

The Pot-Boiler

Edith Wharton

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I

The studio faced north, looking out over a dismal reach of roofs and chimneys, and rusty fire-escapes hung with heterogeneous garments. A crust of dirty snow covered the level surfaces, and a December sky with more snow in it lowered over them.

The room was bare and gaunt, with blotched walls and a stained uneven floor. On a divan lay a pile of "properties" — limp draperies, an Algerian scarf, a moth-eaten fan of peacock feathers. The janitor had forgotten to fill the coal-scuttle over-night, and the cast-iron stove projected its cold flanks into the room like a black iceberg. Ned Stanwell, who had just added his hat and great-coat to the miscellaneous heap on the divan, turned from the empty stove with a shiver.

"By Jove, this is a little too much like the last act of Boheme," he said, slipping into his coat again after a vain glance at the coal-scuttle. Much solitude, and a lively habit of mind, had bred in him the habit of audible soliloquy, and having flung a shout for the janitor down the seven flights dividing the studio from the basement, he turned back, picking up the thread of his monologue. "Exactly like Boheme, really — that crack in the wall is much more like a stage-crack than a real one — just the sort of crack Mungold would paint if he were doing a Humble Interior."

Mungold, the fashionable portrait-painter of the hour, was the favourite object of the younger men's irony.

"It only needs Kate Arran to be borne in dying," Stanwell continued with a laugh. "Much more likely to be poor little Caspar, though," he concluded.

His neighbour across the landing — the little sculptor, Caspar Arran, humorously called "Gasper" on account of his bronchial asthma — had lately been joined by a sister, Kate Arran, a strapping girl, fresh from the country, who had installed herself in the little room off her brother's studio, keeping house for him with a chafing-dish and a coffee-machine, to the mirth and envy of the other young men in the building.

Poor little Gasper had been very bad all the autumn, and it was surmised that his sister's presence, which he spoke of growlingly, as a troublesome necessity devolved on him by the inopportune death of an aunt, was really an indication of his failing ability to take care of himself. Kate Arran took his complaints with unflinching good-humour, darned his socks, brushed his clothes, fed him with steaming broths and foaming milk-punches, and listened with reverential assent to his interminable disquisitions on art. Every one in the house was sorry for little Gasper, and the other fellows liked him all the more because it was so impossible to like his sculpture; but his talk was a bore, and when his colleagues ran in to see him they were apt to keep a hand on the door-knob and to plead a pressing engagement. At least they had been till Kate came; but now they began to show a disposition to enter and sit down. Caspar, who was no fool, perceived the change, and perhaps detected its cause; at any rate, he showed no special gratification at the increased cordiality of his friends, and Kate, who followed him in everything, took this as a sign that guests were to be discouraged.

There was one exception, however: Ned Stanwell, who was deplorably good-natured, had always lent a patient ear to Caspar, and he now reaped his reward by being taken into Kate's favour. Before she had been a month in the building they were on confidential terms as to Caspar's health, and lately Stanwell had penetrated farther, even to the inmost recesses of her anxiety about her brother's career. Caspar had recently had a bad blow in the refusal of his magnum opus — a vast allegorical group — by the Commissioners of the Minneapolis Exhibition. He took the rejection with Promethean irony, proclaimed it as the clinching proof of his ability, and abounded in reasons why, even in an age of such crass artistic ignorance, a refusal so egregious must react to the advantage of its object. But his sister's indignation, if as glowing, was a shade less hopeful. Of course Caspar was going to succeed — she knew it was only a question of time — but she paled at the word and turned imploring eyes on Stanwell. Was there time enough? It was the one element in the combination that she could not count on; and Stanwell, reddening under her look of interrogation, and cursing his own glaring robustness, would affirm that of course, of course, of course, by everything that was holy there was time enough — with the mental reservation that there wouldn't be, even if poor Caspar lived to be a hundred.

"Vos that you yelling for the shanitor, Mr. Sdanwell?" inquired an affable voice through the doorway; and Stanwell, turning with a laugh, confronted the squat figure of a middle-aged man in an expensive fur coat, who

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looked as if his face secreted the oil which he used on his hair.

"Hullo, Shepson — I should say I was yelling. Did you ever feel such an atmosphere? That fool has forgotten to light the stove. Come in, but for heaven's sake don't take off your coat."

Mr. Shepson glanced about the studio with a look which seemed to say that, where so much else was lacking, the absence of a fire hardly added to the general sense of destitution.

"Vell, you ain't as vell fixed as Mr. Mungold — ever been to his studio, Mr. Sdanwell? De most ex quisite blush hangings, and a gas-fire, choost as natural —"

"Oh, hang it, Shepson, do you call that a studio? It's like a manicure's parlour — or a beauty-doctor's. By George," broke off Stanwell, "and that's just what he is!"

"A peauty-doctor?"

"Yes — oh, well, you wouldn't see," murmured Stanwell, mentally storing his epigram for more appreciative ears. "But you didn't come just to make me envious of Mungold's studio, did you?" And he pushed forward a chair for his visitor.

The latter, however, declined it with an affable motion. "Of gourse not, of gourse not — but Mr. Mungold is a sensible man. He makes a lot of money, you know."

"Is that what you came to tell me?" said Stanwell, still humorously.

"My gootness, no — I was downstairs looking at Holbrook's sdained class, and I shoost thought I'd sdep up a minute and take a beep at your vork."

"Much obliged, I'm sure — especially as I assume that you don't want any of it." Try as he would, Stanwell could not keep a note of eagerness from his voice. Mr. Shepson caught the note, and eyed him shrewdly through gold-rimmed glasses.

"Vell, vell, vell — I'm not prepared to commit myself. Shoost let me take a look round, vill you?"

"With the greatest pleasure — and I'll give another shout for the coal."

Stanwell went out on the landing, and Mr. Shepson, left to himself, began a meditative progress about the room. On an easel facing the improvised dais stood a canvas on which a young woman's head had been blocked in. It was just in that happy state of semi-evocation when a picture seems to detach itself from the grossness of its medium and live a wondrous moment in the actual; and the quality of the head in question — a vigorous dusky youthfulness, a kind of virgin majesty — lent itself to this illusion of vitality. Stanwell, who had re-entered the studio, could not help drawing a sharp breath as he saw the picture-dealer pausing with tilted head before this portrait: it seemed, at one moment, so impossible that he should not be struck with it, at the next so incredible that he should be.

