THE ANGEL IN THE STONE: A STORY. BY KATHARINE METCALF ROOF

ADELINE Ward sat at the studio window with her little girl in her arms. Madeline was bronze-brown in color with a reposeful, strongly modeled beauty. The child was fair-haired and mysterious-eyed. Just so a painter might have conceived the two within the circle of a pale gold frame. Behind and above them a sculptured angel in high relief, half chiseled out—half released, as it were, from the stone—faced the fading light. It was Ward’s last work, left uncompleted at his death. In the angel’s face, shadowed by the irregular, uncut marble, was a sense of mystery, of looking forward into the unknown.

“‘It is like the Unfinished Symphony of Schubert,’ Hans, his German pupil, had said. ‘It was never to be finished in this world, for the end is beyond, behind the veil.’

‘Hans is a sentimental German and must see symbols in everything,’ was Madeline’s thought. She knew with her trained judgment that the angel was her husband’s greatest work, but it had never appealed to her closely.

Madeline was looking down the street. The child was staring up at the swiftly-flying clouds. The mother’s look was alert, the child’s dreamy.

“He is coming, he is coming,” murmured the child. “Oh, mother, see how quickly he is coming!”

“Where?” Madeline started and leaned forward.

The child pointed upward. “The Swan Knight—don’t you see? There are tall wings on his head . . . and waves all about him.”

The mother followed the direction of the child’s pointing finger and a shade passed over her rather immobile face. “Cloud pictures again, Effie? You are always in the clouds. Some day when you are walking on the street you will fall and hurt yourself.”

Effie glanced at her mother with the direct, disquieting glance of observant childhood. “You don’t like cloud pictures, do you, mother? Daddy and I used to look for them long—long oh, ever so long. All afternoon.” The child’s eyes filled with tears.

Madeline met her little daughter’s eyes and looked away again. “Yes, you are like your father, Effie. . . . There, I hear Jane in the hall; you had better run and meet her, it is your supper time.”

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Something like relief passed over her face as the child closed the door behind her. She never felt at ease with Effie as she did with her sister’s happy-go-lucky little boy of the same age. Madeleine was a conscientious, even a scrupulous mother. She loved her child. She had loved her husband. She had not missed anything in her life while he lived. She was deeply unhappy when he died; but she had not fathomed the black depths of despair with that last look at his dead face. She had married Victor Ward when she was a very young girl and they had been married eight years when he died. The daughter of a painter herself, brought up in the atmosphere of studios, she had the professional attitude toward art and was able of her own judgment to recognize Victor not only as the greatest sculptor of his day, but as the man of genius, and possibly that fact had made its appeal to her vanity, but it had not caused her to over-estimate her husband. She was proud of his work, yet without any feminine tenderness of idealism. There was no faintest tinge of idealism in Madeline’s nature. She was essentially, ineradicably practical and unimaginative. The sculptor she understood; the man often puzzled her, but she had not troubled herself to understand. Madeline never troubled herself with unanswerable questions. She was an excellent wife,—restful, capable, even-tempered. Ward’s poetic passion for her had from the first filled her with a pleased, yet half amused wonder. To her he seemed always, as she had said of her child, “in the clouds.” In the most exalted moments of his love she had—unconsciously—remained untouched.

When he lay dead, Hans, the silent German boy whom he had befriended, stole into the darkened studio and looked long upon the sculptor’s peaceful face. Then, softly covering it, he took the unfinished angel from the stand where the sculptor had laid down his tools for the last time, and carried it over to the window facing the sunset. Then he lifted the curtain and let in the flood of golden light; and Madeline had looked up shocked at the sudden illumination in the chamber of death. “Why do you do that, Hans?”

“It must stand always there,” Hans replied softly. “His last vision, the angel that waits to be set free.” The wife’s eyes met those of the boy comprehendingly, wearily, then returned to the quiet form under the sheet.

“You do not remember how he said so often the words of the
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great Michael—'there is an angel imprisoned in this stone and I must set it free.'—In life he was as his own angel imprisoned, but death has set him free.—We are like the angel, unfinished—but he saw what we could not see; and now he knows all."

"I wish he might have finished it; it would have been his greatest work," said Madeline sadly.

But Hans shook his head. "The end was not for this world."

And Madeline had looked down in anguish upon her dead husband; but Hans saw the white angel through a blur of tears.

A man, tall and broad shouldered, came rapidly down the street, bending forward as he faced the wind. A change passed over Madeline's face and she half rose from her seat, then recollecting herself, sank back into her chair again. A moment later, following immediately upon the servant's announcement, he entered the room. He grasped her outstretched hand eagerly. She looked up at him as he stood before her,—rosy with the wind, strong, athletic, full of the joy of life and good to look upon.

"Am I too late for tea?"

