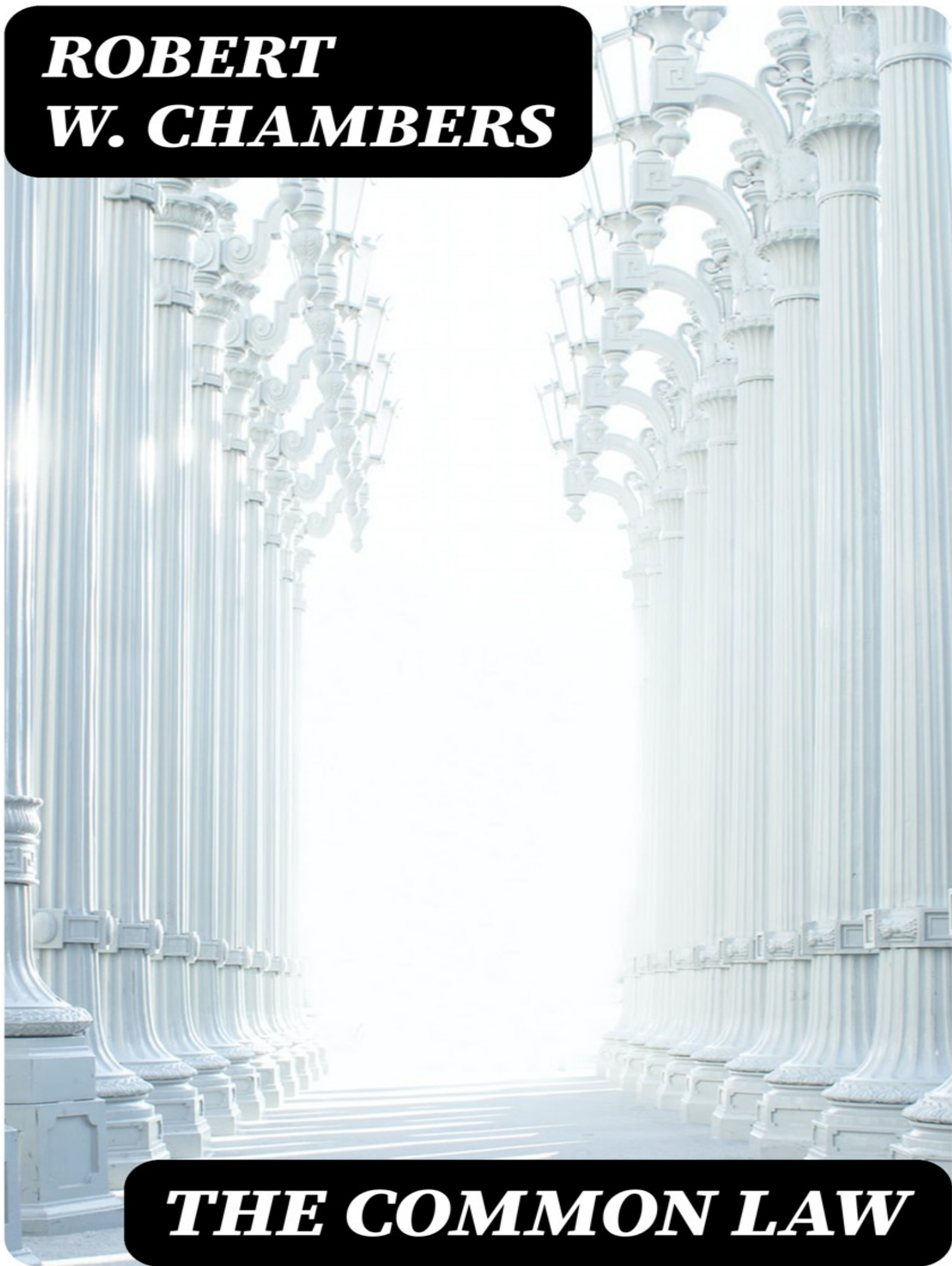


***ROBERT
W. CHAMBERS***

THE COMMON LAW





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Robert W. Chambers

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NEW YORK AND LONDON D. APPLETON AND COMPANY 1911
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[Illustration: "She sat at the piano, running her fingers lightly over the keyboard." [Page 48.]]