Shepson cocked his parrot-eye at the canvas with a desultory "Vat's dat?" which sent a twinge through the young man.

"That? Oh — a sketch of a young lady," stammered Stanwell, flushing at the imbecility of his reply. "It's Miss Arran, you know," he added, "the sister of my neighbour here, the sculptor."

"Sgulpture? There's no market for modern sgulpture except tombstones," said Shepson disparagingly, passing on as if he included the sister's portrait in his condemnation of her brother's trade.

Stanwell smiled, but more at himself than Shepson. How could he ever have supposed that the gross fool would see anything in his sketch of Kate Arran? He stood aside, straining after detachment, while the dealer continued his round of exploration, waddling up to the canvases on the walls, prodding with his stick at those stacked in corners, prying and peering sideways like a great bird rummaging for seed. He seemed to find little nutriment in the course of his search, for the sounds he emitted expressed a weary distaste for misdirected effort, and he completed his round without having thought it worth while to draw a single canvas from its obscurity.

As his visits always had the same result, Stanwell was reduced to wondering why he had come again; but Shepson was not the man to indulge in vague roamings through the field of art, and it was safe to conclude that his purpose would in due course reveal itself. His tour brought him at length face to face with the painter, where he paused, clasping his plump gloved hands behind his back, and shaking an admonitory head.

"Gleffer — very gleffer, of course — I suppose you'll let me know when you want to sell anything?"

"Let you know?" gasped Stanwell, to whom the room grew so glowingly hot that he thought for a moment the janitor must have made up the fire.

Shepson gave a dry laugh. "Vell, it doesn't sdrike me that you want to now — doing this kind of thing, you

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know!" And he swept a comprehensive hand about the studio.

"Ah," said Stanwell, who could not keep a note of flatness out of his laugh.

"See here, Mr. Sdanwell, vot do you do it for? If you do it for yourself and the other fellows, vell and good — only don't ask me round. I sell pictures, I don't theorize about them. Ven you vant to sell, come to me with what my gustomers vant. You can do it — you're smart enough. You can do most anything. Vere's dat bortrait of Gladys Glyde dat you showed at the Fake Club last autumn? Dat little thing in de Romney sdyle? Dat vas a little shem, now," exclaimed Mr. Shepson, whose pronunciation became increasingly Semitic in moments of excitement.

Stanwell stared. Called upon a few months previously to contribute to an exhibition of skits on well-known artists, he had used the photograph of a favourite music-hall "star" as the basis of a picture in the pseudo-historical style affected by the popular portrait-painters of the day.

"That thing?" he said contemptuously. "How on earth did you happen to see it?"

"I see everything," returned the dealer with an oracular smile. "If you've got it here let me look at it, please."

It cost Stanwell a few minutes' search to unearth his skit — a clever blending of dash and sentimentality, in just the right proportion to create the impression of a powerful brush subdued to mildness by the charms of the sitter. Stanwell had thrown it off in a burst of imitative frenzy, beginning for the mere joy of the satire, but gradually fascinated by the problem of producing the requisite mingling of attributes. He was surprised now to see how well he had caught the note, and Shepson's face reflected his approval.

"By George! Dat's something like," the dealer ejaculated.

"Like what? Like Mungold?" Stanwell laughed.

"Like business! Like a big order for a bortrait, Mr. Sdanwell — dat's what it's like!" cried Shepson, swinging round on him.

Stanwell's stare widened. "An order for me?"

"Vy not? Accidents vill happen," said Shepson jocosely. "De fact is, Mrs. Archer Millington wants to be bainted — you know her sdyle? Well, she prides herself on her likeness to little Gladys. And so ven she saw dat bicture of yours at de Fake Show she made a note of your name, and de udder day she sent for me and she says: 'Mr. Shepson, I'm tired of Mungold — all my friends are done by Mungold. I vant to break away and be orishinal — I vant to be done by the bainter that did Gladys Glyde.'"

Shepson waited to observe the result of this overwhelming announcement, and Stanwell, after a momentary halt of surprise, brought out laughingly: "But this is a Mungold. Is this what she calls being original?"

"Shoost exactly," said Shepson, with unexpected acuteness. "That's vat dey all want — something different from what all deir friends have got, but shoost like it all de same. Dat's de public all over! Mrs. Millington don't want a Mungold, because everybody's got a Mungold, but she wants a picture that's in the same sdyle, because dat's de sdyle, and she's afraid of any oder!"

Stanwell was listening with real enjoyment. "Ah, you know your public," he murmured.

"Vell, you do, too, or you couldn't have painted dat," the dealer retorted. "And I don't say dey're wrong — mind dat. I like a bretty picture myself. And I understand the way dey feel. Dey're villing to let Sargent take liberties vid them, because it's like being punched in de ribs by a King; but if anybody else baints them, they vant to look as sweet as an obituary." He turned earnestly to Stanwell. "The thing is to attract their notice. Vonce you got it they von't gif you dime to sleep. And dat's why I'm here to-day — you've attracted Mrs. Millington's notice, and vonce you're hung in dat new ball-room — dat's vere she vants you, in a big gold panel — vonce you're dere, vy, you'll be like the Pianola — no home gomepleat without you. And I ain't going to charge you any commission on the first job!"

He stood before the painter, exuding a mixture of deference and patronage in which either element might predominate as events developed; but Stanwell could see in the incident only the stuff for a good story.

"My dear Shepson," he said, "what are you talking about? This is no picture of mine. Why don't you ask me to do you a Corot at once? I hear there's a great demand for them still in the West. Or an Arthur Schracker — I can do Schracker as well as Mungold," he added, turning around a small canvas at which a paint-pot seemed to have been hurled with violence from a considerable distance.

Shepson ignored the allusion to Corot, but screwed his eyes at the picture. "Ah, Schracker — vell, the Schracker sdyle would take first rate if you were a foreigner — but, for goodness sake, don't try it on Mrs.

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Millington!"

