

O'Rell Max

Woman and Artist



Max O'Rell

Woman and Artist

«Public Domain»

O'Rell M.

Woman and Artist / M. O'Rell — «Public Domain»,

© O'Rell M.

© Public Domain

Содержание

I	5
II	6
III	8
IV	14
V	21
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	26

O'Rell Max

Woman and Artist

I

FRENCH AND ENGLISH HOMES

The English, whose knowledge of France consists in a fair acquaintance of that part of Paris lying between the Madeleine and the Faubourg Montmartre, affirm that family life is unknown on our side of the Channel, putting forward as proof the fact that the French language cannot boast of possessing the word *home*, that appeals so strongly to the British heart. Their conclusion is sublime: Since the French have no such word, they say, it is very evident that they have not the thing. As to the word itself, I am inclined to think they may be right; we have not, or rather we have no longer, a perfect equivalent for the English expression, as our pretty word *foyer* is only used in pretentious or poetical language. In ordinary conversation the Frenchman does not refer to his *foyer*. *Il rentre à la maison, chez lui*. M. Perrichon, alone, returns to his *foyer*. Our old French possessed an equivalent for the English word *home*. It was a substantive that is still with us, but we have it to-day in the form of a preposition – I mean the word *chez*, which is no other than the word case. The Frenchman of olden times said: "*Je rentre en chez moi*."

But enough of philology.

I own that an apartment on the fifth floor, *au dessus de l'entresol*, would not suggest to the heart what the *home* does to every English mind. But the piquancy and humour of this malevolent criticism, founded, like all international prejudices, on the most crass ignorance and the narrowest patriotism, consists in the fact, that in all parts of London, at the present time, enormous barracks of eight and ten storeys, called flats, are being raised, where the English, tired of the tyranny of domestics, seek refuge, at the terrible risk of likening to Chicago, not only that part of the city devoted to business, but all the pretty, peaceful neighbourhoods, that made London, in summer, the most charming city in the world. They offend the eye, even in St. John's Wood and Hampstead, etc.

True, we have quite near Paris, Ville-d'Avray, Fontenay-sous-Bois, Enghien, Meudon, Bellevue, and I do not know how many more delightful places; but they are suburbs, and not *rus in urbe*, like Chelsea, St. John's Wood, Hampstead, and many others practically in the heart of London.

France, completely absorbed by Paris in all that is written about her in foreign countries, is as unknown of the English people as the forbidden land of Thibet. Provincial France (where all enjoy the possession of homes, English fashion, *plus gaiety*), the laborious and thrifty population of our villages (who are the fortune and salvation of France), our family life (narrow, exclusive, nay almost mean, I own it, but made up of love and devotion) – all these are a sealed letter to our neighbours over the Channel, of which a goodly number still hallow the venerable joke, that the French live on frogs and snails. For that matter, there are also in France a great many people perfectly convinced that an Englishman, tired of his wife, may with impunity go and sell her at Smithfield Market. We are quits. As we travel far less than the English, it is not surprising that we should know them still less than they know us. We cannot throw stones at them. In the utter ignorance of what exists and takes place in foreign countries, there are few nations to which France cannot give points.

II

THE HOUSE IN ELM AVENUE

Of all the rustic neighbourhoods bordering on London city, there is none prettier, fresher, and more verdant than St. John's Wood. It is the refuge of workers in search of light, air, and tranquillity. Painters, sculptors, writers, journalists, actors, and musicians – in fact, the majority of the highest intellectual Bohemia – inhabit these semi-rural acres, lying between Regent's Park and Hampstead Heath. Among the leafy haunts of St. John's Wood, numberless masterpieces have been produced by writers and artists whose fame has rung through the world. It is there, in short, that chiefly congregates the artistic intelligence of London. If you doubt my testimony on this point, apply direct for further particulars to the inhabitants of this favoured district.

No. 50 Elm Avenue, St. John's Wood, did not attract the gaze of the passer-by. Walled around and almost hidden by large trees, the house, which could be seen through the iron gates, was a modest, unpretentious, two-storeyed structure. On the ground floor it was traversed by a long vestibule. Those who had been privileged to enter it knew that there was a long drawing-room and boudoir on one side, and on the other a spacious dining-room, and a library with a French window and steps leading down to a beautiful garden, surrounded by spreading elms and chestnut trees. On the outside, glossy ivy with gnarled stems mantled the lower part of the house, and in autumn bold virginia creepers hung wreaths of scarlet around the chamber windows. At the side of the house, with the door opening on the adjacent street, stood a building with high north window, which indicated that the house was the abode of an artist. In this spacious, well-lit studio, worked Philip Grantham, A.R.A.

The house was furnished with great taste; everything spoke of that comfort which the English value before luxury. A thousand and one little details told of an artistic woman's hand reigning supreme in the little domain, and one left the house feeling, "these people are happy and evidently well-off; there may be artists who vegetate, but Philip Grantham is not one of them." The garden was admirably kept, the lawn smooth and soft as a Turkey carpet to the foot; and when the sun filtered through the trees to the grass, you could imagine yourself in the depths of the country, instead of near the centre of a great city.

The studio was a favourite room of the Granthams. Loving care had been expended upon it, and the result was a worker's paradise that invited to lofty labours and cosy conversation. Dora Grantham was her husband's comrade in art, and all the leisure that was hers, after seeing well to her household, was spent at Philip's side. The studio was more than comfortable – it was even luxurious, with its beautiful Renaissance mantelpiece of carved oak, its rich oriental rugs and curtains and hanging eastern lamps. All these gave an atmosphere of restful, dreamy ease to the place; and the fresh flowers that in all seasons filled the rare porcelain vases struck a note of gaiety among the sombreness of the old oak furniture. A thousand curios from all the ends of the earth had been accumulated in this beloved apartment, and here, too, stood Dora's Pleyel piano and Philip's bookcase of precious volumes on art, all richly bound. A huge screen, gay with eastern embroideries, hid the door that opened into the road; and in this veritable nest, nothing reminded of a hustling and bustling world outside. In summer, through the open door that led into the garden, one got a delicious vista of green foliage and turf.

In the centre of the studio stood two easels of almost equal size, and when I have told you that at these two easels, placed side by side, quite near each other, worked Philip and Dora, you will rightly understand that this studio had not been so fitted up to serve as a mere workshop, but that all its details had been suggested by the love of two kindred artistic spirits, who adored each other and passed most of their time there in loving rivalry and mutual encouragement.

Dora had such respect for the studio that she never entered it except when dressed in some colour that harmonised with the carpets and hangings and the rest of the furniture. To speak truly, this was not a difficult matter. Tall, dark, superb in figure and in face, her lips perhaps a trifle haughty in repose, but instantly softened by the lightness of her frank, gay smiles, which disclosed her little even white teeth; with dark hazel eyes through which you seemed to look into her soul as through two open doors; with a smooth, fresh, and clear complexion – almost all colours became her. Philip admired his wife in every separate colour of the rainbow, but he had his preferences as a painter. He loved best for her certain crimsons and deep tones of orange and of Gobelin blue; and, as one must never run counter to the fads of an artist, it was generally in one of these tints that Dora dressed, when she wanted Philip to surpass himself at his painting.

At the time when this story begins, which is but one of yesterday, Philip was thirty-six and Dora twenty-seven. They had been six years married, and possessed a lovely little girl of five, so full of dainty grace and childish fascination, that when Philip was showing a new picture to a friend, and watching out of the corner of his eye to see if his work was being admired, as often as not the friend would say, "Ah, yes! that is a fine creation, a beautiful picture; but there," indicating the lovely child, "is your *chef-d'œuvre*— nothing can match her." And as in Philip's nature the parent outweighed the painter, he would proudly smile and reply, "You are right."

