A Square of Canvas

Anthony M. Rud

“No, Madame, I am *not* insane! I see you hide a smile. Never mind attempting to mask the expression. You are a newcomer here and have learned nothing of my story. I do not blame any visitor—the burden of proof rests upon us, *n’est-ce-pas?*

“In this same ward you have met several peculiar characters, have you not? We have a motley assemblage of conquerors, diplomats, courtesans and divinities—if you’ll take their words for it. There is Alexander the Great, Richelieu, Julius Caesar, Spartacus, Cleopatra—but no matter. I have no delusion. I am Hal Pemberton.

“You start? You believe this my delusion? Look closely at me! I have aged, it is true, yet if you have glimpsed the Metropolitan gallery portrait that Paul Gauguin did of me when I visited Tahiti…?”

I gasped, and fell back a pace. This silver-haired, kindly old soul the mad genius, Pemberton? The temptation was strong to flee when I realized that he told the truth! I knew the portrait, indeed, and for an art student like myself there could be no mistaking the resemblance. I stopped, half-turned. After all, they allowed him freedom of the grounds. He could be no worse surely, than the malignant Cleopatra whom I just had left playing with her “asp”—a five inch garter snake she had found crossing the gravel path.

“I—I believe you,” came my stammered reply.

What I meant, of course, was that no doubt could exist that he was, certainly, Hal Pemberton. His seamed face lighted up; it was plain he believed that establishment of identity made the matter of his detention absurd.

“They have me registered as Chase—John Chase,” he confided. “Come! Would a true story of an artist’s persecution interest you! It is a recital of misunderstanding, bigotry….”

He left the sentence incomplete, and beckoned with a curl of his tapered, spatulate index finger toward a bench set fair in the sunshine just beyond range of blowing mists from the fountain.

I was tempted. A guard was stationed less than two hundred feet distant. Notwithstanding the horrid and distorted legends which shrouded our memories of this man—supposed to have died in far-off Polynesia—he could not harm me easily before assistance was available. Beside, I am an active, bony woman of the grenadier type. I waited until he sat down, then placed myself gingerly upon the opposite end of the bench.

“You are the first person who has not laughed in my face when learning my true identity,” he continued then, making no attempt to close the six foot gap between us—much to my comfort. “*Ignorance* placed me here. Ignorance keeps me. I shall give you every detail, Madame. Then you may inform others and procure my release. The *cognoscenti* will demand it, once they know of the cruel, intolerance which has-stolen nine years from my career and from my life. You know——” and here Pemberton glanced guardedly about before he added in a whisper, *“they won’t let me paint!*

“My youth and training are known in part. Alden Sefferich’s brochure dealt with the externals, at least. You have read it? Ah, yes! Dear Alden knew nothing, really. When I look at his etchings of buildings—at his word sketch of myself—I see behind the lines and letters to a great void.

“At best, he was an admirable camera equipped with focal-plane shutter and finest anastigmatic lenses depicting three dimensions faithfully in two, yet ignoring the most important fourth dimension of temperament and soul as though it were as mythical as that fourth dimension played with by mathematicians.

“It is not. Artistic inspiration—what the underworld calls *yen*—has been my whole life. Beyond the technique and inspiration furnished by Guarneresi, one might scrap the whole of tutelage and still have left—myself, and the divine spark!

“I was one of the Long Island Pembertons. Two sisters still are living. They are staid, respectable ladies who married well. To hell with them! They *really* believed that Hal Pemberton disgraced them, the nauseating prigs!

“Our mother was Sheila Varro, the singer. Father was an unimaginative sort, president of the Everest Life and Casualty Company for many years. I mention these facts merely to show you there was no hereditary taint, no connate reason for warped mentality such as they attribute to me. That I inherited the whole of my poor mother’s artistic predilection there is possibility for doubt, for she was brilliant always. I was a dullard in my youth It was only with education and inspiration that even a spark of her divine creative fury came to me —but the story of that I shall reach later.