Stanwell pushed the two skits aside. "Oh, you can trust me," he cried humorously. "The pearls and the eyes very large — the extremities very small. Isn't that about the size of it?"

Dat's it — dat's it. And the cheque as big as you vant to make it! Mrs. Millington vants the picture finished in time for her first barty in the new ball-room, and if you rush the job she won't sdickle at an extra thousand. Vill you come along with me now and arrange for your first sitting?"

He stood before the young man, urgent, paternal, and so imbued with the importance of his mission that his face stretched to a ludicrous length of dismay when Stanwell, administering a good-humoured push to his shoulder, cried gaily: "My dear fellow, it will make my price rise still higher when the lady hears I'm too busy to take any orders at present — and that I'm actually obliged to turn you out now because I'm expecting a sitter!"

It was part of Shepson's business to have a quick ear for the note of finality, and he offered no resistance to Stanwell's friendly impulsion; but on the threshold he paused to murmur, with a regretful glance at the denuded studio: "You could haf done it, Mr. Sdanwell — you could haf done it!"

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II

KATE ARRAN was Stanwell's sitter; but the janitor had hardly filled the stove when she came in to say that she could not sit. Caspar had had a bad night: he was depressed and feverish, and in spite of his protests she had resolved to fetch the doctor. Care sat on her usually tranquil features, and Stanwell, as he offered to go for the doctor, wished he could have caught in his picture the wide gloom of her brow. There was always a kind of Biblical breadth in the expression of her emotions, and today she suggested a text from Isaiah.

"But you're not busy?" she hesitated; in the full voice which seemed tuned to a solemn rhetoric.

"I meant to be — with you. But since that's off I'm quite unemployed."

She smiled interrogatively. "I thought perhaps you had an order. I met Mr. Shepson rubbing his hands on the landing."

"Was he rubbing his hands? Well, it was not over me. He says that from the style of my pictures he doesn't suppose I want to sell."

She looked at him superbly. "Well, do you?"

He embraced his bleak walls in a circular gesture. "Judge for yourself!"

"Ah, but it's splendidly furnished!"

"With rejected pictures, you mean?"

"With ideals!" she exclaimed in a tone caught from her brother, and which would have been irritating to Stanwell if it had not been moving.

He gave a slight shrug and took up his hat; but she interposed to say that if it didn't make any difference she would prefer to have him go and sit with poor Caspar, while she ran for the doctor and did some household errands by the way. Stanwell divined in her request the need for a brief respite from Caspar, and though he shivered at the thought of her facing the cold in the scant jacket which had been her only wear since he had known her, he let her go without a protest, and betook himself to Arran's studio.

He found the little sculptor dressed and roaming fretfully about the melancholy room in which he and his plastic off-spring lodged together. In one corner, where Kate's chair and work-table stood, a scrupulous order prevailed; but the rest of the apartment had the dreary untidiness, the damp grey look, which the worker in clay usually creates about him. In the centre of this desert stood the shrouded image of Caspar's disappointment: the colossal rejected group as to which his friends could seldom remember whether it represented Jove hurling a Titan from Olympus or Science Subjugating Religion. Caspar was the sworn foe of religion, which he appeared to regard as indirectly connected with his inability to sell his statues.

The sculptor was too ill to work, and Stanwell's appearance loosed the pent-up springs of his talk.

"Hullo! What are you doing here? I thought Kate had gone over to sit to you. She wanted a little fresh air? I should say enough of it came in through these windows. How like a woman, when she's agreed to do a certain thing, to make up her mind at once that she's got to do another! They don't call it caprice — it's always duty: that's the humour of it. I'll be bound Kate alleged a pressing engagement. Sorry she should waste your time so, my dear fellow. Here am I with plenty of it to burn — look at my hand shake; I can't do a thing! Well, luckily nobody wants me to — posterity may suffer, but the present generation isn't worrying. The present generation wants to be carved in sugar-candy, or painted in maple syrup. It doesn't want to be told the truth about itself or about anything in the universe. The prophets have always lived in a garret, my dear fellow — only the ravens don't always find out their address! Speaking of ravens, though, Kate told me she saw old Shepson coming out of your place — I say, old man, you're not meditating an apostasy? You're not doing the kind of thing that Shepson would look at?"

Stanwell laughed. "Oh, he looked at them — but only to confirm his reasons for rejecting them."

"Ha! ha! That's right — he wanted to refresh his memory with their badness. But how on earth did he happen to have any doubts on the subject? I should as soon have thought of his coming in here!"

Stanwell winced at the analogy, but replied in Caspar's key: "Oh, he's not as sure of any of us as he is of you!"

The sculptor received this tribute with a joyous expletive. "By God, no, he's sure of me, as you say! He and his tribe know that I'll starve in my tracks sooner than make a concession — a single concession. A fellow came after me once to do an angel on a tombstone — an angel leaning against a broken column, and looking as if it was

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waiting for the elevator and wondering why in hell it didn't come. He said he wanted me to show that the deceased was pining to get to heaven. As she was his wife I didn't dispute the proposition, but when I asked him what he understood by heaven he grabbed his hat and walked out of the studio. He didn't wait for the elevator."

Stanwell listened with a practised smile. The story of the man who had come to order the angel was so familiar to Arran's friends that its only interest consisted in waiting to see what variation he would give to the retort which had put the mourner to flight. It was generally supposed that this visit represented the sculptor's nearest approach to an order, and one of his fellow-craftsmen had been heard to remark that if Caspar had made the tombstone, the lady under it would have tried harder than ever to get to heaven. To Stanwell's present mood, however, there was something more than usually irritating in the gratuitous assumption that Arran had only to derogate from his altitude to have a press of purchasers at his door.

"Well — what did you gain by kicking your widower out?" he objected. "Why can't a man do two kinds of work — one to please himself and the other to boil the pot?"

Caspar stopped in his jerky walk — the stride of a tall man attempted with short legs (it sometimes appeared to Stanwell to symbolize his artistic endeavour).

"Why can't a man — why can't he? You ask me that, Stanwell?" he blazed out.

"Yes; and what's more, I'll answer you: it isn't everybody who can adapt his art as he wants to!"

