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IMMORTAL YOUTH

*A Study in the
Will to Create*



*Behold my most beautiful work:
the souls that I have sculptured.
These they cannot destroy. Let
the wood burn! The soul is mine.*

— Romain Rolland : Colas Breugnon

by
Lucien Fier

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Parsifal: Act III.

IN the third act of Wagner's last music-drama there comes a flourish of muted horns, remote, mysterious. In it sounds the grandeur of that quest which never ends — the quest of the Holy Grail. The phrase is repeated, and over the flower-starred meadow under the April sun of Good Friday morning comes a knight in dark armor, his visor down, carrying the holy spear. It is PARSIFAL. His errand is the errand of aspiring youth in all lands and all ages. I set that phrase of music, compact with the poetry and pain of idealism, at the beginning of these pages in token of the spiritual brotherhood.



Portrait of the artist by himself

IMMORTAL YOUTH

Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.

—HAMLET

I

THERE was a humble restaurant on Charles Street where cabmen and chauffeurs could be induced to tell the story of their lives over a combination-supper of lamb chop and two fried eggs costing (that was in 1912), with coffee and rolls, twenty-five cents. Across the table one evening in the spring of that year sat a young man about twenty-four years old. Anyone would have taken a second look at him; also a third, a fourth, and as many more as good manners would permit. What was there about him that attracted attention? It was hard to say. The dark eyes with a somber light burning in them? The rugged features and swarthy complexion with a ruddy glow of health in each jowl? The hands; very large and finely muscled? (I have never seen a more beautiful pair of hands on a human being.) It was all of these things and none of them. Rather it was the look of one with immense forces in reserve, bound on an errand.

Impossible to guess anything from his clothes: dark suit, shirt of gray flannel, and black knitted tie. Chauffeur? Hardly. Well then, what? Who?

(This is no isolated personal impression. Wherever he went people felt the same intense curiosity about him. Sometimes they stared at him so that he asked me if his face was smudged.)

Was this stranger conversible? He was. Presently he was speaking of the colonial doorways on Chestnut Street with a discrimination which suggested the architect. No. It ap-

peared that he was studying under Mr. Tarbell at the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts. Next, that he came from Pittsburgh. Here was a bond in common. As two young Middle Westerners we resented the social cold storage which New England imposes as a probationary period of acquaintance. We condoled. We fraternized. We were as neighbors meeting in a foreign land. At last somebody with whom it was safe to scrape acquaintance in the good old-fashioned Middle Western way without incurring suspicion of designs on one another's souls, bodies, or estates.

He climbed Beacon Hill with me to the house where I lived, carrying a paper bag which, he explained modestly, contained his breakfast: two bananas and a shredded wheat biscuit.

The evening was mild. Windows stood open to the breeze which rumbled the leaves of an old linden where it spread its boughs in the brick-walled court.

He promptly took off his coat, displaying in the rays of a green-shaded student lamp a pair of forearms worthy of the hands which went with them. Summer and winter he wore his sleeves rolled above his elbows. His wrists resented cuffs as wild creatures resent cages. He stretched out his long legs on a cot which did duty by the fireplace as a sofa; pushed his hair off his forehead with both hands, fingers interlocked, a trick he had; and gave symptoms of feeling at home.

Was he talkative? Not much! Never did clam yield shell to knife edge more gingerly. He would and he would not. Shy, reserved, proud, devoured with ambition, savagely determined, a prey to some misgivings, genuinely modest, and anxious to talk it over with the right person, but by no means sure who the right person was.

On sped the ambrosial hours of the spring evening. Bit by bit he revealed himself. This was his third year in the Museum School. He admired the technique of Mr. Tarbell

and Mr. Benson; he prized their instruction. But he distrusted their smoothness. He missed vigor. All round him he saw students neglecting their own creative bents to produce "little Bensons" and "little Tarbells." Already he had resolved to quit Boston as soon as his student days were over.

"I don't say I shall ever be able to paint as well as they can; but I must be myself,—not an imitation Tarbell."

There had been two years in Cornell before he came to Boston. He had rowed in his class eight on Lake Cayuga. Hence that physical self-respect which betokens the young man accustomed unconcernedly to strip in a college boat-house or gymnasium. But to eyes grown impatient with the college athlete's all too customary intellectual torpor and social complacency it was a holiday to find this well-made body, tall, broad in the shoulder, narrow at hips, lean and muscular, housing also the brain of the thinker and the spirit of the pioneer.

For the astonishing thing was to find a young man of this type studying to be a portrait painter instead of a bond salesman. It didn't sound Yankee. I said so. That shot rang the bell. He began to open up.

He was, it appeared, of German extraction. His grandfather, who had wished to become an artist, had come to America in a period when artists were about as much in request among us as concert pianists on a cattle ranch. He had earned his living as an architectural sculptor. The talent plunged, like a river, underground for a generation; then reappeared. What happened when this little fellow's fingers began to itch for the pencil was easy to guess. The father and grandfather put their heads together and resolved that he should have his chance.

It began to unravel. Now one understood the earnestness which seemed at first precocious — the seemingly cool indifference to the call of the world, the flesh and the devil

which usually troubles youngsters of twenty-four. Here was something more than ambition. Loyalty, affection, gratitude, and family pride. This boy had more than talent. He had character.

*

* *

With this we are in the heart of the conflict between the artist and the trader: between the will to create and the will to possess. It is the central conflict of any age; especially of this, and especially in America. The young man comes to the forks of the road where he must decide whether he shall acquire or create; whether he shall be a business man or a prophet. He finds himself in a society which offers princely rewards to the commercial career and little but pains and penalties to those who would create. This youngster was just learning his way around in the problem. He recited, with comical irony, the squalid platitudes which are chewed out at a youth bold enough to follow his creative bent:

“‘Is there any *money* in it?’ ‘Oh, of course, if you get to be a great painter. But how do you know you’ve got it in you to be a great painter? Think you have? Got a pretty good opinion of yourself, haven’t you?’ ‘What if you fail? Suppose you wake up some morning and find yourself a middle-aged man and a fizzle? Guess you’ll wish then that you’d stuck to plain everyday business and dropped all this highfalutin about art.’ ‘Yes. I suppose it’s an easy life: sitting around and painting pictures. Pretty soft, eh? Give me a man’s job!’ ‘Don’t you think it’s a little rash, my boy, to risk so much, when if you’d settle down to a good business you’d be sure of a decent living? And what about marriage? If you marry you’ll have to paint pot boilers, and then what becomes of your art? You might as well be a business man and be done with it. And if you don’t, is it worth going without a wife and children

in order to paint pictures, and so come at last to a lonely old age?" "

He knew all the old ones by heart. Later we used to recite them together in concert like school children in the geography class.

If you took the roof off any Chamber of Commerce you would find half a dozen retired business men whose guilty secret it is that they dabble on the quiet with paint tubes, or modeling clay, or scenarios, or a violin — the poor, damned souls of artists. They have made their "pile." House and lot, wife and children, motor car and country club — all these they have; and yet, gnawing at their hearts is the secret knowledge that they have missed the big thing. They were born to beget children of the spirit; they were born to create in art, in music, in literature, in social experiment; and the ignoble standards of the society in which they live have bludgeoned and ridiculed them into prostituting their highest powers in the market-place.

In such relationship did this young man stand to the life of his country and his time. With unflinching eye he listened to its taunt:

"Artist, create at your peril! You may starve, for all me, until you win a reputation that is a commercial asset. After which, having despised you, I will do my best to corrupt you by rewards and flatteries gratifying to my intellectual snobbery."

Such were the terms. This youth, uncertain of his own powers, accepted them with quiet courage and imperturbable good humor. Such was the secret of that look of settled purpose so intriguing on a face so young, and such the secret of the fire which smouldered behind those dark eyes. He was prepared for a siege. He was ready to go to the mat.

It had taken three generations — son, sire, and grand-sire — to make this stand against the all-devouring maw of American commercialism: three generations to conquer

and produce an artist. And mindful of his end I ask myself whether they did conquer. We shall see.

Midnight clanked from the city clocks.

“Gosh!” said he, “is it as late as that?” He stood up and knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the red bricks of the hearth. “By the way, I don’t know your name.”

I told him.

“Mine,” said he, “is Fred Demmler.”

Explaining that I already had a friend named Fred I asked if he had any objection to being called Fritz.

“None whatever.”

“Fritz it is, then.”

And Fritz it remained.

II

A once-aristocratic residential street now reduced to a teaming thoroughfare; pedestal to Beacon Hill; narrow, ill-paved, spattered with mud to the second story, double row of tall brick town houses, where Thackeray and Dickens were once guests, now placarding “rooms to let;” assorted antique shops and restaurants,—“the long, unlovely street” of *In Memoriam*, yet with a certain wistful charm in its decayed gentility: that is Charles Street.

Number 94 maintained its rubber plant on console-table in dark vestibule. There was a contraption, usually out of order, by which you pulled a bell five times to save yourself the climb if the art colony in the fifth-floor-back did not answer the ring. The young barbarians were usually out.

It was a colony of three: Ralph Heard, small, slender, fair, escaped from a western military academy of which he could tell tales that froze the blood; Irving Sisson, a tall, rangy Berkshire Yankee, dry and droll, an Artemus

Ward turned art student (though known as "Siss" it would never have occurred to anyone to call him "Sissie," and if anyone *had* been so rash, Sisson's grim reply would have been, like the man in the yarn, "Smile when you say that"), and Fritz.

