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PAINTED IN CHARACTER.

BY MRS. STARR KING.



“OU promise to paint my portrait?”

“If you wish it, Miss Stuart.”

“Of course I wish it—above everything else in the world! and in character, too, Palmer.”

“What character?”

“Oh! you shall decide upon that yourself. Your taste is so perfect, you will be the best judge of what will suit me. Take a good look at me, now, and say what it shall be—for I shall have to prepare a dress to suit the character, and there will be no time to lose, if the picture is ready for the next exhibition.”

The artist deliberately laid down his brushes and pallet, turning a long and steady gaze upon the magnificent beauty, who drew herself up to her full height with an exultant consciousness of her charms. Her full, dark eyes met his with a smile, soft yet triumphant; she did not modestly shrink from his scrutinizing gaze, but allowed her glance to mingle with his, pouring its full splendor upon him. Many men had thrilled and trembled beneath those eyes, and she had no doubt that Palmer Kingsley realized their power, though she could not, with all her experience, read the precise meaning of the expression with which he regarded her. She was provoked at this. No man had ever so puzzled her—ever been so difficult of capture—and she was not even yet secure of him, though she considered his promise to paint her portrait the most hopeful assurance she had yet received.

“He thinks of Zenobia, Hypatia, Cleopatra,” thought she; “I am not afraid of the comparison. I wonder what he will choose!”

Her wonder was not to be immediately gratified.

“I must make two conditions to my consent,” said the artist presently, with a manner as if he was bestowing a favor upon Miss Stuart in receiving her as a sitter; whereas she had been accustomed to having the favor begged of her by the proudest of his tribe.

She did not resent this; it was something new; and one of the most piquant of Mr. Kingsley’s attractions, was, that

he treated her so differently from the crowd of her admirers, who were ready to fall at her feet at the slightest token of her favor. They blushed and flattered if she spoke, smiled, allowed them to pick up her handkerchief, or lead her to the dance; but this man never changed countenance, even when, with that slight tremor of tenderness in her tone, she had called him by his first name, Palmer.

“I shall doubtless accept them, if they be not too hard.”

“They are not very hard. The first is, that you make no attempt to see the picture until it is finished and ready for exhibition to your friends.”

“Do you not call that a difficult condition? You have forgotten how powerful is a woman’s curiosity. However, I promise.”

“The other is, that you do not seek to know in what character I am representing you, until the same time. I shall need no costume other than your usual dress—I can get what I want in that line.”

“Very well—but you are a tyrant, Palmer Kingsley! you use your power at discretion. Only think what an ordeal you require me to pass! I shall be dying of impatience and curiosity, before the picture is completed.”

“That mercy I to others show,  
That mercy show to me,”

repeated the artist lightly; and the lady smiled, for in his words she heard an intimation of her own triumph. “Do not disappoint me; to-morrow at twelve for the first sitting, as our time is limited.”

“I shall be sure to come. I am engaged to Phil Halbert for the matinee at the Academy at one, but I shall send him an excuse.”

“Do you break your engagements so lightly, Miss Stuart?”

“When I can better them so infinitely,”—then, as if conscious she had made too open an avowal of her principles to one whose judgment might be severe upon them, she added, with a bewitching smile, “not that I often have sufficient temptation, but in this case must consider myself justified.”

In the studio were two other persons who had been quiet observers of what was passing—a brother and sister—Alice and John Forrest, friends of both parties, and companions of Mildred Stuart in her morning walk, which had terminated at the artist’s apartments.

This couple were ill at ease, though they had a different way of showing it. John, a handsome young man of twenty-three, was pacing up and down like a caged lion; his face was pale, and he bit his under lip from time to time; he scarcely made an effort to conceal his agitation, which, from the despairing glances he cast at Mildred and the savage air with which he listened to Palmer, might readily be guessed to spring from jealousy.