Philip and Dora had begun their married life in the most modest fashion, but fortune had smiled on them. Each year the painter had become better known and valued, and his pictures more sought after. To-day he was not only well known, but almost celebrated. Every succeeding year had deepened the sincere and strong love of these two lovers and friends, who led a calm, sweet existence, and trod, side by side, a flowered path, under a cloudless sky, with hope, glad labour, honour, and security as companions on the road.

I think I have said enough to convince the reader, that if there existed a happy little corner of the world, it was No. 50 Elm Avenue, St. John's Wood.

III

THE PORTRAIT

On the 10th of May 1897, that is to say on the sixth anniversary of Philip's marriage with Dora, he had promised to present her with a portrait of herself. The picture was all but finished. Only a painter would have noticed that it wanted a few more touches to complete it.

Hobbs, a faithful servant, who had been Dora's nurse in her old home, and had followed her to St. John's Wood when she had married, was dusting the studio and gazing with admiring eyes at the portrait of Dora, which seemed to smile at her from her master's easel.

"Only a few flowers to put in," said the good woman, "and the picture will be finished. I have watched it for weeks. How wonderful it is! Just her beautiful face and kind smile. And to think that there are people who pay hundreds of pounds to have their portrait painted! How lucky a lady is to be the wife of a painter – she can get hers for nothing!"

She was interrupted in her reflections by a ring and a double knock at the studio door. Hobbs ran to answer the postman, and returned immediately, bearing in her hand a box from which some magnificent pansies were escaping. She had great difficulty in extracting the flowers from the badly crushed box.

"Pansies," said she, "for the portrait, no doubt – models for copying. If I were the wife of a painter, that is the only kind of model I would allow my husband to paint from – nature. Fancy women coming to a studio and undressing before a man! – the hussies! I am glad there are no such creatures wanted here."

It is necessary to be an artist, or at any rate of an artistic nature, to understand that it is possible to regard a perfectly nude model with as much *sang-froid* and respect as one would a statue; but the English middle class have not the artistic nature; and, in the eyes of a good ordinary woman, a female model is a lost creature, and the artist who studies and draws her an abandoned man. England produces something very humorous: this is the prudish model, who comes to an artist's studio, refuses at first, hesitates long, and finally offers to pose in tights. Better still. A French painter in New York was doing the portrait of a beautiful American woman in evening dress. When the head and shoulders were finished, the pretty American declared that she was too busy to pose any longer, and suggested that the picture might be completed from a model of her own height and figure, who could wear her gown. The painter agreed, but had the greatest difficulty in finding a model who would consent to exhibit her charms, as the society lady of the United States had done freely and imperturbably.

Hobbs did not let her indignation get the better of her, and, consoling herself with the thought that "the creatures" were not wanted here, finished dusting the studio, and then, gathering up the pansies, took them to her mistress.

It was ten o'clock. Philip had not yet come to the studio. He usually began working at nine o'clock, and went on steadily until one, so as to profit fully by the best of the light that London puts at the disposition of an artist. Hobbs was astonished that her master was not yet at work, especially as she knew he had promised Dora to finish her portrait by the 10th of May. She herself had told her so. She began making conjectures, when a loud ringing at the studio door aroused her from her reverie.

She returned in a few moments, followed by a young man about twenty-five, tall and distinguished-looking, with a pleasant face, whom she had often seen in the house.

"This way, please, sir," said she, showing him into the studio; "master hasn't come down yet, but I am sure he won't be long. I will go and tell him you are here."

Hobbs knew that M. de Lussac was a friend, and not one of those inconvenient people who bore artists by going to their studios and talking inanities to them about their work. Besides, she had a

list of the people whom Philip received at any time. And she went immediately to inform her master of M. de Lussac's arrival.

Georges de Lussac was an attaché at the French Embassy in London. The manly beauty of his face and figure, his good spirits, elegant manners and easy wit, added to the lustre of his name, made him one of the favourites of London society. No ball, dinner, or house-party was quite complete without him, the most sought-after man in the most aristocratic circles. He was a favourite with artists, whose works he well knew how to appreciate, and welcomed in literary society owing to his brilliant conversational powers. These also gained for him the admiration of society women, who were fascinated by his soft, insinuating voice. There are legions of women who admire first in a man – a well-cut coat, an intelligent and handsome face, with a slightly cynical smile which seems so little in earnest that they say to themselves, "He is not serious; with him one can have a good time without fear of being compromised; and then, he is a diplomatist, and as discreet as a tomb." By reason of this reputation for discretion, the diplomatist is beyond competition in the race for women's favour, without even excepting the brilliant cavalry officer who appeals chiefly to women in love with glitter and who are ready to catch Cupid as he flies. I have not mentioned the tenor, who only makes his chief conquests amongst romantic and flighty women. In high society in France, England, and probably everywhere, the distribution of prizes is somewhat in this order: First prize, the diplomatist; second prize, the officer of hussars; third prize, the tenor. *Accesserunt*, the remainder who have not much to share between them. In the remainder may be classed husbands.

De Lussac drew a gold cigarette case from his pocket, took a cigarette, and seating himself on a divan began to smoke.

"I know of nothing pleasanter," said he, "than a chat and smoke in the morning with a painter in his sanctum. If I had to live all my time in one apartment, I would choose first a studio, secondly, a library; in all other rooms, one eats, drinks, sleeps, or bores oneself."

He gazed complacently around the studio and his eyes fell on Dora's portrait. He rose, chose a good angle, and inspected the picture carefully.

"Beautiful likeness!" said he, "full of poetry – modelling perfect. It is simply quivering with life – and what lovely flesh colour! There is not a man in England that can paint flesh like Grantham – no, not one that comes up to his ankle. Yet, with the most brilliant future before him, with the foremost place among the painters of the day close at hand, and certain to be a Royal Academician before he is forty – here is a man to whom artistic fame does not suffice."

Without noticing it he had approached the door leading to the garden. He opened it. The lilacs and hawthorns were in bloom, and whiffs of delicious scents were wafted into the studio.

"Who would imagine," thought he, "that in this peaceful retreat, where the rustling of the trees is the only sound to be heard, a man was to be found who had invented a projectile likely to revolutionise modern warfare!"

Philip entered hurriedly.

"Ah, my dear de Lussac – no news yet?"

"No! the Commission is to-day sitting in Paris at the War Office. There is every hope of a favourable decision, I believe."

"Not so loud," said Philip, "not so loud; Dora might hear you. She knows nothing about it. Ah, my dear fellow, I have worked day and night to perfect that shell. The mechanism is so simple and yet so precise, that, by winding up the little spring, the shell will burst without necessarily striking any object on the ground or in the air, at any portion of its course, exactly so many seconds as is wished after it has been fired. The usefulness of the shell in the open field or against fortified positions is obvious."

"That is so! in every case the experiment has proved entirely successful; and we wonder how it is the invention was not immediately bought by the English Government."

"Do you think the Commission will soon arrive at a decision?"

"To-day, probably," replied de Lussac, "very likely in a few hours. We are expecting every minute a telegram from Paris."

"If they should buy it!" said Philip dreamily.

"Well, then, you will be a wealthy man!"