"I haven't rung for it yet. I can't bear to have tea alone and I had thought you might come."

He laughed happily. "A very natural suspicion." He selected a comfortable chair and drew it forward with an air of privileged familiarity.

She watched him with a smile, a warm, awakened look upon her face. " Been working hard?"

"All day. I have a new order."

"I am so glad. What is it?"

"Oh—figure for the Morton Trust Company—new building to go up on lower Broadway."

Madeline's face contained all the radiant congratulation it might have shown when Victor had received the commission for his famous war memorial. She did not even remember that Maxwell's brother was the architect of the building.

Maxwell sat smiling into the fire, rubbing his hands together. It was a cold day, yet the gesture had more the effect of an expression of satisfaction. He looked up at her with something in his eyes that made hers fall.
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"When will you come down to the studio to see the model? You know I think a lot of your criticism. To-morrow? Fine! Will you really? Jove, you are no end good to me!" His face was glowing with strong, happy feeling. She felt her color rise and moved her chair back more into the shadow.

"To-morrow at four o'clock? Good! And we will go somewhere for tea afterwards." His voice shook as if he were making a declaration of love. Madeline did not answer at once. He looked from her to the fire with a self-revealing face. The silence was broken by the arrival of the tea tray. As Maxwell rose to make room for it by Madeline's side he found himself near the angel. His eyes roved over it with dispassionate admiration.

"Good work, eh? What a shame he couldn't have finished it! Bully good work!"

Madeline's glance went to the shadowy angel. "It is more than that, it is very great," she said. Maxwell met her eyes. He saw in them only the judicial decision of the critic.

RICHARD MAXWELL had "taken up" sculpture, as he expressed it, at the age of thirty in a spirit of buoyant enthusiasm clouded with no misgivings. The afternoon following his call upon Madeline, as he waited for her in his luxurious studio, he walked about among his works arrayed for her inspection and viewed them with a cheerful pride of authorship. Maxwell was not poor and art with him was not the handmaid of necessity. The figure destined to adorn the doorway of the Trust company's future home, as imagined in clay, occupied a conspicuous place against one wall. It represented a heavy limbed young woman in the act of stepping forward, one hand raised to shade her eyes, the other clasping a large key. In admiring his own handiwork Maxwell forgot to listen for the rustle of Madeline's skirts. Her knock interrupted his reverie. He greeted her with a joy so unreserved, so unmistakable in its nature that she felt herself meeting his boyishness with the confusion of a school girl. She turned from his too expressive eyes to the clay figure. "This is the model?"

"Yes, this is the lady, how do you like her?"

Madeline looked at the watchful maiden in silence. In the presence of Maxwell's work, expression was more difficult than in
contemplation of the idea of his success. For the first time in her life in the expression of an art opinion she took refuge in words. "Very well adapted to the place and the purpose, isn't it?" She met his eyes fearfully and was relieved to see that although he might have craved a more highly colored appreciation, he felt no suspicion.

After lingering lovingly for some minutes before the shrine of his creation, he turned away to pick up a small bas-relief portrait which he handed to her. The clay was smooth and greasy with tentative working; the result, a more or less faithful map of the profile of the politician it represented.

Again, almost falteringly, she took up the unaccustomed shield of words: "How much you have done—I thought you had just begun it. How many sittings have you had?"

A faint shade passed over Maxwell's usually clear brow. "Not any as yet."

"You mean you have done it all from memory? What an exceptional memory you must have."

"Well, not altogether from memory. That is,—I had a photograph to help me."

Madeline handed him back the bas-relief without further comment. It was not a form of art work she was accustomed to contemplating. But she felt no scorn for Maxwell and she was not embarrassed. She was not hypersensitive, and was not accustomed to feeling the necessity to make conversation. She had expressed herself, and that was sufficient. Victor had never expected of her anything more than the essential. Fortunately Maxwell was not embarrassed either. He replaced the bas-relief upon the shelf, saying cheerfully, "I am so glad you like it." Then he looked at Madeline and something in her appearance struck him.

"Say, you have taken off the black gown, haven't you? Jove, but you are stunning in that green thing! Forgive my stupid way of plunking out with it, but you know I am not clever at compliments. Another chap might dress it all up poetically, eh? And all I can say is just that you are a star!"

Victor had once spoken of her in a green gown; he had told her that she was like the "memory of green woods and deep waters." She had forgotten the phrase and the fact; but as she walked out of the studio with Maxwell her heart was beating confusedly over
the look in his eyes. And after she was home in her own room she went his words over in her mind.

There was more exclamation than surprise when Madeline’s engagement to Maxwell was announced.

“Most delightful and understandable, that she should marry another sculptor,” one of her Philistine friends had observed—Madeline had more of these friends than most artists. But Hans had heard the news with tears.