Alice, on the contrary, was absolutely quiet. She stood, her face half turned from the party, looking out of the window, as if she saw something of interest in the street, while nothing except a slight fluctuation of the delicate waves of color in her cheek, betrayed that she even heard what was passing within. Several times the artist had glanced at her, and he had observed that not even the gloved fingers resting upon the back of a chair had stirred. As she stood in the full light of the window, slender and fair, her exquisite profile defined against the blue distance, the golden light breaking against the curls which would not all be restrained within her bonnet, she made a graceful picture of youth and innocence. If Mildred was superbly beautiful, Alice was winningly lovely. Palmer Kingsley should have considered himself fortunate in having two such interesting women in his studio, either of them an incarnation of beauty to be thankful for. Perhaps he did so consider himself—it was difficult, often, to tell what he felt or thought, when he chose to compel his soul to retreat from his marble features.

“What do you see, Alice, that interests you so much?”

It was her friend Mildred who asked the question, and Alice felt a covert mockery in the sweet, affectionate voice.

“I was using my spiritual eyes—I cannot tell what passed before my material ones,” she answered.

“Come, Alice, let us go! we have stayed here too long, already,” exclaimed her brother, opening the door as he spoke.

She turned to accompany him.

“I did not know you were in haste, this morning, Mr. Forrest—you did not appear particularly occupied before we came in,” said Mildred. “I think the air of a studio does not agree with you—it makes you restless—the odor of the paints, perhaps,” and she smiled provokingly.

The artist saw the hot blood flash up

into John's face, and arose before he had time for a reply, himself saying—

"It ought not to agree with any of us this glorious October morning. I do not mean to confine myself to it any longer, since you are going; but, with your permission, will join you in your promenade. Alice, will you walk with me?"

The four went out together, and Mildred, much against her will, was obliged to walk with the young man whom she had contrived to get into a very unhappy temper; but now, being herself chagrined, she concealed it by efforts to restore his peace of mind which were as successful as the most she chose to make. They had not gone the length of four blocks before he became as radiant as hitherto he had been cloudy and savage; his frank, bright countenance was as gay as hope and love could make it. As for Alice, if her serenity had been disturbed, it, too, was restored; and she glided by the side of her companion, enjoying his society, and the fresh, exhilarating day.

When they came to the residence of the Forests, Alice invited the party in to lunch; but Miss Stuart had a positive engagement which she hardly wished to neglect—to make calls with a lady friend; and was very reluctantly compelled to decline, leaving Mr. Kingsley to enter alone, while her escort continued his walk with her; knowing, that, in all probability, the two would have a pleasant *tete-a-tete* over their luncheon. She would have liked, very well, to have broken up any such "golden opportunity," for she guessed that the artist was more deeply interested in Alice Forest than in any other living woman—and she was bound that, before a month passed by, that supremacy should be wrested from her. The knowledge, which her penetration had enabled her to acquire, that the young girl loved the gifted artist with her whole deep soul, formed no barrier to this resolve. Mildred was fond of triumphs. If she enjoyed the excitement of bringing the proudest men to her feet, by the attraction of her royal beauty, regally adorned—for she had wealth and taste—she liked one thing still better—to win them from women who had claims upon them, or who hoped to have. She had interrupted the calm course of many a true love which had hitherto run smooth.

She knew that Alice and Palmer were old friends—that their parents were "acquaint in the days of auld lang syne"—

that the two houses would like nothing better than a union between the two—and she suspected an engagement already existed, or would soon be entered into. Nevertheless, she resolved to drag the haughty artist at her chariot-wheels. We say haughty, because, to her, he had at first been so. Perhaps it was a kind of steel armor which he put on to defend himself from the perils which threatened him, in meeting so magnificent a woman. He certainly was not regarded as repelling by his family or friends. To Alice Forest he was always considerate and gentle; and this deferential tenderness was the more winning, because of the reserve of his general manner. There was a vein of satire about him which his enemies feared, which society admired, and which he was very careful not to use against those who were dear to him.

There were three reasons why Mildred was unusually bent upon the conquest of Palmer Kingsley. In the first place, he was the fashion—all the beaux and belles sat to the rising young artist; no party was complete without his presence; his criticisms were respected; his *bon mots* repeated; and the women adored him. In the second place, he was indifferent to her. Thirdly, she was herself half conquered by him—and it was a question with her if she should not accept him, provided she could bring him to a proposal.