"Shall I?" exclaimed Philip, his eyes shining with joy – "shall I be rich? My dear de Lussac, I am quite satisfied with my lot. I earn more than I want. But my wife, my Dora – I want to be rich for her sake. She was brought up surrounded with every luxury. Six years ago, she left the house of a wealthy and generous father to share the life of a struggling artist. She never once complained, but has been happy and has made me the happiest of men. She has sat constantly by my easel, inspiring my brush by her sweet presence, and encouraging me by her constant and discriminating praise. To better appreciate my work, she has set to work herself, and has had two pictures hung at the Royal Academy, which have been splendidly noticed. How she has helped me! Sometimes she would come and put her arms on my shoulders and say, 'Go on, Philip, you are on the road to fame.' What a wife! Yes," said he, with earnestness and warmth, "I want wealth, but God is my witness that it is for her that I aspire to riches."

"Still in love, I see, *cher ami*, *hein*? It is possible then to be in love with one's wife after six years, six long years, of marriage."

"Still in love! Why, I am only now beginning to love her as she deserves. Oh, that wealth may enable me to make her still happier!"

"Amen," said de Lussac, and he turned again to the picture.

"I think this portrait is delightful," said he; "you can never have done a better piece of work than this!"

"Yes! I am fairly satisfied with it," said Philip; "it is like her, is it not? My wife with a bunch of pansies in her hand."

"I don't see the pansies," remarked de Lussac.

"No! I shall put them in presently. I shall finish the picture this afternoon."

"I see," said de Lussac, "that Madame Grantham will have the bunch of pansies in her hand, and that she will look lovingly at them."

"Yes, it is her favourite flower," replied Philip, "and mine too. There was a bed of pansies growing just under her window in that beautiful country house where I met her for the first time and where I courted her. She tended them herself, and called them 'her family.' Before entering the house, I would always pluck one and place it in my buttonhole. When it was faded, I gave it to her. It is utter nonsense, I know; but, after all, happiness is made up of little foolish trifles of that sort."

"The Anglo-Saxons!" said de Lussac – "a practical and yet sentimental race."

Philip went to a bureau and, opening a drawer, took out a little packet carefully tied up.

"Here they are," said he, "her family."

And he replaced the packet with great care.

"This is charming, quite romantic," cried de Lussac, "perfectly idyllic! You know, you are a curious mixture, *mon cher ami*. Fancy your inventive genius turning to an instrument of war that will make widows of wives who perhaps once had such a 'family.'"

"Oh, if I thought that!" exclaimed Philip.

"You would beg the Commission to kindly return you your shell," suggested de Lussac, with a wink.

"Hardly," said Philip, smiling; "I am too near the goal to do that."

"I think I had better be off now," said de Lussac, looking at his watch. "I am preventing you from working."

"Not at all, my dear fellow. I have, it is true, to finish this portrait to-day; but I have plenty of time. I will go and put on my working-jacket. Dora will be down in a minute ... only, dear boy, do not mention the shell, will you? Not a word about it!"

De Lussac, left alone, could not control his curiosity. The drawer in which the pansies had been placed was only half shut. He took the packet in his hand and gave way to hearty laughter at the expense of Philip and Dora.

"Well! I'll be hanged," said he, "if ever a woman makes me save some withered old flowers tied in pink ribbon, like a box of chocolates."

If he had only looked round at the garden door, while indulging in these reflections, he would have seen Dora come into the studio.

Dora was radiant, in a pretty simple morning gown, which accentuated her severe and classical beauty. Her large hazel eyes, encircled with long lashes, had an expression of exquisite sweetness; but they were also capable of making any man, who would dare look into them with any other sentiment than that of profound respect, sink into the ground. Her haughty mouth, with its short upper lip, almost Austrian, betrayed a proud, susceptible, and ardent nature. She had the consciousness of her beauty and intellectual worth. The smallest underhand act filled her with repugnance. On seeing de Lussac with the packet of flowers in his hand and the drawer still open, she hardly knew whether to laugh or treat him with contempt. The corner of her mouth turned slightly up and, with a little mocking smile which completely disconcerted the young diplomatist, she said —

"Well, Monsieur de Lussac, and how are you?"

"How are you, *chère madame*," answered he in an embarrassed manner.

"Very well, thank you. I thought I heard Philip."

"He is in there, changing his coat." And, remarking that Dora had brought in a handful of pansies, he added —

"More pansies?"

"Why more? Ah! that is true, you have some also, I see."

De Lussac reddened to the tips of his ears.

"Yes! A minute ago Philip was telling me the history of your 'little family,' and when he went out I could not resist the temptation of taking another peep at the little packet that he had left in my hand, and which contains the prologue of your love affairs."

Seeing himself caught in the act he did not hesitate to tell this little fib, so as to reinstate himself in Dora's good graces. She was taken in by it.

"Give the packet to me; you are a very wicked man — these are not for the profane; and Philip is still more wicked than you are to show them to you."

She put the packet back again. She was vexed, almost humiliated. Why had Philip mentioned the story of the pansies to Monsieur de Lussac? It could interest no one, except the two lovers, who had thus repeated their vows. Why had Philip shown him the packet? In her eyes, it was an almost ungentlemanly act. She passed a hand across her forehead, as if to brush away the ideas that came to her mind, and smiled good-humouredly once more.

"I believe you are jealous," said she gaily.

"Not a bit — I am disgusted. Two people supposed to be sensible, billing and cooing over a package of old flowers, after being married, let me see — how long?"

"Six years to-day."

"And after six years of marriage you are still in the region of romance? Will you allow a bachelor, an intimate friend of your husband's, to congratulate you with all his heart? I declare I almost envy your happiness."

"Well, get married yourself!" exclaimed Dora; "it is very easy."

"Not for the world," said he, in a bantering tone. "I am too fond of woman in the plural to ever love one in the singular. Besides, I could never marry a woman unless I could respect her."

"Naturally."

"Well!" exclaimed de Lussac, laughing heartily, "I don't believe I could respect a woman who would be willing to marry me."

"Oh! come, you are like most Frenchmen," said Dora, "not so bad as you would make people believe. You will succumb to the temptation all in good time. You will marry, you will love your wife, and, what is more, you will make the most docile of husbands. It is the most recalcitrant of you that generally become the model husbands in the end."

"Heaven forbid! I will succumb to every temptation you like to name except that one; if I ever find myself married I shall have been chloroformed before the ceremony. For fear of giving way to this temptation I will stick to all the others, in case they should forsake me – you see, I am a vagabond pure and simple."

"Women love vagabonds – many do at any rate. You will find a hundred for one that will have you."

"A hundred perhaps – one never," said de Lussac.

"And when you are old, who will occupy the other side of the chimney corner? A chimney has two corners."

"I know it," said de Lussac; "but there is also the middle, where I shall be very happy and comfortable – that is better still. No, no, long live Liberty!"

"Pure selfishness – and besides, conjugal life is the most comfortable."

"Undeceive yourself, madame; one lives as well at the club. One dines better at a restaurant, where for a small tip one may grumble and blow up the waiter to one's heart's content."

"You can do as much in your own house, and blow up your wife without its costing you a farthing."

The light-hearted gaiety of the young man amused Dora. A woman, although she does not countenance that love of independence in her husband, admires it in other men. I feel inclined to believe that women have a mingled feeling of admiration and respect for the man who has not been caught in the matrimonial toils.

Dora was playing with the pansies that she had scattered on the table.

"You see these flowers," she said suddenly to de Lussac, "well, there is an impenetrable mystery connected with them."

"You don't say so," said he, noticing the comically majestic air she had assumed.

"Yes! a real live mystery. On our wedding-day there arrived a bunch similar to this one. Who sent it? That is the mystery. On every anniversary of our marriage, we get another. Are the flowers for Philip or for me? More mystery. Philip says they are from some old admirer of mine; from some old sweetheart of his, I say. Still they come, and are always welcome."

"I am not versed in the language of flowers," said de Lussac, "but I fancy I remember a little verse, beginning something after this fashion —

Pansies for thought —
Love lies bleeding.

