

OBLIVION.

The Story of a Painter's Opportunity.

On a long cane lounge at the side of the room a man lay asleep, one velvety-clad arm thrown across his eyes to shut out the hard glare from the skylight above him. Through a colored window at the end of the studio a bar of sunlight struck redly and fell upon the dence bronze curls of his hair and head and the short, powerful fingers of his upturned hand. A half-smoked cigarette had fallen upon the dark red rug beside him. A yellow-backed French novel lay at the man's feet. His lips, red and full, were half unclosed in a faint smile.

The shutting of a door he had left ajar did not rouse him. A woman came in, swishing her long skirts over the bare floor. She wore a loose house-gown of peacock-blue silk; somewhat faded and worn about the hem. Her dark rusty-brown hair was twisted up not too tidily in an unbecoming knot. Her bright-blue eyes blinked in the strong light, and she put up one long nervous hand to shield them.

She stood still for a moment in the middle of the floor, looking at the sleeping man. Then she went to his side, picked up the novel and the cigarette, tossed the latter into the fire in the grate, and looked at the book as though she would have liked to dispose of this in the same manner. However, she laid it down on a table, pushing it under a pile of other books.

The light at its strongest fell upon some large object standing in the centre of the floor on a wooden pedestal, shrouded in a white cloth. The woman's eyes fell on this with a bitter curiosity. She hesitated for some time, glancing at the man on the lounge. At last she went up to the pedestal and carefully lifted off the cloth, which had rested on splinters of wood stuck into the wet clay.

There was revealed the figure of a woman, somewhat more than life size, lying at full length in an attitude of rigid calm, the arms straight at the sides, the hands laid palms upward, with relaxed fingers. The loose hair swept sideways from her face over a sheaf of flowers as yet only roughly indicated, and curled in a deep wave over her arm. The thin drapery, drawn in long oblique folds from right to left, revealed outlines full and firmly moulded, composed now to an unnatural quiet. The face, too, with heavy, down-cast lids and lightly closed, full-bowed mouth, seen in profile, wore an expression of life held in some strange trance. It was not sleep; a latent mockery hid beneath those brows and lurked in the corners of those unsmiling lips.

The clay model seemed nearly finished, with the exception of the detail of the feet.

"Well, what are you doing?" demanded a voice suddenly and sharply. The man stood up, yawning and frowning slightly.

"I wanted to see how you get on," said the woman, her fingers twitching nervously at a corner of the white cloth, which trailed upon the floor. She tried to speak lightly and to smile, but her lips were dry and hard.

"You might have asked. You know I hate prying about before the thing's finished."

The artist's thick brows knitted over his gray-blue eyes. He got up and took the sheet from the woman's loose grasp.

"Will it be done in time?" she asked absently, her eyes still studying the recumbent figure.

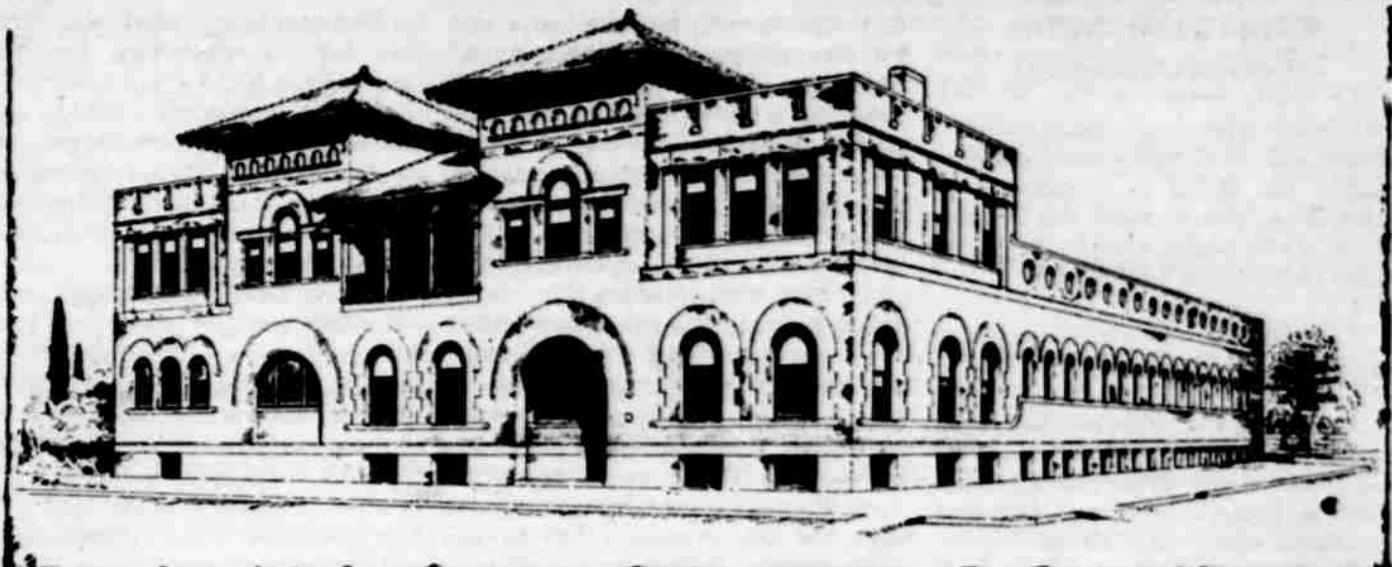
"Well, I suppose so."

She glanced at him now sharply with a certain irony.

"Are you satisfied with it?"

His shrug spoke an irritation which he did not try to conceal.

"What a question! As though I were ever satisfied."



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His eyes, resting, too, on the clay figure darkened moodily. And the woman, watching, smiled—a swift, involuntary, yet bitter smile.

"Has Masterson seen the design?" she asked. "And does he like it?"

"Like it"—the sculptor began, and stopped abruptly, casting a hard look at his wife. A latent irritation edged this look, which seemed to comprehend every detail of her untidy person, and expressed a distaste approaching active dislike. He shook his broad shoulders as though to dismiss her questions, and turned his back on her. Instant resentment appeared in the woman's eager eyes and compressed lips.

"I think it is unworthy of you," she said impetuously. "It is not up to the level of your work."

The artist moved toward his statue as though to veil it from this unwelcome criticism.

"Fortunately your opinion, my dear, is not of prime importance," he said indifferently.

"You used to value it," she flashed at him. "And you trusted to it, once!"

His suppressed smile stung her almost beyond control.

"At least you seemed—it may have been only pretense, like the rest."

"My dear Martha, are we going to quarrel—and pary, over what?"

"Quarre!"—she stopped and bit her thin under lip. "It seems that we cannot speak to one another without quarreling."

"Let me suggest, my dear, that we keep in future to our different sides of the line, and meet, when we do meet, on common ground. You have your own occupations—I my work. Let us not interfere"

[To be Continued.]

Young Mother—What makes you turn your back every time the baby squalls?
Young Hubby (meekly)—I haven't the courage to face the music.

"How do you like living in a flat?"
"First rate. Every time my wife has company I have to go out to make room."

De Sappy—When I was a child I had a fall that knocked me senseless.

Miss Pert—I suppose it is too late now to do anything about it.

Chawley—I'd have you understand, suh, that I belong to Chicago.

New Yorker—Oh, thunder! is that all? I thought from the way you talked that Chicago belonged to you.

The doctor says there's something the matter with my head.

Did you pay a doctor to tell you that?

She—Do you believe there are marriages in heaven?

He—Not if it's really heaven.

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