THE UNPAINTED PORTRAIT

BY ELLEN DUVALL

For one who averred that he particularly hated bustle, Urquhart felt that the lines had fallen unto him in exceptionally pleasant places. The old-fashioned house, amply pillared and porticoed, standing sheltered and private in the middle of its old-fashioned and spacious garden, with the nobly satisfying live-oaks, and stately magnolias now in full bloom; the affluent quiet and peace —

'Truly, Ashford, I wonder you don't come home oftener,' he commented warmly, glancing about with interest, as the two friends sat on one of the side porticoes after dinner.

Ashford, with evident relish of the other's unqualified admiration, returned, 'Yes, it's really fine, singularly and subtly harmonious. Everything is so in keeping; the grounds with their laying out and adornment; the house with its size, shape, and furnishings, — I often ask myself what touch I would add, and am forced to confess I can suggest nothing.'

'You did n't do it, then?' said Urquhart in surprise.

'No, it's my mother's work; her home is her masterpiece, and she thoroughly loves and enjoys it.' He paused a moment, then added, 'And she has wisdom enough to know when she has achieved the due effect; so many people keep on tinkering till they spoil all.'

'You must inherit your talent from her,' said Urquhart with interest.

'I suppose I do, though it's only in the last few years that I've been beginning to think so,' replied Grantham Ashford candidly. It would have been crass affectation in him to minimize in the least his rich and rare talent; moreover, his reputation was too well established for him not to have become accustomed to all forms and degrees of flattery, to say nothing of sincere appreciation. He was a really delightful person to praise, for he treated his talent as impersonally, or as third-personally, as did Cæsar the Gallic War, so that his friends and acquaintance felt unconsciously at liberty often and openly to discuss his work.

'It may not impress you at first,' continued Ashford, 'but the sense and truth of it sink gradually in and cause a feeling of perfect rest. Harmony, harmony, everywhere, in mass, form, and color, — with here and there just that sharp fillip of unexpected contrast that affords the imagination its necessary stimulus. Here I always feel that momentary poise and thrill — what the gushing call "inspiration" — which precede more active work; and I'm apt to do my best work after being here.'

He spoke lightly, and with a certain frankness rather unusual; for, on the whole, Ashford was a somewhat self-contained man.

The two friends were on the south portico, and could look over the garden where the land sloped gently down to a broad expanse of water. Warm enough to sit out of doors with comfort, the May evening was perfect, and the pale bluish light of the as yet starless sky bathed all things with its

shadowless flood. Both men were sensitive enough to keep silence awhile before the matchless beauty of evening.

'Of course, you've done a portrait of your mother?' remarked Urquhart presently, as if many impressions were coming to a focus.

Ashford smiled, and leaned forward from the depths of his chair. 'You know you've always said that my ninety-nine magnificent successes only throw into stronger relief my one-hundredth failure. Well, of all faces, my mother's is just my consummate miss. I've tried again and again, and always with the same result, — what comes from my hand is a sort of wooden sphinx. Yet if there *is* a face a portrait-painter ought to know, it is his mother's. And I assuredly do know mine; but it escapes me. You who theorize and speculate to the queen's taste, how will you account for this?'

Urquhart threw back his head and laughed. 'How can I answer? I've never met your mother, never even seen her, and you, yourself, have said very little about her. I've heard from others that she's a delightful woman, charming, very good company; but that's not much to go upon.'

'If you would know her, look around,' said Ashford gayly.

'Easier said than done,' returned Urquhart earnestly. 'All I can say is, evidently a person of perfect taste, and — as faith embraces works — one who balances perfect taste with a consummate sense of perfect comfort.'

Ashford laughed satirically. 'Most people appreciate the comfort far more than the taste.'

But Urquhart seemed to have taken his friend's question seriously, and to be considering. He laid his cigar in the ash-tray on the table between them, and gazed keenly about the lovely grounds as if to evoke from them the secret of their owner's being.

