

***ROBERT  
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***BETWEEN  
FRIENDS***

**Robert W. Chambers**

# **Between Friends**

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Like a man who reenters a closed and darkened house and lies down; lying there, remains conscious of sunlight outside, of bird-calls, and the breeze in the trees, so had Drene entered into the obscurity of himself.

Through the chambers of his brain the twilight corridors where cringed his bruised and disfigured soul, there nothing stirring except the automatic pulses which never cease.

Sometimes, when the sky itself crashes earthward and the world lies in ruins from horizon to horizon, life goes on.

The things that men live through—and live!

But no doubt Death was too busy elsewhere to attend to Drene.

He had become very lean by the time it was all over. Gray glinted on his temples; gray softened his sandy mustache: youth was finished as far as he was concerned.

An odd idea persisted in his mind that it had been winter for many years. And the world thawed out very slowly for him.

But broken trees leaf out, and hewed roots sprout; and what he had so long mistaken for wintry ashes now gleamed warmly like the orange and gold of early autumn. After a while he began to go about more or less—little excursions from the dim privacy of mind and soul—and he found the sun not very gray; and a south wind blowing in the world once more.

Quair and Guilder were in the studio that day on business; Drene continued to modify his composition in

accordance with Guilder's suggestions; Quair, always curious concerning Drene, was becoming slyly impudent.

"And listen to me, Guilder. What the devil's a woman between friends?" argued Quair, with a malicious side glance at Drene. "You take my best girl away from me—"

"But I don't," remarked his partner dryly.

"For the sake of argument, you do. What happens? Do I raise hell? No. I merely thank you. Why? Because I don't want her if you can get her away. That," he added, with satisfaction, "is philosophy. Isn't it, Drene?"

Guilder intervened pleasantly:

"I don't think Drene is particularly interested in philosophy. I'm sure I'm not. Shut up, please."

Drene, gravely annoyed, continued to pinch bits of modeling wax out of a round tin box, and to stick them all over the sketch he was modifying.

Now and then he gave a twirl to the top of his working table, which revolved with a rusty squeak.

"If you two unusually intelligent gentlemen ask me what good a woman the world—" began Quair.

"But we don't," interrupted Guilder, in the temperate voice peculiar to his negative character.

"Anyway," insisted Quair, "here's what I think of 'em—"

"My model, yonder," said Drene, a slight shrug of contempt, "happens to be feminine, and may also be human. Be decent enough to defer the development of your rather tiresome theory."

The girl on the model-stand laughed outright at the rebuke, stretched her limbs and body, and relaxed, launching a questioning glance at Drene.

“All right; rest a bit,” said the sculptor, smearing the bit of wax he was pinching over the sketch before him.

He gave another twirl or two to the table, wiped his bony fingers on a handful of cotton waste, picked up his empty pipe, and blew into the stem, reflectively.

Quair, one of the associated architects of the new opera, who had been born a gentleman and looked the perfect bounder, sauntered over to examine the sketch. He was still red from the rebuke he had invited.

Guilder, his senior colleague, got up from the lounge and walked over also. Drene fitted the sketch into the roughly designed group, where it belonged, and stood aside, sucking meditatively on his empty pipe.

After a silence:

“It’s all right,” said Guilder.

Quair remarked that the group seemed to lack flamboyancy. It is true, however, that, except for Guilder’s habitual restraint, the celebrated firm of architects was inclined to express themselves flamboyantly, and to interpret Renaissance in terms of Baroque.

“She’s some girl,” added Quair, looking at the lithe, modeled figure, and then half turning to include the model, who had seated herself on the lounge, and was now gazing with interest at the composition sketched in by Drene for the facade of the new opera.

“Carpeaux and his eternal group—it’s the murderous but inevitable standard of comparison,” mused Drene, with a whimsical glance at the photograph on the wall.

“Carpeaux has nothing on this young lady,” insisted Quair flippantly; and he pivoted on his heel and sat down