Caspar stood before him, gasping with incredulous scorn. "Adapt his art? As he wants to? Unhappy wretch, what lingo are you talking? If you mean that it isn't every honest man who can be a renegade — "

"That's just what I do mean: he can't unless he's clever enough to see the other side."

The deep groan with which Caspar met this casuistry was cut short by a knock at the studio door, which thereupon opened to admit a small dapperly-dressed man with a silky moustache and mildly-bulging eyes.

"Ah, Mungold," exclaimed Stanwell, to cover the gloomy silence with which Arran received the new-comer; whereat the latter, with the air of a man who does not easily believe himself unwelcome, bestowed a sympathetic pressure on the sculptor's hand.

"My dear chap, I've just met Miss Arran, and she told me you were laid up with a bad cold, so I thought I'd pop in and cheer you up a little."

He looked about him with a smile evidently intended as the first act in his beneficent programme.

Mr. Mungold, freshly soaped and scented, with a neat glaze of gentility extending from his varnished boot-tips to his glossy hat, looked like the "flattered" portrait of a common man — just such an idealized presentment as his own brush might have produced. As a rule, however, he devoted himself to the portrayal of the other sex, painting ladies in syrup, as Arran said, with marsh-mallow children leaning against their knees. He was as quick as a dressmaker at catching new ideas, and the style of his pictures changed as rapidly as that of the fashion-plates. One year all his sitters were done on oval canvases, with gauzy draperies and a background of clouds; the next they were seated under an immemorial elm, caressing enormous dogs obviously constructed out of door-mats. Whatever their occupation they always looked straight out of the canvas, giving the impression that their eyes were fixed on an invisible camera. This gave rise to the rumour that Mungold "did" his portraits from photographs; it was even said that he had invented a way of transferring an enlarged photograph to the canvas, so that all that remained was to fill in the colours. If he heard of this charge he took it calmly, but probably it had not reached the high spheres in which he moved, and in which he was esteemed for painting pearls better, and making unsuggestive children look lovelier, than any of his fellow-craftsmen. Mr. Mungold, in fact, deemed it a part of his professional duty to study his sitters in their home-life; and as this life was chiefly led in the homes of others, he was too busy dining out and going to the opera to mingle much with his colleagues. But as no one is wholly consistent, Mr. Mungold had lately belied his ambitions by falling in love with Kate Arran; and with that gentle persistency which made him so wonderful in managing obstreperous infantile sitters, he had contrived to establish a precarious footing in her brother's studio.

Part of his success was due to the fact that he could not easily think himself the object of a rebuff. If it seemed to hit him he regarded it as deflected from its aim, and brushed it aside with a discreet gesture. A touch of comedy was lent to the situation by the fact that, till Kate Arran's coming, Mungold had always served as her brother's Awful Example. It was a mark of Arran's lack of humour that he persisted in regarding the little man as a conscious apostate, instead of perceiving that he painted as he could, in a world which really looked to him like a vast confectioner's window. Stanwell had never quite divined how Mungold had won over the sister, to whom her

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brother's prejudices were a religion; but he suspected the painter of having united a deep belief in Caspar's gifts with the occasional offer of opportune delicacies — the port-wine or game which Kate had no other means of procuring for her patient.

Stanwell, persuaded that Mungold would stick to his post till Miss Arran's return, felt himself freed from his promise to the latter and left the incongruous pair to themselves. There had been a time when it amused him to see Caspar submerge the painter in a torrent of turbid eloquence, and to watch poor Mungold sputtering under the rush of denunciation, yet emitting little bland phrases of assent, like a gentleman drowning correctly, in gloves and eye-glasses. But Stanwell was beginning to find less food for gaiety than for envy in the contemplation of his colleague. After all, Mungold held his ground, he did not go under. Spite of his manifest absurdity he had succeeded in propitiating the sister, in making himself tolerated by the brother; and the fact that his success was due to the ability to purchase port-wine and game was not in this case a mitigating circumstance. Stanwell knew that the Arrans really preferred him to Mungold, but the knowledge only sharpened his envy of the latter, whose friendship could command visible tokens of expression, while poor Stanwell's remained gloomily inarticulate. As he returned to his over-populated studio and surveyed anew the pictures of which Shepson had not offered to relieve him, he found himself wishing, not for Mungold's lack of scruples, for he believed him to be the most scrupulous of men, but for that happy mean of talent which so completely satisfied the artistic requirements of the inartistic. Mungold was not to be despised as an apostate — he was to be congratulated as a man whose aptitudes were exactly in line with the taste of the persons he liked to dine with.

At this point in his meditations, Stanwell's eye fell on the portrait of Miss Gladys Glyde. It was really, as Shepson said, as good as a Mungold; yet it could never be made to serve the same purpose, because it was the work of a man who knew it was bad art. That at least would have been Caspar Arran's contention — poor Caspar, who produced as bad art in the service of the loftiest convictions! The distinction began to look like mere casuistry to Stanwell. He had never been very proud of his own adaptability. It had seemed to him to indicate the lack of an individual stand-point, and he had tried to counteract it by the cultivation of an aggressively personal style. But the cursed knack was in his fingers — he was always at the mercy of some other man's sensations, and there were moments when he blushed to remember that his grandfather had spent a laborious life-time in Rome, copying the Old Masters for a generation which lacked the facile resource of the camera. Now, however, it struck him that the ancestral versatility might be a useful inheritance. In art, after all, the greatest of them did what they could; and if a man could do several things instead of one, why should he not profit by the multiplicity of his gifts? If one had two talents why not serve two masters?

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III

STANWELL, while seeing Caspar through the attack which had been the cause of his sister's arrival, had struck up a friendship with the young doctor who climbed the patient's seven flights with unremitting fidelity. The two, since then, had continued to exchange confidences regarding the sculptor's health, and Stanwell, anxious to waylay the doctor after his visit, left the studio door ajar, and went out when he heard a sound of leave-taking across the landing. But it appeared that the doctor had just come, and that it was Mungold who was making his adieux.

The latter at once assumed that Stanwell had been on the alert for him, and met the supposed advance by affably inviting himself into the studio.