'If there's anything more beautiful and suggestive than a flowering tree, I don't know it,' he said presently, after a prolonged survey. 'Look at that magnolia; it's a realization of the Hermaphroditus of the Greeks, — masculine strength combined with feminine beauty.'

Ashford, who was a long-featured, handsome man, with a temperamental seriousness of expression, turned his naturally grave eyes thoughtfully upon his friend. 'Now I never think of that sort of thing,' he observed.

'Well, you don't have to, it's rank sentimentality,' returned Urquhart, laughing; 'but I get heaps of enjoyment out of it. If you can't amuse yourself with your own mind, what can you amuse yourself with?'

'But why does n't *my* mind work in something the same way?' persisted Ashford musingly; 'I think I'm something like Thackeray, — no head above the eyes.'

'Well, you may say it of yourself, if you choose; but he had the head as well as the eyes; he had both sight and vision.'

Ashford looked first surprised, then half vexed. 'The same old story, and from you, too? That's what my mother in effect said to me years ago: "Your sight far exceeds your vision, Grantham." And as my talent crystallized, and became more and more assured, with its seeing eye and facile hand, she once said, "You're like the Queen, in *Hamlet*, who said, 'All there is I see.' But she did n't see the Ghost, the only thing just then worth seeing."'

Urquhart wonderingly regarded him. 'That would seem as if she compassed *you*, rather than you her,' he said quickly.

Ashford looked frankly amused. 'Oh, my mother's not at all complex, not subtle. There's nothing particularly to understand about her. She's one

of the most natural women in the world, absolutely and always just her cheerful, kindly self. She's always more or less interested in some one, or some thing; she's always helping lame dogs over stiles.' He paused, then added, 'And the easiest human being in the world to live with; one of the least exacting. She likes punctuality at meals out of consideration for the servants, she says; but this — other than moral lapses — is all I've ever known — trouble her.' Again he paused, as if reflecting. 'An ideal wife, I fancy, — I hardly remember my father, — an ideal mother, an ideal friend; and yet I can't for the life of me put my finger on those particulars that make up her unique sum of excellence. Her health is perfect, and she is wonderfully young,' — a vision of elderly artificiality flitted before Urquhart's mind's eye, — 'even my wife, who is essentially unenthusiastic, adores her.' — Urquhart had sometimes wondered whether it were not significantly sinister, Ashford's choice of the marvelously Beautiful Ordinary who was the younger Mrs. Ashford. — 'And she has right royally loved me, and fostered my talent.' His rather flat voice softened: 'Now, *why* can't I paint her portrait?'

Urquhart made no answer, and presently Ashford continued, 'I've often thought that my mother must have some kind of fine wine in her veins, some ichor of the gods, instead of mere human blood, — she so enjoys life and living. She once said that if she failed to give the proper account of herself, it would be because she had been so interested in the Lord's handiwork, men and women, nature animate and inanimate, that she had overlooked or forgotten her part. She is the life of any and every company; she can make anything "go." Some one once asked her, "What is happiness?" And she answered solemnly, "Twenty-one gowns and four proposals a year." It was the aptest reply possible to the simpleton who asked the question. But then she immediately added, "But for most women, self-martyrdom is happiness."'

Both men laughed.

'My mother, herself, has always had suitors; and even I, her son, naturally disinclined to a step-father, am persuaded that they were not actuated by mercenary motives. She *is* most attractive; I feel and know it. There is one "steady company," however,' continued Ashford, smiling, 'who has been quietly and persistently devoted to her for years, with what my mother herself calls "the tepid devotion of habit." You may have heard of him in a small way, as he has had a small success as a very minor writer, — Horace Gray; a faded white rose of a man, to quote my mother again, whose cheerful patience in the face of his dim success must appeal to her standing generosity.'

'Humph! The quality of life lies in its adjectives. How much of a human phonograph *are* you, Ashford?'

Ashford laughed. 'I leave you to guess. Gray is a civil-engineer by profession and family propulsion, a writer by inclination; something of a misfit either way, I take it.'

