

M. DELAPORTE'S PICTURE.

The studios stood in a meadow high above the quaint little fishing village of Trenoweth. The meadow, which the proprietor had just named "Le Champ des Beaux Arts," came suddenly upon one as a surprise on mounting the stony, dusky street that led up from the quay. The studios—three in number—were a still greater surprise, so modern and out of place they looked in this little Old World nook, where only fisher folk had lived and worked since the village had existed.

History stated that the little village had suffered severely at the hands of the Spaniards in 1595, at which time these ruthless invaders had partly destroyed the beautiful old church, which stood in the parish of Polwyn, about a mile off.

There was much that was picturesque and quaint about the little hamlet, and wonderful beauty of bay and coast, where the wide blue sea rolled bold and unbroken to the Lizard Point.

So, in the course of time, it entered the mind of one Jasper Trenoweth, owner of the old Trenoweth, and accounted by the country folk as a somewhat eccentric individual, to buy the waste piece of a meadow land that commanded so unrivalled a view, and build thereon a set of studios for the benefit of such artists as cared for marine subjects. The studios had been built and tenanted for some years, and the place itself had acquired considerable favor among the "Brothers of the Brush." Jasper Trenoweth was a man of great culture and artistic taste.

Indeed, he himself had worked and studied as an artist in his youth, with no inconsiderable success. But of late years, and, strangely enough, since the first year that the studios had been completed and opened, Jasper Trenoweth had never touched brush or pencil. He gave no reason, but then he was a man too reserved and cold to give confidence easily.

To artists in their days of struggling and despair he had ever been a friend, but he conferred benefits so delicately that it would have been a difficult matter to trace them back to his hand. A cold man, a cynical man, a man scant of praise, intolerant of feebleness, so said the art world; but here and there some nature would recognize the deep tenderness and nobility of this unknown benefactor; would learn that no man held genius in greater reverence or gave to it more ready help.

Five years had passed since the studios had been tenanted—four since the strange rule had been framed and published by their owner that they would never be let to a woman artist. He was very strict on this point. He would give no reason, and suffer no questioning, but the rule, once made, had been rigidly adhered to.

Various tenants had held the studios from time to time, some remaining but a few months, others for a year or more. One artist, however, a young Irishman, celebrated for his sea pieces, and a great favorite with Jasper Trenoweth, had held his studio ever since they had been opened. This young man knew more of the cynical and reserved owner than any of the "art brotherhood" to whom his tall figure, and grave stern face, and quiet merciless criticisms were familiar.

As far as it was in him to unbend to, or care for any one, Jasper had unbent to Denis O'Hara; perhaps because the bright sunny nature and genial temperament were so unlike his own—perhaps because he recognized in the youth of 25 those possibilities which he, too, loved art more than fame, in an age when men care all for fame and little for art.

For five years the two had been constantly together, save for some months when Jasper Trenoweth would be travelling in Italy, or Switzerland, or Norway. It was after returning from one of these tours that one evening Jasper Trenoweth took his way down the hillside to the studios.

The general room where the artists usually sat and smoked and drank coffee in evenings was bright with lamp-light and firelight, as he opened the door, and stood for a moment on the threshold looking at the group round the fireplace.

They sprang up at his advent to give him a warm welcome. Brushes had been laid aside, easels forsaken. On the morrow the pictures destined for acceptance or rejection at the Royal Academy would be on view to the village folk, or gentry around. Hard work was over for a time. It remained to be seen what its results would produce.

"I suppose you've come to see what we've been doing," said Denis O'Hara, shaking him warmly by the hand. "You couldn't have hit on a better time, only—"

He stopped and glanced round at his companions, a momentary chill and embarrassment on his bright face, and in his usually gay young voice.

"Only—what?" said Jasper Trenoweth, his deep tones sounding less stern than usual as he glanced round at the familiar scene.

Denis O'Hara seemed to constitute himself spokesman. "Sit down," he said, "and I'll tell you in what schoolboy fashion we were going to amuse ourselves. You see those sketches, * * * we found them in that cupboard yonder, and after some valuable and impartial criticism—which you've missed—we agreed to relate each a story of the origin or subject of one particular sketch, to be selected by vote."