“AS a boy, I hated school. Before the age of ten I had been expelled from three academies, always on account of the way I treated my associates. I was cruel to other boys, because lessons did not capture my attention. Nothing quiet, static, like the pursuit of facts, *ever* has done so.

“When I tired of sticking pins into younger lads, or pulling their hair, I sought out one or another of my own size and fought with him. Often—usually—I was trounced, but this never

bothered. Hurt, blood and heat of combat always were curiosities to me—impersonal, somehow. As long as I could stand on my feet I would punch for the nose or eyes of my antagonist, for nothing delighted me like seeing the involuntary pain flood his countenance, and red blood stream from his mashed nostrils.

“Father sent me to the New York public schools, but there I lasted only six or seven weeks. I was not popular either with my playmates or with the teachers, who complained of what they took to be abnormality. I had done nothing except arrange a pin taken from the hat of one of the women teachers where I thought it would do the most good. This was in the sleeve of the principal’s greatcoat.

“When he slid in his right hand the long pin pierced his palm, causing him to cry out loudly with pain. I did not see him at the moment, but I was waiting outside his office at the time, and I gloated in my mind at the picture of his stabbed hand, ebbing drops of blood where the blue steel entered.

“I longed to rush in and view my work, but did not dare. Later, when by some shrewd deduction they fastened the blame on me, Mr. Mortenson had his right hand bandaged.

“Father gave up the idea of public school after this, and procured me a tutor. He thought me a trifle deficient, and I suppose my attitude lent color to such a theory. I tormented the three men who took me in hand, one after the other, until each one resigned. I malingered. I shirked. I prepared ‘accidents’ in which all were injured.

“It was not that I could not learn—I realized all along that simple tasks assigned me by these men could be accomplished without great effort—but that I had no desire to study algebra, geography and language, or other dull things of the kind. Only zoology tempted in the least, and none of the men I had before Jackson came was competent to do much of anything with this absorbing subject.

“Jackson was the fourth, and last. He proved himself an earnest soul, and something of a scientist. He tried patiently for a fortnight to teach me all that Dad desired, but found his pupil responsive only when he gave me animals to study. These, while alive, interested me.

“One day, after a discouraging session with my other studies, he left me with some small beetles which he intended to classify on his return. It was a hot day, and the little sheath-winged insects were stimulated out of dormance to lively movement. I had them under a glass cover to prevent their escape.

“Just to see how they acted, I took them out, one by one, and performed slight operations upon parts of their anatomy with the point of my penknife. One I deprived of wings, another

lost two legs of many, a third was deprived of antennae, and so on. Then I squatted close with a hand lens and eyed their desperate struggles.

"Here was *life, pain, struggle*—death close by, leering at the tiny creatures. It fascinated me. I watched eagerly, and then, when one of the beetles grew slower in moving, I stimulated it with the heated point of a pin.

"At the time—I was then only sixteen years of age—I had no analytical explanation of interest, but now I know that the artist in me was swept through a haze of adolescence by sight of that most sincere of all the struggles of life, the struggle against *death*!

"A fever raced in my blood. I knew the beetles could not last. An instinct made me wish to preserve some form of record of their supreme moment. I seized my pencil. I wrote a paragraph, telling how I would feel in case some huge, omnipotent force should put me under glass, remove my legs, stab me with the point of a great knife, a red-hot dagger, and watch my writhings.

"The description was pale, colorless, of course. It did not satisfy, even while I scribbled. As you may readily understand, I possessed no power of literary expression; crude sentences selected at random only emphasized the need of expression of a better sort. Without reasoning—indeed, many a person would have considered me quite mad at the time—I tore a clean sheet of paper from a thick tablet and fell to *sketching* rapidly, furiously!

"As with writing, I knew nothing of technique—I never had drawn a line before—but the impelling force was great. Before my eyes I saw the picture I wished to portray—the play of protest against death. I drew the death struggle....