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A FRIEND OF MANY YEARS

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CHAPTER I

There was a long, brisk, decisive ring at the door. He continued working. After an interval the bell rang again, briefly, as though the light touch on the electric button had lost its assurance.

"Somebody's confidence has departed," he thought to himself, busy with a lead-weighted string and a stick of soft charcoal wrapped in silver foil. For a few moments he continued working, not inclined to trouble himself to answer the door, but the hesitating timidity of a third appeal amused him, and he walked out into the hallway and opened the door. In the dim light a departing figure turned from the stairway:

"Do you wish a model?" she asked in an unsteady voice.

"No," he said, vexed.

"Then—I beg your pardon for disturbing you—"

"Who gave you my name?" he demanded.

"Why—nobody—"

"Who sent you to me? Didn't anybody send you?"

"No."

"But how did you get in?"

"I—walked in."

There was a scarcely perceptible pause; then she turned away in the dim light of the corridor.

"You know," he said, "models are not supposed to come here unless sent for. It isn't done in this building." He pointed to a black and white sign on his door which bore the words: "No Admittance."

"I am very sorry. I didn't understand—"

"Oh, it's all right; only, I don't see how you got up here at all.

Didn't the elevator boy question you? It's his business."

"I didn't come up on the elevator."

"You didn't *walk* up!"

"Yes."

"Twelve stories!"

"Both elevators happened to be in service. Besides, I was not quite certain that models were expected to use the elevators."

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "you must have wanted an engagement pretty badly."

"Yes, I did."

He stared: "I suppose you do, still,"

"If you would care to try me."

"I'll take your name and address, anyhow. Twelve flights! For the love of—oh, come in anyway and rest."

It was dusky in the private hallway through which he preceded her, but there was light enough in the great studio. Through the vast sheets of glass fleecy clouds showed blue sky between. The morning was clearing.

He went over to an ornate Louis XV table, picked up a note book, motioned her to be seated, dropped into a chair himself, and began to sharpen a pencil. As yet he had scarcely glanced at her, and now, while he leisurely shaved the cedar and scraped the lead to a point, he absent-mindedly and good-humouredly admonished her:

"You models have your own guild, your club, your regular routine, and it would make it much easier for us if you'd all register and quietly wait until we send for you.

[Illustration: "There was a long, brisk, decisive ring at the door."]

"You see we painters know what we want and we know where to apply for it. But if you all go wandering over studio buildings in search of engagements, we won't have any leisure to employ you because it will take all our time to answer the bell. And it will end by our not answering it at all. And that's why it is fit and proper for good little models to remain *chez eux*."

He had achieved a point to his pencil. Now he opened his model book, looked up at her with his absent smile, and remained looking.

"Aren't you going to remove your veil?"

"Oh—I beg your pardon!" Slender gloved fingers flew up, were nervously busy a moment. She removed her veil and sat as though awaiting his comment. None came.

After a moment's pause she said: "Did you wish—my name and address?"

He nodded, still looking intently at her.

"Miss West," she said, calmly. He wrote it down.

"Is that all? Just 'Miss West'?"

"Valerie West—if that is custom—necessary."

He wrote "Valerie West"; and, as she gave it to him, he noted her address.

"Head and shoulders?" he asked, quietly.

"Yes," very confidently.

"Figure?"

"Yes,"—less confidently.

"Draped or undraped?"

When he looked up again, for an instant he thought her skin even whiter than it had been; perhaps not, for, except the vivid lips and a carnation tint in the cheeks, the snowy beauty of her face and neck had already preoccupied him.

"Do you pose undraped?" he repeated, interested.

"I—expect to do—what is—required of—models."

"Sensible," he commented, noting the detail in his book.

"Now, Miss

West, for whom have you recently posed?"

And, as she made no reply, he looked up amiably, balancing his pencil in his hand and repeating the question.

"Is it necessary to—tell you?"

"Not at all. One usually asks that question, probably because you models are always so everlastingly anxious to tell us—particularly when the men for whom you have posed are more famous than the poor devil who offers you an engagement."

There was something very good humoured in his smile, and she strove to smile, too, but her calmness was now all forced, and her heart was beating very fast, and her black-gloved fingers were closing and doubling till the hands that rested on the arms of the gilded antique chair lay tightly clenched.

He was leisurely writing in his note book under her name:

"Height, medium; eyes, a dark brown; hair, thick, lustrous, and brown; head, unusually beautiful; throat and neck, perfect—"

He stopped writing and lifted his eyes:

"How much of your time is taken ahead, I wonder?"

