

A LETTER OF REFUSAL.

66 MAY I come in?"

The curtains from behind which the musical voice issued shook a little, but no one appeared.

The man at the easel painted away industriously, putting in a sunset sky with strong, even strokes.

"When our forefathers signed the Declaration of Independence 120 years ago," he began.

"Please—"

A face made its appearance at the parting of the curtains, a face framed in dark, wavy hair, with big, shining eyes, made soft by long curling lashes, and a red, red mouth, just now drooping pitifully at the corners.

"They made all men free and equal," proceeded the man, never once looking up, "and since then a lot of ladies with abbreviated hair and petticoats have been struggling to make their sex also independent—and with considerable success."

"Don't be horrid," pleaded the red mouth, seconded by the shining eyes.

"Therefore, I was about to say," he went on, calmly, "I don't see how I can hope to prevent you from coming in, if you choose to do so."

She stepped inside, but did not advance into the room.

"I know you're going to be horrid," she said, plaintively.

He laid down his brush, and, turning at last, surveyed her deliberately as she stood, her slender shape outlined against the curtains. They were burly curtains, which she had painted a dull brick red ("Pompeian red," she called it), and which she had ornamented with a Greek border in yellow floss and hung in the doorway, herself, in spite of his scoffing and ribald protests.

They were pretty bad, those curtains but whatever their limitations from an esthetic point of view, they certainly made an effective background for the white-robed figure, and his eye lingered approvingly on the picture a moment before he said, severely:

"What have you been doing?"

"Why, the idea!" she exclaimed, indignantly drawing her figure up to its full height and flashing a protesting glance at him from under her long lashes.

"I notice that you generally take it for granted that I'm going to be horrid when you've been particularly horrid yourself," he observed blandly.

She did not reply to this daring remark, but, crossing the room to the mantel, carefully selected an especially ugly bulldog pipe from the collection it contained. This she filled, with practiced fingers, from a battered tobacco jar that stood near, and then, crossing to the easel, offered it to the man with a most bewitching little air of coaxing humility.

"My dear young woman," he cried, waving the offering away sternly, "do I look like a man who would accept a bribe? Do my features bear the imprint of vulnerable virtue, that you should thus seek to gain my favorable judgment for your nefarious goings-or-by such a palpable—"

He said no more, for just then the stem of the pipe was dexterously inserted between his teeth, and, deftly striking a match on the broad sole of his shoe, conveniently presented to her by the careless attitude of its owner, the girl applied it to the tobacco in the pipe bowl.

In spite of himself, he closed his teeth on the stem and drew a long breath, and as the first cloud of aromatic vapor rose to his nostrils his features relaxed.

"Well, who is it?" he asked, as the girl seated herself on a hassock and fixed her eyes on him appealingly.

"It's—it's—Hinsdale," she replied, dolefully.

"Hinsdale. Why I thought we disposed of Hinsdale three weeks ago, and since then—let me see—there was Smith and Devereux and how many others?"

"Oh, never mind the others," she cried, petulantly. "It's Hinsdale now. We did dispose of him—or at least, I thought we had—and I'm sure that letter I wrote—"

"Ah, did you write to him, too?" he asked, putting a big cloud of smoke over his sunset and watching the effect of its vivid hues shining through the clouds of grayish vapor with an artist's delighted appreciation of color.

"Oh, well—the letter you wrote, then," she said. "Though I'm sure you didn't do it all; you only helped me."

"Oh, yes," he answered indolently. "But Hinsdale—he's broken out again?"

"Yes, worse than ever," and she sighed dismally, "and I want you to help me write him another letter—one that will fix it so he'll understand there's no hope—no possibility—I mean—of my ever being anything more to him—"

here she floundered and broke quite down.

"Can't do it to-day," he said, decidedly. "I've got to get this picture done

to-morrow—order, you know—and it'll be a scratch if I manage to do it. It means painting all night as it is."

"Oh, John, you must," she cried, eagerly. "I've just got to send it to him this afternoon by a messenger boy or he'll be sure to come up to-night and make a scene or something, besides—"

"No, it's no go," he said, cruelly, taking up his brush. "You'll have to get rid of him somehow and come to-morrow—"

"But, oh, John," she burst out, tears coming to her eyes, "I—I can't come to-morrow. Aunt Maria has issued her commands—the fiat has gone forth—I'm forbidden to come here any more."

"The deuce you are." And he laid down his brush and faced quite around in his astonishment.

"Yes," she replied, furtively drying a tear on one of the ends of her muslin sash. (Jean never could find her handkerchief, being always without pockets.) "She says it's all well enough for me to take painting lessons of you, though everybody knows I never could learn to paint. Aunt Maria is so ignorant about such things, you know."