'I seem to recall the name — in a magazine occasionally,' said Urquhart slowly; 'too good for the average, not good enough for the best, — a kind of mezzanine writer.'

'Maybe so,' returned Ashford indifferently; 'at all events, he's my mother's long-time devoted.'

'I should love to meet her, and I wish she was n't away,' said Urquhart earnestly.

'Oh, she'll only be gone a few days; she went up to Washington to see an old friend. You *must* stay till she comes back,' said Ashford pleasantly.

At this moment, through one of the long French windows, stepped the old colored butler. He held a small tray bearing a special-delivery letter.

'Something for you, Mr. Grantum,' he said, in a gentle, interested voice.

'Sign for me, please, Ben; and, here, give the boy this dime to ride back with.'

As Ben disappeared through the window again, Ashford exclaimed, 'Why, it's from my mother!' and hastily opened the letter. As his eyes gathered in the words, he uttered a smothered exclamation, and half rose. As he clutched the letter in one hand, his fine, straight-featured face flushed deeply, and even in the thickened light his annoyance was plain.

The situation was too obvious to be ignored, and Urquhart frankly said, 'Can I in any way help?'

Evidently the contents were so disquieting that, for the moment, Ashford could hardly speak. Strong feeling is a touchstone, and now, in the blank discomfiture of his expression, the wide helpless stare of his annoyed eyes, there was a suggestion of inadequacy or of limitation, some sense of which had come to Urquhart once or twice before. Grantham steadied himself, however, and said in a voice colorless from the effort at self-control, 'It's from my mother; she has married Gray.'

Urquhart could only reflect his friend's surprise, and was rather at a loss how to show sympathy.

'At her age, — it's worse than absurdity!' cried Ashford almost passionately. 'Why should a woman who has had emotional experience ever try to repeat it? She has everything to make life desirable — why should she think of taking under her wing this — this —'

He broke off, and Urquhart didn't know what to say.

'It's the sort of thing that makes a whole family ridiculous,' continued Ashford, in a tone of intense feeling. 'And people have always spoken of my mother's sense of humor!' he added bitterly.

Urquhart could not help reflecting that no one could ascribe much of this ozone to Ashford's own mental atmosphere.

'She is full sixty,' he concluded, with a look and manner of open disgust.

Urquhart was silent. To attempt to condole with a man because of his mother's second marriage at the ripe age of sixty, was worse than to proffer philosophical consolation for the toothache. The unexpected, wholly incalculable tangents of human nature, the actions which make kindred blood tingle with a sense of the undeserved ludicrous, are like the knight's move at chess; nothing may interpose. If Ashford took it in this way —

Ashford himself became aware of the varying shades of hesitancy in Urquhart's face.

'You may read the note; it's very characteristic, and not private.' He spoke abruptly, almost harshly, and held out the sheet.

Urquhart took it almost reluctantly, well knowing that nothing spoils friendship like too great, or impulsive, intimacy.

DEAREST GRANTHAM, — I have just married Horace Gray. I wish I could soften the blow to you; and it is because I knew it would be a blow, that I have deferred the action till now. But you no longer in any way need me; your character is formed; your art perfected; you have reached the acme of worldly success and fame; you are happily married to a charming woman who is devoted to you, and you are a father. Your life, rounded, full, complete, as a mere human life may be,

has swung out into its own rightful orbit. Your art requires you to live chiefly abroad, and you lovingly return at times simply to see me. I cannot expatriate myself, and I have no art to absorb me, no particularly strong personal interest apart from your beloved self. In marrying Mr. Gray I am securing friendship and companionship for my old age, and I like the thought of fixing myself by some definite responsibility. I appreciate the parsimony of his pale success; and he understands the nature and quality of my so-called abundance. In other words, each can reckon with the other's boundaries, which is (believe me) a rare thing between any two. And — we both first love Life.

Lastly, before coming here to Margaret Hunsdon's to be married, Mr. Gray relinquished, unsolicited, any and all claim upon my property; and by this ante-nuptial agreement, all will come to you as in any case it would. You will think that I, at my age, by such a step, must make myself ridiculous; but the world easily forgets because it does not understand, and this will be less than a nine days' wonder. The thistle of ridicule has only to be grasped like any other.

