginative temperament he was sure to

exaggerate the gravity of the situation, and he was firmly convinced that by the destruction of the portrait he had virtually renounced his betrothed. He recalled jealously the many signs Celia had given of her interest in her cousin, and he settled himself in the theory that only Ralph's boyishness and apparent want of character had prevented her cousin from winning her love. Looking back over the summer and recalling how Thatcher had advanced in manliness, how his character had developed, and Celia's constant appreciation of his progress, Claymore could not but conclude, with an inward groan, that although she was pledged to him, her affection was really given to his rival.

Whether Celia was aware of the true state of her feelings, Tom could not determine. Her silence of the last fortnight had perplexed and tormented him; and he felt sure that in this time she could not have failed to reflect deeply upon the situation. He believed, however whimsical such a theory might seem, that his only chance of holding her was by bringing home to her the dark side of Ralph's character, as he was convinced he had been the means of showing her the best traits of her cousin. The effect of the portraits had become to him a very real and a very important factor in the case, and although he was at heart too good to regret that he had destroyed the second picture, he was not without a feeling of self-pity that fate had forced upon him the destruction of his own hopes. The logical reflection that, if his ideas were true, he had himself chosen to take up the weapon by which he was in the end wounded, did not occur to him, and would probably have afforded him small consolation if it had.

A servant directed him down a wood-path which led to a small cascade, where he was told he should find Miss Sathman. As he came within sound of the falling water, he heard voices, and pressing on, he was suddenly brought to an abrupt halt by recognizing the tones of Ralph Thatcher. What the young man was saying Tom did not catch, but the reply of Celia came to his ears with cutting distinctness.

"And does it seem to you honorable, Ralph," she said, "to follow me here and talk to me in this way, when you know I am engaged to another man, and he your friend?"

"No man is my friend that takes you away from me!" Thatcher returned hotly. "And besides, I happen to know you have quarrelled with him. You have n't written to him since you came here."

"I have not quarrelled with him," Celia answered. "Oh, Ralph, I have always believed you were so honorable."

"Honorable! honorable!" repeated the other angrily. "Shall I let you go for a whimsical fancy that it is not honorable to speak to you? I have loved you ever since we were children, and you—"

"And I," Miss Sathman interrupted, "have never loved anybody in that way but Tom."

The woodland swam before Claymore’s eyes. Instinctively, and hardly conscious what he was doing, he drew himself aside out of the path into the thicket. What more was said, he did not know. He was only aware that a moment or two later Ralph went alone by the place where he lay hidden, and then he rose and went slowly toward the cascade and Celia.

She was sitting with her back toward him, but as she turned at the sound of his footsteps, the look of pain in her eyes changed suddenly into a great joy.

VII

It was nearly a year before Tom told Celia the whole story of the two portraits. The temptation and the effects of his paltering with it were so real in his mind that he could not bring himself to confess until he had made such effort as lay in his power at reparation. He finished the original picture without more sittings, for Ralph, much to the artist’s relief, kept away from the studio. Then he left Salem, saying to himself that his presence there might drive Ralph from home, where Tom wished him to remain, that the influence of the face, if it really existed, might help him.

“I do not know,” Celia said thoughtfully, “whether the changes in Ralph came from the pictures or from his disappointment; but in either case I can see how real the whole was to you, and I am glad you stood the test; although,” she added, smiling fondly upon her husband, “I should have known from the first that you would n’t fail.”

“But you must acknowledge,” Tom responded, replying to the latter portion of her remark by a caress, “that Ralph has come out splendidly in the last year—since he has had that portrait to look at.”

“Yes,” she replied musingly, “and he is fast growing up to the picture.”