"Yes, I know." Blowing a ring of smoke ceilingward to hide a little smile.

"And she doesn't mind my having a studio, if I'll fix one up at home, but she doesn't think it looks well for me to have one in this building and run in and out of here all the time—and so I've got to move to-morrow."

This time she forgot to dry the tear, and it ran forlornly down her cheek and fell with a splash on a study of the head of John the Baptist that lay on the floor.

For a moment there was silence, then John suddenly pushed back his easel and pulled a writing table toward him.

"Well, if you can't come to-morrow, I suppose I'll have to help you write your letter to-day," he said, but there was an unnatural sound in his voice and Jean looked up hastily through her tears.

John's face was grimly set, however, and told her nothing.

"Let me see—it was Hinsdale, I think you said"—he went on, still with that grating sound in his voice.

"Yes," she replied, miserably, again having recourse to the crumpled sash. "And I think we told him, in our last, that we'd be a sister to him," he proceeded, nibbling the end of his pen. "Something of that sort." And she flushed warmly, clear up to the curly waves of dark hair on her temples.

"Evidently the 'sister' racket won't go down with Hinsdale," he said, reflectively. "You might offer to be his maiden aunt, you know—"

"There! I knew you'd be horrid!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"It's a delicate job," he went on, reflectively. "Are you quite sure you mean to refuse him this time?"

"Of course I am," she burst out indignantly. "You don't suppose I could care for a boy like him, do you?"

"He has a nice eye for color," proceeded John, drawing faces on the margin of the paper—faces that had big, soft eyes and pouting lips, strangely like the girl on the hassock, "and his drawings are wonderfully strong. He's a gifted fellow, is Hinsdale—the best pupil I have."

"Yes, he's gifted enough," she assented.

"I've often wondered why he fancied you," said John.

"Oh, indeed!" she exclaimed, flushing once more.

"Yes, he's a dreamer, you know—an idealist—and it seems to me some angelic creature a little too pure and good for human nature's daily food, and that sort of thing, would be more in his line than a little human bundle of naughtiness like you," went on John, cheerfully. "You'd make a fellow like Hinsdale unutterably miserable, you know."

"You're very kind," exclaimed Jean, crimson with vexation. "But I shall not make Mr. Hinsdale miserable. I have not the slightest intention of ever doing so."

"Ah," replied John, coolly. "Then the sooner we write this letter the better. Now—what do you want to say to him?"

"Oh," she cried, struggling with her anger. "You are so disagreeable, I hate you—but I've got to have somebody to help me with that letter."

"Of course. And you really want to refuse him—for good and all?"

"Certainly I do. I want him to understand definitely that there is absolutely no hope of my ever caring for him in—the way he means"—and once more she broke down, blushing but defiant.

"There's only one way to make a man understand that," said John meditatively.

"Anything—so long as he understands and leaves off being—being silly," she cried impatiently.

John made no reply to this, but after

a moment's deep thought commenced to write rapidly.

Five minutes passed, during which John's pen scratched industriously over the paper and Jean sat bolt upright on her hassock, staring at the picture on the canvas. It was a pale watery sunset that shed green gleams of light on a wide, lonesome landscape, in the center of which a woman stood alone, gazing with desolate, hopeless eyes at the retreating figure of a man on horseback. It was painted with inimitable skill and a strange wild power that had made John Steele the most famous of the younger school of painters. What an artist he was and what a friend he had been to her! And now she must go away and perhaps never see him again, except in the class with the others. All those hours of merry comradeship were over—never to come again; all the sweet work and play together. A great sob came up in her throat, but just then John threw down his pen and she choked down the sob and rising, reached out her hand for the letter.

But he did not give it to her as she expected.

"It is a difficult thing to do," he said. "To make a man understand that no matter how much he cares for you, you can never care for him."

"Yes, I suppose it is," she assented. "But you have done it, I'm sure."

"Indeed, I may say there's only one way to convince a fellow of such an unpleasant fact," he went on.

"But you employed it?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, you may think it an extreme measure, though. I'll read it to you."

And he read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Hinsdale: I thought I had made it quite plain to you when, several weeks ago, you asked me to be your wife, that such a thing was quite impossible. I certainly tried to have you understand it, and I deeply regret that I did not succeed, because this renewal of your offer can only result in added pain to both of us. Believe me, I am deeply grateful for your preference, but you will realize, I am sure, how hopeless it is for you to ask for more than my esteem when I tell you that I am engaged to be married to Mr. John Steele. Hoping that you will believe in the sincerity of my friendship, I am very sincerely yours,

"JEAN CHESTER."

The silence in the room could have been cut with a knife when John concluded his reading and laid the epistle back on the table.