“She has been loved by the great master who drew his dreams from the clouds and she is content with a little boy who makes mud pies,” he exclaimed bitterly.

They were married quietly in the early summer. They were deeply in love, temperamentally adapted, and, therefore, intensely happy. Madeline, tranquil, unemotional, as she had always conceived herself, was realizing an intensity of feeling that she had not dreamed she possessed. Maxwell was youthfully, overwhelmingly in love and wanted to talk to everyone about Madeline. He did not touch his modeling tools all summer. But one day in the fall after they had returned to town again, Maxwell met an old friend—a woman—who told him that he was “neglecting his art,” and so he set to work again vigorously. Madeline accepted his renewed activity in placid silence. Maxwell’s work did not isolate him from her as she had sometimes felt, without bitterness, that Victor’s had done.

One evening they stood together at the studio window toward sunset looking up at the amber sky. The light was reflected upon their contented faces and rested with revealing touch upon the marble angel. Maxwell began speaking of Victor with his boyish directness, untroubled by any restraint of delicacy.

“He was your first love, wasn’t he, Madeline? They say a woman always loves her first love best. Is that true of you?”

She was silent so long that he questioned her again. “Did you love him best, Madeline?”

She lifted grave eyes to his. “I thought I loved him. I was fond of him—happy with him; but I know now, dear, that I never knew what love was before.”

A moment later he turned from her to a table littered with
modeling wax and tools. "I want you to see my design for the G. A. R. Anniversary dinner medal. You haven’t seen it yet. I want you to criticize it for me.” He placed a wax disk lying upon a small board confidently in her hands. “Ward always said you were his best critic, didn’t he? Stafford told me that the other day. He said you had a lot to do with his success.”

She took the medal with unconscious hands, her eyes were upon his face. “Kiss me, Dick,” she said.

He bent down and kissed her and, slipping his arm around her looked down at his medal over her shoulder. “Come, tell me about it.” She turned her reluctant attention to his work. It required a moment to focus her wandering thought, then she looked up.

“The composition is like the Della Robbia singing boys, isn’t it?”

A shade of annoyance passed over his face. “Oh, of course, in a way. I think it is well—you have said so yourself—to have the composition of one of the old chaps in one’s mind. But the working out is my own.”

She looked down at the smooth stiff outlines of the group of boys,—wooden, lifeless, childish. The wax, as in all Maxwell’s efforts, was shiny with over-working. “I think you can do better.”

He drew his arm away under pretence of holding off the model. “I am disappointed. I had hoped you would like it.” As she did not speak he went on: “Mother liked it and Jim, and Dolly Spencer thought it was great. She came in while I was working on it.”

Madeline silently reached out for the bas-relief and looked at it again as if for a reconsidered criticism.

“You don’t like it at all. . . Go ahead, tell me; I want to know.”

“I don’t think it is very good, dear.” He looked down into her eyes with a sudden hardness in his. “You think it is rotten—no good, is that it?”

She met his eyes fully although it cost her an effort. “I think it is pretty poor, Dick. I think you can do better.” She laid the medal unconsciously upon the pedestal at the angel’s feet. She saw Maxwell turn away and go out into the hall. In a moment he came back with his coat on, holding his hat. He talked with her lightly, cheerily as he buttoned his gloves, yet with a subtle difference in
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his manner. She watched him silently. "You will be back for dinner, Dick?"

"Don't wait for me. I am going down to the club to see Walters. I want to talk to him about a possible order. I may find it necessary to stay and dine with him." With a light good-bye he went out the door down the stairs.

Madeline stood where he had left her. Her eyes wandered to the angel, going it over with the careful detailed study characteristic of the stunned moment of pain, realizing acutely, too, with another section of her consciousness, its mysterious, unfinished perfection. Her eye traveled down to the angel's feet and then she saw Maxwell's medal. Her heart contracted; her mind still worked separately on; he could do better, she had told him—but she had lied; he would never do better. With the relentless truth-perceiving mind of the critic she knew that and had always known it, but she had not cared.

She heard the outer door close. He was gone. And then she no longer saw either medal or angel for a mist of tears.

THE SPIRIT OF ART

"N"OTHING so reveals the true life of a people or an epoch as its art. Neither history nor religion offers such a sure test of the heights to which the spirit of an age has risen. View it as you will, art is molded by the forces that environ it, revealing on the one hand the art and soul of its creator, and on the other hand the heart and soul of his age. However much an artist may think himself detached from his surroundings, however passionately he may turn to other ages for inspiration—nay, even though he feels himself gifted with prophetic prescience, and can project himself into ages yet unborn—still he can no more throw aside the mantle of his environment than he can escape the intangible, viewingless air which gives him breath and life."

—Edwin Wiley.