I cannot recollect the words exactly, but perhaps there is a bleeding heart somewhere. Oh, this is terrible of me," exclaimed de Lussac, again looking at his watch; "it is eleven o'clock, and I am still here chattering. I ought to be at the Embassy; I must really go. Will you be kind enough to tell your husband that I will send him a wire as soon as I know something definite? – no, no, I will come myself."

"About what?" said Dora.

"Oh! about something – which concerns me."

He shook hands with Dora and went out hurriedly.

Dora, left alone, began to arrange the flowers. The pansy was a flower which fascinated her, and suggested to her mind all kinds of fantastic faces. She seemed to see sad and solemn ones, some smiling and gay, others saucy; they represented to her a perfect gallery of weird faces. She chose

some of the best, made them into a little bouquet for Philip to paint in her picture. Taking away one or two that did not harmonise with her dress, she placed the bunch on her husband's easel.

"Oh, what pretty flowers!" shouted Eva, who had just come into the studio, followed by Hobbs. She was dressed to go out for her daily morning walk.

"Mama, aren't you coming out for a walk with us?"

"No, my sweet," replied Dora; "I cannot this morning. You know that daddy is going to finish my picture this morning, so I must stay with him; he will want me."

"You are always with daddy," said Eva, pouting. "You never come for a walk with me."

"How can you say such things? You know I go out very often with you – but I can't to-day. To-morrow, yes! to-morrow. Come, be a good little girl."

"A good little girl," said Eva, sighing, "that's what you always say to me."

"When I was a little girl," said Dora, trying to look serious, "I, too, had to be good, you know."

"Oh, mama! aren't you glad you're not a little girl any longer?" said Eva.

"Oh, what shall we do with her, Hobbs, if she is so naughty?" said Dora, taking the child up in her arms and covering her with kisses.

And yet, she knew that the reproaches were well-merited.

"Is it true that mama was a little girl first?"

"Of course, dear, certainly."

"Quite a little girl, and then as tall as that – and that – and that?"

"Yes! – and then like this," said Dora, touching the top of her head.

"Well, then, you had a mama, too, that's grandma, isn't it? Was she pretty, like you?"

"Much prettier."

"Did she scold you?"

"Certainly, when I was naughty."

"Isn't it funny though? – Where is daddy?"

"He is coming in a minute, dearie. Come, it is time you went for a walk, Hobbs," said Dora to the good woman, who was laughing at the child's questions; "do not stay out very long; it is chilly, and Miss Eva might catch cold."

"Very well, ma'am," replied Hobbs.

Dora, ascertaining that the child was warmly enough clad, gave her bonnet strings an extra touch, then looked at her and kissed her again and again.

Eva and her nurse went out at the studio door. The latter, finding a letter in the box, came back with it and gave it to Dora, returning again to the child.

Dora, remembering Eva's reproaches, felt the tears come into her eyes. With many women the mother kills the wife, but Dora was so much absorbed in her husband that she often reproached herself with not taking enough notice of the child. She was wife first, mother next. Yet, God knew how she adored her child.

IV DORA

It was past noon, and Philip had not yet set to work.

For some time past Dora had noticed that Philip had no longer the same lively interest in his painting, but she had been very careful not to speak to him about it. Dora was the ideal artist's wife, not only because she understood her husband's art, but also because she was keenly alive to the conditions under which works of art are produced. If she had been the wife of Bernard de Palissy, she herself would have broken up the furniture of her home to keep alive the furnace fire. Blessed with a calm, even temperament herself, she knew that the artistic nature is sensitive, susceptible, irritable even, and that a veritable diplomacy has to be exercised daily and hourly, if one would so live with an artist as to cheer him in his moments of discouragement, to stimulate him, to give him constantly the discreet and intelligent praise he needs, when it seems to him that his imagination and his powers are forsaking him, and that he is no longer doing his best work. An artist is a piece of machinery that must be wound up every day. There is scarce an artist worthy of the name who does not think he is used up each time that he terminates a new work, and there is not a painter who, when he shows a new picture for the first time, does not watch the scrutinising gaze of the critic, much as a mother watches with anxious eye the expression of the doctor who is going to pronounce himself upon the subject of her sick child. An artist is a child, who must be constantly petted and applauded.

Dora knew all that, and, on this subject, she had nothing to reproach herself with; on the contrary, it was to her that her husband owed his growing celebrity – she had made him what he was. She did not take any credit for this, she had never reminded him of it, never a hint on the subject had passed her lips. A woman like Dora leaves a husband to recognise these things for himself, but never speaks of them.

Dora had not the courage to ask Philip why he painted with less ardour, but she longed to say to him, "You promised me that you would finish the portrait to-day; you tell me that it is only a matter of two or three hours' work; but I am sure that it will take seven or eight hours to finish it ... why don't you set about it?" And her imagination fell to inventing all sorts of explanations, each more fantastic and improbable than the other.

The last words of Monsieur de Lussac came back to her memory, "*Pansies for thought – Love lies bleeding.*" What connection would there be between a pansy and a crushed love? No one had ever loved her well enough to break his heart about her, except Philip, and he had married her. But he? Had there been a romance in his life, before she had known him? He had never spoken of anything of the kind. "After all," she said to herself, "the best of men have some experience of that kind in their early life, which they do not talk about. Ah, well! what matters it? Philip has filled my life with happiness."

Her glance wandered again to the picture. "Not yet finished," she murmured. "Has he forgotten his promise? For some time past he has been quite strange; he seems preoccupied, distraught, anxious even – at times his mind seems to be far away." And a thousand ideas flitted through her mind, only to be dismissed as all equally absurd.

Suddenly she uttered a little cry of surprise, to find the vigorous arms of her husband clasped around her waist.

"What is my little wife thinking of so deeply that she does not notice the sound of her husband's footsteps?" said Philip.

"Of you," said Dora, laughing, "and of these flowers."

"They have come again, eh?" said Philip, taking up his palette and brushes.

"Yes; who sends them?"

"That is what I should like to know. As I told you before, an old admirer of yours, I daresay."

"Nonsense, you know better. As I said before, some old sweetheart of yours – far more likely," replied Dora.

Then looking her husband straight in the eyes, she added —

"Confess."

"Look here," said Philip, "I have come to work; if you tease me in this way, I shall never do anything."

He tried his brushes and began mixing his colours.

Dora took the little bunch of pansies which she had arranged, and placed them near the portrait.

"The colours harmonise exquisitely with the yellow of the dress. How sweet they are, these pansies! Look, do look, at this dear little yellow one – what a saucy face! Put it in the picture. By-the-bye, there is a letter for you."

She went to the table, where Hobbs had laid the letter, took it up and read the envelope aloud, "Philip Grantham, Esq., A.R.A. Associate of the Royal Academy! There are lots of people who live in hopes of adding letters to their name, but you, my Philip, will soon drop one: instead of A.R.A., just Royal Academician, R.A."

"Who knows?" said Philip. "Perhaps – thanks to your encouragement and loving praise. There! open the letter for me, will you?"

"It is Sir Benjamin Pond, who announces that he is coming to see you to-day: he wants to choose one or two pictures."

"I hope he will come late, then," said Philip. "I want to finish your portrait before dinner. It ought to be easy enough – two or three hours of steady work, and the thing is done."

Dora smiled a little smile of incredulity.

"Seven or eight," said she, "at least."

Philip had stuck the bunch of pansies on the easel, his palette was ready, he was just going to begin.

"Come here," said he to Dora, "here, quite close – that's it. I can work so much better, darling, when you are near me. Look, the brush works already more easily, my hand is surer – there, that is good – splendid – I shall go ahead now."