Jean stood rigid, gazing with a fixed and haughty stare at some point on the wall above John's head, when he turned and confronted her with as little embarrassment as he would have shown in facing a new pupil.

"Well—what do you think of it?" he asked coolly.

"I think," she flashed out, "that you're the most conceited beast I ever saw."

"My dear girl," he protested. "I told you that extreme measures were necessary. It's the only way to get rid of him, and I'm willing to sacrifice myself in a good cause."

With great dignity Jean turned to leave the room, but somehow he was at the door before her, with his arms outstretched.

"You're not going to leave me, little Jean!" he cried. "I can never get along without you any more, for, oh, I love you—love you—love you!"

A second she stood hesitating—then, with a little sigh, she went to him and burst out crying comfortably on his shoulder.

"Jean!" came a voice suddenly from behind the burlap curtain. It sounded like the clinking of ice in a pitcher.

"Aunt Maria!" gasped Jean, in horror.

"Oh, come in, Miss Chester," said John, drawing aside the Pompeian red draperies. "We were just going to find you and ask you to come to our wedding to-morrow, at 12."

"Jean—what does this mean? Why didn't you tell me this before?" exclaimed Aunt Maria, aghast.

"I thought I ought to consult John before I told you," said naughty Jean. —Chicago Times-Herald.

Famous Divorces.

The Sloane-Belmont wedding in New York and the recent case in Washington where a man sent a check for \$100,000 as a wedding present to his divorced wife are reminiscent of the most famous divorce case of modern times—that of Mrs. John Ruskin from her husband, the famous author and art critic. When they were married John Ruskin was threatened with consumption. His wife was a young and lively woman. Sir John Millais, afterward president of the Royal Academy, came to paint Ruskin's picture. He fell in love with Mrs. Ruskin and she with him. Mr. Ruskin saw how things were going, but instead of objecting he assisted his wife in getting a divorce. Then, a little later, he went to the church with his former wife and actually gave her away in marriage to Millais.

Ouida's Writing Desk.

Ouida does not use a table for writing her stories. She sits on a low stool, with an ink pot on the carpet, and writes on her knee.

Although the gas meter never fails to register, it isn't allowed to vote.

SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY.

Production of pig iron in Russia is estimated to have increased from 600,000 tons in 1887 to 2,194,000 in 1898.

Belgium had 193 strikes last year, involving 14,266 laborers. Only in 12 of these cases did the strikers win a complete, and in eight a partial, success.

New York made between 3,000,000 and 4,000,000 fewer cigars in the year ended April 1, than in the previous year, and more than 129,000,000 fewer paper cigarettes.

A machine that will greatly reduce the cost of harvesting has been invented for the harvesting of sugar beets. This means a few more laborers will be looking for work in the cities.

The United States a Power for Good. A distinguished historian writes, while referring to our advent as a colonizing power, that our influence for good over European spheres will be immense. This result was just as inevitable as is the cure which follows the use of Hostetter's Stomach Bitters. It cures indigestion, constipation, and tones up the whole system.

Chicago business men are urging a system of municipal pawnshops to lend money at 1 per cent.

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Mothers will find Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup the best remedy to use for their children during the teething period.

At Fayetteville, N. C., a new \$100,000 spinning mill is under construction.

Piso's Cure for Consumption is the best of all cough cures.—George W. Lotz, Fabucher, La., August 26, 1895.

The tax on coffee amounts in France to about 14 cents a pound, while in England it is only 3 cents a pound.

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Mrs. MADGE BARCOCK, 176 Second St., Grand Rapids Mich., had ovarian trouble with its attendant aches and pains, now she is well. Here are her own words:

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Mrs. Pinkham invites women who are ill to write to her at Lynn, Mass., for advice, which is freely offered.

He Is Learning Now.

Agent—The Barlows haven't asked for a cent's worth of repairs this spring. What do you think of that?

Landlord—I'm not surprised. Barlow got a house through a trade a few weeks ago and is so busy filling the wants of a tenant of his own that he has forgotten about bothering us.—Chicago Evening News.

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After Hours.

Sometime ago, on a day set apart for humiliation and prayer, a Gateshead manufacturer offered to pay his workmen their wages on condition that they attended church. To this they readily agreed.

Shortly before evening service one of the employes called at his employer's residence and told the servant he wished "to see the maister."

"Now, Jack, what do you want?"

"Well, sor, me and ma myets hev been taaking the thing over, and we'd like to knae, if we gan to choorch the next, do we get overtime for't?"—Spare Moments.

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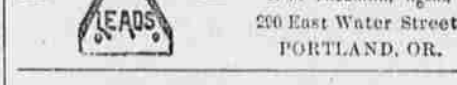
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