

written, a subject he seemed particularly interested in, and from which he would not let his guest escape. At length a particular book came under discussion, and Caroline, dissenting from Howard's opinion, crossed the small room with the noiseless movements of a woman accustomed to tread in soft places, took the volume from its shelf, and commenced to read aloud, at first in a low monotonous tone, then her voice underwent remarkable inflections, investing every sentence with meaning. The reading done, she took it all to pieces with critical anatomy. Her unerring insight was a revelation, not only of her critical faculty, but her knowledge of life. She spoke still in her precise, half-hesitating manner; but the girl had thought—or had she lived?

Howard found himself wondering, whether underlying the calm surface, was there a rich warm temperament with potentialities of passion? The subtle contradictions of her manner drew his attention somewhat from her analysis, but it was a clever manipulation, and left him personally sore by her almost fierce scorn of "cheap effect." It was a rather vehement protest. Was it brain, or feeling? Mechanical construction or conviction?

A silence fell on the little room when she ceased speaking. She had created an atmosphere that left Howard tingling; that she could do it annoyed him. She seemed to have turned on an electric light to his tinsel. Because her manner was so totally devoid of self-consciousness or consciousness of him, personally he acquitted her of affectation. She was in earnest, and unwillingly, reluctantly he found himself justifying his own methods of work, the more because she had emphasized his own racking fear that it was evanescent, did he defend his position hotly.

"After all, the writer is but a caterer to the public taste, and must seize the passing moment if he is to seize anything at all—anything that interests him for an hour, he must make interesting to his reader—with fundamental truth the novelist has nothing

whatever to do. To present his conception dramatically is his business."

"But if nothing in particular is true to an artist, how can he make 'nothing' particularly true to his readers?"

"To create an illusion it is not necessary for the conjuror to be under the spell."

She looked at him suddenly.

"To place the senses under the illusion is not to convince—'all possible cleverness in expression is of no use to him who has nothing to express—'" she replied in a low dull tone, in which at the moment Howard Grey fancied he detected a shade of sarcasm.

"It is not only the mission of literature to delude; delusion is the sum and substance of life, pain and pleasure in one. To be wise is to know what we have to meet," he went on in the slow unimpassioned way of speaking he had when angry, and which frequently deluded those who did not know him well into the belief that his remarks were impersonal. "And success means using every atom of material that comes your way with a definite object in view—self. The disposition that is contented or contending—in other words weak, commonly called self-sacrificing—is the biggest deception among deceptions, because self-deceived. It swallows the hook baited by the angler, whose expressed or unexpressed desire is to fill his own bag——"

He laughed a short mirthless laugh.

"There's a good deal of maudlin sentiment rife about the victims of life. In nine cases out of ten a victim is a fool, and in the tenth a pose of ultra egoism—in every case an inflection and an irritation——"

Through his half-closed eyes he saw the girl's thin lips compress and the clasped hands tremble.

"Moral qualities no more rule the individual than they rule the world. We are dupes of our own emotions as well as of each other. Self-assertion is the common instinct——"

"As a man *thinketh* so is he."

The interruption came from Caroline in a voice so musical that Howard looked at her in surprise, but tone and eyes were for her