Their room was a first act stage-set for an American version of *La Bohème*. It was large, low-ceiled, and had one of those sepulchral white marble mantel-pieces of the black walnut period. There was an iron bed and a cot, a gaslight always out of kilter, a writing-table strewn with pipes, unanswered letters, tiny bottles of india ink, drawing pens, crayons, thumb tacks, jars holding bouquets of paint brushes, and scurrilous caricatures of one another scrawled on scraps of white cardboard. The place reeked with that heavenly odor of paint tubes. By the window was a drawing board and portfolios. Canvases were stacked in a dark corner, faces to the wall.

Their windows looked into a deep courtyard formed by a triangle of tall brick houses,—the rears of houses on Charles and Brimmer Streets, the fronts of three quaint Italianate red-brick dwellings,—all enclosing a tiny greensward on which slender poplars rustled their glossy leaves. In the farthest corner of this court rise the walls and mullioned windows of the Church of the Advent, and on mild evenings when casements were open, the thrush-like voices of the choir boys over the melodious thunder of great organ floated up to these windows. But I was never able to observe that it produced any pietistic tone in number 94. On the contrary they affected to take a lively interest in the upper windows of the houses opposite and threatened to keep a pair of field glasses on their window sill.

As you go down Pinckney Street to the river you pass a break in the solid row of house fronts through which you can look up and see the two windows of that fifth-floor-back. One always did look, and if they were lighted, it was

impossible not to go up; for in that room there was always some form of what is technically known as "trouble." I never pass the spot now without looking up to see if there is a light in those windows. . . . They are dark.

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On the walls of the room were two paintings by Fritz; student works. One was a small landscape sketch—smouldering red of a sunset after rain, burning through ragged drab clouds over a hill country bathed in violet mists of twilight. It was modest, quiet. There was a strain of thoughtful poetry in it. But the striking part was its sincerity. There was none of that striving after effect, that ambitious rhetoric which youngsters usually mistake for eloquence: no attempt to make the scene anything more than what it was. The other was a portrait study of a workman naked to the waist. It was bold, vigorous, masculine, and overflowing with the joy of bodily health.

So far so good. But something else was in store.

Out of the canvases stacked against the wall he dug a study of a woman's head in profile. One looked; and then looked again. "Who was she?" She had come to the school as a model for one week: that was all they knew. But her secret was on this canvas. She must have been in her early thirties. Her face was quite serene. It was the serenity of a place reduced to ashes. Utter resignation. "Endure. Life has done its worst."

By what divination had this youngster of twenty-four guessed a secret like that? From that moment it was clear to me that he was a portrait painter.

"What," I asked, "is that little star in the lower corner of the canvas?"

"That? Oh," he explained diffidently, "that is put on pictures which the school saves for its exhibition."

III

That golden Spring! Clandestine dinners at an obscure French café in an obscure court, where one went because, though the food was something less than so-so, the sauces were exotic; "clandestine" because, behind closed shutters, they served *vin ordinaire* without a license. Our parties, to the disgust of Jacques, were teetotal, the real attraction being that the joint might be pinched any minute.

On May afternoons in the Fenway, disguised in a baseball suit of gray flannel, Fritz rejoiced as a strong man to swat the pill. The pill swatted him one day, broke his thumb, and in the end he had to have it rebroken and reset under ether. His first words on coming to were: "Give me my paint box." All the nurses of his ward fell for him with a loud crash. In all innocence he told what a lot of extra trouble they went to for him. His friends smiled in their sleeves.

As often as there was a play of Shaw or Ibsen or Galsworthy or Maeterlinck or Shakespeare or Synge there were expeditions to peanut heaven. Knoblauch's *Kismet* happened along and Fritz appropriated the cry: "Alms! for the love of Allah" for occasions choicely inappropriate.

When a fine May morning of blue and gold came winging over the city on the northwest wind he would get up extra early, hustle through his shave and cold tubbing and join me in the tramp over Beacon Hill, across the Common, and down into Newspaper Row for breakfast at the celebrated Spa. On the way up Chestnut Street, where the Brahmin pundits live, the favorite sport was to crack jokes at the expense of the sources of income which sustained these Georgian fronts and mahogany-and-brocade interiors: here, a famous brand of ale; there, notorious industrial nose-grinding in Fall River spinning mills—merry clank of dividend skeleton in genteel closet . . . On the Common, jocund morning, fresh green of turf and tree,

sweet breath of the earth; sunshine, bird-song, youth, . . .
Spring!

And on a stool at the Spa, Fritz's provoking grin and sly banter of a waitress who, after a good look at him, would conclude that if she was being kidded she liked it and was cheerfully ready for more. After which breakfast he trudged the mile and a half to the Art Museum to see the morning and to save his father carfares.

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It appeared that he was a walker, and not afraid of rain. He proved it. On a May evening brewing thunder we did a dissolving view out of the city on a train for Cape Ann. At the end of the shore road around the Cape awaited lodgings at an inn and a midnight supper. At Gloucester he was introduced to one of Wonson's clam chowders and we set off at dusk.

That evening came the first inkling of his larger purpose — his higher than personal ambition: what he would paint after his portraits assured him a livelihood. Something was said about Pittsburgh and the mills.

"They ought to be painted," said he, "exactly as they are. Not sentimentalized like the magazine covers; not made romantic, as Joseph Pennell has made them; but painted in all their horror. Some day. I don't know enough yet."

Thunder had been muttering distantly. The night had turned pitch black. There were sullen flashes, and drops began to patter. Would he be for turning back? Not he! Then the storm came crashing and pelting across the granite moors of the Cape. Gorgeous flashes which flushed the winding tidal inlets and the rocky hills a brilliant rose pink. Flash! Crash! Swish went the rain. And the harder it stormed the better he liked it. He strode along intoxicated with color and sound.

Near Annisquam is a double shade-row of willows over-arching the road. Not far beyond, yellow lamplight was streaming from the windows of a tiny cottage. Wading knee-deep in wet grass we knocked.

Now it is a complicated process explaining to two aged New England spinsters on a lonely road at nine o'clock of a stormy night what your errand is, especially when you haven't any. They listened; lifted the lamp on us for an inspection — particularly on Fritz; one soon got used to seeing people inspect him furtively — and invited us in.

“Walkin' round the Cape to Rockport, be ye? And in the rain? For the fun of it! Well, come in and set down. I'd like to get a good look at someone who'd walk to Rockport in the rain for the fun of it. Set down, young gentlemen.”

We set. They were sisters. One was small and timid: she was of the sort that remain naïve to the end. The other was tall, angular and sardonic, with a mother wit smacking of the soil and the salt water. She addressed herself to Fritz:

“You ain't an escaped murderer, be ye?”

Fritz cackled lustily.

“How do you know I'm not?” said he.

“You look like that fella who's on trial in Boston now. I see his pictures in the paper . . . and you come knockin' on the door at dead o' night in a thunder squall like in a story book.”

“Would you say I looked like a murderer?” inquired Fritz with relish.

“You might look worse 'n him,” replied our free-speech hostess. “By his pictures he's a good-lookin' fella. I says to Saide whiles we was weedin' garden this morning, 't wouldn't be safe to let him go now, for half the women in New England are ready to fall in love with him — he's been that advertised.” She eyed us with her sardonic grin. I looked at Fritz. He was blushing.

To her shrewd Yankee wits we were clearly two lunatics, but harmless; and the object was to extract as much entertainment from us as the law allowed. Such was the tone of her farewell, half an hour later.

“If anyone asks who was here,” said she, “I’ll tell them it was two young fellas walkin’ to Rockport in the rain for the fun of it. — And then they’ll think *I’m* one!”

Past midnight, stumping dog-tired into the inn; cold meat and bread, ravenously devoured; bed, and the sleep of the just.

. . . Morning; and such a morning as never was. Quite forgetting to dress, Fritz lost himself staring out of the open window at the quaint harbor, the fishing fleet, the blue bay and the gaunt headlands until it was suggested to him that passers by might be enjoying him as much as he was enjoying the morning.

There was an hour for soaking it in before the train left for the city, and soak it in he did. A sea of pale blue, like molten glass, untroubled by a breeze; sky the deep blue of a morning after storms; air sweet with the scent of blossoming orchards and dooryard lilacs and tart with the tang of salt brine; merry twitter of robins; lazy splash of surf; the long headlands tapering down to the sea; the squat white tower of Straitsmouth light solitary on its rocky islet, “and overhead the lovely skies of May.”

In the midst of it stood a young artist, dumb with delight. His eyes drank.

Oh brethren of the possessing class, ye who must own this and that before you can enjoy, this world can never give the bliss for which ye sigh. That pilgrimage cost less than \$3.00 per.

Evening. Above the tiny grass-plat and spindling poplars in Mount Vernon Square floats the magic of a night in mid-June. The windows of the fifth-floor-back in 94 Charles

are lighted and open to the breeze. From those of the Advent come gusts of music,—rumbles of organ and the fresh voices of boys: choir rehearsal. But I think the sounds which float down from the windows of 94 are more in tune with the night: peal after peal of infectious laughter. It was clear to the meanest order of intellect that Sisson was telling stories which were more joyous than dutiful: also that he had Fritz going. There was no mistaking that laugh.

A belated delivery man, basket on arm, pauses beside me to listen and grin.