Your loving mother,
CHARLOTTE GRANTHAM GRAY.

Urquhart handed back the note slowly, with a sigh; and the two men looked at each other in distinctly helpless silence.

Finally Urquhart ventured, 'What she says is quite true: your life *is* complete; and she has evidently enough individuality to desire a life of her own. Can you really object? A son is not like a daughter.'

Ashford stared gloomily into space. 'I don't understand it at her age,' he said presently. 'I see no inducement. She and Gray would have been friends to the end, — that should have sufficed. They used to play together as children; she is three years older. He was a rather delicate boy, and she protected him, I fancy. She is always protecting some one or some thing. Oh, no, I don't *object*, that would be extreme in its turn,' he continued bitterly. 'But it's the sort of thing that defeats calculation, and holds for me too much of the unexpected. I don't care for raw, elemental surprises.' He was falling back into the mood of chastened irony in which he generally lived.

Urquhart eagerly regarded him. The orientation of a soul to Life holds all possibility of revelation, and Urquhart could not help being avid for the manifestations. He was a born disciple of Isis, and waited hungrily for the glimmerings from behind the veil, gleams of beauty and of truth, or their reverse. Gathering himself together, he said, 'Are you one of those who think that a second marriage carries with it something of slight to the first?'

'In this day of easy divorce? How unfashionable you must think me! No, not when the first was ended by death more than thirty years ago.'

Urquhart's face showed an interest he did not care to put into words; but Ashford partly divined the nature of his friend's thoughts.

'Here at the South we think so much of family, you know. My mother had both family and money, though *that* came from the Northern branch, a great-uncle who was *not* a "Southern sympathizer." She married my father (she told me so herself) rather against the wishes of *her* family. He was a nobody in particular, except a very bright and promising young lawyer, and she was a girl of twenty; he died within seven years of their marriage. She befriended his people, who were socially obscure, and married off his

young sisters to advantage; and she has always maintained cordial relations with his entire connection. But then, she has strong notions of family duty, and of the claims of kindred blood. Indeed, my mother maintains cordial relations, within reason, with every one, for she is a born promoter of peace, — a Hague Conference in herself.'

'Any significant action,' began Urquhart slowly, taking up his cigar again, 'throws a telling light upon an individual's feeling and thought.' He broke off, for his speech might be too close to the wind. What he was wondering was, whether in that first marriage there had been anything that might have made a second seem compensatory.

Ashford looked at him rather blankly. 'Oh, she was devoted to my father, by common account. She herself has never said very much, but she has frankly answered any questions I 've seen fit to put. But my mother is no hero-worshiper; and some of her casual remarks are very telling. "So long as marriage is the chief feminine career, a woman may be pardoned for marrying a man when to have loved him would be far less easily excusable." "It's a long love that knows no turning." "Among the blessings of life are, that no man may sequester sea and sky, and that no woman may marry her ideal; there always remain havens for the imaginative." I don't know any one who so enjoys life as does my mother, and by "life" she means people, singly or in groups; and yet she has a clarity of perception — '

He paused.

'— Which you might think would mar enjoyment?' asked Urquhart thoughtfully.

They were silent for a while, then Urquhart said lightly, 'I must stay, and meet her, Ashford; I want to find out why you can't paint her portrait.'

A morning or two later, Urquhart had come down early, and, thinking to sweeten and beguile time withal by a stroll through the rose-garden, he stepped out of one of the dining-room windows on to the portico, to be there confronted by a lady.

'It must be Mr. Urquhart. Good morning, and how do you do?' she said, smiling, and held out her hand.

'It's Mrs. — Gray. I so wanted to meet you, that I stayed on for that purpose.'

'I'm very glad you did. I hoped you would,' returned Ashford's mother, with a frankness and interest that matched Urquhart's own.