"By the time Jackson returned the fire had died out of me.

"The horrid sketch was finished, and all but one of the beetles lay, legs upturned, under the glass. That one had managed to escape somehow, and was dragging itself hopelessly across the table, leaving a wet streak of colorless blood to mark its passing. Exhausted in body and mind. I had collapsed in the nearest chair, not caring whether I, myself, lived or died.

"Poor Jackson was horrified when he saw what I had done to the *Coleptera*, and he began reproaching me for my needless cruelty. Just as he was waxing eloquent, however, his eye caught sight of my crude sketch. He stopped speaking.

"I saw him tremble, adjust his pince-nez and stare long at the poor picture I had made, and then at the dead beetles. Finally, seeming in a torment of anger, he read the paragraph of

description, turning to examine me with horror and amazement in his glance.

“Then, suddenly, he sprang to his feet, gripping the two sheets of paper in his hands, swung about, and made off before I could rouse from my lassitude sufficiently to question him. I never saw Jackson again. The poor fool.

“An hour later father sent for me. I knew that the tutor had been to see him, and I expected another of the terrible lectures I had been in habit of receiving each time a new lack or iniquity made itself apparent to others. On several occasions in the past father had flogged me, and driven himself close to the verge of apoplexy because of his extreme anger at what he deemed deliberate obstinacy. I feared whippings: they sickened me. My knees were quaking as I went to his study.

“This time, however, it was plain that father had given up. He was pale, weighed down with what must have been the great disappointment of his life; but he neither stormed nor offered to chastise me. Instead he told me quietly that Jackson had resigned, finding me impossible to instruct.

“In a few sentences father reviewed the efforts he had made for my education, then stated that all the tutors had been convinced that my lack of progress had been due more to a chronic disinclination for work rather than to any innate defect of body or mind.

“ ‘So far,’ he told me, ‘you have refused steadfastly to accept opportunity. Now we come to the end. Mr. Jackson has showed me a sketch made by you in which he professes to see real talent. He advises that you be sent abroad to study drawing or painting. Would you care for this last chance? Otherwise I must place you in an institution of some kind, where you no longer can bring disgrace and pain upon me—a reform school, in short. I tell you frankly, Hal, that I am ready to wash my hands of you.’

“What could I do? I chose, of course, to go to Paris. Father made the necessary arrangements for me to enter Guarneresi’s big studios as a beginner, paying for a year in advance, and making me a liberal allowance in addition.

“ ‘I shall not attempt to conceal from you, Hal,’ he told me at parting, ‘that I do not wish you to return. Your allowance will continue just as long as you remain abroad. If, in time, a moderate success in some line of endeavor comes to you I shall be glad to see you again, but not before. The Pembertons never were failures or parasites.’

“Thus I left him. He died while I was in my third year at the studio, and by his express wish I was not notified until after the funeral was over. I wept over the letter that came, but only because of the knowledge that now I never could make up in any way for the great sorrow I had caused my father. Had he lived only ten years longer—and this would not have been

extraordinary, as he died at the age of fifty-two—I could have restored some of that lost pride to him.

"Is it necessary to tell of my years with Guarneresi? No; you confessed some slight knowledge of me. Very well, I shall pass over them lightly. Suffice it to say that here at last I found my forte. I could paint. The *maestro* never valued my efforts very highly, but he taught with conscientious diligence nevertheless. In the use of sweeping line and chiaroscuro I excelled the majority of his pupils, but in color I exhibited no talent—in his estimation, at least.

"It was strange, too, for through my mind at odd intervals swept riots of crimson, orange and purple, which never could be mixed satisfactorily upon my palette for any given picture. I told myself that the fault lay as much in the subjects of my pictures as in myself—the excuse of a liar, of course.