“I bet that was a good one,” says he. “Say, but can’t that guy laugh!”

IV

In the autumn he reappeared bronzed and husky from a summer on a Pennsylvania farm. That spring had been the overture. Now the curtain rose. How can my thin piano score reproduce that richly glowing orchestration?

Gradually the artist in him unfolded. It was like a process of nature—slow, silent, sure. In speech he was inarticulate. The spoken word was not his trade; he knew it, and the knowledge made him self-conscious. But give him a brush and he found tongue. His silences were formidable. “The better to eat you with, my dear!” Nothing escaped him. With a secret, fierce impetuosity he was storing away impressions: glances, gestures, lines of faces, colors, inflections of voices, landscapes, phrases, incidents, ideas: he soaked them in like a thirsty sponge. Everything was fish that came to his net. What sometimes looked like an intellectual torpor was the boa constrictor digesting the zebra whole. I doubt if he realized the tremendous vitality of his creative instinct. He went about it as a wild creature roams the forest for its food: it was a law of his being. On tramping trips he would stalk miles in silence; stopping

stock still until he had taken in the scarlet-and-gold maple grove in a purple autumn mist; or a mossy wood pile under pines; or the rolling diversity of hill and woodland. No apologies; no explanations. Business.

It was soon clear that this young man knew exactly what he wanted and that he intended to get it. There was a kind of animal sagacity about his mind which told it what food to accept and what to reject.

“*Künstler*,” says Goethe, “*rede nicht. Bilde!*” (Artist, don’t talk. Create!) Fritz lived this precept. He would do first, and then let the doing speak for itself. When a young man is so determined to do something that he cannot be got to talk about it, you may consider the thing as good as done. Here was a hungry mind, seeking what it might devour and devouring it. All that provender was being assimilated. It could not evaporate in talk, for Fritz was no talker. It had to be expressed somehow and that somehow would have to be with a brush. . . . Oh, he came and went disguised in the business suit of a young man dedicated to the career of buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest: pleasant, friendly, a prodigious eater, a sound sleeper, invincibly healthy,— and with only that silent intentness of eye to betray the secret of the creative power he carried within him.

But that winter it was surprised out of him.

Fred Middleton, then twenty-seven years old, six years out of Harvard College, thoroughly conversant with the ethics of modern business, was preparing to *de-class* himself and earn an honest living by manual labor on the land—a farmer, and not a “gentleman farmer.” With mock solemnity Fritz was commissioned to do a portrait of Fred. The transaction was conducted on a basis of “free agreement” which would have satisfied even Peter Kropotkin. The painter was to do it any way he chose—absolute free speech. The sitter was to choose any clothes he liked, to sit till he was tired, and stretch when he pleased. The

purchaser was to pay what he was able. So everybody was happy, being free.

In the third floor back on Pinckney Street (it had north light) decks were cleared for action: two rickety orange boxes covered with a steamer rug did duty as a dais. With paint box, easel and palette Fritz came down from Exeter where he had just finished a portrait of an old lady.

There was a glowing fire in the grate; a bluster of March winds in the brick court; the roar of blast through the antlers of the old linden; waning light of Saturday and Sunday afternoons; pages of Nietzsche's epigrams and of *Jean-Christophe* read aloud; pauses to rest and consult.

Fritz always noticed people's hands. He found almost as much character in them as in faces. He admired the hands in Rodin's work, especially that of the sculptor in his *Pygmalion*:—"the tenderness of that hand!" he said. Fred's large hands interested him. The right one he caught hot off the bat. The left caused him no end of trouble. Finally one day he threw down his brush and exclaimed:

"I've watched that left hand come down to rest on that leg a dozen times. I've tried everything else and now I'm going to paint it exactly as it is. After all, it *is* a hand."

"*Thank you; thank you!*" replied Fred, bowing suavely. "People usually refer to it as a ham. A photographer once told me that I had a mitt like an elephant's hoof."

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And Fritz painted. And the secret was out. It came out in two installments: the first, when he was spreading on canvas a life history of Fred Middleton compressed into terms of a rugged face and two large hands; the second came three years later. Fred had remarked, after one of his sittings, that it was all he could do to keep his face straight at some of the grimaces Fritz made while paint-

ing. The precaution was needless. If he had laughed outright it is doubtful if Fritz would have noticed it.

Most of the time while he was painting the portrait of me, three years later, I was absorbed in my own work and paid no attention to him. But one afternoon when my wheels refused to grind I took a holiday and watched him out of the tail of my eye . . .

It was as if some one you supposed you knew all about had removed a set of false whiskers and spoken in his natural voice. Was this our shy, silent Fritz? Why, the impudence of him! The shameless way he peered into the secret places of a face! "See here, young gentleman, who gave you permission to rummage through that trunkful of old letters?"

Here at last was Fritz, on his native heath, naked and unashamed, talking his own language and, confident of its not being understood, indulging in the most appalling candor.

What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. While he pried into my secrets I pried into his. I amused myself by painting a portrait of Fritz painting. Some day I meant to show it to him . . . But here it is:

"He may not be able to talk with his tongue. But give him his brushes and his whole body talks. No gymnastics: but his whole being aquiver. Silent, but his arms, fingers, head, shoulders make animated dumb show. He is conversing delightedly with himself over his work. He has forgotten time and place. Intense mental concentration, and nervous energy. He squints, grimaces, stoops and looks at his canvas wrong-side up. He sets his teeth, compresses lips, squares his shoulders,—lost in his work. He mixes colors with minute particularity. Sometimes he dabs with a tiny brush, a peck here, a peck there, like a dainty bird. Again he paints in sweeping flourishes, beating a kind of rapturous rhythm with his brush, gesturing with it between strokes, like an orchestral conductor hewing out the

rhythms of a symphony . . . He pauses; he hangs limp over his palette, considering . . . Or he gives a joyous little bounce in his chair as the decision comes. His hands and forearms, strong and supple, talk in every sinew. Fingers mobile, infinitely expressive: they thumb the brush; turn its handle in a ruminating pause; reflect a sudden resolution in the stiffening of tendons . . .

“And above all this quiet animation and silent dexterity is the regnant, gallant head with dark eyes flashing mastery; the mouth set with purpose; the thick mass of shining black hair breaking into a wave as it falls away from the clear forehead—and all in complete self-forgetfulness, the oblivion of the artist rapt in the joy of creating.”

It was quite simple. Here was a soul which dwelt in a prison of shyness. Painting unlocked the door. Out it rushed. Free. It could be itself at last. No fears; no concealments. Liberty!

That was all very well for Fritz, but how about his sitter? About the time the sitter sensed what was going on he felt moved to exclaim:

“Just a moment, Fritz. Don’t you think you are getting a trifle familiar?”

I heard one of his painter friends, eyeing a canvas which Fritz had just finished, mutter,

“There is some marvelous subtlety about that mind.”

Already his knack of guessing people was damnable. He played no favorites. “I am going to paint what I see or I am not going to paint at all.” If what he saw was fatuous, he told it with the disconcerting gusto of a child; if it was sad, he told it (as in that student portrait) so as to produce a burning pressure behind the eyelids; if it was strong and gentle, he told it (as in the portrait of the young farmer) so as to kindle respect and affection. Often all this was unconscious. Again he knew exactly what he was doing and took a wicked relish in it. Of some wealthies whom he was painting he confided with a grin:

“Of course they patronize me within an inch of my life, but I sometimes wonder what would happen if they knew . . .”

Perhaps he was not so unsophisticated as advertised in the catalogue. He helped himself pretty generously out of the popular supposition that an artist is a mild form of lunatic. He made good use of his talent for silence. But what ears and eyes! Nobody who had seen him paint could ever feel quite safe with him again.

V

It happened that Alexander James was studying at the Museum School. That the son of “the psychologist who made psychology read like a novel” and the nephew of “the novelist who made a novel read like psychology” should have identified Fritz’s talent the first crack out of the box was about the least surprising thing in the world. The two young painters proceeded to form an offensive and defensive alliance. Where one was, there was the other also; on the baseball field, on painting expeditions, on pilgrimages in early spring into New Hampshire to climb Chocorua, and on occasional voyages into the land of pretty girls. It was good to see the pair together: two thoroughbreds. Both athletes, both artists, one dark, the other fair, both about the same height and build. People would turn to look after them as they passed with an expression of “Wonder who they are. Somebody out of the ordinary.”

Alexander was wont to disguise his frank admiration of Fritz behind a smoke screen of banter. This Fritz would suffer with an amused grin and the massive calm of a mastiff, for he had no such arsenal of repartee as this young gentleman from the household of a Harvard professor; but once in a while he would land a retort so neat as to set Alexander spinning. It did not take the Cambridge

youth long to discover the use Fritz made of his talent for silence and it was his delight to give him away in his game of holding his tongue the better to use his eyes,—as Alexander said: “the wise old Bruin!”

In Massachusetts the anniversary of the battle of Lexington, April 19, is a holiday. It was 1913. In the parlor of an inn whose windows look northward across the snug haven of Rockport to the surf-scoured ledges of Pigeon Cove I was seated at a piano, back to the door, painfully dissecting a score of *Tristan*.

The door opened and a voice exclaimed, “Good Lord!”

It was Fritz. With him was Alexander James. Both were half ossified with the chill of the mid-April afternoon, for they had been painting on the shore down towards Straitsmouth.