"May I come and take a look around, my dear fellow? I have been meaning to drop in for an age — " Mungold always spoke with a girlish emphasis and effusiveness — "but I have been so busy getting up Mrs. Van Orley's tableaux — English eighteenth century portraits, you know — that really, what with that and my sittings, I've hardly had time to think. And then you know you owe me about a dozen visits! But you're a savage — you don't pay visits. You stay here and piocher — which is wiser, as the results prove. Ah, you're very strong — immensely strong!" He paused in the middle of the studio, glancing about a little apprehensively, as though he thought the stored energy of the pictures might result in an explosion. "Very original — very striking — ah, Miss Arran! A powerful head; but — excuse the suggestion — isn't there just the least little lack of sweetness? You don't think she has the sweet type? Perhaps not — but could she be so lovely if she were not intensely feminine? Just at present, though, she is not looking her best — she is horribly tired. I am afraid there is very little money left — and poor dear Caspar is so impossible: he won't hear of a loan. Otherwise I should be most happy — . But I came just now to propose a piece of work — in fact to give him an order. Mrs. Archer Millington has built a new ball-room, as I daresay you may have seen in the papers, and she has been kind enough to ask me for some hints — oh, merely as a friend: I don't presume to do more than advise. But her decorator wants to do something with Cupids — something light and playful, you understand. And so I ventured to say that I knew a very clever sculptor — well, I do believe Caspar has talent — latent talent, you know — and at any rate a job of that sort would be a big lift for him. At least I thought he would regard it so; but you should have heard him when I showed him the decorator's sketch. He asked me what the Cupids were to be done in — lard? And if I thought he had had his training at a confectioner's? And I don't know what more besides — but he worked himself up to such a degree that he brought on a frightful fit of coughing, and Miss Arran, I'm afraid, was rather annoyed with me when she came in, though I'm sure an order from Mrs. Archer Millington is not a thing that would annoy most people!"

Mr. Mungold paused, breathless with the rehearsal of his wrongs, and Stanwell said with a smile: "You know poor Caspar is terribly stiff on the purity of the artist's aim."

"The artist's aim?" Mr. Mungold stared. "What is the artist's aim but to please — isn't that the purpose of all true art? But his theories are so extravagant. I really don't know what I shall say to Mrs. Millington — she is not used to being refused. I suppose I had better put it on the ground of ill-health." The artist glanced at his handsome repeater. "Dear me, I promised to be at Mrs. Van Orley's before twelve o'clock. We are to settle about the curtain before luncheon. My dear fellow, it has been a privilege to see your work. By the way, you have never done any modelling, I suppose? You're so extraordinarily versatile — I didn't know whether you might care to undertake the Cupids yourself."

Stanwell had to wait a long time for the doctor; and when the latter came out he looked grave. Worse? No, he couldn't say that Caspar was worse — but then he wasn't any better. There was nothing mortal the matter, but the question was how long he could hold out. It was the kind of case where there is no use in drugs — he had just scribbled a prescription to quiet Miss Arran.

"It's the cold, I suppose," Stanwell groaned. "He ought to be shipped off to Florida."

The doctor made a negative gesture. "Florida be hanged! What he wants is to sell his group. That would set him up quicker than sitting on the equator."

"Sell his group?" Stanwell echoed. "But he's so indifferent to recognition — he believes in himself so

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thoroughly. I thought at first he would be hard hit when the Exhibition Committee refused it, but he seems to regard that as another proof of its superiority."

His visitor turned on him the penetrating eye of the confessor. "Indifferent to recognition? He's eating his heart out for it. Can't you see that all that talk is just so much whistling to keep his courage up? The name of his disease is failure — and I can't write the prescription that will cure that complaint. But if somebody would come along and take a fancy to those two naked parties who are breaking each other's heads, we'd have Mr. Caspar putting on a pound a day."

The truth of this diagnosis became suddenly vivid to Stanwell. How dull of him not to have seen before that it was not cold or privation which was killing Caspar — not anxiety for his sister's future, nor the ache of watching her daily struggle — but simply the cankering thought that he might die before he had made himself known! It was his vanity that was starving to death, and all Mungold's hampers could not appease that hunger. Stanwell was not shocked by the discovery — he was only the more sorry for the little man, who was, after all, denied that solace of self-sufficiency which his talk so noisily pro-claimed. His lot seemed hard enough when Stanwell had pictured him as buoyed up by the scorn of public opinion — it became tragic if he was denied that support. The artist wondered if Kate had guessed her brother's secret, or if she were still the dupe of his stoicism. Stanwell was sure that the sculptor would take no one into his confidence, and least of all his sister, whose faith in his artistic independence was the chief prop of that tottering pose. Kate's penetration was not great, and Stanwell recalled the incredulous smile with which she had heard him defend poor Mungold's "sincerity" against Caspar's assaults; but she had the insight of the heart, and where her brother's happiness was concerned she might have seen deeper than any of them. It was this last consideration which took the strongest hold on Stanwell — he felt Caspar's sufferings chiefly through the thought of his sister's possible disillusionment.

IV

WITHIN three months two events had set the studio building talking. Stanwell had painted a full-length portrait of Mrs. Archer Millington, and Caspar Arran had received an order to execute his group in marble.

The name of the sculptor's patron had not been divulged. The order came through Shepson, who explained that an American customer living abroad, having seen a photograph of the group in one of the papers, had at once cabled home to secure it. He intended to bestow it on a public building in America, and not wishing to advertise his munificence, had preferred that even the sculptor should remain ignorant of his name. The group bought by an enlightened compatriot for the adornment of a civic building in his native land! There could hardly be a more complete vindication of unappreciated genius, and Caspar made the most of the argument. He was not exultant, he was sublimely magnanimous. He had always said that he could afford to await the Verdict of Posterity, and his unknown patron's act clearly shadowed forth that impressive decision. Happily it also found expression in a cheque which it would have taken more philosophy to await. The group was paid for in advance, and Kate's joy in her brother's recognition was deliciously mingled with the thrill of ordering him some new clothes, and coaxing him out to dine succulently at a neighbouring restaurant. Caspar flourished insufferably on this regime: he began to strike the attitude of the recognized Great Master, who gives advice and encouragement to the struggling neophyte. He held himself up as an example of the reward of disinterestedness, of the triumph of the artist who clings obstinately to his convictions.

