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# AN AMERICAN

## ASPIRANT

BY **JENNIE BULLARD WATERBURY**  
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[CONTINUED.]

ly, music as a means of financial restitution and literature as a record of self advertisement. They had fine fingered emotions for so long that they attributed their own motives to other persons' acts, and in the process hinged to themselves the gratifying consciousness of superlative ability. A little body of paid workers, they told their "truths" with gusto, perceptibly swayed by personal prejudice, after the fashion of an orchestra swayed by the conviction of the man who holds the baton. They were quite unconscious that in this display of personal prejudice they exhibited their own insignificance as critics pure and simple.

It had been agreed that tonight Desmoulin was to set the tune to their antics. He had hinted at big spoils in connection with this debut to rush in from some mysterious quarter. They were quite willing to sign their names to an adequately remunerated appreciation as to an unjust rebuke clothed in graceful metaphor and choice vocabulary. The little figure stepped toward the footlights when her turn came and sang the cadenza. The voice was farreaching, possessed of unusual richness and bore the impress of absolute erudition and a musical sense as rare as it was unexpected. The new prima donna was greeted with a storm of applause which, started up in the gallery by the claque—those reprehensibly hired appreciators in France—happily found its way down to the body of the house. It was repeated twofold after the waltz song.

Priscilla, rosy enthusiastic, with one little dimpled arm crushed up against the box edge, her hands clasped speechlessly before her in intense sympathy, sat with confessedly far haunted eyes as the full notes soared forth firmly and saluted her anxious ears. Constance appeared electrified. Vanished was the waxen mask of that morning. It had made way for a crimson bloom like rose stains on cream. The pathetic face, with its mass of clustering blond curls caught and held carelessly in their gold traditional fillet studded with pearls, stood out like a cameo from the background of Venetian tapestry and wax lights. Her gestures were natural, unstudied, although Priscilla knew how many years it had required to assume their present proportion. The diction, that most difficult accomplishment for American girls—an accomplishment seldom taken into consideration by the unenlightened, but which is none the less the rock upon which most Anglo-Saxon go down with all on board—the diction was openly discussed as "remarkable."

Stormouth's eyes had been fixed upon Doxie, who, attired in one of his employer's dress suits, which set off his broad figure to great advantage, had restlessly mopped his sunburned brows while awaiting the rise of the curtain. He was conspicuously impatient as regarded the lack of ventilation and the development of Stormouth's seemingly humorous plan to "introduce him to a new singer." But the big, honest fellow had trembled undisguisely as Constance walked toward the footlights, had given vent to a guttural exclamation when she began to sing, and then had broken forth hoarsely, to Aunt Mildred's visible consternation, with "Grit, pure grit! Who would have ever imagined the little woman had it in her?"

Afterward a great silence had fallen upon him, but it was a golden silence, fraught with memories. There had come to Doxie, as there comes into most lives at the time of a supreme crisis, an atmospherical association which had been with him when he had experienced his greatest heart swell. It was the faint whiff of new hay, the echo of a thrashing sound, the odor of salt and sedge. His mind had traveled back, there in that crowded auditorium packed with the titled and the illustrious of the eastern continent, to a clover patch, meadow, bound in with scrub oaks, which, like a frieze of spice about fulfilled promise of summer, exuded a familiar happiness redolent of hope and youth and peace.

"Hush," Stormouth whispered succinctly, with a quick comprehension—a revelation to Doxie in its masterful tenderness and its subsequent action. "Hush! We will see her after the opera." Then, very low, "Brace up; Rome was not won in a day," with which enigmatical suggestion Stormouth won his new friend's perpetual allegiance by turning his back abruptly upon his ungovernable emotion.

In return for that plethoric promise, Stormouth's concealed hand, which hung over the back of Priscilla's chair, experienced a grip, a moment later, which was essentially firmyard in its unbridled eloquence.

Doxie's blue eyes glanced across his, the way a sword glances across steel, leaving the flash of more to come behind it.

That glance, to Stormouth, weary with the past month's smothered pain and quicksilver evolutions, seemed like a knock at the chained portal of his own despair, which he had fiercely striven to shut out in order to make way for his customary phlegmatic philosophy—in vain. It gaped hideously at him now as when he was alone. It reminded him that he was living on the brink of a mental precipice wherefrom he dared not even contemplate the gulf below. He sighted shortly and turned toward Priscilla.

"Will you take me into the foyer?" that unwise and daring young woman

asked. "I wish to speak to the curtain and M. Desmoulin." The curtain had fallen on the second act.