General astonishment. The two expeditions had originated quite independently. It was whimsically like those momentous chance encounters in picturesque spots which abound in the novels of Alexander’s uncle Henry; but the novelist, be it noted, doesn’t always save these coincidences from a slightly fishy sound which was totally wanting in this.

They thawed themselves out and exhibited their sketches. Fritz had, as usual, gone after it and got it—a spirited bit: druidical heaps of pink granite boulders against dashing surf: dazzling white of foam-crest on deep blue.

There was a jolly supper in the brown-walled dining room (it had been the kitchen of an eighteenth century farm house) which the last rays of the spring sun flooded with red golden light; the two painters comparing notes on the exhibitions of the Scandinavians and the Ten Americans.

They departed for a home-talent play at a local hall in a frame of mind which boded no good for the performance. . . . About eleven o’clock they breezed in with the

announcement that there was a Northwest wind (the New England wind which sweeps the sky cloudless blue), a full moon and a dashing sea; and that to go to bed was a crime. Away, then, for Land's End, along shore paths at the edge of grassy cliffs, by bushy lanes, over meadows, moors, popple beaches and brooks, across the moon-blanchèd land beside the moon-burnished sea. Straitsmouth Light burned a yellow spark. The twin lights on Thatcher's Island shone weird blue in their tall towers. Low on the rim of sky and sea hung gigantic masses of cloud whitened by the bluish pallor of the moon. In the marsh bottoms frogs cheeped their shrill sweet song of spring: the northwester bellowed through the willow twigs . . . mournful pour of surf . . . splendor of spring moon . . . the lonely moor . . . the steadfast light-house flames . . . the white walls and gray roofs of the sleeping town . . .

At one in the morning, tip-toeing into the dining room, we devoured a plate of bread and butter left for late comers. Both of them were too genuine artists to comment on what we had seen.

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It is a lovely afternoon of June, 1914, at the pier of the Allan Line steamships in Charlestown. The ship is the old *Nubian*, safe and slow, saloon upholstered in plush of maple sugar brown, brass oil lamps swinging in gimbles as befitted a smart packet of the late 80's. Boston to Glasgow. Scotland swarmed the wharf.

Mixed in was an artists' colony. For that was the great day. Fritz and Alexander were sailing for a year's study abroad: London, Paris, Munich. The gang which came to see them off were *dramatis personae* of Act II of *La Bohème*: four painters, an interior decorator, an illustrator, assorted scribblers, and a Scottish chieftain (lord

of an ancient clan, hero of a hundred skin-of-your-teeth escapes, veteran of Polish revolutionary escapades, uncrowned king of an African tribe: as *raconteur* he had his rival, Robert Louis Stevenson, lashed to the bed). This day he strode resplendent in plaid knee socks, plaid kilt, a murderous Hieland dirk swung at his hip, short jacket the breast of which blazed with medals, and long black locks caught up under a cap. As he crossed the wharf planking at a stride like deer-stalking over his native crags, the rest of us half expected the assembled Scots to prostrate themselves and knock foreheads on flooring in fealty. He did excite some attention. Sisson said—well, no matter what Sisson said.*

It was a great occasion. Fritz, his black eyes snapping with excitement, came up the gang plank from deck to wharf to be pounced on by a jolly crew. He was outwardly cool, but his engines were racing. After him came Alexander James. Pounce number two. Showers of rice clattered on a bridal pair close by, but their festival was tame compared to this. To meet Henry James and John Sargent in London: to study in Paris and Munich: to see the great galleries. They were embarking on greater seas than the Atlantic. This was the great day, the great hour, and with a troop of friends rejoicing in their good fortune to sweeten it . . . Away to the land of heart's desire . . . Romance . . . Bohemia . . . Europe.

“O Youth, and the days that were!”

From the caplog at the pier head as the *Nubian* swung into midstream of the Charles, the band of pariahs bawled ribald farewells and wrung out handkerchiefs in mock

* After all, why not? Some one was explaining that the chief (who was a genuinely fine fellow) had come to America to raise funds for his clan. Sisson said: “He'll be lucky if he gets back to Scotland with his kilt.”

tears. Alexander James, the Clive Newcome of the adventure, leaned on the teakwood rail, waving his straw hat; and Fritz, the "J. J." of the story, sat on the lowest ratline of the shrouds, feet on rail, pretending to weep into his hat and then emptying the brine into the brine.

The ship's side, black hull and white upperworks, took a burnishing from the late afternoon sun. Under the gaiety there was a queer feeling. There, divided from us by a hundred yards of harbor water, were the two friends with whom we had just shaken hands, and the strip between was widening, would widen to an ocean. They stood out amid the throng of passengers as distinct as though they had been the only souls aboard. They waved: we waved. As the vessel straightened away in her course they imitated our several gestures to signify personal farewells: it was thought and done impromptu. And long after their figures grew indistinct as the ship lessened down the harbor lane between elbowing wharves and the piled masses of city towers and spires, there were gleams of two white straw hats which we knew . . .

All the same, it was a trifle too much like a dress rehearsal for death.

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* * *

Then, in less than six weeks, a world in tumult. Continental ateliers were emptying their students on the battlefield. Fritz, who was in England, prudently kept out of the rush homeward and made the most of his few weeks.

He was in Downing Street in front of that dingy Georgian façade the night the British Cabinet sat waiting for Germany's reply to their ultimatum.

"It gave one an odd feeling," said he, "to realize that behind those drawn shades sat men who were settling the question of life or death for hundreds of thousands

of their fellow creatures. The crowd cheered. I did not."

Of Henry James he saw comparatively little, for the novelist was in poor health, but he was immensely stimulated by the little he did see, for beginning with *Roderick Hudson* he had been quick to discover how much this master of style had to teach a painter of what he had himself learned from painters.

There was a memorable session with Mr. Sargent in his London studio. Mr. Sargent happened just then to be doing a portrait of Lord Curzon, and Fritz related with wicked glee (imitating Mr. Sargent as he backed away from his easel) how the painter had remarked:

"I have not made up my mind how to finish it. If I can't get enough interest out of the face, I'll put a scarlet coat on him."

It was late in October before he sailed for home, as one of a handful of passengers on a freighter. The voyage was one of continuous foul weather which, to the mystification of the others, was vastly to the delight of Fritz. He lived on deck, begrudging time to sleep. He fraternized with the crew. One day of thin drizzle and greasy swells, getting into old togs, he helped the deck-hands greatly to their satisfaction and somewhat to the scandal of the other passengers, shovel coal down a hatch.

"They didn't think I'd stick it through," said he.

After that he was one of them.

VI

He had chosen to live in Pittsburgh, partly because it was his home and partly because it promised him more elbow room.

"I want to paint," said he, "and I do not want to have to play social politics in order to get commissions, as I

am afraid I would have to do in Boston. Besides, in Pittsburgh, there are fewer painters to influence me. I stand more chance of being myself."

Alexander James said it was brutal of Fritz to go away to Pittsburgh. The rest of the colony agreed. But it became Fritz's delight to swoop down on us in Boston unannounced.

. . . It is late in a wild night of mid-winter, a furious gale of wind and snow whipping across the gables and chimney stacks of Beacon Hill: a night for tucking oneself up in a wing chair beside a fire with a book and reading lamp, roar of storm in ears. . .

A rap sounds on the door.

"Come!"

The rap is repeated.

"Come in!"

The door opens and framed in its blackness stands Fritz.

With him is Ralph Heard in a state of jubilation.

"You remember," says he, "I told you only two days ago that I sort of had a hunch that Fritz might be dropping in on us most any time now? Well, to-night I was sitting at my writing-table, when the door opened with a bang. I thought, without looking around, 'That is the way Fritz opens a door.' And there was Fritz."

His one emotional luxury was this enjoyment of watching his friends fall all over their own feet in the glad surprise of seeing him.

He was on his way to paint some portraits of Exeter schoolmasters. It was slowly wormed out of him that romance had visited his shores. A St. Louis woman was motoring to New York. In a street of Pittsburgh a tire blew out. As it was raining, she got out of the car and went into an art store in front of which it had stopped, to wait for repairs. Her errand in New York was to choose a portrait painter. In the art store a portrait by Fritz was on exhibition. She decided that there was no need of going on to

New York. That evening Fritz was called to her hotel. It ended by his going on to St. Louis and painting portraits of the whole family.

What his bread-and-butter problems were I never fully knew. I think they were more in what he faced than in what he had to encounter. Within two or three years after he left the Museum School, he was paying his own way. He lived with the utmost frugality. His studio was a workshop: four walls and a north light.

"I keep it bare on purpose," he confided, "to frighten away loafers."

It appeared that certain amiable slayers of their own and others' time, envisaging a studio of divans, Russian cigarettes, tea and twaddle, paid one visit, and only one.

His attitude toward money was an island of sanity in a lunatic ocean. It was no time before he sensed the absurdity of attempting to measure creative work by commercial values, and that is, of course, the avenue by which the artist-thinker divines the idiotic husbandry of organizing society to batten those who distribute and those who own by penalizing those who produce and those who create. Money he viewed as an article neither to be spent nor to be hoarded, but rather to be reinvested where it would draw intellectual dividends. His one extravagance was to buy his mind the food it needed if he had the wherewithal to pay for it. "And," as Erasmus remarks, "after that, some clothes." The same independence which had fortified him against those who had once pointed him out as a crack-brained youngster with the presumption to suppose he could be a great artist sustained him now when he was pointed out as a promising portrait painter who was already "getting good money for his work."

