

EASTER LILIES

MARCH, 1894

THE McCOOK TRIBUNE.

An Easter Romance.

BY PAUL FLEMING.

LAUDE REMINGTON sat in his comfortable studio and watched the sputtering embers in the open fireplace. His giant figure looked as if it had been thrown into the luxurious arm chair, so utterly regardless of grace was his attitude. His chin rested heavily on the closed knuckles of his left hand. His huge legs were crossed in an unceremonious fashion. His brow was clouded with heavy wrinkles that bespoke thoughts of an unquiet nature.

Claude was an artist, in fair, almost affluent, circumstances. He may be said to have been born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, for his parents were wealthy and he was an only son, but, though the scion of a rich family, the young man had an inherent spirit of independence which urged him, after leaving college, to adopt some profession as a means of earning his own living. His natural talents leaned towards art, and after taking some preliminary lessons in drawing and painting, from a local teacher, he betook himself abroad and studied for several years in Paris, Vienna and Florence.

He was an apt scholar and soon made a name for himself in European art circles as an adept with the pencil and brush. Magazine publishers sought his work eagerly, and his paintings had a great demand and at high prices. So when Claude returned home to America in the summer of '92 his fame had already preceded him, and society in New York prepared to lionize, in becoming style, the young artist of whom the European critics had spoken so highly.

Mr. Remington would have been a very popular young man had he allowed himself to become so, but flattery and fawning were distasteful to him, and when he found that the fashionable sets in town were bent on making a social lion of him, he immediately sought retirement, and could rarely be induced to leave his own sumptuous apartments up town. Even the most influential members of society failed to draw him from his seclusion. Politely, but firmly, he declined all invitations to dinners, receptions and garden parties, until the higher circles of society began to think themselves snubbed and concluded that the famous Mr. Remington must be something of a crank.

There were a chosen few of his intimate friends, however, who knew the cause of Claude's dislike for gaiety. Rumors had been wafted over the Atlantic which brought a whisper of romance in them—the romance of an artist's love for a beautiful American girl whom he had met in one of his Alpine tours. The story took a vague shape, in fact several shapes: one had it that Claude was already married to the fair unknown but for certain family reasons they would not live together for a year or so. Another reason was that the girl's parents were opposed to her alliance with Claude, but on what account was not stated. One thing, however, seemed certain, and that was the young artist was deeply in love, and his romantic disposition was such that he silently fretted over the absence of the object of his affections.



"I said Constance was in Nice. I was mistaken, she is here!"

He certainly did not look a very gay young man as he half sat, half lounged there in the somber glow of the fire, moodily gazing into the dull, fiery glare of the coals as if he were studying some abstract problem in which the fire grate was concerned.

Presently he arose and shook himself like a huge retriever after a plunge in the water. His tall, massively built figure was the very picture of an athlete, and denoted great physical strength, but a close study of his face discovered almost a feminine beauty in the sweet sadness of its expression and contour. The eyes and the lines of the mouth had a look of fixed resignation to the inevitable.

It was with a deep drawn sigh that he took from the mantel a long Ger-

man pipe—his companion in many a sketching ramble in the south of Europe. He filled the meerschaum bowl mechanically with some choice Turkish tobacco and leisurely applied a match to the weed. Almost with affection he handled that pipe, and a more satisfied look crept into his eyes as he watched the blue smoke curl in circles from the bowl and ascend to the ceiling like the azure clouds that float over the far away Mediterranean. For fully ten minutes he smoked on in silence, then he laid aside his pipe and turned to his easel, on which rested the half finished portrait of a young girl. It was the picture of a maiden of eighteen or twenty, dressed in white and with just a single rosebud at her throat. On her head was a simple straw hat, and in her uplifted right hand a bunch of wild grapes which she had evidently just plucked from a vine that drooped above her. Her dark eyes sparkled with fun and her lips were parted in a merry smile that seemed contagious as one looked upon it. The background was unfinished, as were some details of the drapery, but even novice in matters would have pronounced the picture the work of a master hand. While Claude toyed with his brush, looking lovingly on the canvas face to which his art was giving life and reality, there came a gentle knock at the studio door, and in response to the word "come," a little colored "boy-in-livery" entered noiselessly, and handed the artist a card. Mr. Remington took the piece of pasteboard quietly, glanced at the name and said, "Show the gentleman in."