"What?"

"How many engagements have you? Is your time all cut up—as I fancy it is?"

"N-no."

"Could you give me what time I might require?"

"I think so."

"What I mean, Miss West, is this: suppose that your figure is what I have an idea it is; could you give me a lot of time ahead?"

She remained silent so long that he had started to write, "probably unreliable," under his notes; but, as his pencil began to move, her lips unclosed with, a low, breathless sound that became a ghost of a voice:

"I will do what you require of me. I meant to answer."

"Do you mean that you are in a position to make a time contract with me?—provided you prove to be what I need?"

She nodded uncertainly.

"I'm beginning the ceiling, lunettes, and panels for the Byzantine Theatre," he added, sternly stroking his short mustache, "and under those circumstances I suppose you know what a contract between us means."

She nodded again, but in her eyes was bewilderment, and in her heart, fear.

"Yes," she managed to say, "I think I understand."

"Very well. I merely want to say that a model threw me down hard in the very middle of the Bimmington's ball-room. Max Schindler put on a show, and she put for the spot-light. She'd better stay put," he added grimly: "she'll never have another chance in your guild."

Then the frown vanished, and the exceedingly engaging smile glimmered in his eyes:

"You wouldn't do such a thing as that to me," he added; "would you, Miss West?"

"Oh, no," she replied, not clearly comprehending the enormity of the Schindler recruit's behaviour.

"And you'll stand by me if our engagement goes through?"

"Yes, I—will try to."

"Good business! Now, if you really are what I have an idea you are, I'll know pretty quick whether I can use you for the Byzantine job." He rose, walked over to a pair of closed folding doors and opened them. "You can undress in there," he said. "I think you will find everything you need."

For a second she sat rigid, her black-gloved hands doubled, her eyes fastened on him as though fascinated. He had already turned and sauntered over to one of several easels where he picked up the lump of charcoal in its silver foil.

The colour began to come back into her face—swifter, more swiftly: the vast blank window with its amber curtains stared at her; she lifted her tragic gaze and saw the sheet of glass above swimming in crystal light. Through it clouds were dissolving in the bluest of skies; against it a spiderweb of pendant cords drooped from the high ceiling; and she saw the looming mystery of huge canvases beside which stepladders rose surmounted by little crow's-nests where the graceful oval of palettes curved, tinted with scraped brilliancy.

"What a dreamer you are!" he called across the studio to her. "The light is fine, now. Hadn't we better take advantage of it?"

She managed to find her footing; contrived to rise, to move with apparent self-possession toward the folding doors.

"Better hurry," he said, pleasantly. "If you're what I need we might start things now. I am all ready for the sort of figure I expect you have."

She stepped inside the room and became desperately busy for a moment trying to close the doors; but either her hands had suddenly become powerless or they shook too much; and when he turned, almost impatiently, from his easel to see what all that rattling meant, she shrank hastily aside into the room beyond, keeping out of his view.

The room was charming—not like the studio, but modern and fresh and dainty with chintz and flowered wall-paper and the graceful white furniture of a bed-room. There was a flowered screen there, too. Behind it stood a chair, and onto this she sank, laid her hands for an instant against her burning face, then stooped and, scarcely knowing what she was about, began to untie her patent-leather shoes.

He remained standing at his easel, very busy with his string and lump of charcoal; but after a while it occurred to him that she was taking an annoyingly long time about a simple matter.

"What on earth is the trouble?" he called. "Do you realise you've been in there a quarter of an hour?"

She made no answer. A second later he thought he heard an indistinct sound—and it disquieted him.

"Miss West?"

There was no reply.

Impatient, a little disturbed, he walked across to the folding doors; and the same low, suppressed sound caught his ear.

"What in the name of—" he began, walking into the room; and halted, amazed.

She sat all huddled together behind the screen, partly undressed, her face hidden in her hands; and between the slender fingers tears ran down brightly.

"Are you ill?" he asked, anxiously.

After a moment she slowly shook her head.

"Then—what in the name of Mike—"

"P-please forgive me. I—I will be ready in a in-moment—if you wouldn't mind going out—"

"Are you ill? Answer me?"

"N-no."

"Has anything disturbed you so that you don't feel up to posing to-day?"

