My Platonic Friend

Or Was It Above Earthly Love?

By F. A. MITCHEL

There is something pleasing in light hearted youth on the threshold of manhood or womanhood, all unconscious of the vicissitudes that flesh is heir to. Such a person I met during a sojourn in Rome. He was about twenty years old, tall, lithe and handsome as Adonis. Indeed, I never looked at him that he did not remind me of the statue of the Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican gallery. He gave the impression the statue gives—that he was about to spring off into space.

I first saw him in the gardens on the Pincian hill. He was standing beside the great basin of the fountain, spattering the water with a light cane with childlike interest. I have compared him to a statue. Perhaps a better comparison would be one on the Capitoline hill, the Faun. While he had the lightness of the former, he had the relaxedness of the latter. I was standing on the opposite side of the basin from him, and he suddenly looked up to take me unawares.

He saw that my whole soul went out to him, not exactly as a woman's would go out to a strong man, but as to a younger brother, for I was twenty-five years old, and my ideal of the man I would marry was some one older, more massive.

Though our stay at the fountain was but for a few minutes, though no word was spoken between us, something told me that two kindred spirits had met and mingled. There is a certain kind of mating between a boy and a girl a few years older than himself that may last well into his manhood. The young man had returned my gaze in kind, his own indicating "I like you." I could understand how he, skimming along the surface of the waters of life like a young bird, would find a companion in a woman four or five years his senior more readily than in a young girl more like himself. And so I thought about him a great deal and wished that I might know him.

"HE SUDDENLY LOOKED UP TO TAKE ME UNAWARES."

But, though I met him again and quite often, there was no way for me to make his acquaintance except by speaking to him without an introduction. I would not have hesitated to do so except that in a country where so much attention is paid to conventional forms I feared to give him an incorrect idea of my status. As for him, doubtless he would have considered addressing me without being duly presented an insult. I presumed he was an Italian, though I did not know.

One day I was walking on the Janiculum, a hill on the same side of the Tiber with St. Peter's, where the land is devoid of buildings and has something of the sylvan appearance about ancient Rome, when, leaning against a tree, I saw the young man who had so impressed me. He had taken a position similar to that of the statue of the Faun in the gallery on the Capitoline hill. For a moment my fancy ran away with me, and I went back in imagination 2,000 years, when fauns and satyrs and such creatures were supposed to inhabit this very hill. On seeing me a pleased expression came over his face—not a smile nor a look of recognition, but simply a sudden ripple of pleasure like a sunny pool stirred by a light breeze.

Our party passed on, leaving the young man behind. We descended the hill toward St. Peter's, which stood out white against the green hills and a little below us, and on reaching the Tiber took a car to our hotel.

One day in company with a friend I rode on the electric railway across the Campania to Frascati, a village in the direction of Alba Longa, from which, tradition says, came the people who first settled Rome. While taking some refreshments at the hotel another car came, and I saw my friend descend from the outside seats. I lost him in the crowd, but when my companion, a woman, and I were climbing the hill back of the hotel, turning, I saw him following us. We wandered about in the country, and I noticed that he never lost sight of us until we had descended.

On returning to Rome, having told what we had done, we were informed that we had taken a great risk. Just beyond where we had gone is a town nearly all the inhabitants of which are criminals. Then for the first time the reason for our being shadowed by the young man was a possible need of protection.

One morning I met with a surprise. I lived in a pension on the fifth floor of a large building on the Esquiline hill. The floors beneath were occupied for different purposes—apartments, studios, music rooms, and the like. I usually descended and ascended by an elevator. But on this occasion, preferring not to wait for it, I walked down the stairs. Coming up between the second and third floors whom should I meet but my young friend. My look of surprise was met by the same pleasurable expression I had seen on his face before. I wished to thank him for his attention to me at Frascati, but he gave me no opportunity, bounding up the stairs so lightly as to seem to be made of air.

I wondered if he lived in the building, and, in order to find out, after that I usually walked downstairs, hoping to meet him when he came up. I did not have to make many such trips before I saw a door opened. He came out and descended the staircase directly ahead of me. This time he did not see me, for he was in haste and did not look back.