Finding himself, as he did, endowed with a creative purpose considerably at odds with the structure of the society around him; put to it, as he was, to protect that fledgling from the well-intentioned but fatal meddlings of

the mediocre, not a shadow of ill-humor did he allow to cross his average human intercourse. He made me think of a wise old cat who, having carefully hidden her kittens in the hayloft, presents a tolerant frame to the cuffs and caresses of the children.

By the beginning of 1916 it was clear to anyone who knew him that all he needed to reach the summit was to keep climbing, and this he appeared abundantly able and determined to do.

VII

He was growing up. Shy he would always be, but in place of his boyish self-distrust had come a quiet confidence in his own powers. His mind was on the watch for its food, like an eagle ready to pounce. There was an eager, vigilant look in his eyes when one spoke of certain books unknown to him: he was questioning whether they would be what he wanted. He would pump me about the content of certain authors. I could see him accepting and rejecting. He read the poets as one quarrying marble for architectural designs of his own. His hungry reading was as different from that of the perfunctory college student as the oarsmanship of a dory fisherman on the Grand Banks is from that of an eight-oared crew on the placid Charles: the producer as contrasted with the consumer.

George Meredith and Walt Whitman became two of his great companions. Once he told me that he was reading everything of Thomas Hardy he could lay his hands on.

"Why?" I asked.

"He knows how to set the human figure against vast backgrounds of Nature: figures outlined half against a heath and half against sky."

I wonder if Romain Rolland realizes the intimacy of the friendship which has sprung up between *Jean-Christophe* and the youth of to-day. Fritz and Christophe

took an amazing shine to each other from the start. It was *Christophe* who led Fritz to read everything else of Romain Rolland he could find, and thus his steps were guided to the summit of that Mount of Vision, Rolland's *Life of Tolstoy*, whence he looked far and wide into the stern grandeur of that moral wilderness unsubdued by man through which the heroic thinker and prophet pushes on alone . . . To look is to follow. He began to devour Tolstoy's works. *The Kreutzer Sonata* he sat up half the night beside my fire to finish. Waking towards morning I saw him scowling over it. He asked to take the book away with him. Soon he was up to his neck in the dramatists: Ibsen, Strindberg, Brieux, Sudermann, Galsworthy, Synge, Shaw.

There was a performance of *Candida* with Mr. Milton Rosmer as the poet. They say that a secret can be told only to him who knows it already. There is a secret in two tremendous speeches at the close of that play which (as the dramatist himself says) few but poets know:

MORELL: (*alarmed*) Candida: don't let
 him do anything rash.

CANDIDA: (*confident, smiling at Eugene*)
 Oh, there is no fear. He has
 learnt to live without happiness.

MARCHBANKS: I no longer desire happiness: life
 is nobler than that. Parson James,
 I give you my happiness with both
 hands.

Those lines stung Fritz as the whip stings a mettled horse. His flesh rebelled, but the poet in him leaped to the truth.

On March 20, 1913, the colony at 94 Charles Street adjourned to a performance of *Man and Superman*. Fritz kept his room-mate up until two in the morning discussing

it. The next night he routed me out of bed at ten and quizzed me about it until three in the morning.

He had had his glimpse of the collision between sex and ambition; between the impulse of the woman to create children of flesh and blood, with the man as adjunct and provider; and the impulse of the man to create children of the spirit independently of the woman. He was quick to realize that he had struck something which he had to settle, and he was settling it. The thing was deliciously transparent. Here was a young gentleman tremendously in earnest about being an artist. Being an artist he loved beauty. Hitherto, in his shy way, he had secretly been rather tickled by the flutter which his striking head created in the dove cots of pretty girls. But after March 20, 1913, the tune changed. He was affable, delighted to make their acquaintance—but on his guard. He had not the slightest intention of letting sex thwart his ambition.

“Yes, but . . .?”

“Yes, but . . .” He played the game. A commercial society decrees that the artist cannot have a livelihood until his work is accepted at a commercial value. Pending that acceptance, if he assumes the responsibility of wife and children he also assumes the risk of shackling himself to pot-boiling work for life.

Society also decrees a standard of prenuptial chastity for the male. Suppose the male happens to be more interested in art than in domesticity. He must then ask himself whether he shall abide by a decree which bourgeois society promulgates with more emphasis than sincerity. With his eyes wide open to the fact that the very society which promulgates this decree openly winks at its evasion, Fritz abode by it. A slightly sterner set to his jaw; a slightly darker flash in his eye; a slightly grimmer stoicism in the grip on his emotions were all that betrayed the battle which had raged in him between the two creative forces: sex and intellect. He never pretended that the battle was

won for keeps. The crust on which he walked he knew to be thin. But it was won for the present. He well knew that there are no bargain days at life's counter: he had come there to purchase one of the most precious commodities—a creative career—and he was willing to pay the fee. If he found the fee somewhat high (and I have reason to know that he did) he never complained. It was his reward to enjoy that supreme luxury of conduct—to be the thing he seemed. He lived in that kind of glass house which is not damaged by any amount of stone-throwing, because there is nothing to hit: a glass house with all the curtains up. "Naked and unashamed" could have been written over the door of his mind. Time and again he quoted a passage from *Trilby* in which Du Maurier says that mental chastity begins in the artist when the model drops her last garment. He was frank to add that this was strictly true; that in the intense concentration of his mind on problems of form and color he had found in painting from the nude no room for images of sex but on the contrary an actual release from the heats and fevers which plague young men. The remedy he proposed was: "Get rid of mystery."

There is a portrait painted at about this time which tells the story of the inner struggle which he was fighting and winning. It is of a young girl, about his own age, with a wondrously sweet expression and sparkling eyes. The delicacy, the spirituality which shines through it makes it hard to believe that the portrait could have been painted by a young man. Not a hint of sexuality. He later told me that the girl was afflicted with a lameness and he told how grateful he was to her for valuing him for his mind and not obtruding sex. I doubt if he knew how publicly yet with what delicacy he had thanked her.

There were moods of him, as when he stood silently drinking in a landscape, which made me think of that fine old chant which one hears in the churches:

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

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In the emptiness left by his death I came to realize that one of the principal anticipations of my life had been looking forward to watch, year by year, the unfolding of his mind and the ripening of his powers. His talent had long since passed the stage at which it was a sporting proposition — the stage at which one could chaff him about cashing in heavily some day on a pair of “early Demmlers.”

There was no kind of doubt that he carried within him the creative “daimon.” His very instincts betrayed it. He went at a landscape the way Hugo Wolf went at a song: he lived with the poem before creating the music. For the first few days in a novel countryside he never thought of touching brush to canvas. He walked around in the scene, his every sense alert to its feature and color, to its sound and smell. He laid in wait for its moods. He eyed it in every circumstance of wind and weather, as if it had been a face he was preparing to paint, or a woman he was preparing to wed. No words. The quality he most appreciated in a companion at such times was silence. And it was entertainment enough to watch the play of expression in his face as his eyes roamed meadow, hill or sea horizon — vigilance, delight, eagerness, discriminating study, instructions to memory, brooding thought — his life was a perpetual honeymoon with nature for his bride.

Then would come the day and the hour when he was ready to paint. By that time, in the wealth of his materials, his only study would be not what to put in but what to leave out. I doubt if he had reached the point of knowingly causing his subconscious to work for him, but it will be apparent from the foregoing that he was doing so unconsciously.

He was able, somehow, to communicate his sense of form and color to another, without resort to speech, or with only

the fewest words. Perhaps it was the stimulus of seeing how much there was for him in the distant shining of sunlight on winding waters, or a range of low hills scrawling their signature on the chill blue of horizon sky, which taught others to find the wonder and dignity in what they would once have looked on as commonplace. At any rate, I find myself, in all seasons, seeing landscapes through his eyes . . . "Now that looks commonplace, but it isn't. Fritz would have seen something in these somber March-brown meadows drowned in the freshets of spring; these red-budding birches; this delicate flush of pink in a drab evening sky . . ." And so he, being dead, yet seeth.

He was well aware, by this time, that the artist who is not also a thinker is a one-legged man. He accepted the obligation of understanding matters which, superficially, might have seemed far outside his province. It was in 1915 that he encountered Tolstoy's great work on Christian anarchism, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*. It revolutionized his view of life. It convinced him of the futility of violence as a method of settling disputes, personal or national. And the shock of having to transvalue all the accepted values, of having, in a world organized on the basis of fear, to conceive of a world organized on the basis of good will, made him a thinker in his own right.

Next he encountered Romain Rolland's *Life of Michael Angelo*. Far from being chilled by the classic austerity of that work, it warmed him. In it he found the food he had been seeking. He made it a part of him. It confirmed, with revelations of the laws of mental conduct which governed that giant of the Renaissance, principles which this young man had been formulating and practising by the naked instinct of his will to create. Things which he had been doing or forbearing to do, he could not have told you why, here received their sanction or veto in the experience of a genius.

Little as was said about this between us, it was easy to see how profoundly this discovery of the similarity be-

tween his own mental processes and those of a great master had strengthened his confidence in himself. Michael Angelo was added to the list of his Great Companions.

He had another. Rembrandt.

There was a gallery in London, which one I forget, which he visited day after day.