As the boy left the room the artist took a brown silk curtain from a side shelf and carefully drew it over the easel so as to effectually conceal the portrait. There was a slight tremor in his hand as he did so, and his face seemed to have flushed considerably. His brows, too, were deeper wrinkled, as if in anger.

One minute elapsed before the boy returned, ushering in a gentleman of middle age, whose dress and manner showed at once the unmistakable ease and grace of a traveled man of the world. He walked directly up to Claude and grasped his hand, though it seemed as if the artist were far from cordial in reciprocating the salutation. But the visitor did not notice, or did not seem to notice, any lack of hospitality on the part of the artist, and immediately commenced the conversation.

"Delighted to see you, my dear boy. Just came direct from the Riviera and have good news for you."

"Good news for me," repeated Claude in measured tones, "I wonder what good news anyone can bring me

from the Riviera. Nevertheless, Col. Bland, I am pleased to see one who takes my thoughts back to the days when all news was good to me. When were you in Mentone?"

"Not for months, but I was in Nice just two weeks ago and saw somebody there who begged me to see you without delay, so I flew to London as fast as the express would carry me, caught the Paris at Southampton and here I am!"

Claude was evidently struggling with a powerful emotion, striving to conceal the effect of his visitor's words. One word of interrogation alone left his lips.

"Constance?"

"No, not Constance herself, but her mother!"

"Her mother! why she sent me away!"

"Yes my boy, I know that, and I believe she meant to keep you away. She is a proud, haughty woman. All the Foster-Parkers were, and she is no exception. Everybody, even in the Paris colony, which is certainly the most exclusive set of Americans abroad, considered you a perfect match for Constance Blythe, but her mother had set her heart on that wealthy English baronet and so opposed your suit strenuously."



"Well, why did she wish you to see me?"

"I bear her personal assurance that her opposition to your marriage with Constance is withdrawn."

The greatest transformation ever seen in a human countenance was possibly right there in that Fifth Avenue studio as the afternoon March sunlight streamed in upon those two figures. Claude's joy was inexpressible in words, he merely wrung Colonel Bland's hand in silence.

"Constance has not been well, you know," continued the Colonel, in a voice that tried to be cheery, but seemed to lack the power. "To speak plainly, the separation from you preyed on her nervous system to such an extent that her strength gave way. At first Mrs. Blythe called it sentimentalism and tried to wean Constance from thoughts of her disappointment by providing extra gaieties, receptions, concerts and so forth, but it was to no purpose. At Christmas the poor girl had to take to her bed. Doctors prescribed for her in vain, until Sir William Jowitt, the fashionable English physician, learned the true particulars of her case, and frankly told Mrs. Blythe that the only sure way to save her daughter's life was to permit her to conduct her own matrimonial affairs. Constance is now at

from extreme poverty."

Claude laughed outright, for the first time during the interview.

"No," he said, in a voice full of confident satisfaction. "Fortunately my profession enables me to live well and also to keep a good account at my bank."

"You take many private commissions, I suppose—you were always clever at portraits," said Colonel Bland in an interested tone.

"Yes," replied Claude, lightly. "I have more requests for sittings than I can well attend to and the offers sometimes range as high as \$3,000, but—"

"Have you some work there—may I see it?" interrupted the Colonel, indicating the covered easel by an inclination of his head.

Claude arose from his chair and walked over to the easel. Then he paused and faced the Colonel with a peculiar look in his face.