"No.... I—am—almost ready—if you will go out—"

He considered her, uneasy and perplexed. Then:

"All right," he said, briefly. "Take your own time, Miss West."

At his easel, fussing with yard-stick and crayon, he began to square off his canvas, muttering to himself:

"What the deuce is the matter with that girl? Nice moment to nurse secret sorrows or blighted affections. There's always something wrong with the best lookers.... And she is a real beauty—or I miss my guess." He went on ruling off, measuring, grumbling, until slowly there came

over him the sense of the nearness of another person. He had not heard her enter, but he turned around, knowing she was there.

She stood silent, motionless, as though motion terrified her and inertia were salvation. Her dark hair rippled to her waist; her white arms hung limp, yet the fingers had curled till every delicate nail was pressed deep into the pink palm. She was trying to look at him. Her face was as white as a flower.

"All right," he said under his breath, "you're practically faultless. I suppose you realise it!"

A scarcely perceptible shiver passed over her entire body, then, as he stepped back, his keen artist's gaze narrowing, there stole over her a delicate flush, faintly staining her from brow to ankle, transfiguring the pallour exquisitely, enchantingly. And her small head drooped forward, shadowed by her hair.

"You're what I want," he said. "You're about everything I require in colour and form and texture."

She neither spoke nor moved as much as an eyelash.

"Look here, Miss West," he said in a slightly excited voice, "let's go about this thing intelligently." He swung another easel on its rollers, displaying a sketch in soft, brilliant colours—a multitude of figures amid a swirl of sunset-tinted clouds and patches of azure sky.

"You're intelligent," he went on with animation,— "I saw that—somehow or other—though you haven't said very much." He laughed, and laid his hand on the painted canvas beside him:

"You're a model, and it's not necessary to inform you that this is only a preliminary sketch. Your experience tells you that. But it is necessary to tell you that it's the final composition. I've decided on this arrangement for the ceiling: You see for yourself that you're perfectly fitted to stand or sit for all these floating, drifting, cloud-cradled goddesses. You're an inspiration in yourself—for the perfections of Olympus!" he added, laughing, "and that's no idle compliment. But of course other artists have often told you this before—as though you didn't have eyes of your own. And beautiful ones at that!" He laughed again, turned and dragged a two-storied model-stand across the floor, tossed up one or two silk cushions, and nodded to her.

"Don't be afraid; it's rickety but safe. It will hold us both. Are you ready?"

As in a dream she set one little bare foot on the steps, mounted, balancing with arms extended and the tips of her fingers resting on his outstretched hand.

Standing on the steps he arranged the cushions, told her where to be seated, how to recline, placed the wedges and blocks to support her feet, chalked the bases, marked positions with arrows, and wedged and blocked up her elbow. Then he threw over her a soft, white, wool robe, swathing her from throat to feet, descended the steps, touched an electric bell, and picking up a huge clean palette began to squeeze out coils of colour from a dozen plump tubes.

Presently a short, squarely built man entered. He wore a blue jumper; there were traces of paint on it, on his large square hands, on his square, serious face.

"O'Hara?"

"Sorr?"

"We're going to begin *now!*—thank Heaven. So if you'll be kind enough to help move forward the ceiling canvas—"

O'Hara glanced up carelessly at the swathed and motionless figure above, then calmly spat upon his hands and laid hold of one side of the huge canvas indicated. The painter took the other side.

"Now, O'Hara, careful! Back off a little!—don't let it sway! There—that's where I want it. Get a ladder and clamp the tops. Pitch it a little forward—more!—stop! Fix those pully ropes; I'll make things snug below."

[Illustration: "'Now, Miss West,' he said decisively."]

For ten minutes they worked deftly, rapidly, making fast the great blank canvas which had been squared and set with an enormous oval in heavy outline.

From her lofty eyrie she looked down at them as in a dream while they shifted other enormous framed canvases and settled the oval one into place. Everything below seemed to be on rubber wheels or casters, easels, stepladders, colour cabinets, even the great base where the oval set canvas rested.

She looked up at the blue sky. Sparrows dropped out of the brilliant void into unseen canons far below from whence came the softened roar of traffic. Northward the city spread away between its rivers, glittering under the early April sun; the Park lay like a grey and green map set with, the irregular silver of water; beyond, the huge unfinished cathedral loomed dark against the big white hospital of St. Luke;

farther still a lilac-tinted haze hung along the edges of the Bronx.