This proposition of hers that he should paint her in character, was a plan by which she expected to profit much, as she could ask no better opportunity for trying the power of her charms than would be afforded by the long sittings it would necessarily call for. This "sitting for a portrait" is a favorite theme of story-tellers, and may well be, for there is dangerous propinquity and necessary familiarity which naturally result in deeper interest between those at liberty to cultivate tender sentiments. Mildred expected to make the most of these advantages. She scarcely doubted that any heart, however pre-occupied, would melt before the blaze of her beauty, when thus exposed to its splendor. She knew all the arts and witcheries which could be used during these golden hours. Then, it was the wish of her vanity, that her portrait should grace the coming exhibition—and then, also, she wished to spite Alice Forest, and ruin the peace of her brother John.

The next ten days after the arrangements for the portrait were made were equal to a year of ordinary life to all the four persons we have introduced—yes, to a lifetime of such common-place experience as makes up the sum of many souls. There was a sitting every day—except two, which were Sabbaths,—between the hours of twelve and three. The first sitting the artist and his subject were entirely alone. Mildred came, carefully and splendidly dressed, as for an evening reception, not knowing but that he would wish her arms and neck bare in the costume he was to give her. Whether he wished it or not he made no remark. When she flung aside her rose-lined opera-cloak and placed herself in the seat which he indicated, he was obliged to confess to his secret thought, that he had never before gazed upon such glowing, superb, and faultless beauty. His cheek flushed with the fire of an artist's fervor, if with no deeper feeling, and his hands almost trembled, as he arranged his easel and pencils for the sketch. Mildred saw it all—she saw that he was moved, as she had hoped he would be. She had spent hours upon the adornment of a person which required no arts to set off its marvelous perfections. She was not afraid of the cold lustre of the northern light which came through the window upon her; for the bloom of her cheek was kindled by the healthy blood which ebbed and flowed beneath its velvet texture; and to nothing but the rich transparency of the white rose, whose fibres are flushed with faint crimson, could the soft fairness of her brow and bosom be compared. Her complexion bore the close scrutiny of the painter's eye; no fancy could depict hair more dark and lustrous than the profuse locks she had wreathed about her head with such consummate skill. Delicate and distinguished as was Mildred's beauty, her features being of the finest mould, there was a warmth and fullness about it which breathed of youth and passion. Dimples lurked on her elbows and fair round shoulders, and her chin melted into her throat with a loveable curve that was dangerous to contemplate.

With pencil resting in his hand for the first outline touch, Palmer turned and confronted his beautiful sitter. For several moments he looked into her eyes with a peculiar look which she could hardly understand—he seemed studying her soul as well as her features—but she

met this look with the full lustre of a pair of eyes which had burned the peace out of many an unwary breast. She smiled at first, and then the smile softened down into a dreamy languor, as if her soul were being drawn away from her by his magnetic gaze.

At length with a sigh and half-start, as if recovering himself from some too sweet or too painful thought, he turned to the canvast and proceeded rapidly with his sketching. At first there was but little conversation. Mildred longed to arise and peep over his shoulder, to discover what flattering semblance he was giving her; but she dared not do so. He told her not to be under the least constraint of position—she might walk, sit, talk, do as she pleased—only she must not approach the easel. So she sat and dallied with the pearls upon her arms, the flowers of her bouquet, her costly handkerchief, and talked on many subjects with the artist, who grew more animated every moment, and used his agreeable powers to the utmost.

Although not strictly a handsome man, Mr. Kingsley had qualities more effective than mere beauty; he had a noble face, a voice of singular melody, and a manner of his own. His conversation had always something original—he could be gay, witty, nonsensical, sentimental, sententious, or profound, as pleased his mood. He pleased to be nearly all of these during the three hours in which he was complimented by the presence of Miss Stuart. Her purpose of fascinating him was overpowered by a sense of being herself more interested than she had ever been in any man before.

Usually, Miss Stuart, too cool and calculating to be overmastered by any emotion, was so superbly self-possessed as to be able to work out effects upon others, and note them carefully, without being in the least disturbed herself. But to-day, she felt herself reluctantly acknowledging the power of a mind as self-centered as her own. She had laughed, she had blushed, and she had frowned against her will.