Philip was in working mood, and Dora was beaming. She could have hugged him, and would not have been able to resist the temptation, but for the fear of hindering his progress. After a few minutes' silence, she burst out —

"Philip!"

"Yes, dearest," replied Philip, without withdrawing his eyes from his work.

"Don't you think ours is a very romantic life?"

"Very romantic? How do you mean?"

"Oh, I mean that we are so happy."

"Yes, but that is hardly what people call romance. A romantic life is an eventful life, and happy people have no events in their lives. I don't believe that cousin Gerald Lorimer, with all his imagination, could get a one-act play out of our lives. There is no plot to be found in them. To make a novel or a play, there must be intrigue, troubles, misunderstandings, moral storms. There are people who love storms. Some people only love the sea when it is in a fury. Are you fond of storms yourself?"

"Oh no," replied Dora; "I have no sea-legs. I love the life that I lead with you – and my enthusiasm for your art deepens my love for you every day."

"My darling," said Philip, drawing Dora still nearer to him, and caressing the graceful head that was resting against his knee, "do you know that one of these days I shall be jealous of you, you are making such progress with your painting."

"What nonsense! I am learning, so that I may understand you better. To appreciate you thoroughly, my ambition soars no higher than that."

Philip looked at his watch, turned towards the door that led to the street, and made a little gesture of impatience, that did not escape Dora.

"Philip," said she, "what are you thinking of?"

"Why, of you, dear, always you."

"No, you were not thinking about me just now. You cannot deceive me," said she coaxingly.

"Do you know that, of late, I have observed a little change in you – oh! just a little change."

"A change? What a little goose you are!"

"Oh, I am not so silly as all that; the fact is you seem absent-minded lately, anxious, irritable even; and, worse than all that, this morning you had forgotten it was the anniversary of our wedding. Now, had you not?"

Philip started.

"Oh, but I am quite sure of what I am saying. I am certain you had forgotten."

"What nonsense! it is all in your imagination, my dear child."

"No, it is not," said Dora, with great emphasis; "a woman's intuition is often a safer guide than her eyes."

"Your intuition, then, for once is wrong."

"Come, come," said Dora tenderly, "tell me, have you any troubles, any little worry?"

"No, dear, none," said Philip, frowning a little. "Let me get on with my work, and don't ask silly questions."

"Oh, very well," said Dora, pouting.

She rose, and went away from the easel a few steps; but noticing that Philip was looking at her, as if to ask her forgiveness for having been a trifle abrupt, she turned her steps towards him, and, laying her head on his shoulder, burst into tears; then looking him in the face, with eyes that were smiling through the tears, she cried, "Oh, do tell me what ails you."

"What a child you are, dearest! I assure you, there is nothing the matter."

"I know better."

"You will have to believe me," said Philip, in a not very convincing tone, but doing his best to comfort her with his look, "when I tell you, that there is absolutely nothing wrong, although" —

"Although? Ah!" cried Dora, "you see that I was right after all. Well?"

And she eagerly waited to hear the explanation that should put an end to all her conjectures.

"Well, then, yes," said Philip resolutely, "there is something. Sometimes I feel I should like to do so much more for you than I have been able."

"What an idea! There is not a woman in the world with whom I should like to change places. How could I be happier than I am?"

"What is your definition of happiness?" said Philip, continuing to paint.

"For a woman," replied Dora, with warmth, "happiness consists in being loved by the man whom she loves and can be proud of; in being rich enough to afford all the necessary comforts of life, and poor enough to make pulling together a necessity; an existence hand in hand, side by side. And what is yours?"

"Well, I confess, I should like to be a little richer than that," said Philip, with a little amused smile.

"Ah! I see," exclaimed Dora sadly; "you are beginning to grow tired of this quiet life of ours. Take care, Philip, noise frightens happiness away. Happy the house that is hidden in the trees, as the nest in the thick of the hedges."

"My dear child, we have to live for the world a little."

"Excuse me if I do not understand you," said Dora; "I am only a woman. I can live for you, and for you alone. I know that love is not sufficient even for the most devoted and affectionate of husbands. A woman can live on love and die of it. That's the difference. Now, what is your definition of happiness?"

"To be blessed with a dear, adorable wife; to have money enough to enable me to surround her with every luxury. Yes, I long to be really rich, if only to make my father repent of his treatment of me. In his eyes a man is successful according to his proven ability to pile up money. Ah, that letter of his, how it rankles in my mind still and always will!"

"What letter is that?" said Dora; "you never spoke to me of it before. Why, what a tomb of dark secrets you are!"

Philip rose, went to a drawer, took out a letter, and returned with it in his hand.

"Here it is," he said; "listen."

"MY SON,

– When I opened to you the doors of the banking house which I have founded, and bade you join me as a clerk who would eventually be master of it, I did not doubt that you had sufficient good sense and filial docility to make you joyfully accept such an opening. It appears that you have neither of these qualities. Twice I have made the offer, twice you have declined it. From this day please to consider yourself free to follow art or any other road to starvation. I relinquish all right to direct your career, but I also require you to relinquish all right to call yourself the son of

"THOMAS GRANTHAM."

Philip folded the letter and replaced it in the drawer.

"Yes," said Dora, "it was a cruel letter, for, after all, your only crime had been to wish to become an artist. And yet, a father knows that out of a hundred men who take up painting as a profession, one or two perhaps get to the top of the tree. Where is the father who would advise his son to work at art, music, or literature for a livelihood? In the case of a real vocation, he may bow gracefully to the inevitable, but, as a rule, a parent does not bring up his sons with a view to making artists of them. On the contrary, he does what he can to dissuade them from choosing that course. In the case of your father, my dear Philip, I think one might allow extenuating circumstances. Where is the head of the family who would not dread for his sons these often illiberal professions? Professions, which ninety-nine times out of a hundred bring in little besides disappointments, disillusion, a miserable pittance, and often despair? Try and forget this grievance, darling. In any case you have had your revenge already. You are celebrated, and we are no longer poor."

"Ah, but we have been, and it has sometimes brought tears of rage to my eyes, and to-day we are a long, a very long way, from being rich."

"Ah, but think what an enviable lot yours is!" said Dora proudly. "Yours is the most honourable of callings. You have no poor wretches sweating for you. Your income is the fruit of your personal handiwork. You are your own master. You help to make life beautiful. You have a fame increasing every day. You enjoy the respect of everybody, the admiration of the public, the appreciation of the best critics, the company and the friendship of all the intelligence of London. A king might well envy the life of a great artist!"

Dora was excited, and Philip looked at her with eyes that thanked her for all she thought of him.

"You are quite right," he resumed, "and I am far from complaining of my fate. I have also full confidence in the future. But you, my darling; it is of you I am thinking."

"Of me?" exclaimed Dora. "But do I not share all your honours? What more can I wish for? Why, my dear boy," she added, laughing, "before ten years have passed you will be knighted, and I run the risk of being one day Lady Grantham. Just fancy?" And she drew herself up most comically.

They both burst out laughing. Philip was in a confessing mood, and he went on.

"I should like," he said, "to see you the mistress of such a house as you were brought up in!"

"Good heavens! It is all I can do to keep this dear little one properly! Besides, where is it now, that beautiful house where I was brought up? After my mother's death, my father took to speculating,

and he died penniless. Everything had to be sold to pay his debts. Much better begin as we do than finish as he did."

"I should like," continued Philip, in the same strain, "to see you drive in a handsome carriage of your own."

"A hansom cab," replied Dora, laughing, "is much more convenient, goes faster, costs less, and gives you much less trouble."