"A good idea and interesting, if you tell the truth," said Jasper Trenoweth. "You must not let my visit interfere with your proposed amusement."

He came forward and stood by the little table, looking down with grave, unsmiling eyes at the scattered suggestions before him. Idly enough his hand turned over the scattered sheets. The three men resumed their chairs and pipes. They were used to his visits and ways, and accepted them without remark. Denis O'Hara alone of the group watched the face that was bent over the sketches, watched it with that sense of interest and speculation that it had always aroused in his breast. It was usually so calm and impressive a face that he was startled to see it flash darkly, hotly to the very brow, as the hand so idly moving among the scattered sheets turned up one and seemed arrested by that one.

A quiver as of pain, or the memory of pain, disturbed the usually impassive features. Jasper Trenoweth's eyes flashed

and started on the young and earnest face so intently watching him.

"Who—who did that?" he asked hoarsely.

"It is mine," he said simply.

For a moment the man who had asked that question stood silent and still, gazing down at the picture in his hand, his thoughts and memories centered in something it had recalled. Something—a dream, a hope, a memory.

"All—even men, the coldest and hardest of men, may have one such dream, one such hope, one such memory. 'So it is yours, that sketch,' said Jasper Trenoweth. 'But it is unfinished. Lend me your pencil, Denis; you may have the credit of the sketch, but I think I alone could tell the story aright.'"

"And you will, you will!" cried Denis O'Hara, eagerly. "How often I've wanted to know—how often I've wondered. Trenoweth, don't think me intrusive or curious, but you know that old folly—the romance of that first year we spent here—if only I knew what had become of—her!"

For a moment Jasper Trenoweth was silent. The others now roused and wondering were looking at him, and at Denis, marveling at the unwonted excitement of the one, the disturbance of the other. Then they saw the pencil working rapidly over the panel that Jasper Trenoweth held. No one spoke. Swiftly with unerring certainty, with that firmness and ease which bespoke certain knowledge and artistic skill, the sketch grew and lived before their eyes, and Denis O'Hara, breathless and wondering, watched it as no one else watched it, for to him it meant what it could never mean to any one else, or so, in youth's blind egotism, he imagined.

Then with a deep drawn breath almost a sigh, Jasper Trenoweth handed him the sketch and took the vacant chair placed for himself.

The face of the young artist grew pale as he looked at the little picture.

He looked questioningly at his friend. "I—I cannot understand," he said, hesitatingly. "I could not tell the story from this now."

A faint smile quivered on those pale set lips of Jasper Trenoweth. "No?" he said. "But the sketch was yours; describe it."

"A—large room; one, it seems, of many rooms. Pictures cover the wall. Before one picture a group of figures standing. Behind the group a man, his frame bent, almost crippled it seems, leaning on a woman's arm. I—I know the woman—I made this sketch of her long years ago—but—"

"I know what you would say," interrupted Trenoweth. "Tell the story of that woman as you know it. I will finish it."

THE YOUNG ARTIST'S STORY.

Denis O'Hara kept the sketch in his hand and glanced at it from time to time as he spoke.

"When I came here," he said, "I had the place all to myself. I came in one of those fits of enthusiasm at which you all laugh. Our friend Trenoweth introduced me to the place, gave me inestimable hints and (no use shaking your head, Jasper; you shall not always hide your light under a bushel) in every way he made me at home and comfortable. Altogether it was very pleasant, and I am not sure that I felt pleased when one evening he stroled down here to show me a letter he had received from one of our fraternity asking to hire a studio for three months in order to complete a picture."