"There *was* some excuse there, however. For instance, when we painted nudes Guarneresi would assemble a half-dozen old hags with yellowed skin, bony torsos and shriveled breasts, asking us to portray youth and beauty. Instead of attempting to pin a fabric of imagination upon such skeletons, I used to search out the more beautiful of the *cocottes* of the night cafés, and bring with me to the studio the next day memories and hurried sketches of poses in which I had seen them. This was more interesting, but unsatisfactory withal.

"I had been five years in the studio, and had traveled three winters to Sicily, Sardinia and Italy, before the first hint of a resolution of my problem came to me. It was in the month of July, when north-loving students take their vacations.

"I was alone in the vast studio one afternoon. Guarneresi himself was absent, which accounted for the holiday taken by the faithful who remained during the hot days. On one side of the room were the cages, where the *maestro* kept small live animals, used for models with beginners. There were a few rabbits, a dozen white mice and a red fox.

"Wandering about, near to my wits' end for inspiration to further work, I chanced to see one of the rabbits looking in my direction. Rays of sunlight, falling through the open skylight, caught the beast's eyes in such a manner that they showed to me as round discs of glowing *scarlet*.

"Never had I witnessed this phenomenon before, which I since have learned is common. It had an extraordinary effect upon me. In that second I thought of my delinquent boyhood, of dozens of cruel impulses since practically forgotten—of the mutilated, dying beetles which had been instrumental in embarking me upon an art career.

“Blood rose in torrents to my own temples. A fever consumed me. There was life and *there could be death*. I could renew the inspiration of those tortured beetles.

“With agitated stealth, I glanced out into the empty hallway, locked the door of the studio, drew four shades over windows through which I might be seen, and crept to the rabbit cage.

“Opening it, I seized by the long ears the white-furred animal which had stared at me. The warm softness of its palpitating body raised my artistic desire to a frenzy. I pulled a table from the wall, and holding down the animal upon it I drew my knife. Overcoming the mad, futile struggles of the rabbit, I slit long incisions in the white back and belly. The blood welled out....

“Perfect fury of delight sent me to my canvas. My fingers trembled as I mixed the colors, but there was no indecision now, and no hint of muddiness in the result. I painted....

“You perhaps have seen a reproduction of that picture? It was called ‘THE LUSTS OF THE MAGI,’ and now hangs in one of the Paris galleries. Some day it will grace the Louvre. And all because our white rabbit had sacrificed its heart’s blood.

“At eleven next morning Guarneresi himself, coming to the studio, found me exhausted and asleep upon the floor. When he demanded explanations, I pointed in silence to the finished picture upon my easel.

“I thought the man would go frantic. He regarded it for an instant, with intolerance fading from his bearded face. Then his mouth gaped open, and a succession of low exclamations in his native tongue came forth. His raised hands opened and shut in the gesture I knew to mean unrestrained delight.

“Suddenly he dashed to the easel, and, before I could offer resistance, he snatched down my picture and ran with it out of the studio and down the stairs into the narrow street. I followed, but I was not swift enough. He had disappeared.

“In half an hour he returned with four brother artists who had studios nearby. The others were more than lavish in their praise, terming my picture the greatest masterpiece turned out in the Quarter for years. Guarneresi himself was less demonstrative now, but I detected tears in his eyes when he turned to me.

“ ‘The pupil has become the master,’ he said simply. ‘Go! I did not teach you this, and I

cannot teach you more. Always I shall boast, however, that Signor Pemberton painted his first great picture in my studio.'

"The next day I rented a studio of my own and moved out my effects immediately. I started to paint in earnest. There is little to relate of the next few months. A wraith of the inspiration which had given birth to my great picture still lingered, but I was no better than mediocre in my work. True the experience and accomplishment had improved me somewhat in use of color, but I learned the galling truth soon enough that never could I attain that same fervor of artistry again—unless....

