

'Yes, yes; Norton paints charming portraits of women,' admitted Tom Morley, Elizabeth's fiancé, that evening, when she told him where she had been. 'He is a fine fellow, too, and a gentleman; but eccentric, as, no doubt, you will soon notice. It is said he has never recovered from his grief over the death of his wife, although it happened years ago.'

The next day the sittings began.

Although so pleasing to look at, Miss Van Ruyter could not be called a beauty. Her features, though fairly good, were irregular. The fascination of her face consisted in a certain sweetness of expression that reflected a charming personality. She moved in the world of society, yet was not of it; she had been educated in a convent, and her tastes were simple. Naturally cheerful, at times even vivacious, she was also very conscientious and unaffectedly devout. During the hours when she sat for her portrait, she had many people and things to think about—her father, her lover, the care-free life of her girlhood, the new sphere of duty of which her wedding day would be the threshold. And sometimes, too, soaring higher, her thoughts, perhaps, dwelt upon 'the beauty of things unseen.'

On the occasions of the sitting, however, she was not always silent or absorbed; she liked to talk to Norton, and they became friends. He was as old as her father; frequently there was something paternal in his tone as he conversed with her. Of the eccentricity of which Tom Morley had spoken, Elizabeth saw no signs for several weeks. By December the portrait was nearly finished.

One morning Miss Van Ruyter came to the studio unexpectedly. After sending Mr. Norton word that she could not give him a sitting, she had suddenly changed her mind. It was a 'gray day,' and Norton was at work without sitter or model. As Elizabeth entered the room, he hastily drew a curtain half way across his canvas, but, upon recognising his visitor, and, as if on second thought, as quickly pushed it back again. Absalom had disappeared. Mammy took her accustomed place on the corner settle. The artist had discovered long ago that she could not see well without the spectacles she was too amusingly vain to wear, and that she was also a little deaf.

'I was able to come after all,' began Miss Van Ruyter cheerfully. Then she broke off with a little cry of admiration as her eyes fell upon the picture on the painter's easel. Norton again started forward as if to cover it; but, deterred this time perhaps by her interest, he again drew back, and Elizabeth noticed that he sighed as if involuntarily. The picture was the portrait of a woman, no longer young, but still beautiful. Clear, frank, and true the dark eyes looked from the canvas into the girl's very heart, yet in them there seemed the mystery of an infinite longing, as of a spirit not quite at peace. The lovely mouth was so sweet, however, that Elizabeth wished she could kiss it, as she had often wished she might caress her mother, whom she had scarcely known. The hair, once brown—as could be seen—was now touched with silver. The face was still a perfect oval; but over the speaking eyes, and the broad, low forehead time had passed a gentle hand. About the sweet mouth, too, were lines that, to herself, Elizabeth called, not wrinkles, but 'the record of many smiles.'

'Miss Van Ruyter, you have unintentionally learnt my secret,' said Norton, as, enthralled, she continued to gaze upon the canvas. 'This is the portrait of my wife, Marie, who died twenty years ago, when she was about your age, I should judge. You are surprised. I know the question you would like to ask. This is not, you would say, the face of a young woman! Dear child, you have a nature that glows with human kindness; you are "sympatica," as my neighbors around the corner in Little Italy say.'

'When my wife was taken from me, my grief was so great that it threatened my reason. When I grew calmer, I resolved to keep her likeness with me all the time. In order to do this I decided that year by year I would change her portrait so that we might grow old together. In this way, at least, I hoped to keep her with me. Always, on the anniversary of our wedding day, I have altered the lines of this dear face, adding what I thought would make the difference of one year. There have been many anniversaries, and many changes of the portrait, until you see here a fading woman, "a rose of yesterday." Yet, had time done its worst, she would still have remained beautiful. Is it not so?'