"The handwriting was bold and clear; the signature at the end of the simple, concise words only 'M. Delaporte.' We discussed and speculated about M. Delaporte. We wondered if he was old or young, agreeable or the reverse; if he would be a bore, or a nuisance—in fact, we talked a great deal about him during the week that intervened between his letter and his arrival. Trenoweth saw to the arrangements of the studio. It was No. 11. He had agreed to let, and gave directions as to trains, etc., and then left me to welcome the new-comer who was to arrive by the evening train. I had been out all day, and when I came home tired, cold and hungry, I saw lights in No. 11, and thought to myself, 'My fellow artist has arrived, then.' Thinking it would be only civil to give him welcome, I walked up to the door and knocked. A voice called out, 'Come in!' and, turning the handle, I found myself in the presence of a woman! For a moment I was too surprised to speak. She was mounted on a short step-ladder arranging some velvet draperies, and at my entrance she turned and, with the rich-lured stuffs forming a background for the pose of the most beautiful figure woman could boast of, faced me with as much ease and composure as—well, as I lacked."

"Mr. Trenoweth?" she asked, inquiringly.

"Her voice was one of those low, rich, contralto voices, so rare and so beautiful."

His own voice trembled; he glanced again at the sketch in his hand. "But then everything about her was beautiful and perfect. That says enough. 'I'm not Mr. Trenoweth,' I said, 'I'm only an artist living in the next studio. I—I came here to see if Mr. Delaporte had arrived; I beg your pardon for intruding.'"

"Do not apologize," she said frankly. "This studio is let to me, and you are very welcome."

"To you?" I said, somewhat foolishly. "I thought you were a man."

"She laughed. 'I have not that privilege,' she said. 'But I am an artist, and art takes no count of sex. I hope we shall be friends as well as neighbors.'"

"I echoed that wish heartily enough. Who would not in my place, and with so charming a companion? There and then I set to work to help her arrange her studio and fix her easel."

"Of course, Jasper and I having decided that M. Delaporte was a man, had expected him to rough it like the rest of us. I could not let her stay in Trenoweth's studio, but took her up the hillside to a farmhouse, where I felt certain they would accommodate her. When Trenoweth heard of the new artist's sex he was rather put out. I could not see why myself, and I agreed that the mistake was our own."

"However, when he came down and saw

M. Delaporte here I heard no more about the disadvantages of sex. At the end of a month we knew little more about her than we did on that first evening. I opined that she was a widow, but no hint, however skilful; no trap, however baited, could force her into confidence or self betrayal. We called her Mrs. Delaporte. Her name was Musette, she told me. Her mother had been a French woman; of her father she never spoke. She worked very hard, often putting me to shame; but still she would not let me see the picture, always skilfully turning the easel so that the canvas was hidden whenever Jasper or myself entered the studio. We were never permitted to do so in working hours, but when the daylight faded, and the well-known little tea table was set out, we often dropped in for a cup of tea and a chat. It was all so pleasant, so homelike, and—"

He paused, and laid down the sketch. The usual gaiety and brightness of his face was subdued and shadowed.

"I—well, it's no good to dwell on it all now," he said abruptly. "Of course I fell madly in love with her. Who could help it? I'm sure I used to bore Trenoweth considerably at that time, though he was very patient. And she was just the same—always—calm, friendly, gracious, absorbed in her work, and to all appearances unconscious of what mischief her presence had wrought. As the third month drew near to its end I grew desperate. But she laughingly evaded all my hints, and would only receive me at the farmhouse."

"I believe Trenoweth was equally unsuccessful. At last I could stand it no longer. I spoke out and told her the whole truth. Of course," he laughed somewhat bitterly, "it was no use. If she had been my mother or my sister she could not have been more serenely gracious, more pitiful or more surprised. I—I had made a fool of myself, as we men call it."

"So, suddenly, without a word to Trenoweth or herself, I packed up my traps and started off on a sketching tour through Cornwall. When I came back the studio was closed, and Trenoweth had gone away. The man left in charge, and who made the arrangements for letting them, told me that a new rule had been made by their landlord. They were never to be let to women artists. That is all my part of the story. This sketch is only the figure I remember."

He glanced at Jasper Trenoweth, who silently held out his hand for the sketch.

For a moment silence reigned throughout the room. The eyes of all were on the bent head and sad, grave face of the man who sat there before them, his thoughts apparently far away, so that he seemed to have forgotten his promise to finish the story which Denis O'Hara had begun.