“In the first room you entered,” said he, “was a portrait of an old woman by Rembrandt, painted in his last period. Time after time I went there intending to see the rest of the gallery. Sometimes I even tried a room or two. What was the use? I went back to that portrait. It seemed like a waste of time to look at the other pictures. Everything they said — if they said anything — was said in that portrait by Rembrandt and said better. It seemed to me as if the whole history of humanity were concentrated in that old woman’s face . . . Finally I surrendered and went only to see that.”

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There is a chastity of the mind, just as there is a chastity of the body. There are certain creative processes which a sincere thinker would no more reveal to casual eyes than he would strip in a public place. A rule of mental chastity: Do not hold promiscuous mental intercourse. The shallow would intrude into these austere places like picnickers in a sanctuary, littering it with their luncheon refuse. Let the artist raise his thought-stained face from his toil, smiling but mute.

Fritz guarded his secrets well. A sudden flash of arrested eye, a certain silent intentness of gaze, an interest in a subject which would seem altogether out of proportion to its importance, a look of perpetual expectancy were all that betrayed his search. He was learning, learning, learning: every hour, every minute. Sometimes for days together

he would seem dormant—practical people would have said loafing—lazily absorbing impressions as it had been through his pores. Again he seemed to devour scenery, faces, books, ideas with an appetite that was insatiable.

A young sculptor, meeting Fritz, observed to me privately,

“What an unromantic exterior for an artist!”

The joke was too good to tell Fritz for, all innocently on the sculptor's part, it revealed a secret which I was not supposed to know: that Fritz instinctively cultivated this young-man-just-out-of-college-and-doing-well-in-business exterior as a high board fence behind which, free from intrusion, to train the muscles of his mind and cultivate the golden orchards of his soul.

He had to. For once he had mastered the tools of his trade there was absolutely no one to teach him the things he most needed to know. He must go it alone. He knew it. And he was going. That was the secret of the watchful, hungry look of him—the look of one aware of a ravenous appetite and never sure of his next meal. That was the secret of his inarticulate gratitude to anyone who happened to be able to put him in the way of finding the food his spirit craved. He discovered that the composers knew more about painting than most painters, and he used to turn up at Symphony concerts or at the opera with the look of a small boy fresh from a session with the jam pot behind the pantry door. He wasn't saying anything, but you knew that he'd got it. He made a bee-line for Beethoven and Wagner. He came away after a performance of *Tristan* most divinely drunk on the strongest wine in music.

For the method of these composers was the method which he had chosen for himself unconsciously. He was not satisfied to write a thin melody. He was determined to teach his brush the rich and complicated instrumentation of an orchestral score. Not this face or that landscape was what he planned to put on canvas, but the abundance of life which

he had absorbed through every avenue of sense. Not a violin alone, nothing less than the full orchestra would content him.

I ask myself whether I shall ever see anything more inspiring than the quiet, secret quest of this young man for an excellence and a mastery not only unrecognized and unrewarded by the social order in which he lived, but not even comprehended. This is the courage of the creative mind: that it is prepared to meet alike its triumph or its defeat in an utter moral solitude. Stories of the physical courage which Fritz displayed on the field of battle were to come later. . . . Which is likely to advance the Kingdom of Heaven on earth more speedily—the courage of the body, to destroy; or the courage of the mind, to create?

Is all this too eulogistic? “Oh, come! He must have had faults, weaknesses, common spots.” . . . I suppose so. To tell the truth I never noticed them. There was a trait, as I first remember him, of too ready assent to the opinions of others which it amused me to attribute to peasant ancestry; but, after all, that conformity was only outward and it soon disappeared. In matters really vital to him his will was granite and he commanded a silence which could vociferate “Hands off!”

His very inarticulate tongue gave promise of greatness. One saw all this life-stuff entering into him. He could never express it in speech. It was a necessity of his being to express it somehow. It would have to come out on canvas.

Oh, once in a great while the curtain would be dropped. Some lucky turn of conversation would relax the inhibitions and liberate his tongue. Then for a few minutes, perhaps for an hour, one would be shown the treasure house within. What shall I say of those glimpses? There are times to walk fearfully lest one smash something which cannot be replaced, and these occasions were of them. Treasures not of this world; possessions which honored

the possessor by being held in honor; bins heaped, as it had been, with jewels and brocades; others which gaped with a sacrificial emptiness; spaces eked out with the heroic poverty of one dedicated to the monasticism of a creative career.

Enough. . . . I saw — what I saw.

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And withal he was half pagan. The physical gratification with which he drank in the beauty of the world reminded me of that statuette by *Roderick Hudson*, *Δίψος* ("Thirst")—a boy, feet planted wide apart, head thrown back, slaking his throat out of a gourd held in both hands. Fritz was that boy. The ugliness of modern clothes disgusted him. He was alert for chances to take off his own: impromptu baths in cold brooks on walking trips, or long days of summer sunshine on lonely stretches of sea beach with gleaming yellow sands. There was some place among the mountains of West Virginia where he used to go: ledges of flat rock above a rushing river. All day long they gathered warmth from the sun, retaining it well into the night. When the moon had risen he loved to steal away for a plunge in the river, then lie out naked in the moonlight on these great slabs of warm rock, alone with the magic night.

VIII

In May, 1917, he came to Boston from Pittsburgh. I was in Parkersburg, West Virginia. He came there.

Conscription impended. Under his composure the struggle was going on. Tolstoy had converted him. What was he to do?

“If there were no one but myself to consider . . . ,” said he, “But the suffering which you would have no hesitation in imposing on yourself you hesitate to impose on those dearer to you than yourself.”

He was thrilled by the nonresistance of the still-young Russian revolution:

“Wonderful people, liberated by their refusal to kill! They fold their arms and say ‘Shoot!’ The Cossacks refuse to shoot them. And a despotism, centuries old, comes tumbling down. It proves everything that Tolstoy has said.”

For three days, tramping about the scrubby countryside, rambling along the banks of the Ohio, rowing up the swift, muddy current of the Kanawah, the dilemma of a man born to create and commandeered to destroy was threshed out. Never before had he spoken so freely. The economic causes of the trouble he understood fairly well, but it was startling with what a seeing eye he pierced the illusions which beset that time. By that faculty of divination peculiar to the artist’s mind he reached, at one leap, conclusions which the thinker only arrives at after laborious effort. And he was a young man without an illusion left, steadfastly looking the ugliest facts of our social order in the face.

On the last evening of his stay we were standing on the steel spider web of a suspension bridge which spans the Ohio, watching a sunset unfurl its banners of blood and fire.

All day there had been thunder and rain, and eastward behind the towers and spires of the city skyline still hung the retreating clouds, sullen and dark. Fritz pointed to where, against that gloomy cloud bank, high above the city and gilded red from the setting sun, rose two symbols: one on the tip of a spire, the other on the staff atop a tower: cross and flag.

“Church,” said he grimly, “and State.”

The next day he returned to Pittsburgh to register for the draft.

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July found me back in New England at a farm on the banks of the Merrimac in West Newbury. Returning one noon from an errand up the hills to the village I was hailed by the children with a shout:

“A friend of yours is here.”

“Who is he?”

“He told us his name but we’ve forgotten it.”

“What does he look like?”

Descriptions varied:

“He’s awfully strong,” said the boy.

“He has shiny black hair and black eyes,” said the littlest girl.

“He wears his coat off and his sleeves rolled up,” said the biggest little girl, and she added, with the spontaneous poetry of childhood, “And his hands are beeootiful!”

“Where is he?”

“Down by the river.”

Under the maples, lying in the tall grass at the foot of a steep bank which sloped to the stream, with children clambering all over him, was Fritz. He scrambled to his feet and came forward putting out his hand with that awkwardness of meeting after an absence which he never quite outgrew, but his eyes snapped with enjoyment at my astonishment.

It appeared that he had been painting some one in a Massachusetts mill city and had dashed up here between-whiles.

There is a tiny hut perched like a brown owl on a knoll in a grove of hickories beside the river. To this hermitage we retired and he related the news of the intellectual

underworld in Pittsburgh. Roger Baldwin had been there, much to his comfort. A friend whose portrait he had been painting, aware that the mildest radicalism had now become high treason, had remarked by way of chaffing him,

“I hope they give you a cell with a north light.”

He unburdened with a tone of sheer physical relief:

“This frantic enthusiasm for ‘democracy,’” said he, “on the part of people who have spent their whole lives combating it!”

He sat relaxed in a deep chair, hands hanging limp on its arms—hands large, strongly muscled, marked with heavy veins, the fingers full-fleshed at their tips, the skin bronzed by the sun.

Tatters of sunlight, reflected from the wavelets of the river obliquely up underneath the hickory boughs, flickered on the ceiling and walls of the hut.

Disillusioned he was, but not cynical. His humor was a bath to a sore spirit. He kindled, in the moral solitude of that hour, a little fire of faith and hope. It struck me anew, eyeing him as he sat there, what a beautiful creature he was, inside and out.

There was in him, too, an odd streak of stoicism. Keen as he was for “the eats,” he delighted in little acts of self-discipline. That afternoon, it being necessary for me to try for a nap, he cleared out to gather views of river and woods. An hour later I discovered this young Spartan, hands clasped behind head, spine stretched along the plank flooring of the narrow ledge in front of the hut, sleeping quietly. . . .