"A man must believe in his star — look at Napoleon! It's the dogged trust in one's convictions that tells — it always ends by forcing the public into line. Only be sure you make no concessions — don't give in to any of their humbug! An artist who listens to the critics is ruined — they never have any use for the poor devils who do what they tell them to. Run after fame and she'll keep you running, but stay in your own corner and do your own work, and by George, sir, she'll come crawling up to you and ask to have her likeness done!"

These exhortations were chiefly directed to Stanwell, partly because the inmates of the other studios were apt to elude them, partly also because the rumours concerning Stanwell's portrait of Mrs. Millington had begun to disquiet the sculptor. At first he had taken a condescending interest in the fact of his friend's receiving an order, and had admonished him not to lose the chance of "showing up" his sitter and her environment. It was a splendid opportunity for a fellow with a "message" to be introduced into the tents of the Philistine, and Stanwell was charged to drive a long sharp nail into the enemy's skull. But presently Arran began to suspect that the portrait was not as comminatory as he could have wished. Mungold, the most kindly of rivals, let drop a word of injudicious praise: the picture, he said, promised to be delightfully "in keeping" with the decorations of the ball-room, and the lady's gown harmonized exquisitely with the window-curtains. Stanwell, called to account by his monitor, reminded the latter that he himself had been selected by Mungold to do the Cupids for Mrs. Millington's ball-room, and that the friendly artist's praise could, therefore, not be taken as positive evidence of incapacity.

"Ah, but I didn't do them — I kicked him out!" Caspar rejoined; and Stanwell could only plead that, even in the cause of art, one could hardly kick a lady.

"Ah, that's the worst of it. If the women get at you you're lost. You're young, you're impressionable, you won't mind my saying that you're not built for a stoic, and hang it, they'll coddle you, they'll enervate you, they'll sentimentalize you, they'll make a Mungold of you!"

"Ah, poor Mungold," Stanwell laughed. "If he lived the life of an anchorite he couldn't help painting pictures that would please Mrs. Millington."

"Whereas you could," Kate interjected, raising her head from the ironing-board where, Sphinx-like, magnificent, she swung a splendid arm above her brother's shirts.

"Oh, well, perhaps I shan't please her; perhaps I shall elevate her taste."

Caspar directed a groan to his sister. "That's what they all think at first — Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came. But inside the Dark Tower there's the Venusberg. Oh, I don't mean that you'll be taken with truffles and plush footmen, like Mungold. But praise, my poor Ned — praise is a deadly drug! It's the absinthe of the artist — and they'll stupefy you with it. You'll wallow in the mire of success."

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Stanwell raised a protesting hand. "Really, for one order, you're a little lurid!"

"One? Haven't you already had a dozen others?"

"Only one other, so far — and I'm not sure I shall do that."

"Not sure — wavering already! That's the way the mischief begins. If the women get a fad for you they'll work you like a galley-slave. You'll have to do your round of 'copy' every morning. What becomes of inspiration then? How are you going to loaf and invite the soul? Don't barter your birthright for a mess of pottage! Oh, I understand the temptation — I know the taste of money and success. But look at me, Stanwell. You know how long I had to wait for recognition. Well, now it's come to me I don't mean to let it knock me off my feet. I don't mean to let myself be overworked; I have already made it known that I will not be bullied into taking more orders than I can do full justice to. And my sister is with me, God bless her; Kate would rather go on ironing my shirts in a garret than see me prostitute my art!"

Kate's glance radiantly confirmed this declaration of independence, and Stanwell, with his evasive laugh, asked her if, meanwhile, she should object to his investing a part of his ill-gotten gains in theatre tickets for the party that evening.

It appeared that Stanwell had also been paid in advance, and well paid; for he began to permit himself various mild distractions, in which he generally contrived to have the Arrans share. It seemed perfectly natural to Kate that Caspar's friends should spend their money for his recreation, and by one of the most touching sophistries of her sex she thus reconciled herself to the anomaly of taking a little pleasure on her own account. Mungold was less often in the way, for she had never been able to forgive him for proposing that Caspar should do Mrs. Millington's Cupids; and for a few radiant weeks Stanwell had the undisputed enjoyment of her pride in her brother's achievement.

Stanwell had "rushed through" Mrs. Millington's portrait in time for the opening of her new ball-room; and it was perhaps in return for this favour that she consented to let the picture be exhibited at a big Portrait Show which was held in April for the benefit of a fashionable charity.

In Mrs. Millington's ball-room the picture had been seen and approved only by the distinguished few who had access to that social sanctuary; but on the walls of the exhibition it became a centre of comment and discussion. One of the immediate results of this publicity was a visit from Shepson, with two or three orders in his pocket, as he put it. He surveyed the studio with fresh disgust, asked Stanwell why he did not move, and was impressed rather than downcast on learning that the painter had not decided whether he would take any more orders that spring.

"You might haf a studio at Newport," he suggested. "It would be rather new to do your sitters out of doors, with the sea behind them — showing they had a blace on the gliffs!"

The picture produced a different and less flattering effect on the critics. They gave it, indeed, more space than they had ever before accorded to the artist's efforts, but their estimate seemed to confirm Caspar Arran's forebodings, and Stanwell had perhaps never despised them so little as when he read their comments on his work. On the whole, however, neither praise nor blame disquieted him greatly. He was engrossed in the contemplation of Kate Arran's happiness, and basking in the refracted warmth it shed about her. The doctor's prognostications had come true. Caspar was putting on a pound a week, and had plunged into a fresh "creation" more symbolic and encumbering than the monument of which he had been so opportunely relieved. If there was any cloud on Stanwell's enjoyment of life, it was caused by the discovery that success had quadrupled Caspar's artistic energies. Meanwhile it was delightful to see Kate's joy in her brother's recovered capacity for work, and to listen to the axioms which, for Stanwell's guidance, she deduced from the example of Caspar's heroic pursuit of the ideal. There was nothing repellent in Kate's borrowed didacticism, and if it sometimes bored Stanwell to hear her quote her brother, he was sure it would never bore him to be quoted by her himself; and there were moments when he felt he had nearly achieved that distinction.