"This is not painted from life but from memory, Colonel," he said, sadly. "It is a picture which you and I once saw together, two years ago next Easter day."

With a deft move of his hand Claude Remington pulled aside the brown silk curtain and Colonel Bland stood spellbound before the portrait. The artist watched him while his eyes

the Royale, and is some what better because I believe she knows the nature of my mission to New York."

Claudell listened with rapt attention, the working of the muscles in his face, and its constant changing color alone denoting the conflicting emotions struggling within him. Hope, joy, sorrow, fear, despair came and went in kaleidoscopic expression on his features. As the Colonel finished the artist asked, hurriedly—

"When does the quickest steamer sail?"

"The Paris," on Saturday, is the first fast boat. Will you go back with me on that day?"

"Yes, I will go direct to Constance. You say she is in Nice?"

"They will stay there all summer, I believe," replied the Colonel, "but now that you have decided about going tell me about yourself! Rumor said that when you left our party so abruptly in Mentone, you practically went to the devil, that is, to the gambling rooms of Monaco, which amounts to the same thing."

"Rumor was truthful," remarked Claude nodding his head.

"And it also said that you lost heavily," resumed Col. Bland, fixing his keen eyes on the young artist.

"I lost all I had," replied Claude, carelessly. "I could not lose any more, except by borrowing, and I would not do that for gambling purposes."

"Still," continued the Colonel, glancing approvingly around the palatial apartment, "you do not appear to be suffering

For fully five minutes he stood with his eyes chained to the canvas, Claude meanwhile watching him with the keen delight of an artist who knows that his work has enraptured a critic. Then the Colonel spoke deliberately. "I said Constance was in Nice. I was mistaken—she is here!" and he pointed to the easel.

"Thank you, Colonel, for your graceful compliment," replied Claude.

"The heart has a better memory than the eye," continued the visitor, "and for that reason I think that no one but yourself could possibly paint that picture. There is not only consummate art but every evidence of heart in the work. Can you finish it in time to take it with us?"

"I will try. I have only worked on it occasionally, more for pastime than for any other purpose. It is nearly six months since I commenced it. You see, Colonel, when I got that cutting note of curt dismissal from Mrs. Blythe, shattering my hopes of ever making Constance my wife, I felt, as you said awhile ago, like going to the devil. I plunged wildly into dissipation, just like the headstrong fool I was, but a few months of that kind of thing convinced me that if I wished to save my health and reputation it would be wiser for me to drive away care and sorrow by hard work rather than by indulgence in gambling and other delusive excitements. So I went to London and started in doing a little work for the illustrated papers. The few portraits I painted there got me favorable notice, in fact the press was too flattering altogether. I would have stayed in London but for the fact that Constance was within two days' reach and I could not trust myself to obey Mrs. Blythe's injunction not to see her daughter again. So I came back home to find myself famous, and never was fame more distasteful to a mortal. Clubs and coteries wanted to dine and wine me. The fashionable set sent special invitations to receptions and dinners, society leaders almost pleadingly requested my presence at some of their functions. I tried it for a little while, but the calls upon my time became so persistent that I had to cut society and, thank heaven! society has since cut me and left me alone to myself. To be perfectly candid with you, Colonel, I was almost denying myself to you, for I felt as if your conversation would naturally lead back to a subject which I had been striving to banish from my mind."

"That was why you had the picture covered?"

"Precisely. I was afraid the sight of it might remind you of Constance and make you speak of her."

"Well, my dear Claude, you see I came here with that view, picture or no picture. I am stopping at the Savoy. Will you come up to dinner this evening and let us have an old time chat? We ought to have a deal of news to exchange after twelve months."

"I shall be pleased to join you, Colonel. At what hour do you dine?" asked Claude.

"Seven-thirty. Now I must hurry down town to Wall street to transact some business. Good day, Claude, I shall expect you this evening."



Claude entered the room and almost rushed to the bedside.