"All right, O'Hara. Much obliged. I won't need you again."

"Very good, Sorr."

The short, broad Irishman went out with another incurious glance aloft, and closed the outer door.

High up on her perch she watched the man below. He calmly removed coat and waistcoat, pulled a painter's linen blouse over his curly head, lighted a cigarette, picked up his palette, fastened a tin cup to the edge, filled it from a bottle, took a handful of brushes and a bunch of cheese cloth, and began to climb up a stepladder opposite her, lugging his sketch in the other hand.

He fastened the little sketch to an upright and stood on the ladder halfway up, one leg higher than the other.

"Now, Miss West," he said decisively.

At the sound of his voice fear again leaped through her like a flame, burning her face as she let slip the white wool robe.

"All right," he said. "Don't move while I'm drawing unless you have to."

She could see him working. He seemed to be drawing with a brush, rapidly, and with, a kind of assurance that appeared almost careless.

At first she could make out little of the lines. They were all dark in tint, thin, tinged with plum colour. There seemed to be no curves in them—and at first she could not comprehend that he was drawing her figure. But after a little while curves appeared; long delicate outlines began to emerge as rounded surfaces in monochrome, casting

definite shadows on other surfaces. She could recognise the shape of a human head; saw it gradually become a colourless drawing; saw shoulders, arms, a body emerging into shadowy shape; saw the long fine limbs appear, the slender indication of feet.

Then flat on the cheek lay a patch of brilliant colour, another on the mouth. A great swirl of cloud forms sprang into view high piled in a corner of the canvas.

And now he seemed to be eternally running up and down his ladder, shifting it here and there across the vast white background of canvas, drawing great meaningless lines in distant expanses of the texture, then, always consulting her with his keen, impersonal gaze, he pushed back his ladder, mounted, wiped the big brushes, selected others smaller and flatter, considering her in penetrating silence between every brush, stroke.

She saw a face and hair growing lovely under her eyes, bathed in an iris-tinted light; saw little exquisite flecks of colour set here and there on the white expanse; watched all so intently, so wonderingly, that the numbness of her body became a throbbing pain before she was aware that she was enduring torture.

She strove to move, gave a little gasp; and he was down from his ladder and up on hers before her half-paralysed body had swayed to the edge of danger.

"Why didn't you say so?" he asked, sharply. "I can't keep track of time when I'm working!"

With arms and fingers that scarcely obeyed her she contrived to gather the white wool covering around her shoulders and limbs and lay back.

"You know," he said, "that it's foolish to act this way. I don't want to kill you, Miss West."

She only lowered her head amid its lovely crown of hair.

"You know your own limits," he said, resentfully. He looked down at the big clock: "It's a full hour. You had only to speak. Why didn't you?"

"I—I didn't know what to say."

"Didn't know!" He paused, astonished. Then: "Well, you felt yourself getting numb, didn't you?"

"Y-yes. But I thought it was—to be expected"—she blushed vividly under his astonished gaze: "I think I had better tell you that—that this is—the first time."

"The first time!"

"Yes.... I ought to have told you. I was afraid you might not want me."

"Lord above!" he breathed. "You poor—poor little thing!"

She began to cry silently; he saw the drops fall shining on the white wool robe, and leaned one elbow on the ladder, watching them. After a while they ceased, but she still held her head low, and her face was bent in the warm shadow of her hair.

"How could I understand?" he asked very gently.

"I—should have told you. I was afraid."

He said: "I'm terribly sorry. It must have been perfect torture for you to undress—to come into the studio. If you'd only given me an idea of how matters stood I could have made it a little easier. I'm afraid I was brusque—taking it for granted that you were a model and knew your business.... I'm terribly sorry."

She lifted her head, looked at him, with the tears still clinging to her lashes.

"You have been very nice to me. It is all my own fault."

He smiled. "Then it's all right, now that we understand. Isn't it?"

"Yes."

"You make a stunning model," he said frankly.

"Do I? Then you will let me come again?"

"*Let* you!" He laughed; "I'll be more likely to beg you."

"Oh, you won't have to," she said; "I'll come as long as you want me."

"That is simply angelic of you. Tell me, do you wish to descend to terra firma?"