Caspar was not addicted to the visiting of art exhibitions. He took little interest in any productions save his own, and was moreover disposed to believe that good pictures, like clever criminals, are apt to go unhung. Stanwell therefore thought it unlikely that his portrait of Mrs. Millington would be seen by Kate, who was not given to independent explorations in the field of art; but one day, on entering the exhibition — which he had hitherto rather nervously shunned — he saw the Arrans at the end of the gallery in which the portrait hung. They were not looking at it, they were moving away from it, and to Stanwell's quickened perceptions their attitude

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seemed almost that of flight. For a moment he thought of flying too; then a desperate resolve nerved him to meet them, and stemming the crowd, he made a circuit which brought him face to face with their retreat.

The room in which they met was momentarily empty, and there was nothing to intervene between the shock of their inter-changed glances. Caspar was flushed and bristling: his little body quivered like a machine from which the steam has just been turned off. Kate lifted a stricken glance. Stanwell read in it the reflexion of her brother's tirade, but she held out her hand in silence.

For a moment Caspar was silent too; then, with a terrible smile: "My dear fellow, I congratulate you; Mungold will have to look to his laurels," he said.

The shot delivered, he stalked away with his seven-league stride, and Kate moved tragically through the room in his wake.

SHEPSON took up his hat with a despairing gesture.

"Vell, I gif you up — I gif you up!" he said.

"Don't — yet," protested Stanwell from the divan.

It was winter again, and though the janitor had not forgotten the fire, the studio gave no other evidence of its master's increasing prosperity. If Stanwell spent his money it was not upon himself.

He leaned back against the wall, his hands in his pockets, a cigarette between his lips, while Shepson paced the dirty floor or halted impatiently before an untouched canvas on the easel.

"I tell you vat it is, Mr. Sdanwell, I can't make you out!" he lamented. "Last vinter you got a sdart that vould have kept most men going for years. After making dat hit vith Mrs. Millington's picture you could have bainted half the town. And here you are sitting on your divan and saying you can't make up your mind to take another order. Vell, I can only say that if you take much longer to make it up, you'll find some other chap has cut in and got your job. Mrs. Van Orley has been waiting since last August, and she dells me you haven't even answered her letter."

"How could I? I didn't know if I wanted to paint her."

"My goodness! Don't you know if you vant three thousand tollars?"

Stanwell surveyed his cigarette. "No, I'm not sure I do," he said.

Shepson flung out his hands. "Ask more den — but do it quick!" he exclaimed.

Left to himself, Stanwell stood in silent contemplation of the canvas on which the dealer had riveted his reproachful gaze. It had been destined to reflect the opulent image of Mrs. Alpheus Van Orley, but some secret reluctance of Stanwell's had stayed the execution of the task. He had painted two of Mrs. Millington's friends in the spring, had been much praised and liberally paid for his work, and then, declining several recent orders to be executed at Newport, had surprised his friends by remaining quietly in town. It was not till August that he hired a little cottage on the New Jersey coast and invited the Arrans to visit him. They accepted the invitation, and the three had spent together six weeks of seashore idleness, during which Stanwell's modest rafters shook with Caspar's denunciations of his host's venality, and the brightness of Kate's gratitude was tempered by a tinge of reproach. But her grief over Stanwell's apostasy could not efface the fact that he had offered her brother the means of escape from town, and Stanwell himself was consoled by the reflection that but for Mrs. Millington's portrait he could not have performed even this trifling service for his friends.

When the Arrans left him in September he went to pay a few visits in the country, and on his return, a month later, to the studio building he found that things had not gone well with Caspar. The little sculptor had caught cold, and the labour and expense of converting his gigantic off-spring into marble seemed to hang heavily upon him. He and Kate were living in a damp company of amorphous clay monsters, unfinished witnesses to the creative frenzy which had seized him after the sale of his group; and the doctor had urged that his patient should be removed to warmer and drier lodgings. But to uproot Caspar was impossible, and his sister could only feed the stove, and swaddle him in mufflers and felt slippers.

Stanwell found that during his absence Mungold had reappeared, fresh and rosy from a summer in Europe, and as prodigal as ever of the only form of attention which Kate could be counted on not to resent. The game and champagne reappeared with him, and he seemed as ready as Stanwell to lend a patient ear to Caspar's homilies. But Stanwell could see that, even now, Kate had not forgiven him for the Cupids. Stanwell himself had spent the early winter months in idleness. The sight of his tools filled him with a strange repugnance, and he absented himself as much as possible from the studio. But Shepson's visit roused him to the fact that he must decide on some definite course of action. If he wished to follow up his success of the previous spring he must refuse no more orders: he must not let Mrs. Van Orley slip away from him. He knew there were competitors enough ready to profit by his hesitations, and since his success was the result of a whim, a whim might undo it. With a sudden gesture of decision he caught up his hat and left the studio.

On the landing he met Kate Arran. She too was going out, drawn forth by the sudden radiance of the January afternoon. She met him with a smile which seemed the answer to his uncertainties, and he asked abruptly if she

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had time to take a walk with him.

Yes; for once she had time, for Mr. Mungold was sitting with Caspar, and had promised to remain till she came in. It mattered little to Stanwell that Mungold was with Caspar as long as he himself was with Kate; and he instantly soared to the suggestion that they should prolong the painter's vigil by taking the "elevated" to the Park. In this too his companion acquiesced after a moment of surprise: she seemed in a consenting mood, and Stanwell augured well from the fact.

The Park was clothed in the double glitter of snow and sunshine. They roamed the hard white alleys to a continuous tinkle of sleigh-bells, and Kate brightened with the exhilaration of the scene. It was not often that she permitted herself such an escape from routine, and in this new environment, which seemed to detach her from her daily setting, Stanwell had his first complete vision of her. To the girl also their unwonted isolation seemed to create a sense of fuller communion, for she began presently, as they reached the leafless solitude of the Ramble, to speak with sudden freedom of her brother. It appeared that the orders against which Caspar had so heroically steeled himself were slow in coming: he had received no commission since the sale of his group, and he was beginning to suffer from a reaction of discouragement. Oh, it was not the craving for popularity — Stanwell knew how far above that he stood. But it had been exquisite, yes, exquisite to him to find himself believed in, understood. He had fancied that the purchase of the group was the dawn of a tardy recognition — and now the darkness of indifference had set in again, no one spoke of him, no one wrote of him, no one cared.