The next day he made himself everlastingly solid with the people at the farm by spending the whole morning fitting screens to the multitudinous doors and windows of their ark of a house. Everyone wanted Fritz to stay a month.

At nine that evening he left. As we trudged over the

road in the warm darkness of the summer night, he talked soberly of the dubious future.

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* *

He was not called until the following April, 1918. Twice that winter he came to Boston. Number 94 Charles Street had been dismantled. But the third-floor-back on Pinckney Street received him with an extra cot for bivouac.

. . . This should have been the longest chapter of all, and the best. I find that I cannot write it.

*
* *

Only a postscript. I asked him for a picture of himself.

“What do you want,” he inquired, “a painting?”

My ideas had been far more modest:

“Beggars should not be choosers. I will take what I can get: painting, photograph, snap-shot: and be thankful.”

“What size would you like?”

“Small enough so that it can go wherever I go.”

He made no promises. His way was to wait until the time came and then let the performance speak.

Not three weeks later it came: a sketch in oils, head and shoulders, ten inches by twelve, not at all the cold greenish grays I had anticipated from his habitual attitude of self-effacement, but on the contrary a scheme of rich golden browns. He has painted his own portrait with the same reticence which looks out of its eyes. Strangers seeing it remark,

“What a striking face!”

His friends view it and say,

“He was much finer looking than that.”

IX

The rest is seen dimly, as through a mist. His voice is heard, distinct and clear, but as from a great distance.

To Ralph Heard he writes from Camp Lee, Virginia:

“I am eating, sleeping, and drilling with physical enthusiasm,” and later, “Tell the fellows that the dust is gathering on my palette.”

A letter to me in May tells of taking his pipe at the day’s end and strolling into the woods of the camp to be alone with the song of birds and tints of sunset. Late in July came a letter from France describing a march “between gleam of gold in the west and a rising full moon in the east, . . . aëroplanes in action overhead and cannonading over the hills to the east.” Then occurs this:

“I am little different from as you know me, even though now in a machine gun company:—Curious irony.—”

And this:

“Continue your work . . . Other victories are transient.”

And this was his farewell:

“We have seen great visions and dreamed splendid dreams. And the faith you have in me,—which I prize so desperately,—I have in you, no matter where each of us may be headed. We will live the best we can—that, through our friendship, is all we ask of each other.”

*

* *

On January 23, 1919, one of his brothers writes from Le Mans, France:

“St. Remis du Plain is the name of the little town where Fred’s company was billeted. It is perched on the top of a hill in the middle of a vast plain and was visible for a long time as I headed towards it. This was the trip I had planned

long ago, and pictured a happy meeting; however, it was decreed otherwise. Passing up the narrow street I saw 'Headquarters, 136 M. G. Bn.' written on the door of an old stone house. The orderly room was full of officers. I inquired for Lieut. Rew, the one who had previously written to me, and introduced myself as Fred's brother. The officer who was dictating stopped work, came over and shook hands with me. The captain commanding the battalion came from behind the table, greeted me and offered a word of sympathy. Soon all the officers were grouped about me and I saw that Fred was considered one of their number. The captain said, 'He was the best sergeant I ever had.' They invited me to mess with them, and Lieut. Rew said I was to bunk with him, 'for my men have cooties,' but I saw this was all done so that they might have a chance to speak of Fred. One of the sergeants told me that when the news came, the officers were even more broken up about it than the men.

"I was introduced to the noncoms with whom Fred seems to have been a favorite. In the evening, as we sat around an open fireplace, I asked if Fred had had a 'buddy.' The sergeant with whom Fred used to sleep said, 'No. He was everybody's friend.'

"As I was walking up to the kitchen, a private stepped out of the mess line and came up to me saying he knew me through my resemblance to Fred. Soon the mess line was demoralized and I was the center of a lively mass all talking at once and I could easily see why the captain recommended him so highly as a sergeant. — 'He never said a harsh word,' — 'He was always cheerful and never kicked,' — 'When we complained about the feed or anything, he said it would be better later.' They talked so long that at last the cook asked me if I would not please eat so that they would eat and let him get through.

"The division left Camp Lee, June 21, 1918, and sailed

from Newport News on the Italian transport *Caserta*. It was a dirty boat, the feed rotten, and the trip rough. Everybody was disgusted. Fred was about the only one of the company who never missed a meal. A private told me that he and Fred were standing at the rail in the bow of the ship one night talking about a number of things. This fellow voiced the sentiment of most of the company when he said he only wanted to make one more ocean trip and that was in the reverse direction. Fred looked far out across the water and remarked: 'I could stand a few more.'

"They landed at Brest on July 5 and entrained at once for Souville. They used the French type of compartment cars where with ten men and full equipment there wasn't much room to move about. Fred was in charge of his compartment and, with his usual ingenuity, devised means of disposing of the equipment to best advantage for their comfort. He also carefully arranged the daily menu consisting of bread, corned beef, tomatoes, beans, and jam. He did all this in such a serio-comic way that the fellows are still laughing over the memories of the trip.

"On September 20 the division led the drive into the Argonne forest. This is reputed to have been the hardest battle of the war in respect to the Germans' shell fire and the suffering caused by the rainy weather and lack of shelter. Through it all there was not a healthier nor more cheerful man than Fred. Recognized by the commanding officer as having 'the coolest head in the company and afraid of nothing' he was made a sergeant after this battle over the heads of some old National Guardsmen; but there was not a murmur—all were satisfied. When they came out of the woods he helped the doctor with the wounded (he seems to have helped everywhere, from the kitchen to the captain's private office). After they had all been attended to, he asked the doctor to look him over. He had received three flesh wounds in shoulder and arm. He picked out the pieces of shrapnel himself and had the doctor

bandage him. After which he went about his work as usual.

“October 10 found the company in the St. Mihiel sector, and on October 22 it moved into Belgium. All this meant miles of weary hiking under a full pack; but Fred remained the same cheerful fellow as ever. He amused the whole company with his doings. He found an old hair-clipper among some salvage and immediately opened a barber shop where lieutenants as well as privates got their hair cut. Another thing that I recognized as characteristic were the remarks pertaining to his appetite. He never lost it. He was known to have ‘eats’ on his person all the time. He had a special knack of hunting out farm houses, engaging *madame* in conversation, and coming away with bread, eggs, or cheese in his knapsack. Occasionally he did some sketching and his letters were a joy to the lieutenant who censored them because of the excellent descriptions they contained . . .

“The company went over the top early in the morning of October 31. Fred was wounded in the left side by a piece of high explosive shell at about 5:30 A.M. It was before daylight and few knew he had been hit. When they did hear it, they were far in advance and Fred had been carried to Evacuation Hospital Number Five, at Staden, Belgium. He died there on November 2. One of the boys who helped carry him to the rear says that he was fully conscious despite the serious nature of his wound, and tells of how he directed them what to do—how he told them to leave him when the shells fell too fast (which they wouldn’t do)—of how they left him, quite himself, at the first-aid station . . .

“He was never referred to as a bully or even as a fighter—he was spared the grewsome experience of hand-to-hand fighting, for from the first the Germans were in full flight; but he was remembered for his cheerfulness, his kindness toward others and especially for his lack of harsh words. His favorite text from the Bible was that

part of the Sermon on the Mount known as the beatitudes, *and he often wondered why ministers did not preach on it more. He constantly spoke of this to the men.* (The italics are not in the original.)

“His fire has gone out, but he left a glow in the hearts of these men which will never go out.”

*

* *

And now it is time that a few questions be asked, simple and direct. It is due him.

Why is it that when he set himself to create he had to contend against that dead-weight of indifference if not the active hostility of organized society recorded in these pages; but when he was commandeered to destroy, that society clothed him, fed him, sheltered him, trained him, transported him, paid him, nursed him, and buried him?

It is well that we should know what has been squandered. He that might have ennobled generations of men with his great visions and his splendid dreams is mingling his clay with the soil of Belgium. He had the seeds of genius. Capitalism made him a machine gunner.

Is this the best we can find for our artists to do? Is it any wonder that the creative minds of to-day are finding themselves driven to social revolution as their art-form?