She felt fluttered and half uncomfortable, when, the sitting over, she was driven home in her carriage alone, Mr. Kingsley having politely declined her invitation to a seat beside her; because she was in doubt whether he admired her as much as she did him.

Ah! Mildred Stuart, that is a bitter

cup you have often placed to the lips of others, and you should be made to drink it to the dregs yourself.

With her wealth and her charms there seemed but little danger of that. From earliest girlhood she had driven her car of triumph over the hearts of her worshippers. If she had acted from vanity alone, she would not have been so bad a woman; but there was often much of malice in her acts, and always a cool selfishness ruled her motives.

When Palmer Kingsley declined the further company of Miss Stuart, he took his way to the mansion of the Forests, where he was a frequent and welcome visitor. Alice was alone in the drawing-room. To eyes not blinded by the diamonds and dark orbs of Mildred, she would have made a lovely picture, in her simple high-necked dress of blue silk, a cluster of golden curls dropping down either delicate cheek, into which the artless color rushed as she heard the name of the visitor announced. She had been reading Tennyson's Princess, and the book was beside her on the sofa; her dark blue eyes were tender with the delicious light they had drawn from that sweetest well of youthful dreams. With the air of one who had a right, the artist sat beside her, playing with the volume as if he would fain have exchanged it for the little tremulous hand so close to his own, yet hardly wished to frighten it.

"Poetry, as usual, Alice. Do you not feed your mind too much upon this dainty fare?"

"Oh, no, I think not. I've just indulged myself with this as a luxury, after spending four hours with Humboldt and Hugh Miller. I've been sewing, too; and practising that Verdi you and John admire so much," (sweet prevarication of the timid heart! she was conscious that John cared but little, just now, what music she played.)

"Where is John to-day?"

"I do not know, wandering about like an unsettled ghost, I suspect. He seems very unhappy; and I am almost afraid Mildred Stuart is trifling with him. But he is so good, so earnest and so handsome, I should not think she could be false with him—should you?"

She looked up as she asked the question and saw his brow darken with a sudden shade, and a curious, firm purpose settle on his lip. Her own heart felt a pang—was Palmer jealous of John, and

bent upon thwarting him in the hope of his life? Palmer Kingsley, who was almost her own—who had looked, smiled, said everything but the one question of asking her if she would be his wife. She could not answer. He was the soul of honor, and, she had supposed, as faithful and true as he was honorable. But things were putting on new aspects. The innocent girl was puzzled and distressed. Yesterday she had been actually unhappy. To-day she grew so again, despite her will.

"You commenced her portrait to-day, I suppose," she continued.

"Yes. She looked queenly, too, as she always does. Flora McFlimsey might have envied her appareling—it was dazzling! Such a throat as she has! such shoulders—such hands!—forgive me, Alice, I forgot to whom I was speaking."

Inwardly he was begging pardon of the pure maiden at his side for his ugly thoughts with regard to the lavishly-displayed perfections of Miss Stuart; she read it, however, that he regretted betraying so much warmth of admiration to her, who might be grieved by it. Her womanly pride was up in arms; she dissembled the sharp pain she felt, and turned lightly to other subjects.

Presently John came in. He was in high spirits. Miss Stuart passing him near Union Square, had stopped the carriage and held a gay conversation of a few moments with him, ending by inviting him to call upon her that evening, as she should certainly be at home. His angry jealousy had all subsided beneath her renewed smiles; and it was with a resolve to decide his fate that very night thrilling his breast, that he came home, glad, buoyant, tumultuous—his fresh cheeks glowing, his eyes sparkling, his breast heaving high with hope and passion.

Despite the almost boyish bloom of his features, John was a person of earnest feeling, honest as he was ardent, quick as the lightning, passionate as the sun, true as steel—a glorious lover for any woman who could appreciate his fine temperament and frank affections. Alice adored her brother. She knew all his best qualities—how worthy he was of respect and regard, how tender of childhood, how reverential of womanhood, how considerate of old age—what a noble son and dear brother he was—what real esteem he had for the fair sex—how closely he guarded

himself against the temptations of his age,—and she would have hated any one who deceived or trifled with him. She more than suspected Mildred of this heartless play; her heart was burning with conflicting feelings—when John came in, so bright, so handsome, so assured, that she banished, for the hour, the fears which troubled her.