"If he were in good health it would not matter — he would throw off such weakness, he would live only for the joy of his work; but he is losing ground, his strength is failing, and he is so afraid there will not be time enough left — time enough for full recognition," she explained.

The quiver in her voice silenced Stanwell: he was afraid of echoing it with his own. At length he said: "Oh, more orders will come. Success is a gradual growth."

"Yes, real success," she said, with a solemn note in which he caught — and forgave — a reflection on his own facile triumphs.

"But when the orders do come," she continued, "will he have strength to carry them out? Last winter the doctor thought he only needed work to set him up; now he talks of rest instead! He says we ought to go to a warm climate — but how can Caspar leave the group?"

"Oh, hang the group — let him chuck the order!" cried Stanwell.

She looked at him tragically. "The money is spent," she said.

He coloured to the roots of his hair. "But ill-health — ill-health excuses everything. If he goes away now he will come back good for twice the amount of work in the spring. A sculptor is not expected to deliver a statue on a given day, like a package of groceries! You must do as the doctor says — you must make him chuck everything and go."

They had reached a windless nook above the lake, and, pausing in the stress of their talk, she let herself sink on a bench beside the path. The movement encouraged him, and he seated himself at her side.

"You must take him away at once," he repeated urgently. "He must be made comfortable — you must both be free from worry. And I want you to let me manage it for you —"

He broke off, silenced by her rising blush, her protesting murmur.

"Oh, stop, please; let me explain. I'm not talking of lending you money; I'm talking of giving you — myself. The offer may be just as unacceptable, but it's of a kind to which it's customary to accord it a hearing. I should have made it a year ago — the first day I saw you, I believe! — but that, then, it wasn't in my power to make things easier for you. But now, you know, I've had a little luck. Since I painted Mrs. Millington things have changed. I believe I can get as many orders as I choose — there are two or three people waiting now. What's the use of it all, if it doesn't bring me a little happiness? And the only happiness I know is the kind that you can give me."

He paused, suddenly losing the courage to look at her, so that her pained murmur was framed for him in a glittering vision of the frozen lake. He turned with a start and met the refusal in her eyes.

"No — really no?" he repeated.

She shook her head silently.

"I could have helped you — I could have helped you!" he sighed.

She flushed distressfully, but kept her eyes on his.

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"It's just that — don't you see?" she reproached him.

"Just that — the fact that I could be of use to you?"

"The fact that, as you say, things have changed since you painted Mrs. Millington. I haven't seen the later portraits, but they tell me — "

"Oh, they're just as bad!" Stanwell jeered.

"You've sold your talent, and you know it: that's the dreadful part. You did it deliberately," she cried with passion.

"Oh, deliberately," he interjected.

"And you're not ashamed — you talk of going on."

"I'm not ashamed; I talk of going on."

She received this with a long shuddering sigh, and turned her eyes away from him.

"Oh, why — why — why?" she lamented.

It was on the tip of Stanwell's tongue to answer, "That I might say to you what I am just saying now — " but he replied instead: "A man may paint bad pictures and be a decent fellow. Look at Mungold, after all!"

The adjuration had an unexpected effect. Kate's colour faded suddenly, and she sat motionless, with a stricken face.

"There's a difference — " she began at length abruptly; "the difference you've always insisted on. Mr. Mungold paints as well as he can. He has no idea that his pictures are — less good than they might be."

"Well — ?"

"So he can't be accused of doing what he does for money — of sacrificing anything better." She turned on him with troubled eyes. "It was you who made me understand that, when Caspar used to make fun of him."

Stanwell smiled. "I'm glad you still think me a better painter than Mungold. But isn't it hard that for that very reason I should starve in a hole? If I painted badly enough you'd see no objection to my living at the Waldorf!"

"Ah, don't joke about it," she murmured. "Don't triumph in it."

"I see no reason to at present," said Stanwell drily. "But I won't pretend to be ashamed when I'm not. I think there are occasions when a man is justified in doing what I've done."

She looked at him solemnly. "What occasions?"

"Why, when he wants money, hang it!"

She drew a deep breath. "Money — money? Has Caspar's example been nothing to you, then?"

"It hasn't proved to me that I must starve while Mungold lives on truffles!"

Again her face changed and she stirred uneasily, and then rose to her feet.

"There is no occasion which can justify an artist's sacrificing his convictions!" she exclaimed.

Stanwell rose too, facing her with a mounting urgency which sent a flush to his cheek.

"Can't you conceive such an occasion in my case? The wish, I mean, to make things easier for Caspar — to help you in any way you might let me?"

Her face reflected his blush, and she stood gazing at him with a wounded wonder.

"Caspar and I — you imagine we could live on money earned in that way?"

Stanwell made an impatient gesture. "You've got to live on something — or he has, even if you don't include yourself!"

Her blush deepened miserably, but she held her head high.

"That's just it — that's what I came here to say to you." She stood a moment gazing away from him at the lake.

He looked at her in surprise. "You came here to say something to me?"

"Yes. That we've got to live on something, Caspar and I, as you say; and since an artist cannot sacrifice his convictions, the sacrifice must — I mean — I wanted you to know that I have promised to marry Mr. Mungold."

"Mungold!" Stanwell cried with a sharp note of irony; but her white look checked it on his lips.

"I know all you are going to say," she murmured, with a kind of nobleness which moved him even through his sense of its grotesqueness. "But you must see the distinction, because you first made it clear to me. I can take money earned in good faith — I can let Caspar live on it. I can marry Mr. Mungold; because, though his pictures are bad, he does not prostitute his art."

She began to move away from him slowly, and he followed her in silence along the frozen path.

When Stanwell re-entered his studio the dusk had fallen. He lit his lamp and rummaged out some

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writing-materials. Having found them, he wrote to Shepson to say that he could not paint Mrs. Van Orley, and did not care to accept any more orders for the present. He sealed and stamped the letter and flung it over the banisters for the janitor to post; then he dragged out his unfinished head of Kate Arran, replaced it on the easel, and sat down before it with a grim smile.