'And why?' asked he, as they unconsciously held hands a thought longer than usual, and gazed earnestly at each other.

'I wanted you to be with him when I made my little — venture, and I hoped you would soften the — the — surprise,' said the lady gently.

'He took it very well, if there was really anything to take, — after the first douche,' said Urquhart, smiling.

Mrs. Gray looked at him closely, and both sighed and smiled.

'The world may be divided into two classes,' she said, 'those who are surprised at nothing, and those who are surprised at everything. Neither has any real power of anticipation, so they are generally found in conjunction. Louise belongs to the first class; Grantham to the second, — so they hit it off admirably between them.'

'I can't answer for Mrs. Ashford. Ashford broke it to her in private; but your son never flinched — after the first.'

'And we must concede something to human nature,' said Mrs. Gray lightly. 'But I know what Louise said: "That's just like your mother, Grantham!" As if I had been in the habit of doing it every day in the year.'

Her smile was subtle and reserved, but her laugh was as frank and simple as a child's; he noted the difference. And they now laughed together in mutual comprehension and sympathy.

'I congratulate you with all my heart, and wish you all happiness,' he said warmly. 'It's so wholesome and rare to be able to do just what one wishes, — the psychic moment ready, the gods being propitious, we privileged, and no other human rights invaded or impaired.' He spoke with the confidence that begets confidence.

'Thank you a thousand times; that sounds as if you understood,' she answered.

'Is comprehension so rare, then?'

'Have n't you found it so?'

They both paused, and looked perhaps rather wistfully at each other. Urquhart was a big, red, hairy man, with a woefully long upper lip, which he veiled and softened by a close-clipped moustache. He had small, finely expressive eyes with handsome lashes, his one beauty. His manner and manners were simple and compact, and quite devoid of ornament; not ungraceful, certainly, but suggestive of plain, family silver with nothing but an initial or clear-cut crest. He was sufficiently well furnished forth, but one could see that he carried no more life-baggage than was absolutely necessary, and that his power of adaptation was quietly great.

'Incomprehension is the only loneliness,' said Mrs. Gray presently, harking back to his last question.

'And you have always been more or less alone?' It escaped him involuntarily, yet for the life of him he could not help saying it; for it was pouring over him like the delicate freshness and light of early day, that this woman's individuality exhaled truth which, like gravitation, is a basic law, and must draw all things unto itself.

'Oh, no,' she said, indicating a chair, and taking one beside it, 'not in that sense; for I have always had it in my power largely to fashion and to fill my own life, which is as much a responsibility as a privilege; or perhaps the one always implies the other. But the heart asks friendship and love; and the first is equality, as Balzac says, and the second is, in one sense, comprehension. Life in itself is too rich and deep, too intense and varied, for any mere mortal to have the shameless audacity, the blasphemy, to ask more. Yet this is not all.' She sighed and smiled again. 'From every height of perception we look out to the heights beyond, Life's mountains of feeling, thought, and endeavor. They simply challenge us to come on and to dare. It is more than pleasant, then, to meet those who are not only climbers, but who keep step with us, who also love to see and look beyond. I never could understand why Goethe should have said, "On every height there lies repose." For a height is simply a breathing-place where we gather up ourselves in order to go on. On the very top we sigh for the clouds; and then — man builds himself an airship, or, better still, travels in the moonboat of the imagination.'

Her rare child's laugh was infectious, and Urquhart chimed in. He listened with a sense of witchery. She had a delightful voice, as if Nature had bestowed upon her the hid treasures of the winds. The whole gamut of feeling and of thought, he felt, could be compassed and expressed by that voice. And like Nature she had the perennial charm of unconsciousness; she spoke as if thought and word were inseparable, and as if she might fling them freely forth upon Life's waters, trusting to the wholesome ineptitude of the many, to the rare comprehension of the few. Urquhart knew that he was partaking of something finer than her hospi-

tality, he was being presented with something of the freedom of her mind. He thought of the old colonial name of the grant, 'My Lady's Bower.' What an incomparable comrade, friend, lover, she would make! It was all there, all in her, the very soul of Life's joy.