"I should like to see *rivières* of diamonds on your lovely neck, precious stones on your fingers."

Dora looked serious, almost sad.

"I wish no better collar for my neck than your true, manly arms – my Philip! On my fingers? Do you see this little ring?"

"A five-pound ring!" said Philip, with an air of contempt. "I am almost ashamed to see it on your finger."

"A five-pound ring!" exclaimed Dora, – "a priceless ring! Do you remember – ah, I do! – how for many weeks you put away ten shillings a week so as to be able to buy it for me on my birthday? A five-pound ring, indeed! Not for the Koh-i-nûr would I exchange it," she added, as she kissed the little ring passionately. "To me the real value of a jewel is the love it represents in the giver, and no rich gems could be richer in that sense than this dear little ring."

Philip felt deeply moved and almost humiliated. He tenderly kissed Dora, and resumed painting. Dora thought she was gaining her cause, and went on pleading —

"Ah, Philip," she said, "the rich don't know the pleasures they miss, the sweetest pleasures of poverty. Their gifts cost them no sacrifice. They don't possess their wealth, it is their wealth that possesses them. They have not the satisfaction of knowing that they are loved for their own sake. I would not give one year of my life for ten years of a millionaire's life. Why, they don't even have the proof that they are honest. They have no temptations. I would shudder at the idea that I might be rich one day."

"Well," said Philip sarcastically, "I think I could bear it with fortitude. My darling, the philosophers of all ages have taught that money does not make happiness; but sensible men of all times have come to the conclusion that it considerably helps to make it. I want money for no sordid reason. Money is round, it was meant to roll, and I mean to enjoy it."

"No, dear," replied Dora reproachfully and pathetically, "money is flat, it was meant to stop and be piled up a little. And, by the way, do you know that you have made over a thousand pounds this year, and that we have kept very nearly half of it? You see I am of some use after all. The financial position is good, since the Chancellor of the Exchequer has only spent half his budget. We are rich, since we don't want all we have."

"Yes, you are a dear, lovely little housewife," said Philip rather coldly and without raising his eyes from the canvas.

Dora was susceptible. She felt a little wounded.

"Am I?" she said. "Perhaps you will say I am a good little *bourgeoise*. Possibly! But I will tell you this: happy as I am now, I am not sure that I was not happier still when we were quite poor, pulling, struggling together, hand in hand. I have never dreaded poverty; on the contrary, I have enjoyed it, loved it by your side. To poverty I owe the happiest days of my life. Do you remember, for instance, how we enjoyed the play when, once a month, obscure, unknown to everybody, we went to the upper circle? Wasn't it lovely? And how we often yawn now, once a week, in the stalls!"

"Yes," said Philip, "and how we made the dinner shorter, so as to be able to afford the price of two seats in that upper circle?"

"Right, and that's why we enjoyed the play so much. We were not overfed in those days."

"We were not," seconded Philip.

"You cannot enjoy, even appreciate anything intellectual after a dinner of six or eight courses: you are only fit for a pantomime or a music-hall. And that's why those pathetic forms of entertainment

are so successful now. Why, look at the people in the boxes – indifferent, half sulky, lifting their eyebrows and staring their eyes out – like that – awful!"

"Yes," said Philip, "all the response, all the appreciation, all the warmth comes from the pit and gallery."

"And do you also remember when, two years after we were married, our *general* suddenly gave notice, and left us alone to manage housekeeping as best we could while Hobbs was temporarily absent? And how I cooked all the meals, and how you never enjoyed them better? Now, say it's true."

"Perfectly true. And I peeled the potatoes."

"The less you speak of that, the better. You wasted half of them. But what fun! The house was gay, happy, ringing with our laughter all day long; so much so that, in a month, baby put on six pounds of flesh."

"And how I cleaned the knives!" said Philip, who was enjoying the reminiscences.

"Which helped your appetite for breakfast."

"And the boots – now, I did not like cleaning the boots."

"Yes, you did, and they never shone so beautifully."

"Well, I flatter myself I was able to make myself useful."

"Those were and will always be the dear old days of my life."

"And how pretty you looked," said Philip, "with a white apron on, and your sleeves tucked up, showing your lovely arms."

"Ah!" said Dora, "and do you also remember how you were once turned out of the kitchen for kissing the cook? You were sorry when I got a new servant."

"Upon my word, I believe I was."

"Ah!" exclaimed Dora, "you will never picnic like that again, you will never have such lovely times. My dear Philip, the very rich people must lead very dull lives. We look for happiness far ahead of us, when often we have it close at hand. The poet is right: 'Paradise is cheap enough, it's only the hells we make for ourselves that are expensive.' We are as rich now as we should ever wish to be. And, let me tell you that, if ever we get really rich (that will be through your fault), I shall find my consolation in the constant recollection of all the pleasures I enjoyed when I was poor – as the ear remains for ever under the charm of some sweet old melody that once struck it. I could go on for ever on this theme. Now, do you know the holiday of my life that I shall never forget?"

"Our trip to Paris with ten pounds in our pockets," replied Philip.

"That's not fair; you guess too quickly. Well, didn't we do it after all? We saw everything – the museums, the theatres, the gardens, and when we arrived home" —

"We had to borrow one-and-six from the servant to pay the cab fare from Charing Cross."

"Lovely!" cried Dora, clapping her hands with joy. "What fun we had – real, good, wholesome fun! Now, look at our little girl. She will hardly look at the beautiful dolls she has. She always goes back to the old stuffed stocking, with a face painted on the ball of cotton that does duty for a head. Now, why? Tell me why she prefers it to all the others."

"Oh, probably because she can ill-use it to her heart's content."

"Not a bit of it; because it reminds her of the happiest, the jolliest days of her life. The pleasures of poverty again, my dear Philip, the sweetest, the never-to-be-forgotten ones – alas, never to be enjoyed again, perhaps!"

"I will see that they are not," said Philip.

"Oh, Philip, tell me that you are happy now, that the ambition of your life will be your work, your art, not money."

"Certainly, darling. But, let me tell you also, honestly, that the greatest pleasure in connection with my days of poverty" ...

"Well?"

"Is that I am poor no longer."

"You incorrigible cynic."

Dora looked at Philip for some moments.

"Oh, Philip," she cried, "say that you are only teasing me, that you don't mean a word of it."

"Yes, dear, I am only teasing you," said Philip indifferently. "Now, little wife, you must be quiet and let me work, or this portrait will never be finished to-day."

Philip looked at the clock, then at his watch. It was half-past one. A ring was heard at the studio door. He shivered with excitement. "It is perhaps de Lussac," he said to himself.

"I hope it is not that bothering Sir Benjamin coming to disturb me," he said to Dora.

Gerald Lorimer, for whom there was always a cover laid at Philip's table, entered the studio.

"Why, it's Lorimer," exclaimed Philip, rising, and going to shake hands with his friend. "I am as hungry as a hound; I'll go and wash my hands, and we'll have lunch at once."

"Well, and how goes the portrait?" said Lorimer.

"My dear fellow," replied Philip, "I shall have to take a studio a mile or two off, so that my wife will not be able to come and chatter and hinder me from working. Look at it: here have I been for the past two hours in front of this easel, and done half an hour's painting at most."

Philip ran upstairs to wash and change his coat, and quickly rejoined Dora and Lorimer in the dining-room.