"After four months of ineffectual striving—during which time I completed two unsatisfactory canvases—I yielded, and bought myself a second white rabbit. What was my horror now to discover, when I treated the beast as I had treated its predecessor, that no wild thrill of inspiration assaulted me.

"I could mix and apply colors a trifle more gaudily, yet the suffering and blood of this animal had lost its potent effect upon me. After a day or two the solution occurred. *Lusts of The Magi* had exhausted the stimulus which rabbits could furnish.

"Disconsolate now, I allowed my work to flag. Though I knew in my heart that the one picture I had done was splendid in its way, I hated to believe that in it I had reached the peak of artistic production. Yet I could arouse in myself no more than the puerile enthusiasm for methodical slapping on of oils I so ridiculed in other mediocre painters. Finally I stopped altogether, and gave myself over to a fit of depression, absinthe and cigarettes.

"Guarneresi visited me one day, and finding me so badly in the dumps prescribed fresh air and sunshine. As I refused flatly to travel, knowing my ailment to be of the subjective sort, not cured by glimpses of pastures new, he lent me his saddle mare, a fine black animal with white fetlocks and a star upon her forehead. I agreed listlessly to ride her each day.

"Three weeks slipped by. I had kept my promise—actually enjoying the exercise—but without any of the beneficent results appearing. I was in fair physical health—only a trifle listless—it is true, yet whenever I set myself to paint a greater inhibition of spiritual and mental weariness seemed to hold me back. Little by little, the ghastly conviction forced itself upon me that as an artist I had shot my bolt.

"One day, when I was riding a league or two beyond Passy, I had occasion to dismount and slake my thirst at a spring on which it was necessary to break a thin crust of ice. Drinking my fill I led the mare to the spot, and she drank also. In raising her head, however, a sharp edge of ice cut her tender skin the distance of a quarter inch. There, as I watched, *I saw red drops of blood gather on her cheek*.

“I cannot describe adequately the sensations that gripped me! In that second I remembered the beetles and the rabbit; and I *knew* that this splendid animal had been given to me for no purpose other than to renew the wasted inspiration within me. It was the hand of Providence.

“Preparations soon were made. I obtained the use of a spacious well-lighted barn in the vicinity, and put the mare therein while I returned to Paris for canvases and materials. Then, when I was all ready for work, I hobbled the mare with strong ropes, and tied her so she could not budge. Then I treated her as I had treated the rabbit.

“Deep down I hated to inflict this pain, for I had grown to care for that mare almost as one cares for a dear friend; but the fury of artistic desire would not be denied.

“Next day, when all was over, I took the canvas in to Paris and showed it to Guarneresi. He went into ecstasies, proclaiming that I had reawakened, indeed. Yet when I told him of the mare and offered to pay his own price, he became very white of countenance and drew himself up, shuddering.

“ ‘Any but as great a man as yourself, Signor,’ he shrilled, his cracked old voice breaking with emotion, ‘I should kill for that. Yourself are without the law which would damn another, but *not* outside the sphere of undying hatred. You are great, but awful. *Go!*’

“I found, then, that no one wished to look at my picture. Guarneresi had told the story to sympathetic friends, and it had spread like a fire in spruce throughout the Quarter. I was ostracized, deserted by all who had called me their friend.

“A month later, nearly broken in spirit, I came to New York. I was done with Paris. Here in America none knew the story of my last painting, and when it was put on exhibition the critics heralded it as greater far than the finest production of any previous or contemporary American artist. I sold it for twenty thousand dollars, which was a good price in those days.

“I was swept up on a tide of popularity. As you know, in this country even the poorest works of a popular man are snatched up avidly. Criticism seems to die when once a reputation is attained. I got rid of all the canvases I had painted in Paris, and was besieged for portrait sittings by society women of the city.

“Because I had no particular idea in mind for my next painting I did allow myself to drift into this work. It was easy and paid immensely well. Also I was called upon to exercise no

ingenuity or imagination. All I did was paint them as they came, two a week, and get rich, wasting five years in the process.