'The portrait is exquisite,' declared Elizabeth with enthusiasm. 'And, dear friend, I feel, I know what a consolation it must have been to you to try to keep even this shadow of her with you. Neverthe-

less—Elizabeth hesitated, and then went on, impelled by the eagerness of her thought—'have you not sometimes felt also regret that, in altering the portrait, you lost the likeness of your wife as she appeared in all the charm of her youth and the perfection of her beauty? Does not death lose something of its victory, when we reflect that the dear ones who have been called away remain forever young, that old age, or sorrow, or the cares of the world can never touch them?'

'You mistake me,' said Norton quietly. 'I would as soon have taken my own life as destroy the likeness of my dearest Marie as she was when she became my wife.' Opening a drawer of the Chinese cabinet, he took from it a miniature and placed it in Elizabeth's hand. His visible emotion cast a spell upon her. She glanced alternately from the little painting on ivory to the portrait in oils. The artist, feeling that she understood him, proceeded to take a packet of sketches in color from the cabinet, and spread them out before her on the divan. They represented every year of the shadow life which had become so real to him. Beginning with the miniature of the bride, they were like a series of medallions that terminated in the picture on the easel, linking together the past and the present in one continuous chain. Or, like the beads of a rosary, beginning with the cross, they came back to the cross again.

'Oh, they are all beautiful,' Elizabeth murmured, half to herself, and only the mind of a true artist could have conceived the thought of thus portraying a life as it might have been.'

'I painted it for no other eyes than my own; but into it I have put my best work,' said the artist. 'And yet—and yet—Miss Van Ruyter, whenever I study this portrait, I am haunted by the fancy that it lacks something, that in some point I have failed. Yes; there was an indescribable charm, a dominant characteristic of my wife's personality, that I have been unable to interpret or portray. Whenever I even think of the picture I am uneasily conscious that, after all, it is not herself as she would have been had she lived. At such times, in my despondency and disappointment, I am often tempted to slash the canvas into shreds.'

'Oh, no, no; never commit such an act of reckless vandalism,' protested Elizabeth in alarm. 'If you had done no other work than this, Mr Norton, you would still be acknowledged a great artist.'

Her appreciation pleased him. 'Thank you,' he said, simply, and then went on: 'But the most singular part of it all, Miss Van Ruyter, is that the illusive quality I have missed in the portrayal of my dear wife I imagine I find in you. Or is it imagination? During the hours when you sit for your portrait, when you are present here bodily—apparently idle, yet occupied with your own thoughts and often in spirit far away, while I paint and watch you, striving to interpret your inner self, this being always the aim of the true portrait painter—at such times I see in your face the expression that is lacking in the pictured face of my wife, the charm I have failed to grasp. Perhaps you can tell me what it is?'

For a few moments Elizabeth stood silently studying the dream picture, thinking of the painter and of this woman whom he had so loved, whom he so loved still, although she had been dead nearly a quarter of a century. The girl had had little experience beyond her two short seasons in society. She knew, however, that Norton was a man of the world. Tom Morley said he was a good man, as men of the world go. Norton had told her once that, like herself, he and his wife were Catholics—adding, with a light laugh and a shrug of the shoulders: 'But you know, we painter fellows are a careless set, and so now I am not much of anything.' So now, as she scrutinised the canvas on the easel, the truth came to her.

Norton, arresting his impatient stride, paused at her elbow. 'Well, what does the portrait lack?' he inquired in a tone that was half a demand, half an entreaty.

She answered slowly, absently, almost to herself, and as if only following out her own thought: 'The fault lies—I think—ah, I know, it is simply this—the woman in the picture has forgotten how to pray.'

Norton, dazed, stared at her. Then his eyes searched the portrait, as though it possessed a soul into whose depths he sought to look. 'My God, child, you are right!' he cried unnerved.

Going to a window, he glanced out without seeing anything. But the light borne in upon him by the young girl's involuntary scathing criticism, drew him back. 'Yes, Miss Van Ruyter, you are right,' he re-