### CHAPTER IX.

Desmoulin stood against a marble pillar, chatting with a knot of cronies. De Lacaze, his dyed mustache bitten nervously between his yellow teeth, gazed piercingly about him in search of Priscilla. She came, finally, down the corridor, crowded with that portion of the audience which, Paris fashion, deserts the logs between the acts to imbibe fresh air while exchanging stale platitudes. She was on Stormouth's arm. She looked like a white rose in the midst of a hothouse of forced flowers, sun kissed, instead of gaslit, into fairness. Her eager young face, fine and spirited, bore the hint of a womanly self reliance which was like a whiff of something delightfully uncommon to De Lacaze's jaded epicureanism.

Desmoulin held forth, oraculose, to a man on his right, who was dubbed ironically by his conferees the "patented moralist of France." Cavally had convictions and held to them. In this instance he had barefacedly opposed Desmoulin's criticism and declared that the debutante had won "hands down."

"She will have a big fight, that young one," he asserted, with a worldly-wise wag of his head. "She has voice, talent, beauty and intelligence. Her comrades will damn her future if she does not frustrate their diabolical intrigues with consummate tact. She is too near perfection to attain popularity except among the just, and the just are in the minority here," he added under his breath, with a refractory lift of his brows.

"Absurd!" ejaculated Desmoulin. "Notoriety is not attained so easily this side of the water. They come, these young novices, and dare to try and take us old dogs by storm. She is neither a skirt dancer nor a rope-walker. More's the pity! She poses as an artist. She has much to learn. The third and fourth acts will determine her fate. If I am not mistaken, she lacks sustaining power and temperament."

Temperament in foreign translation is that element which a pure American woman is brought up to ignore and which historically inclined Frenchwomen are exhaustively counseled to cultivate. It is what the sun is to the sky, what the heat is to summer, what the blue is to the sea. It is the body of any achievement. It ranks its owner as a woman who has "lived" materially. Without this hint of temperament, which obviously is portrayed in greater perfection if emulated from the standpoint of personal experience than through any copy, no matter how arduous its reality, an actress is contemptuously alluded to as an "ignoramus," and laughed at for being a weak interpreter instead of exemplifying the epitome of vital delineation. Playing at love, as in Constance's case, rings false on French ears. The critics forgot that Juliet was 14, her materialism therefore in its baldest infancy. They remembered only a once great artist, long since dead, who sang the role to their complete satisfaction because she sang it from a standpoint of many sided temperament, an obvious outgrowth of her own erotic experience.

The critics called Constance "icy," therefore, and "characterless," and yawned out a protest at her evident "unfamiliarity with the boards," totally indifferent as to whether this were her first appearance upon the French stage or not. Had they been asked to consider her tenderly, they would have answered that the debutante had not considered them in her exhibition of imperfection. Yes, the voice was good; small, but sweet. But the girl lacked experience. One could see that she was "raw and colorless"—this, after repeated nudges from Desmoulin, and frowns, fierce and undeniably contradictory, from De Lacaze.

De Lacaze, out of the depths of his own talent for using his friends to make the biggest moves on the world's chess-board, so that he might retire unsuspected of collusion from behind a possibly brought to light intrigue, had discerned, with acute apprehension, the policy Desmoulin proposed to pursue. It was to be a case of blackmail. De Lacaze knew blackmailing methods root and branch. He had pursued them for years with recognized proficiency. Desmoulin was to constitute himself the go between, in journalistic influence, which would determine Constance's future, by substituting a flank movement where Constance's friends were concerned. In this manner he proposed to trip up his adversary if he were caught endeavoring to make off with the whole of the spoils and demand remuneration of his victim for having governed the verdict. He was holding back the tide now, the tide which had turned in favor of the new debutante, whose lucky star had set fair did Desmoulin not

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

### Undismayed.

Counsel for the Defense—Gentlemen, I appeal to you to return this unfortunate to his little home, where a tender, loving wife awaits him, where his little children call him father—

Judge (interrupting)—I will call the learned counsel's attention to the fact that the accused is unmarried.

Counsel (undismayed, continuing)—So much the more unfortunate is this poor man, who has no little home, where no tender, loving wife awaits him, where no little children call him father!—Fliegende Blätter.

### The Good Old Joke.

Grier—By the way, did I ever tell you that story about the end man and the small boy?

Frier—No, but several hundred other people have told it to me.

Grier—Nonsense! Nobody ever heard it before yesterday.

Frier—Then it isn't worth hearing.



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