The sitting for the second day had hardly commenced when a quick knock at the door of the studio was followed by the entrance of John Forest, who bounded into the room without waiting to be asked. He wore the same careless look of happiness which he had on the previous day; he had been to visit Miss Stuart, as appointed, and, although she had given him no opportunity to declare his love, as he was eager to do, she certainly had given him the most graceful encouragement, even to faintly, and with drooping eyelids, returning the pressure of his hand at parting. He had no reason to doubt his being a welcome visitor to the studio, and was surprised at the annoyed and haughty air with which Mildred received him.

Palmer, also, arose hastily upon his entrance.

"It had been my intention to permit no callers at all during these sittings," said he; "but I shall not object to your presence, John, if you will give me your word to make no attempt to see the picture until it is complete, and I myself display it to a chosen group of friends."

"Of course I can submit to the same conditions which the subject herself has," was the gay reply, made with an effort, though, for the lover's ardor was already damped by the cold look cast at him by Mildred. He would not take this hint to depart, but lingered moodily in the room, a disagreeable interruption to the plans of the lady for using those hours to weave her web of enchantment about Kingsley. Not an interruption entirely, either; she would not be so cheated, and young Forest had the maddening privilege of seeing her bestow upon the artist the same subtle, languid glances, the same subdued tones and arch smiles which he had thought peculiarly his own. More, his pride was hurt by perceiving that to these she added all the appearance she could summon of interest in literature and art, of delicate tastes and deep intuitions, as if conscious that mere physical charms, nor even brilliant wit, could en-

chain the man of genius she had set herself to enslave. The wild ocean never fretted against a granite rock more vehemently than the spirit of the young man chafed and rebelled against her hard unscrupulousness—all the more tumultuous because he perceived that she delighted in his misery—and yet he had not the courage or the strength to hurl back her indifference in her face.

Day after day passed; the artist painted, apparently, with elaborate care, though no one could decide upon that, as no eye but his own had rested upon the canvas. While he painted thus carefully and slowly, he made himself as agreeable to his beautiful sitter as all his varied gifts permitted—he had never exerted himself more to entertain or attract any one. That he was successful the manner of Mildred Stuart testified. That she was becoming interested—nay, infatuated—was shown in her own neglect of the arts which she had so lavishly used during the first two or three sittings. She listened more than she spoke; her voice faltered instead of shaking that of another. She always came magnificently dressed—she brought Palmer choice flowers to perfume his apartments.

Almost always there was a third person present. Pale, frowning, gloomy, the opposite of his genial self, John Forest lingered in the studio, making abrupt remarks, intruding himself into the conversation in sudden, ill-natured sarcasms; and then, as if despising himself for his want of self-control, dashing away from the magic chamber, only to yield again to the sorceress, and present himself to her chilling presence. It was pitiful to see so fine a heart and mind in such a plight. If that woman, who secretly enjoyed it all, had not been devoid of conscience and of truth, she would have put an end to it. But when he was in her society, separate from Palmer, she gave him sufficient encouragement to warrant him in feeling all the doubt and distress which beset him.

In the meantime, as the picture drew near completion, the artist became strangely absorbed in his work. Dropping all his charming conversation, he worked in silence assiduously, while his face actually grew pale, and his mouth was set in stern compression. The last two or three days he hardly spoke; but he looked long and singularly into the beautiful eyes whose subtle fires were

poured into his in a languid stream of loving, liquid splendor. Mildred was immensely flattered by this devotion to his task. She doubted not that his whole heart had become so blent with the work, that he could spare no time for the play and mockery of words.

"Like Pygmalion, he is mad with love of his own creation," she murmured to herself, "but not, like him, shall he be doomed to its embrace alone. The 'living original' is his, whenever he chooses to solicit it." Ah, ha! the toiler caught in her own net!

"He must have a glorious picture there," she continued; burning with curiosity to know in what character he had represented her.

And yet she felt, at times, vaguely uneasy. There was a strange expression in the artist's piercing look, a strange pallor upon his face, which made her shrink from eyes that were reading her soul. Was he so desperately enamored as all that intense and haggard devotion might indicate?