In the brown-owl hut beside the Merrimac that summer day in 1917 he remarked in a tone of indulgent irony:

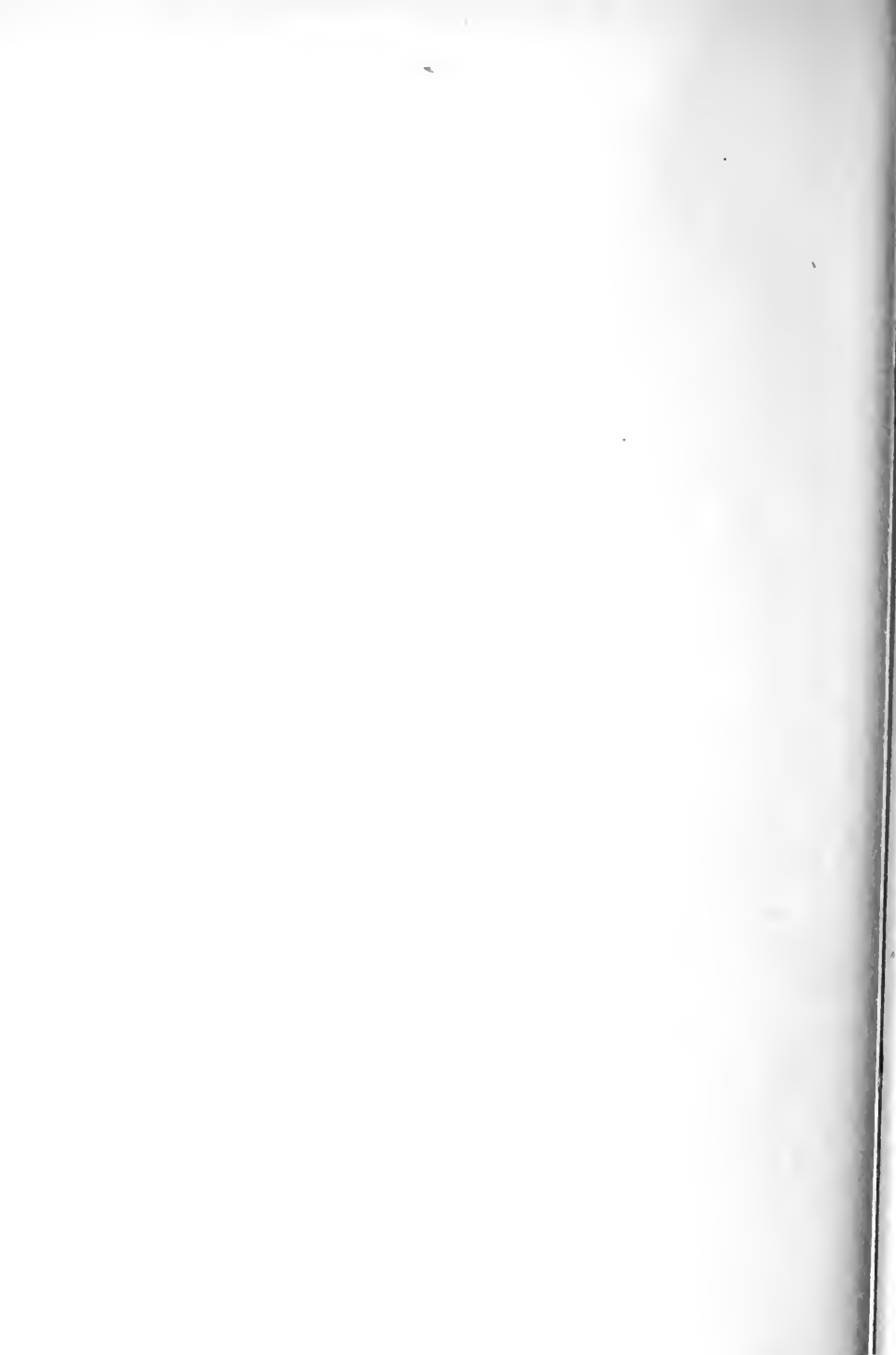
“The ‘military experts’ have found a nice, polite term for men killed or too badly maimed to fight any more.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“‘Wastage.’”

Allegro Assai

— Beethoven: Finale of The Ninth Symphony.



X

VISITATION

Here, at the end, let those measures of the Ninth Symphony sound: no dirge; but a pæan of joy. For in that choral ecstasy of Beethoven's hymn to human brotherhood speaks the whole meaning and purpose of the life that was.

Why have I detained you for a tale so plain? What was he but an obscure young painter, thirty years old, with his way to make? Why should I point him out to you among the millions? Because he was my friend? No. Because he is yours. Because I thought I saw in him the seeds of greatness? No. Because the seeds of greatness which were in him are in you; and he shall make you see them.

I give him to you young men to be your friend, loyal and high-minded. I give him to you young women to be your lover, clean of body and of soul. He will be worthy of your friendship and of your love, and you shall be worthy of his in return.

I give him to you in all the beauty of his youth and he shall never grow old, but he shall himself become one of the heroic friends, one of the great companions. I give you his soul to carry in your own, a life within a life. Through his eyes you may see the wonder and glory of the beautiful world which he saw so joyously. Let his generous heart beat through yours his passion for an ideal society and a better time than ours.

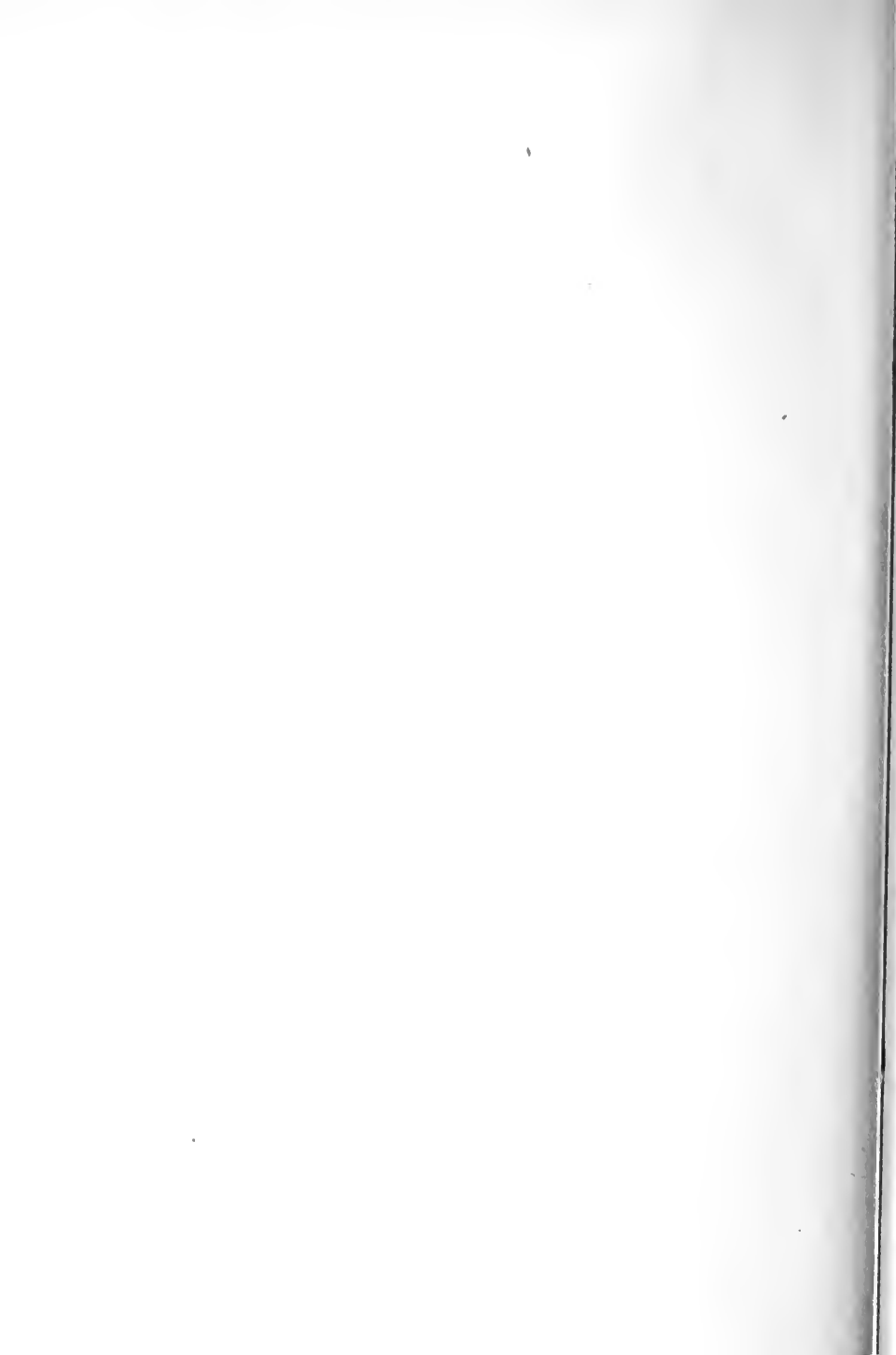
He is to be immortal. And it is you who must make him so. Let him kindle in your hearts a fire which will not go out. He that would have made great canvases glow with the might of his spirit and the splendor of his imagination shall not now live by art alone, but by the living deeds of you. You shall be his masterpieces. You, immortal youth, shall be his immortality.

Away from the dust and heat of the day, when the loud world crowds and clamors, he shall make for you, all in a dim, cool chamber of your souls, a sanctuary—a little space of sacred friendship—where you may enter and, closing the door, renew your vows.

You may have him to stand beside you in hours of triumph, and in hours of disaster; steadier of your aim, sustainer of your courage.

Sit in the twilight with folded hands and he shall speak to you. When moonbeams pour their silent music into your chamber at dead of night and your sight rejoices in them, it is he. Harken to the beat of surf along a lonely shore; to the song of the hermit thrush in dense thickets; to the whisper of the night wind among the leaves: "It is he!" Kindle to the charm and mystery of a face in the crowd, and "It is he!" Thrill at the return of many-blossomed spring, at the strength of men, at the grace of women, and your joy shall be his joy. In every visitation to you of the truth that not by hate, not by blows, but only by the love of the human heart can the world be won from its evil, he shall live, he shall live again. And the color and rhythm of life, the joy of begetting which he never knew, the joy of creating which he knew so abundantly, when it is yours shall be his also. And so all that is highest and best in you, all that inspired him and that he inspired, shall be the works of art by which he is remembered.

Immortal youth, let him be comrade and friend to you as he was to me; let him live forever in your young hearts, himself forever young, bathed in the glory of eternal dawn.



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