V

THE DRAMATIC AUTHOR AND THE PATRON OF ARTS

Gerald Lorimer, although still quite young, was already a dramatist of some note. He was gaiety and *insouciance* personified. A genial philosopher, witty, sometimes a cynic, but always a kindly one, indulgent to the shortcomings of humanity, he looked at life as a comedy, which he witnessed from the most comfortable of orchestra stalls. The world amused him and supplied him with types for study. He enjoyed robust health, the joy of living was written all over his face, and, wherever he went, he brought an atmosphere of contagious irresistible gaiety. He was a handsome man, distinguished-looking, and fairly well off. When asked why he did not marry, he answered, "Thanks, I prefer to study from afar; one observes better at a distance."

He had a little house in Philip's neighbourhood, that was the envy of all who were privileged to enter its doors. Women thought it impudence of a man to dare to install himself thus, and so prove *urbi et orbi* that it is not absolutely necessary to have a woman under one's roof to enjoy the most perfect comfort. And yet, when asked why Lorimer did not marry, all that women had to say, was, "No inclination, I suppose."

Women adore parties given by bachelors. They went in crowds, when Lorimer asked them to an "At home" or a garden-party. They took free advantage of the permission he gave them to wander over the house, and examined all its corners. Every bachelor's house interests women and arouses their curiosity. They pried into every nook and cranny, in the hope of bringing to light a mystery, perchance some woman's portrait – Heaven knows what, perhaps a hairpin on the carpet. Wherever they looked, everything was ease, comfort, and liberty; and they arrived at the conclusion, that one may be a bachelor and yet live happily, but consoled themselves with the thought that nobody has found the way to live a bachelor and die happily. Lorimer's house was arranged with taste, in the oriental style. The drawing-room, dining-room, library, and smoking-room formed a delightful suite of rooms.

"You see," said some woman, "nothing but men-servants – a French cook, a German valet: our host must be a woman-hater."

"I do not see that that follows, dear," said another one: "men are more discreet and less gossiping than women, and I warrant that this house has been the scene of many an interesting little tête-à-tête."

Each one had her own opinion; none of them really knew anything about it. Lorimer had never given anyone occasion to gossip about him; he was English and a gentleman, therefore discreet. The French boast often of things they have never done; the English never boast of what they do. The latter are right. Besides, a bachelor, in giving his house a reputation of perfect respectability, can thus invite to it not only his friends, but their wives and daughters.

Lorimer knew all London: the club world, the aristocratic world, the artistic world of Chelsea and St. John's Wood; and at his parties duchesses, actresses, cabinet ministers, painters, writers, actors, and journalists jostled one another.

A friend of men, because of his good-fellowship, frankness, and loyalty; and of women, by reason of his wit, his discretion, and his charming manners, Lorimer was received everywhere with open arms. He could have dined and lunched out every day, if this had been the programme of his existence. On the contrary, he worked hard, went out little, knew everybody, but was the intimate acquaintance of but few, and amongst these were numbered Philip and Dora, whom he liked exceedingly and who interested him intensely.

They sat down in merry mood and did honour to the simple and appetising lunch.

"What a pity you did not turn up a few moments earlier, my dear fellow!" said Philip to Lorimer. "You would have been edified, and have heard Dora holding forth against wealth. The contempt my wife has for money is sublime. She is of the opinion that art, like virtue, should be its own reward."

"I'm sorry to say it's often the only one art gets," said Lorimer. "Well, what's your news?"

"Haven't any," said Philip. "Oh yes, though," added he, "Sir Benjamin Pond threatens to pay us a visit to-day ... deuce take him."

"You're in luck; he spends a mint of money in pictures."

"They say he buys them by the dozen."

"Hum," said Lorimer, "by the square yard. He's an awful ass, but his money is as good as that of the cleverest. When I said just now, 'What's your news?' I meant from the workshop."

"My wife's portrait will be finished in an hour's time; you shall see it after lunch."

"And what will you call it?"

"Oh, simply, 'Portrait of Mrs. Grantham,' or perhaps, 'A Bunch of Pansies.'"

"'A Bunch of Pansies,' that's charming," said Lorimer; "I should like to have a title like that for my new play, as simple" ...

"Oh, by-the-bye, how about your play, is it getting on?"

"It's finished, my dear fellow. I have the manuscript with me. I have to read it to the company at the Queen's Theatre to-day at four o'clock."

"Are you pleased with it?"

"My dear friend, when a man has the artistic temperament, his work never realises his ideal – but, thank goodness, when I have finished a play, I think of nothing but – the next one."

"You are right – but, still, with your experience – you have been writing plays for years."

"I wrote my first play when I was seventeen," said Lorimer, drawing himself up in a comic manner.

"When you were seventeen?" exclaimed Dora.

"Yes! a melodrama, and what a melodrama it was! – blood-curdling, weird, terrible, human, fiendish. I portrayed crime, perfidy and lying triumphing for a while, but overtaken in the long-run by fatal chastisement."

"And was the piece produced?" interrupted Dora.

"It was read," answered Lorimer. "I received a very encouraging letter from the manager of the theatre. My play, it appeared, showed a deplorable ignorance of stagecraft, but was well written and full of fine and well-conceived situations. However, horrors followed one another so closely that it was to be feared that the audience would scarcely have time to draw breath and dry their tears. Finally, the letter terminated with a piece of good advice. This was, in the future, not to kill all my *dramatis personæ*, so that, at the fall of the curtain, there might be someone left alive, to announce the name of the author, and bring him forward!"

"It was most encouraging," said Dora, in fits of laughter.

"That is not all," added Lorimer; "I received, a month later, an invitation to a dinner given by the Society of Dramatic Authors, and found myself amongst the leading authors and actors of the day."

"You must have been proud," said Dora.

"Proud, my dear madam," said Lorimer; "if you would form an idea of what I felt, try to imagine a little shepherd of Boeotia asked to dine with Jupiter, to meet all the gods of Olympus."

"Now, come, tell us about your new play," said Philip.

"Oh, well, you know, I hope it will be a success, but you never know what will please the great B.P. The dialogue is good, the characters are interesting, the situations are strong without being vulgar, the idea is new ... yes, I must say, I am sanguine."

"Bravo!" said Philip, "the theme is original."

"Perfectly original," said Lorimer. "I don't adapt Parisian plays for the *Pharisian* stage."

"It must be enchanting," cried Dora, "to see one's own creations in flesh and blood ... alive!"

"Yes, for one month, two months, perhaps six months. The creations of painters last for centuries."

"That is true," said Dora, looking at Philip.

"Shakespeare and Molière are still being played with success," said Philip.

"Yes, I grant you these two. Human nature is still and always will be what it was in their time. There are no new passions, follies, to portray since their time; but against those two names which you cite ... real demi-gods ... I could give you two hundred painters and sculptors dating from antiquity down to the present day."

Dora was delighted with the turn the conversation had taken. It seemed to her that Philip no longer enthused over his art, and she tried her utmost to rekindle the sacred fire that threatened to go out. So, encouraging Lorimer to continue in the same strain, she said —

"Yes, you are right. It is painting that expresses all that is beautiful in the world."

"Especially Philip's art," said Lorimer, seeming to grasp Dora's meaning from the warmth with which she spoke. "You paint nature, my dear friend, flowers, portraits ... you do not inflict the nude upon us, as do so many of your brothers in art, who show themselves but poor imitators of the French school, *servum pecus*."

"But nature is surely always beautiful, wherever she is found," said Dora.

"The ideal, yes," said Lorimer; "but it is the realistic method of treatment, in most pictures, that displeases me. Perhaps I am a little puritanical; but what can you expect? I'm English!"

"But there is no ideal nature, there is only true nature," said Dora. "Call it realism, if you wish: what is real is true, and what is true is beautiful."

"My dear Lorimer," exclaimed Philip, "if you are going to argue out that subject with Dora, you are lost, I warn you. You will get the worst of it."