She glanced below, doubtfully:

"N-no, thank you. If I could only stretch my—legs—"

"Stretch away," he said, much amused, "but don't tumble off and break into pieces. I like you better as you are than as an antique and limbless Venus."

She cautiously and daintily extended first one leg then the other under the wool robe, then eased the cramped muscles of her back, straightening her body and flexing her arms with a little sigh of relief. As her shy sidelong gaze reverted to him she saw to her relief that he was not noticing her. A slight sense of warmth, suffused her body, and she stretched herself again, more confidently, and ventured to glance around.

"Speaking of terms," he said in an absent way, apparently preoccupied with the palette which he was carefully scraping, "do you happen to know what is the usual recompense for a model's service?"

She said that she had heard, and added with quick diffidence that she could not expect so much, being only a beginner.

He polished the surface of the palette with a handful of cheese cloth:

"Don't you think that you are worth it?"

"How can I be until I know how to pose for you?"

"You will never have to learn how to pose, Miss West."

"I don't know exactly what you mean."

"I mean that some models never learn. Some know how already—you, for example."

She flushed slightly: "Do you really mean that?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say so if I didn't. It's merely necessary for you to accustom yourself to holding a pose; the rest you already know instinctively."

"What is the rest?" she ventured to ask. "I don't quite understand what you see in me—"

"Well," he said placidly, "you are beautifully made. That is nine-tenths of the matter. Your head is set logically on your neck, and your neck is correctly placed on your spine, and your legs and arms are properly attached to your torso—your entire body, anatomically speaking, is hinged, hung, supported, developed as the ideal body should be. It's undeformed, unmarred, unspoiled, and that's partly luck, partly inheritance, and mostly decent habits and digestion."

She was listening intently, interested, surprised, her pink lips slightly parted.

"Another point," he continued; "you seem unable to move or rest ungracefully. Few women are so built that an

ungraceful motion is impossible for them. You are one of the few. It's all a matter of anatomy."

She remained silent, watching him curiously.

He said: "But the final clincher to your qualifications is that you are intelligent. I have known pretty women," he added with, sarcasm, "who were not what learned men would call precisely intelligent. But you are. I showed you my sketch, indicated in a general way what I wanted, and instinctively and intelligently you assumed the proper attitude. I didn't have to take you by the chin and twist your head as though you were a lay figure; I didn't have to pull you about and flex and bend and twist you. You knew that I wanted you to look like some sort of an ethereal immortality, deliciously relaxed, adrift in sunset clouds. And you *were* it—somehow or other."

She looked down, thoughtfully, nestling to the chin in the white wool folds. A smile, almost imperceptible, curved her lips.

"You are making it very easy for me," she said.

"You make it easy for yourself."

"I was horribly afraid," she said thoughtfully.

"I have no doubt of it."

"Oh, you don't know—nobody can know—no man can understand the terror of—of the first time—"

"It must be a ghastly experience."

"It is!—I don't mean that you have not done everything to make it easier—but—there in the little room—my courage left me—I almost died. I'd have run away only—I was afraid you wouldn't let me—"

He began to laugh; she tried to, but the terror of it all was as yet too recent.

"At first," she said, "I was afraid I wouldn't do for a model—not exactly afraid of my—my appearance, but because I was a novice; and I imagined that one had to know exactly how to pose—"

"I think," he interrupted smilingly, "that you might take the pose again if you are rested. Go on talking; I don't mind it."

She sat erect, loosened the white wool robe and dropped it from her with less consciousness and effort than before. Very carefully she set her feet on the blocks, fitting the shapely heels to the chalked outlines; found the mark for her elbow, adjusted her slim, smooth body and looked at him, flushing.

"All right," he said briefly; "go ahead and talk to me."

"Do you wish me to?"

"Yes; I'd rather."

"I don't know exactly what to say."

"Say anything," he returned absently, selecting a flat brush with a very long handle.

She thought a moment, then, lifting her eyes:

"I might ask you your name."

"What? Don't you know it? Oh, Lord! Oh, Vanity! I thought you'd heard of me."

She blushed, confused by her ignorance and what she feared was annoyance on his part; then perceived that he was merely amused; and her face cleared.

"We folk who create concrete amusement for the public always imagine ourselves much better known to that public

than we are, Miss West. It's our little vanity—rather harmless after all. We're a pretty decent lot, sometimes absurd, especially in our tragic moments; sometimes emotional, usually illogical, often impulsive, frequently tender-hearted as well as supersensitive.