“Then I fell in love. Beatrice was much younger than myself, just turned nineteen at the time. I was first attracted to her because my eye always seeks out the beautiful in face and form as if I were choosing models among all the women I meet.

“She was slim of waist and of ankle, though with the soft curve of neck and shoulder which intrigues an artist instantly. She was more mature in some ways than one might have expected of her years—but the more delightful for that reason.

“Her eyes were dark pools rippled by the breeze of each passing fancy. The moment I looked into them I knew that wrench of the heart which bespeaks the advent of the one great emotion, Many times before I had thought myself in love, yet in company of Beatrice I wondered at my self-deception. In the evening, as she sat beside me in a nook of Sebastian’s Spice Gardens—you know, the great indoor reproduction of the famous gardens of Kandy, Ceylon—I gloried in her beauty, and in the way soft silk clung to her person. The desire for possession was intolerable within me. Before parting I asked her, and for answer she lifted her soft, white arms to my neck and met my lips with a caress in which I felt the whole fervor of love. That was the sweetest and happiest moment of my life.

“We married, and built ourselves a home upon Long Island. After three months of honeymoon we settled there, more than ever in love with each other if that were possible.

“A year sped by. Ten months of this I spent without lifting a brush to canvas. It was idyllic, yet toward the last a sense of shame began to pervade my mind. Was I of such weak fibre that the love of one woman must stamp out all ambition, all desire for accomplishment?

“At the end of the year I was painting again, making portraits. The long rest and happiness had made me impatient with such piffle, however. I had all the money that either of us could need in our lifetime, so I could not take the portraiture seriously. I dabbled with it another full year, without once endeavoring to start a serious piece of work.

“Then, after Beatrice bore me a daughter, I began to lay plans for continuing serious endeavor. It is useless to repeat the story of those struggles. It was the same experience I had had after that first successful picture.

“My technique now was as near perfection as I could hope to attain, and the mere matter of color mixing I had learned from those two wild flights of frenzy. I found myself, however, psychologically unable to attack a subject smacking in the least of the gruesome—and that, of course, always had been my talent and interest.

“I rebelled against the instinct which urged me to try the experiment of the mare again. In cold blood I hated the thought of it, and also I feared, with a great sinking of the heart, that I should find no more inspiration there even if I did repeat.

“I turned to landscape painting, choosing sordid, dirty or powerful scenes. I painted the fish-and-milk carts on Hester Street, showing the hordes of dirty urchins in the background playing on the pavement. Somehow, the picture fell short of being really good, although I had no difficulty in selling it.

“I portrayed, then, a street in the Ghetto on a rainy night, with greasy mud shining on the cobblestones and the shapeless figure of a man slouched in a doorway. This was called powerful—the ‘awakening of an American Franz Hals’ one critic termed it—but I knew better. Beside the work I *could* do under powerful stimulus and inspiration, this was slush, slime. I *hated* it!

“Even waterscapes did not satisfy. I painted half of one picture depicting two sooty, straining tugs bringing a great leviathan of a steamer into harbor, but this I never finished. I felt as if I drooled at the mouth while I was working.

“Thus two more years went by, happy enough when I was with Beatrice, but sad and savage when I was by myself in the studio. My wife had blossomed early into the full beauty of womanhood, and yet she retained enough of modesty and reticence of self that I never wearied of her. Because up to this time, when I turned thirty-three years of age, the powers of both of us, physical and mental, had been on the increase, we still were exploring the delights of love and true affection.

“There was an impelling force within me, however, which would not be denied. I had been born to accomplish great things. Weak compromise, or weaker yielding to delights of the mind and body, could but heap fresh fuel on the flame which consumed me when I got off by myself. I fought against it months longer, but in the end I had to yield. With fear and trepidation struggling with ambition and lust within me. I took a trip to a distant town of New York State, procured a fine, blooded mare, and repeated the experiment which had lost me the friendship of Guarneresi and my Parisian contemporaries.