"Well, you will admit this much, I suppose," said Dora, "that the models chosen are generally beautiful. English models are even more than beautiful, they are mostly pure in form."

"Quite so, but no artist has a right to expose a woman's nude figure to the public gaze. In sculpture it may be permissible, — the cold purity of the marble saves everything, — but never in painting."

"Shake up the Englishman," said Dora, laughing, "and the Puritan rises to the surface. I thought you were artistic, my dear friend. One may forgive a Puritan, but a *pruritan*, excuse the word. Oh!... I have met people who only saw in the *Venus de Milo* a woman with no clothes on. Poor Venus! I wish she could grow a pair of arms and hands to box the ears of such Philistines. Of course, I must say, these people were not of our society."

"Well, call me prejudiced if you will; but I hate to see woman robbed of her modesty ... and of her clothes, for the edification of a profane public, especially a public as inartistic as our English one. Your remark about the *Venus de Milo* proves that I am right. In France it is another matter. The public understands. It knows that such and such a picture is beautiful, and why it is beautiful. Even the workmen over there have been visitors of picture galleries from generation to generation, and I have heard some, at the Louvre and the Luxembourg, making criticisms of pictures that they looked at, criticisms which proved to me that they had more true appreciation of painting than the fashionable crowd that goes to the Royal Academy on private view day. No, I say, the nude in France, if you will; but in England, Heaven preserve us from it!"

"And yet," said Dora, in a calmer tone of voice, "the novelists and dramatists of to-day, for the most part, do exactly the same thing."

"What do you mean to say? Novelists and dramatists describe the emotions, the passions of the soul. To uncover the heart and uncover the body are two vastly different things. Add to that, in England on the stage, if not in the novel, that virtue triumphs invariably."

"Yes, but at what cost? Firstly, often at the expense of insulting one's common-sense; but that is the fault of a public that insists on being sent home, perfectly convinced that the hero and heroine

still henceforth live happily ever after. That is not the worst of it. Before seeing the triumph of virtue, often an impossible kind of virtue, one must assist at the heartrending dissection of a woman's soul. All the deformities of her heart are laid bare. I suppose you call that realism too, I call it clinical surgery – that is to say, my dear friend, that modern fiction exhales a strong odour of carbolic acid. Ah, I must say I prefer a picture in which a woman is presented in all her beauty of form and colour, to a novel or a play, in which we see woman represented as impure, corrupted" ...

"I told you that you would be beaten, Lorimer. Own yourself vanquished."

"My dear madam," said Lorimer, "you preach to a convert. But I must remind you that converting the British public is not my rôle. I serve up to that worthy public, which has always been kind to me, the dish of its predilection. We cannot always put on the stage Pauls and Virginias, who, moreover, are getting rarer every day, as you will admit."

"Virginias, especially," said Philip, in parenthesis.

"Oh, that's another thing," exclaimed Dora almost indignantly; "you work, you turn out dramatic literature, for what it brings you in; own it at once – to make money! That is modern art, the art of making ten thousand a year. Some are writers, some are green-grocers; you put them all in the same category. Under these conditions, I do not see why Philip should not accept offers to paint advertisements for manufacturers of soaps and hair restorers."

"But, my dear friend," said Lorimer, "some of our greatest academicians have accepted such commissions with the most satisfactory results."

"Oh, hold your tongue, you are incorrigible!" said Dora, laughing.

Philip saw that it was time to put a stop to the conversation that threatened to get too heated, and proposed a smoke in the studio. Dora did not go with them; she made a solemn bow to Lorimer; and all three burst out laughing and separated the best of friends.

Philip and Lorimer lit their cigars, the latter without taking his eyes off the portrait of Dora, which he thought a splendid likeness and perfect in colouring and modelling.

"Ah, my dear friend, what a wife you have! What a companion for an artist! Upon my word, if I were married to such a woman, I believe I could write masterpieces."

Philip hardly heeded him. He paced up and down the studio, looking at the clock, then at the door, and starting at every sound he heard in the street.

"I should like to gain the world, to lay it at the feet of this woman," said he, standing before the portrait a moment. Philip felt more and more agitated. Lorimer looked at him fixedly.

"Why, old fellow, what on earth is the matter with you?"

"My dear Lorimer," answered Philip, who could conceal his feelings no longer, "you see me to-day in an indescribable state of excitement. In a few moments, I may hear that I am a rich man."

"You don't say so," said Lorimer, amazed; "an old uncle about to depart this life?"

"No," said Philip; "my work, my very own work is perhaps on the point of making me wealthy. For months past, night and day so to speak, I have been working" ...

"At a great picture," interrupted Lorimer.

"At an invention."

"Nonsense! take care. You will die in the workhouse."

"Not at all, old fellow," said Philip; "there are two kinds of inventors, those who seek and those who discover. I have discovered."

"What have you discovered, dear friend?" said Lorimer, more and more surprised.

"A shell that may revolutionise the art of warfare. A Special Commission is now sitting at the War Office in Paris, to discuss its merits. I am awaiting their decision. I shall get a telegram to-day, perhaps in a few moments. I offered my shell to the English Government, but they declined it."

"Are you speaking seriously?"

"Do I look as if I were joking? Can't you see, man, I'm in such a fever of impatience, that I can't hold a brush, my hand is trembling so? I have neither the courage nor the strength to finish this

portrait, which only requires about an hour's work. But not a word to Dora on the subject; she knows nothing about it yet, and never will, if the affair falls through."

A violent ringing was heard at the studio bell.

"There," said Philip, "that is it perhaps ... the telegram at last." And he ran to open the door himself.

He returned accompanied by a big man, pompous and shiny, who entered the studio with a majestic step. Bald, chubby-faced, with a huge nose that divided his face in two, as the Apennines divide Italy, and two large round eyes set lobster-fashion, he was, with his huge white waistcoat, a fair example of a certain type of city merchant, in all his glory. This pretentious personage cast a look into every corner of the studio.

"Plague take the bore," said Philip to Lorimer.

"I'll be off," said Lorimer.

"Oh no, please stay. Sir Benjamin Pond's visit won't last long."

"Ah, ah," said the big City alderman; "you received my note, in which I announced my visit?"

Philip made a sign in the affirmative. Sir Benjamin placed his hat on a table and, rubbing his hands, threw a condescending glance at Philip, which seemed to say, "You ought to be proud to have a visit from me." He took stock of the furniture in detail.

"Very cosy here; very comfortable quarters indeed. You are evidently doing well. One is constantly hearing of artists who live on buns in garrets ... upon my word, I don't know any such inviting and attractive houses as those inhabited by artists, and I flatter myself I know them all."

"Painters surround themselves with a certain artistic luxury, as a means of inspiration," said Philip; "and then, Sir Benjamin," added he, laughing, "I don't see why all the good things of this life should be for the fools. Pray, take a seat."

"Thanks," said the patron of arts ... "I came" ...

"To arrange for a portrait?"

"No, no, not a portrait. Now I hope I shan't offend you by saying so, but I really don't care for portraits in oil. You may say what you like, but, to have a perfect likeness, give me a good coloured photograph. That's my tackle. For fancy portraits, very good, but otherwise" ...

"It sounds promising," thought Lorimer, who took up his position near the window, to enjoy the fun.

"The moment a process is discovered for photographing colour as well as lines and shade," continued Sir Benjamin, "nobody will want a painted portrait. For a portrait, you don't want imagination, you want truth, sir, real truth, an exact reproduction of the original."

"Some people prefer Madame Tussaud's Exhibition to the Louvre or the British Museum," said Lorimer.

The City alderman turned round and looked at him, and Philip introduced them to each other.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.