He drank in her face with an avidity he had seldom felt when gazing upon a younger one. The features were moulded rather than chiseled, and, but for the eyes, smile, and expression, would have been somewhat broad and heavy; though the lines, now straightening with age, must have been voluptuously curved in youth. Her eyes, indeterminately dark, were far apart and rather narrow, though this, perhaps, was an effect of the solid, thick-lashed lids. The eyes themselves were still and clear, with a sense of light within them like a mountain pool. The lips were full, strong, and flexible, and showed readily the short, square, and quite good teeth. Her years no longer entitled her to a complexion, but her skin was wholesomely fine, sound in grain and surface, with the look of one who spends much time out of doors. The iron-gray hair was worn in an agreeable modification of the present fashion, and was very becoming to her face. And her figure was superb; rather broad for her height, deep-chested, full-bosomed; she was elastic of step and pliant of carriage, easy, strong, steady; no wonder Ashford had spoken of her as being 'profoundly young.'

'There are always coffee and a roll, or cornbread, for those who rise early; won't you have something?' she asked incidentally.

'With breakfast at nine? Oh, dear, no!' returned Urquhart. 'I won't spoil it. I had rather stay here with you.'

'The boat got in at seven, and I've been looking over the garden and grounds ever since we came,' she said simply.

She was well dressed in a traveling-dress of bluish gray, and wore at her throat an old-fashioned brooch of garnet, her one ornament. The more Urquhart looked at her, the more he admired, the more he felt, her harmony. It stole upon him and subtly enveloped him, a tremendously far-reaching sense of her essential femininity, not so much sex, perhaps, — that was too definite and limited, — as something far more primordial, possibly eternal. She was definitively woman, none more so, a gentlewoman, complex, as highly civilized as civilization has as yet gone; yet she brought home to his quickened and intensified consciousness, as never before, the imperishable elemental energy out of which sex itself springs. Some spirit-sense within him awoke and vibrated with *her* spirit.

She seemed to him at once eternally old and eternally young, and to belong to the back and the beyond and the base of all things. She was the feminine incarnate, as much womanhood as woman, and still more the radio-active feminine substance which may underlie creation. He thrilled at the thought that he was perceiving, through her, some elemental truth of the relative value of things; in a dim way, how man is man and woman is woman, — at least, there was a suggestion for him in the movement of creation's shimmering veil. For a moment he felt that he knew why woman is not creative, seldom a genius, and but a small part of the great creative force of the world. Yet she is the essence of which all this is made, the energy out of which the masculine initiatory principle springs, the matrix of art, as it were, at once substance and mould of all forms of energy. She bears out of herself, she broods, she hovers, and sets going the force that does create.

There went through his mind like a blinding flash her definition (repeated parrot-like by her all so able son), 'But for women, self-martyrdom is happiness.' Had she simply instinctively voiced a great law? No wonder Ashford could not paint her. Splendid as his talent was, he was only the mortal son of the immortal mother. The old stories were subtly true, then, the old legends embodied guesses at eternal verity. Woman was at once greater and less, larger and smaller, more lasting and more ephemeral, than man. Infrequently would she be able to do the *things* that he does; but he would never be able to do anything at all without her.

'You are looking at me, Mr. Urquhart, as if you saw — visions; what is it?' she asked, smiling.

'I wish I had known you always — or have I known you always? I have some such feeling,' blurted Urquhart; then gathering himself up, he added, 'I was trying to discover why Ashford can't paint your picture.'

'Oh, he told you, did he? Well, it's quite true; he cannot.' Mrs. Gray laughed.

'I can catch glimpses of the sphinx which he said he produced,' pursued Urquhart earnestly. 'With the hair gone, replaced by the sphinx headdress, it might be possible, and would certainly be interesting.' He regarded her ruefully. 'The value of portraiture lies in expression, it is that that individualizes, and it is just your expression that would escape him. And with me it remains as an impression only. Yes, the likeness escapes; it's too large, too comprehensive, too — everything. I'm thankful to have had the glimpse, the thought, of you; but I can very well see why he fails.'