Determined to open an acquaintance with him, I resolved that the next time I met him I would drop something. He would pick it up, hand it to me, I would thank him, and in this way the conventional gulf between us would be bridged. An opportunity soon occurred. Entering the building in which I lived, I saw him coming on the street. Instead of taking the elevator, I walked upstairs, and when I heard a footstep behind me I purposely dropped my glove.

Then I heard the comer behind me mounting two steps at a time, and presently a voice beside me said:

"Signorina!"

I turned, and my friend was handing my glove to me. I said, "Thank you very much," whereupon he shook his head mournfully, indicating that he did not understand me. I knew enough Italian to say "Gracia" (thanks) and moved on, but the disappointment in my face was reflected in his.

Those were the first and last words spoken between us. I saw him once more. I had made an engagement to go on one of the many excursions in the environs of Rome, and the only available train left early in the morning. I descended in the elevator, and when I reached the ground floor, hearing a step on the staircase, I turned and saw my friend coming down. He was dressed in a dark suit, his coat buttoned close under his chin, concealing his shirt bosom and even his white collar. He raised his hat and smiled—not a sad smile such as I would have expected had I known the errand on which he was going, but the smile of one who has not yet learned how thin is the crust on which mortals walk and the certainty of breaking through to destruction at last. Indeed, he seemed light hearted as a boy.

Soon after this, yielding to my desire to know him, I asked my landlady, who spoke both English and Italian, to write for me on a bit of paper in Italian some sentences to hand him when I should next meet him. I kept this paper with me always and never went out of or entered the building but I was ready to hand it to him should I meet him.

A week passed, and, though I entered and went out, climbing and descending the stairs, I did not see him. Then one day I received a letter through the mail addressed to Signorina Worthington at the pension where I lived. I opened it and found it written in the Italian language. The signature was unknown to me. Since I could not read it I took it to a friend, who translated it for me. It was as follows:

My Friend—I go to fight a duel. If I live you will never receive this letter; if I die it will be sent you by my second, who has instructions to do so. It is said that there can be no such thing as friendship between the sexes. I have disproved the statement by conceiving a pure affection for you with whom I have no acquaintance. So strong is this feeling within me that I have no desire to love or be loved with a view to marriage. I cannot believe that you will receive this letter, for it does not seem to me that I can ever die any more than that I can grow old. But if you do receive it be assured, dearest signorina, that, though my body perish, my affection for you is eternal.

My reception of the missive was proof that he had fallen. Rome, which till this moment had been full of interest, suddenly became repulsive to me. It seemed typical of the world of change in which we live. What is that gap of time from Augustus to Victor Emmanuel? It seemed to me rather a precipice toward which all Romans have been marching and over whose brink they have been pouring like the waters of a cataract. The Eternal City is rather the city of the dead. Of no other have we such records—of its men and women who shone resplendent for a brief season, then mingled with the oblivion of the past.

I returned to America with a sadness that has never entirely left me—a sadness occasioned by one with whom I had no acquaintance, yet between whom and me there existed a pure affection unalloyed with human attributes. Of all my momentary meetings with him the most vividly remembered is that last, when I saw him on the brink of the chasm, yet as light hearted as a bridegroom going to meet his bride.

Beautiful Southern Belle Is One of June's Pretty Brides

WHEN invitations were sent out for the wedding of Miss Ethel McCormick, one of the prettiest daughters of the south, to Francis H. McAdoo, son of Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo, on June 21 a buzz of interest was manifested among society circles in Washington, Baltimore and New York. Miss McCormick's beauty is of the pronounced southern type. She is as talented as she is vivacious and charming. She is the daughter of Mrs. Isaac E. Emerson and stepdaughter of Captain Emerson, who live at Brooklandwood, a fine country estate twenty miles from Baltimore. The wedding was scheduled to take place there.

His Mistake.

Gallyer—What mistakes men do make! I was just reading that Columbus thought he had discovered the Indies. Aspley—There are worse mistakes than that. When I married first I thought I had discovered paradise!

Discouraging a Vocalist.

Why a certain parrot never learned to talk Current Opinion tells in these words:

Kerrigan went on a trip to South America and while there bought a pretty Spanish parrot as a present for his friend O'Brien. He shipped the bird to O'Brien at once, and when he got back home he said:

"Dinny, did ye get the fine parrot I sint ye from Rio Janeiro?"