During the three hours of the last sitting, the artist's studio would have furnished a singular study of character, had there been any disinterested observer present. Silence, which was scarcely once broken, reigned, though three persons were gathered there. The painter leaned forward, absorbed and half breathless, now gazing upon the fair face before him, now busy with his canvas. Every vestige of color had gradually faded out of his features, which were set and rigid; but his hand was firm and quick, and his eyes vivid and eager. As for his sitter, she was completely magnetized. She did not attempt to enter into conversation, but sat there nearly motionless; her glittering drapery floating about her voluptuous figure, her hands folded spasmodically, her head bent slightly forward, and those great black eyes, so wonderful in their power and brilliancy, burning like soft, steady flames, as she gazed upon the artist's face, her soul wrapped in the first dream of love which had ever broken its callous selfishness.

The third figure was that of John Forest. He leaned against the frame of the window, and regarded the couple who had evidently forgotten his existence. Neither did he speak or move. In the face of Mildred, unconscious of his presence, there was now no disguise—all the

dream of passionate regard in which she indulged, spread itself over her fixed yet glowing features. He saw that she loved his rival—her very attitude confessed it, as she sat there, lost to every other earthly seeming—sat there, so beautiful, so resplendent!—despair seized upon his soul, and convulsed his countenance.

The three hours passed—and four.

"It is finished!" exclaimed the artist, rising with a deep sigh, as if shaking off some oppressive spell.

Mildred echoed that sigh, softly.

"If I might only see it," she murmured, with a faint smile.

"Not to-day, Miss Stuart—not to-day. I will make arrangements for its display very soon," replied the painter, abruptly; and he threw a cloth over the easel. "Why, John Forest, my boy, for heaven's sake, what is the matter? You look like a ghost! I had forgotten you were here, my friend."

"No doubt you were unconscious of my presence,—Miss Stuart also, has ignored me. To-morrow, sir, I will see you," in a threatening tone;—"to-night I must speak with this lady. Miss Stuart, will you honor me by accepting my escort to your home?"

She would have declined, but did not dare. His stern look did not intimidate her, for she was dauntless in her cool selfishness; but she would have preferred the company of Mr. Kingsley, yet she did not think it policy to refuse, lest the latter should not be pleased with such a step.

"Certainly, Mr. Forest," she replied, with frigid politeness. Neither of the gentlemen offered to place her cloak over her lovely shoulders; so she poutingly waited upon herself.

The two went out together, leaving the artist alone with his work.

One hour later, Alice Forest was suddenly confronted in her boudoir, by her brother, who appeared before her, excited beyond any mood in which she had ever seen him.

"Tell me, Alice," he cried, "the truth, for I must know it. Did Palmer Kingsley ever speak to you of love. Are you engaged?"

The young girl hesitated, blushing and uncertain.

"We certainly are not engaged," she said, "though I have, perhaps foolishly, interpreted many of his late expressions into those of a lover. But oh, John! do

not become so agitated; what is wrong? I have no claim upon him—and if I had, I would not urge it against his desire. I should die of regret and mortification if I thought that you——"

"The dastard! the coward!" exclaimed John; "he is not bound to you, I suppose, though he very well knows that he has taken every means to win my sister's affections. I tell you, Alice, I have witnessed the most undisguised flirtation between him and that accursed coquette, who has been sitting for her portrait. There, you need not turn so white! I knew the scoundrel was getting ready to break your heart. I have just offered myself to Mildred, Alice. After receiving encouragement more than sufficient, to warrant any man in such a hope—after being alternately heated and cooled like a piece of iron in a furnace, to harden me, and to suit her whims—made desperate by seeing her open actions of love toward *my friend*, Kingsley, I resolved just now, to compel her to speak, once for all. She refused me—most coolly, smilingly, and maliciously; as lightly as she would have cast aside a wilted bouquet, which the day before was so carefully gathered for her pleasure. She was mean and ungenerous about it—for she tried to humiliate me. She has hopes, you see, of enticing the fortunate artist. I do not care for *her*—that disgraceful folly is over with me! I know her now!—but upon Palmer Kingsley, I swear my revenge, if he makes you, my innocent sister, the sufferer for his caprices."