"Now it was a pleasant little vanity for me to take it for granted that somehow you had heard of me and had climbed twelve flights of stairs for the privilege of sitting for me."

He laughed so frankly that the shy, responsive smile made her face enchanting; and he coolly took advantage of it, and while exciting and stimulating it, affixed it immortally on the exquisite creature he was painting.

"So you didn't climb those twelve flights solely for the privilege of having me paint you?"

"No," she admitted, laughingly, "I was merely going to begin at the top and apply for work all the way down until somebody took me—or nobody took me."

"But why begin at the top?"

"It is easier to bear disappointment going down," she said, seriously; "if two or three artists had refused me on the first and second floors, my legs would not have carried me up very far."

"Bad logic," he commented. "We mount by experience, using our wrecked hopes as footholds."

"You don't know how much a girl can endure. There comes a time—after years of steady descent—when misfortune and disappointment become endurable; when hope deferred no longer sickens. It is in rising toward better things that disappointments hurt most cruelly."

He turned his head in surprise; then went on painting:

"Your philosophy is the philosophy of submission."

"Do you call a struggle of years, submission?"

"But it was giving up after all—acquiescence, despondency, a *laissez faire* policy."

"One may tire of fighting."

"One may. Another may not."

"I think you have never had to fight very hard."

He turned his head abruptly; after a moment's silent survey of her, he resumed his painting with a sharp, impersonal glance before every swift and decisive brush stroke:

"No; I have never had to fight, Miss West.... It was keen of you to recognise it. I have never had to fight at all. Things come easily to me—things have a habit of coming my way.... I suppose I'm not exactly the man to lecture anybody on the art of fighting fortune. She's always been decent to me.... Sometimes I'm afraid—I have an instinct that she's too friendly.... And it troubles me. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Yes."

He looked up at her: "Are you sure?"

"I think so. I have been watching you painting. I never imagined anybody could draw so swiftly, so easily—paint so surely, so accurately—that every brush stroke could be so—so significant, so decisive.... Is it not unusual? And is not that what is called facility?"

"Lord in Heaven!" he said; "what kind of a girl am I dealing with?—or what kind of a girl is dealing so unmercifully with me?"

"I—I didn't mean—"

"Yes, you did. Those very lovely and wonderfully shaped eyes of yours are not entirely for ornament. Inside that pretty head there's an apparatus designed for thinking; and it isn't idle."

He laughed gaily, a trifle defiantly:

"You've said it. You've found the fly in the amber. I'm cursed with facility. Worse still it gives me keenest pleasure to employ it. It does scare me occasionally—has for years—makes me miserable at intervals—fills me full of all kinds of fears and doubts."

He turned toward her, standing on his ladder, the big palette curving up over his left shoulder, a wet brush extended in his right hand:

"What shall I do!" he exclaimed so earnestly that she sat up straight, startled, forgetting her pose. "Ought I to stifle the vigour, the energy, the restless desire that drives me to express myself—that will not tolerate the inertia of calculation and ponderous reflection? Ought I to check myself, consider, worry, entangle myself in psychologies, seek for subtleties where none exist—split hairs, relapse into introspective philosophy when my fingers itch for a lump of charcoal and every colour on my set palette yells at me to be about my business?"

He passed the flat tip of his wet brush through the mass of rags in his left hand with a graceful motion like one unsheathing a sword:

"I tell you I do the things which I do, as easily, as naturally, as happily as any fool of a dicky-bird does his infernal twittering on an April morning. God knows whether

there's anything in my work or in his twitter; but neither he nor I are likely to improve our output by pondering and cogitation.... Please resume the pose."

She did so, her dark young eyes on him; and he continued painting and talking in his clear, rapid, decisive manner:

"My name is Louis Neville. They call me Kelly—my friends do," he added, laughing. "Have you ever seen any of my work?"

"Yes."

He laughed again: "That's more soothing. However, I suppose you saw that big canvas of mine for the ceiling of the Metropolitan Museum's new northwest wing. The entire town saw it."

"Yes, I saw it."

"Did you care for it?"