"I did that, Kerrigan, and I want to tell ye that I never put me teeth into a tougher bird in me life!"

Returned From the Dead

By E. D. LEONARD

"Your father is dead."

The announcement was made at 10 o'clock at night to Albert Huntington, a young man who stood in the room where physicians had been attending a dying patient. The son covered his face with his hands as if to shut out a realization of his bereavement. Then, suddenly taking them away, he said:

"Why could he not have lived two hours longer?"

"What purpose would his living those two hours have served?" asked Dr. Pulsifer.

"I cannot explain to you without entering into a long series of legal technicalities. But I can say briefly that my father's estate will pass into the hands of a guardian for me, which will involve endless litigation. Tomorrow will be my birthday. At 12 midnight I will be legally of age and could enter upon the administration of my inheritance myself."

The doctor made no reply. He seemed lost in thought. Then he drew the other physicians into a consultation in low tones and in a few minutes returned to the young man and said:

"Send for your notary."

"He is waiting below."

"Very well. You have heard of the recent discoveries, I suppose, in reference to what we call death—that when a man is pronounced dead and is what we have always supposed to be dead he is not dead. He is like a man unconscious under water. If he is permitted to remain there he eventually rots. If he is drawn above the surface he may be resuscitated. Your father may be brought back to life and possibly held there till after midnight."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do. At any rate, I and my colleagues are willing to make the experiment. But to take advantage of our efforts if we succeed you should have witnesses here to testify that the patient lived the day you became of age."

"Doctor," exclaimed the young man, grasping the physician's hand, "if you do this you will make a friend of me so long as I live. There is a reason why I am so anxious in the matter that I have not yet given you. A marriage was arranged by my father and the parents of a girl I love that by the terms of his will is indirectly dependent upon my coming of age and inheriting as a man instead of a minor. By prolonging my father's life two hours you will not only save my estate from being decimated under an expensive lawsuit, but you will unite a pair of lovers."

While this dialogue was going on the assistant doctors were administering a hypodermic injection. Dr. Pulsifer while waiting for the effect occupied the attention of young Huntington, commenting upon the discoveries on which the expected result was based.

"It has been shown," he said, "that every function of life except consciousness may be kept up after death. We hope to show that your father performs those functions. If his heart beats and he breathes he is, in the eye of the law, alive. Experimenters have not yet reached a point where consciousness may be restored, but it is not unlikely that result may be attained."

One of the assistant physicians, who had his ear on the dead man's chest, announced to Dr. Pulsifer that the heart beat faintly and asked if he should administer another injection. Dr. Pulsifer looked at his watch and saw that there still remained an hour and ten minutes to midnight. "Wait twenty minutes," he said, "unless the heart beats cease."

"Doctor," said young Huntington, "may I announce what you are doing to those waiting below?"

"I would advise you to say nothing."

"I may at least give hope to the girl whom I love and who loves me, may I not?"

"Yes, but I would only give hope. I would not explain the matter to her."

Huntington ran downstairs, and when he returned a second hypodermic injection was being given to the dead man. In ten minutes the physician, who had administered it and who sat beside the bed holding the wrist, announced that he could feel a slight pulsation and, placing his ear on the left breast, found quite a strong beat. Dr Pulsifer took up a hand mirror, held it over the nostrils, examined it, touching it here and there with a cambric handkerchief, and announced that there was a slight moisture on it. This meant that breathing had recommenced.

Huntington ran downstairs again and told his fiancee that his father was better, kissed her and ran back into the room where his father lay.

At 11:40 by the clock the patient's heart was beating with considerable strength, and his chest was rising and falling perceptibly. At 11:55 a last hypodermic was administered, and at 12:05 it was announced to those below that the patient had not long to live, and they were asked to go to the chamber where he lay. Dr. Pulsifer stood with his watch in his hand and pointed to the patient. Several persons examined his heart and took note of his breathing. The lovers stood together, the girl's arm within that of her fiance, looking on with awe. At 12:15 Dr. Pulsifer made an examination of the patient and pronounced him dead.

The notary looked at his watch and took a deposition from every one present that the exact hour of death was 12:15.