At last he roused himself. "There is not much to add," he said slowly. "All that Denis has said of Musette Delaporte is true, and more than true. She was one of those women who are bound to leave their mark on a man's life and memory. After Denis left so abruptly I saw very little of her. She seemed restless, troubled and disturbed. Her mind was absorbed in the completion of her picture. That unrest and dissatisfaction which is ever the penalty of enthusiasm had now taken the place of previous hopefulness. 'If it should fail,' she said to me. 'Oh, you don't know what that would mean. You don't know what I have staked on it.'"

"Still she never offered to show it to me, and I would not presume to ask. I kept away for several days, thinking she was best undisturbed."

"At last one day I walked down to the studio. I knocked at the door. . . . There was no answer. I turned the handle and entered. In the full light of the sun, set as it streamed through the window, stood the easel, covered no longer, and facing me, as I paused on the threshold, was the picture. I stood there too amazed to speak or move. . . . It was magnificent. If I had not known that only a woman's hand had converted that canvas into a living, breathing history I could not have believed it. There was nothing crude or weak or feminine about it. The power and force of genius spoke out like a living voice, and seemed to demand the homage it so grandly challenged. Suddenly I became aware of a sound in the stillness—the low, stifled sobbing of a woman. . . . I saw her then, thrown face downward on the couch at the farthest end of the room, her face buried in the cushions, her whole frame trembling and convulsed with a passion of grief. 'Oh, Maurice! she sobbed, and then again that name—'Maurice! Maurice! Maurice!'"

"I closed the door softly and went away. There seemed to me something sacred in this grief. . . . I—I could not intrude on it. She was so near to fame, and yet she lay weeping her heart out yonder like the weakest and most foolish of her sex, for—well, what could I think, but that it was for some man's sake?"

He paused; his voice seemed a little less steady, a little less cold.

"On the morrow," he said abruptly, "she was gone, leaving a note of farewell, and—thanks for me. I felt a momentary disappointment. I should like to have said farewell to her, and it was strange, too, how much I missed her and Denis. The loneliness and quiet of my life grew more than lonely as the days went on, and at last made up my mind to go to London. Whether by chance or purpose I found myself there on the day the Academy opened. All who are artists know what that day means for them. I—I was an artist enough to feel the interest of art triumphs, and the sorrow of its failures. I went there half London was thronging, and mingled with the crowd, artistic, critical and curious, who were gathered in the Academy galleries. I passed into the first room. I noticed how the crowds surged and pushed and thronged around one picture there, and I heard murmurs of praise and a wonder from scores of lips as I, too, tried to get sight of what seemed to them so marvelous and attractive. At last a break in the throng favored me. I looked over the heads of some dozen people in front of the picture, and I saw—the picture I had gazed at in such wonder and delight in the studio of Musette Delaporte! Deservedly honored, it hung there on the line, and already its praises were sounding, and the severest critics as well as the most eager enthusiasts were giving it fame."

"I turned away at last. My steps were, however, arrested on the outskirts of the crowd by sight of a woman whose figure seemed strangely familiar. She—she did not see me as for a moment I lingered there. Then I noticed she was not alone. Leaning on her arm was a man, his face

pale and worn, as if by long suffering, his frame bent and crippled. As his eyes caught the picture I saw the sudden light and wonder that leaped into his face. I saw, too, the glory of love and tenderness in hers. I drew nearer, the man was speaking: 'How could you do it?' he said, 'how could you?' 'Oh, Maurice, forgive me,' said that low, remembered voice. 'Dearest, are we not one in heart and soul and name? I only finished what you had so well begun. You were so ill and helpless, and when you went to the hospital, oh, the days were so long and so empty. I meant to tell you, but when it was finished I had not the courage, so I just sent it, signed, as usual, M. Delaporte. I—I never dared to hope it would be accepted. After all, what did I do? The plan, the thought, the detail all were yours, only my poor weak hand worked when yours was helpless.'"

"I was so close I heard every word, so close that I saw him bend and kiss with reverence the hand that she called poor and weak, so close that I heard the low breathed murmur from his lips, 'God bless and reward you, my noble wife!'"

"And she was married all the time!" said Denis plaintively. "She might have told us!"

Jasper Trenoweth was silent.

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