"Be calm, my dear brother," implored Alice, laying her hand upon his arm. "I am so sorry, oh, so sorry, for your disappointment. Yet I am so glad you are not going to marry Mildred. I could never confide in her. And do not blame Palmer. He has never asked me to love him; he is at full liberty to make any choice he pleases. To be sure I did think—that some of his—words—meant more than it is proven they did. But that is my own fault. He is high-souled, honorable, I know. If he loves Mildred, it is because he cannot help it. She is so beautiful—so brilliant! and I—I am so timid and unattractive beside of her. Do not shake me off, John! indeed, I shall die of grief and shame, if you go to Palmer, as if I had any right to consider myself injured;" and flinging her arms about his stubborn neck, she dragged him to the sofa, and made him sit by her;

while she soothed away the first outburst of his sorrow and anger, with kisses, and her own gentle, imploring words.

After she had somewhat quieted his fierce resentment, she permitted him to go out; first exacting a promise, that he would not seek Mr. Kingsley, nor insult him if he chanced to meet him. Left to her thoughts, Alice grew very pale and cold, as she remained with her head bent upon her hand, half-hoping, that her brother's jealousy had deceived him, and that Mr. Kingsley would come in, and sit by her, read to her, talk with her, as has been his habit almost every evening of the past few weeks. But he did not come. While she was sitting there, growing more chilled and melancholy, with every passing moment, he was whiling away the hours in the boudoir of Miss Stuart. He was alone with the enchantress; exposed to the full fascination of her witty repartee, her bewitching laugh—gurgling from her snowy throat, as melodiously as silver water from a marble fountain—her flowing locks, her glittering drapery, her lambent eyes.

If Mildred was a finished coquette, she had now encountered her equal. All the time that she was endeavoring to bring the artist into her power, he was quietly and irresistibly subduing *her*. Until, finally, she ceased to laugh, she ceased to be brilliant, she was only tender, timid, womanly—as subdued in reality, as she had often cunningly affected to be. A soft flush pervaded her countenance, she listened eagerly to his words, answering not so much by speech as looks; until a less discerning man than the one she had now to deal with, might have read the evidences of his triumph. We say triumph, not that winning a heart ought to be so named, but because this was a game of pride and skill, in which the players had taken part, with the purpose of seeing which was the superior.

As the time drew near at which it would be proper to close an evening visit, the heart of Mildred throbbed impetuously. "Would he declare himself—would he put in words what his glances, his voice, his manner, spoke so plainly?" Oh, he surely would speak! he could not resist her drooping eyes and burning cheeks.

Nevertheless, he arose, without declaring the passion which seemed to tremble in his tone.

"To-morrow, beautiful Mildred," he said,

taking both her hands and pressing them, "come to my studio at the usual hour, and you shall behold my feeble attempt at depicting your peculiar loveliness," and he was gone, while she stood gazing where he had disappeared, conscious that her face had betrayed her emotion.

The next morning Alice received a note.

"DEAR MISS FOREST :

"Your brother left me in anger yesterday; but if you and he will be at my studio at twelve, when the portrait is exhibited for the first time to a few friends, I am confident that you will, both of you, understand and forgive my late actions. Do not fail to come; by coming you will really oblige your sincere friend,

"PALMER KINGSLEY."

At noon of that day, about a dozen persons were gathered in the artist's reception-room, where the picture, already framed, and hung in a light arranged to display it, awaited in veiled obscurity the moment which was to expose it to the criticism of the assembly. The company was rather singularly chosen. Singular only to Miss Stuart, who, as she entered, radiant and assured as ever, became aware that every gentleman present was a rejected suitor, and the two or three ladies were those whom she had successfully rivaled.

"What a queer coincidence," she murmured, mentally, but not at all embarrassed by it, she took her place by the artist, glowing with curiosity, and the anticipation of fresh flatteries. He answered her gay good-morning with a profound and smiling reverence; then, stepping forward, after an instant of hesitation, he drew away the veil.

