

A STUDY IN YELLOW.

[The Story of a woman who chose art.]

I knocked at the studio door that summer afternoon, and the sweetest voice in the world cried out: "Come in, Charlie."

"How did you know it was Charlie?"

"O, I knew by my nose and my two big toes," she answered, laughing (she always talked to me as if I were still in kilts), and, working away for dear life, without looking up, standing in front of her tall easel (she invariably stood, Chloe did; somehow I never could bear to see an artist sit at her easel) putting the finishing touches on a little study, a bit of out-door life—a clothes line, upon which some sunflecked things, sheets, and pillow slips and towels, flopped in the breeze. It was a fact; you could almost see them flop, and how she ever managed that sunshine goodness only knows:

The slanting north light fell full upon her bronze head, and flung a heavy shadow underneath her chin—just the shadow she would have wished if she had been painting her own portrait, but Chloe did not run to heads. On the whole, I was glad of it, too, for I have a sort of horror of studio walls hung with rows of faces, some of them ill-drawn—and the best of artists will draw them badly at times—frowning, scowling, laughing down at one. It is bad enough to have to look at real people with their thousand and one expressions.

Chloe painted mostly small landscapes and masses of beautiful flowers that lacked nothing but the smell.

The north light also flung a shadow underneath her eyes. I thought then that it was this studio shadow that gave to Chloe's eyes their pathetic intensity, for I was sure no pathos lurked in her life; now I know.

As I saw her—and I saw her every day of that happy, idle summer—she seemed fuller of content than most girls, always busy working at her precious bits of nature, surrounded by her little gem like canvases, worth, according to my idea, their weight in gold. Among these pictures that hung on her walls were fields of daisies, green meadows in sunshine and shadow; now and then in summer showers; indeed, I had often sat with her, under the same umbrella, through these summer showers, patiently submitting to the determined drip, drip, drip of the water from the umbrella points down the back of my neck, while she worked, catching the very feel of the soaked grasses and the misty grays of the tearful skies. Those were very lifelike pictures, for afterward when I saw them in the studio I could feel the drip of that water down the back of my neck.

If ever girl was bound up in her work it was this girl Chloe, this kind girl who allowed me, her faithful slave in knickerbockers, to stretch myself here on the meadows and hillsides, by little brooklets, or under the shadows of oaks, and watch her as she worked, losing myself not always in the picture rapidly forming under her skillful fingers, but oftener in the dimpled roundness of her pretty little hand.

Dear Chloe, it was only puppy love I gave you; and who shall say but what puppy love is best after all, the fresh young love that knows no other experience, that, in passing, holds nothing of that weary feeling—I have trod this road before.

"Well, Charlie, don't stand there mooning forever," said Chloe; "you make me nervous. I haven't seen you yet, but I know you've got your mouth open." (Saucy thing!) "Look at that study of chrysanthemums yonder while I finish this. I've only got to put a dash or so of sunshine on this sheet, and I'm through. There is a break in the branches above it and the sunshine leaks through."

"Don't hurry, Chloe," I said. "The sun is high yet."

And I looked at the chrysanthemum

while I waited. I have never liked those flowers; they are such forced, hot-house things; so artificial; besides, they haven't a sweet smell, and the smell is half of a flower. I passed on to a study of yellow roses, a great bunch of dewy yellow roses in a brown stone jug. My! you could almost smell those roses. The near ones stood out in bold relief with glowing bright lights, while the others melted fetchingly into the creamy tints of the background. Close to them the distant rose leaves look mere strokes of a paint laden brush—a step or two back and the effect was perfect. How it provoked my dear girl to have people nose her canvas! In her work there were no sharp and vivid contrasts that hurt the eye; her tones blended softly, as they do in nature.

This study was a veritable symphony in yellow, yellow roses, brown stone jug; a bit of brownish, yellowish background, and a grayish, greenish, yellowish foreground transparent with the shadow of the jug. On this foreground, so natural as to have almost an earthly feeling lay some scattered rose leaves.

"What are you doing, Charlie?" asked Chloe.

"Only trying to push these roses back into the jug. They are too far forward; I am afraid they will fall out."

"Little flatterer," she laughed; "I wish all my buyers thought as well of my work as you do."

"Most of them do, and you know it," I replied heatedly. It vexed me to hear Chloe disparage her work, for she was becoming famous for her little canvasses. "Hurry up, now, while I pick up these rose-leaves in front of the jug."

"Little goose!" she laughed. Now if there was one thing I cared above all others to hear, it was Chloe's laugh. It was the most musical thing to me in the world. As a rule, I did my best to provoke it. When she quit laughing, then I went to a storm picture hanging on the wall and pushed it straight. "Chloe," I said, "you have made these clouds so heavy that the canvass hangs crooked half the time."

Then she laughed again while I listened. It was sweet as a catbird in a thicket.

"At this rate," said she, "we shall never go sketching in the world. I guess I'll have to leave this until morning, and go now."

She stepped from the easel, converted her pretty hands into two charming tubes, and looked through them.

"That will do I think," she said, and I making two tubes of my own warty hands, thought it would do very well indeed. It was a dear, homelike little thing, sweet and tender, exhibiting, though I didn't know it until long after when I became better versed in such matters, a really wonderful technique. At that time I was unacquainted with that much-abused word.

"Hurry up now and get out my paint box and sketching easel," said this bossy Chloe, "while I put on my hat."

"All right," said I, but I watched her stick two long pins through her hat, ducking to look in a tiny mirror hanging on the wall, before I dived into the closet for the things. She was so pretty with her arms raised like that.

"You'll have to be buying you another easel before long, Chloe; this old thing is getting rocky."

"I know it," said she, "I'll buy one the very next picture I sell. Now come along. By the time we get out there the sun will be just right on our field of brown-eyed Susans," for that was our destination, a field of brown-eyed Susans.

Outside, Chloe trudged ahead along the dusty roads, while I followed, laden down like a little pack-mule with the easel and paint-box—happy to be so laden, willing to carry anything and everything, so long as I might follow in her wake, enamored as I was of the peachy roundness of her cheek and the fall of the sunlight on her hair, my pretty Chloe!

"Charlie," said she, "look at the purple in this path. Isn't it beautiful? You take some grays and browns, and just a trifle of brown madder, for a road like this—and there you are!"

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