'You think he has n't — imagination enough?' Her smile was shadowy.

'Not that exactly,' returned Urquhart slowly, as if he found it difficult to formulate his thoughts; 'perhaps it's not intended, perhaps it would not be possible. We men are too definite, too positive. Talent, genius even, must have its necessary limitations; it is energy concentrated, and its limitation is the very condition of its activity and form; while you are the large, diffused, life-giving essence out of which the genius is framed. No, he'll never paint you; but that does n't mean —' Urquhart broke off with something like confusion.

'That he does n't appreciate womanhood, or me, or both?' she teasingly supplemented, with the sweetest, most amused expression of comprehension.

'He's a mere definite mortal son, while you — belong to Olympus; he's a part, while you are all. That's the reason.'

Urquhart exhaled a long, unconscious breath as if resting upon his own explanation.

At this moment a small, slight, exquisitely finished elderly man came out on the portico, paused, looked about him, and then came toward Mrs. Gray. His features were almost too delicate, and a casual observer would have called him more feminine-looking than his wife. As Urquhart rose, Mrs. Gray presented the two men.

'I have been venturing to offer my congratulations and best wishes,' said Urquhart warmly.

'Then offer them to *me*,' said Horace Gray finely, 'for Mrs. Gray has been princely to me all her life.' There was a glow in his face as, with a beautiful expression, he turned to his wife. Urquhart's seeing eyes comprehended them both. 'I was right at first,' he persisted gently, smiling at Mrs. Gray, 'all tributes should be laid at the feet of the giver.'

Just then Ashford appeared. Evidently he and Gray had already seen

each other, and the son greeted his mother most affectionately.

'If you had only let us know, we would have had a royal wedding-breakfast,' he said, almost reproachfully. 'And you've met Urquhart, too, and I wanted to be in at the first impressions.'

'Intuitions, rather than impressions,' said Urquhart soberly. 'I think your mother must have known me always; and for me, all old faiths are made clearer and more assured. She tremendously enhances Life's value.'

'But that's what every one says,' returned Ashford. 'And do you know why I can't paint her portrait?' he asked, with an almost jealous quickness (a touch Urquhart liked in him), looking from one to the other.

'If I could have lived always, I might explain; but now I shall never have time,' said Urquhart.

'Well, then, let's go in to breakfast,' said Mrs. Gray, smiling, 'especially as I see Louise, beautifully dressed, coming down early to do me honor.'

And they went in.

A STEP-DAUGHTER OF THE PRAIRIE

BY MARGARET LYNN

FAR away on the almost bare line of the prairie's horizon, a group of trees used to show. There was a tall one and a short one, and then a tallish crooked one and another short one. To my childish eyes they spelled l-i-f-e, as plainly as any word in my second reader was spelled. They were the point that most fascinated me as I knelt at the upstairs window, with my elbows on the sill and my chin on my folded arms. I don't know when I first noticed them, for they had been there always, so far as I could remember, a scanty little bit of fringe on a horizon that was generally clear and bare. There were tips of other woods, farther to the south, woods that were slightly known to me; but that group of trees on the very edge seemed to lie beyond the knowledge of any one. Even on the afternoons when I was allowed to go with my father on one of his business errands, and we drove and drove, we never came in sight of it. Yet, when I next went upstairs and looked from the window, there it stood against the sky.

I had no sense of making an allegory of it. At that age, to the fairy-tale-fed child, the line between allegory and reality is scarcely perceptible anyway, and at least negligible. The word on the horizon was quite a matter of course to me. An older person, had it occurred to me to mention the matter, would perhaps have seen something significant, even worthy of sentimental remark, in the child's spelling out the life waiting for her on her far horizon. But to me, mystery as it was, it was also a matter of fact; there it stood, and that was all. Yet it was also a romance, a sort of unformulated promise. It was related to the far distant, to the remote in time, to the thing that was some day to be known.