A repressed shriek broke from one or two of the ladies; then a deathly silence followed, during which the eyes of all present were fixed beyond their power to withdraw them, upon the canvas. At first sight, there appeared to be there no portrait of Miss Stuart. In the midst of a lovely garden, beneath a tree, a serpent, the most conspicuous object in the picture, lay coiled in a rainbow heap. The skin of the serpent was a marvel of skillful coloring; its scales shone with iridescent splendors, which seemed to emanate light, and cast a baleful lustre through the whole apartment. Its bright haughty head was erect, and its eyes were fixed upon the face of a man, a side-view of which could only be given, but which

expressed, with appalling vividness, the power of the enchantment which was holding him, to his own inevitable ruin. He knew—so the haggard pallor of his complexion declared—that he should be stung to death, if he lingered; yet there was an irresistible influence in the enlarging and luminous eyes—eyes sweet as a woman's, and subtle as Lucifer's—from which he could not disengage himself. The spectators read the struggle on his features—features which seemed, each instant during which they continued to gaze, to reflect more and more the expression and likeness of the seducer's—reminding them of that true passage in the poem of Christabel, where the pure countenance of the maiden is represented as unconsciously mirroring that of the sorceress.

It certainly was a terrible triumph of the painter's genius! For as they looked, they became also aware that a likeness to Mildred Stuart was coming out upon the face of the serpent. Yes! those eyes were certainly hers!—black, lambent, dangerous, holding you so brightly, yet so fatally; seeming so warm—yet so cold beneath the outer play of warmth,—seeming so gentle, yet so relentless beneath the outer guise of gentleness. And now, as the spell increased upon them, they forgot whether they were looking at a reptile or at a woman. And that man! he would certainly fall a victim!—would no one reach forth a hand and pluck him away?

Above the glittering snake, in the lower branches of the tree, was seen a lovely bird, a downy, golden and white creature, with innocent eyes, but which seemed stricken with terror, so that it could not fly nor sing.

Still the spectators remained silent. Anguish, despair, horror, mingled with a loathing fondness, spoke in the whitening face of the man; their hearts sank within them to note his fatal intralment.

But how like—how marvellously like—it grew. As by a common impulse, the whole company turned to Mildred Stuart, to her eyes, for the confirmation of their thought.

She could not bear it. The surprise, mortification, anger, and—yes, the fearful *truthfulness*—were too much for her. As the shuddering assembly turned to her, with a shriek, she sprang toward the hateful picture, but fainted, and sank to the floor. Coolly, as if he had not done

a cruel thing, Palmer Kingsley brought water and wine, and she was revived.

"See," he said, with a smile, in a low voice to her, as she was recovered; "do you wish it to be so?" and he pointed to the card attached to the frame—"For Exhibition at the Academy of Design—THE ENCHANTRESS."

"Palmer Kingsley, you are a heartless demon," she whispered fiercely.

"And you are a tender woman—delicate, compassionate, and merciful! you will not injure one human creature. You are as gentle as a lamb. If any one should be wronged by you—by accident of course—no doubt you would weep those brilliant eyes quite dull! you remember?

"That mercy I to others show,  
That mercy show to me."

Then he turned to the friends present, saying apologetically,

"You came here, expecting to see Miss Stuart's portrait. *That* I cannot show you this morning, as it is not finished yet. But, lest you should be disappointed, and see nothing, I have shown you my last fancy picture, which I have prepared for the Exhibition."

They accepted the excuse and went away.

"And now," whispered Palmer, as he offered his arm to Alice, and pressed the hand which rested so timidly upon it; "you are the little bird—Alice. Will you fly away from that hateful atmosphere, up into the heaven of love and joy, which alone is fit for you?"

She trembled with happiness beneath his eyes.

"But were you not too severe in your punishment?" she asked regretfully; for she did not like that any heart should be pained or humiliated.

"Ask John if I was."

"Not a bit," answered that young gentleman. "You took me for your subject in that victim—I went through all that experience last week. It will be a lesson to her! She will be afraid to play the part of charmer longer in this city."

"True coquetry is excusable in a woman—it becomes her," said the artist; "but such coquetry as hers, is treachery and falsehood of the wickedest kind. It was a bitter duty—but I have punished her!"

The three went out into the golden October sunshine, glad to get away from the depressing influence of the picture.