She had cared for it too intensely to give him any adequate answer. Never before had her sense of colour and form and beauty been so exquisitely satisfied by the painted magic of any living painter. So this was the man who had enveloped her, swayed her senses, whirled her upward into his ocean of limpid light! This was the man who had done that miracle before which, all day long, crowds of the sober, decent, unimaginative—the solid, essentials of the nation—had lingered fascinated! This was the man—across there on a stepladder. And he was evidently not yet thirty; and his name was Neville and his friends called him Kelly.

"Yes," she said, diffidently, "I cared for it."

"Really?"

He caught her eye, laughed, and went on with his work.

"The critics were savage," he said. "Lord! It hurts, too. But I've simply got to be busy. What good would it do me to sit down and draw casts with a thin, needle-pointed stick of hard charcoal. Not that they say I can't draw. They admit that I can. They admit that I can paint, too."

He laughed, stretched his arms:

"Draw! A blank canvas sets me mad. When I look at one I feel like covering it with a thousand figures twisted into every intricacy and difficulty of foreshortening! I wish I were like that Hindu god with a dozen arms; and even then I couldn't paint fast enough to satisfy what my eyes and brain have already evoked upon an untouched canvas.... It's a sort of intoxication that gets hold of me; I'm perfectly cool, too, which seems a paradox but isn't. And all the while, inside me, is a constant, hushed kind of laughter, bubbling, which accompanies every brush stroke with an 'I told you so!'—if you know what I'm trying to say—*do* you?"

"N-not exactly. But I suppose you mean that you are self-confident."

"Lord! Listen to this girl say in a dozen words what I'm trying to say in a volume so that it won't scare me! Yes! That's it. I am confident. And it's that self-confidence which sometimes scares me half to death."

From his ladder he pointed with his brush to the preliminary sketch that faced her, touching figure after figure:

"I'm going to draw them in, now," he said; "first this one. Can you catch the pose? It's going to be hard; I'll block up your heels, later; that's it! Stand up straight, stretch as

though the next moment you were going to rise on tiptoe and float upward without an effort—"

He was working like lightning in long, beautiful, clean outline strokes, brushed here and there with shadow shapes and masses. And time flew at first, then went slowly, more slowly, until it dragged at her delicate body and set every nerve aching.

"I—may I rest a moment?"

"Sure thing!" he said, cordially, laying aside palette and brushes.

"Come on, Miss West, and we'll have luncheon."

She hastily swathed herself in the wool robe.

"Do you mean—here?"

"Yes. There's a dumb-waiter. I'll ring for the card."

"I'd like to," she said, "but do you think I had better?"

"Why not?"

"You mean—take lunch with you?"

"Why not?"

"Is it customary?"

"No, it isn't."

"Then I think I will go out to lunch somewhere—"

"I'm not going to let you get away," he said, laughing. "You're too good to be real; I'm worried half to death for fear that you'll vanish in a golden cloud, or something equally futile and inconsiderate. No, I want you to stay. You don't mind, do you?"

He was aiding her to descend from her eyrie, her little white hand balanced on his arm. When she set foot on the floor she looked up at him gravely:

"You wouldn't let me do anything that I ought not to, would you, Mr.

Kelly—I mean Mr. Neville?" she added in confusion.

"No. Anyway I don't know what you ought or ought not to do. Luncheon is a simple matter of routine. It's sole significance is two empty stomachs. I suppose if you go out you *will* come back, but—I'd rather you'd remain."

"Why?"

"Well," he admitted with a laugh, "it's probably because I like to hear myself talk to you. Besides, I've always the hope that you'll suddenly become conversational, and that's a possibility exciting enough to give anybody an appetite."

"But I *have* conversed with you," she said.

"Only a little. What you said acted like a cocktail to inspire me for a desire for more."

"I am afraid that you were not named Kelly in vain."

"You mean blarney? No, it's merely frankness. Let me get you some bath-slippers—"

"Oh—but if I am to lunch here—I can't do it this way!" she exclaimed in flushed consternation.

"Indeed you must learn to do that without embarrassment, Miss West. Tie up your robe at the throat, tuck up your sleeves, slip your feet into a nice pair of brand-new bath-slippers, and I'll ring for luncheon."

"I—don't—want to—" she began; but he went away into the hall, rang, and presently she heard the ascending clatter of a dumb-waiter. From it he took the luncheon card and returned to where she was sitting at a rococo table. She blushed as he laid the card before her, and would have nothing to do with it. The result was that he did the