“All in vain. Out of the hideous slaughter of the animal I obtained only a single grim picture —a canvas which I painted weeks later, when the shudder of revulsion in my frame had died down somewhat. I called the picture ‘CANNIBALISM,’ for it showed African savages gorging themselves on human flesh. It never sold, for the instant I placed it on exhibition the art censors of New York threw it under ban—and, I believe, no one really wanted the thing in his house.

“I did not like it myself, and finally, after much urging by my wife. I burned it. This sacrifice, however, merely accentuated the fury in my heart. I *must* do better than that!

“Since I have told you of my other periods of frenzy and self-hatred, I may pass over the ensuing month. One day the inspiration for my last great picture came, and as with the second, through pure accident. Beatrice was cutting weeds in the garden with a sickle, while I sat cross-legged beside her, watching. I always could find surcease from discontent in being near her, and watching the fine play of animal forces in her supple body.

“The sickle slipped. Beatrice cried out, and I jumped to place a handkerchief over the wound that lay open on her wrist, but not before my eyes had caught the sight of the red blood bubbling out upon her satiny skin.

“A madness leaped into my soul. My fingers trembled and a throbbing made itself felt in my temples as I laved on antiseptic and bound a bandage over the wound. This was the logical, the inevitable conclusion! She was my mate; she was in duty bound to furnish inspiration for the picture I must paint, my *masterpiece*.

“I of course, told Beatrice nothing of what was passing in my mind, but went immediately about my preparations.

“I placed a cot in the studio, fastening strong straps to it. Then I made ready a gag, and sharpened a keen Weiss knife I possessed until its edge would cut a hair at a touch. Last I made ready my canvas.

“She came at my call. At first, when I seized her and tore off her clothing she thought me joking, and protested, laughing. When I came to placing the gag, and bound her arms and legs with strong straps, however, the terror of death began to steal into her dark eyes.

“To show her that I loved her still, no matter what duty impelled me to do, I kissed her hair, her eyes, her breast. Then I set to work....

“In a few minutes I was away and painting as I never had painted before. A red stream dripped from the steel cot, down to the floor, and ran slowly toward where I stood. It elated me. I felt the fire of a fervor of inspiration greater than ever had beset me. I painted. *I painted!* This was my masterpiece.

“Drunk with the fury of creation, I threw myself on the floor in the midst of the red puddle time and time again. I even dipped my brushes in it. Mad with the delight of unstinted

accomplishment, I kept on and on, until late in the evening I heard my little daughter crying in her room for the dinner she had not received. Then I went downstairs, laughing at the horror I saw in the faces of the servants.

"They found Beatrice, of course. The servants 'phoned immediately for the police. I fooled them all, however. I knew that they might do something to me, such is the lack of understanding against which true artists always must labor, so I took the canvas of my masterpiece and hid it in a secret cupboard in the wall known only to myself. I did not care what they did to me, but this picture, for which Beatrice had offered up her love and life, was sacred.

"They came and took me away. Then ensued a terrible scandal, and some foolish examinations of me in which I took not the slightest interest. And then they put me here.

"I have not been in duress all the time, though. Oh, no! Three years later some of my old friends contrived at escape, and secreted me away to the South Seas. There they gave me a studio, meaning to allow me to paint. I was guarded, though. They would not allow me full freedom.

"I painted, but I have not the slightest idea what was done with those canvases. I had no interest in them personally. All I could think of now was the one great masterpiece hidden in the cupboard of my old studio. I wanted to see it, to glory in the flame of color and in the tremendous conception itself.

"At last I gave my guards the slip, and after long wandering about in native proas, made my way to this country again, to New York. I found the canvas, and, rolling it, secreted it upon my person. Then I went out and gave myself up to them. I was brought here again.

"Imprisonment was not important to me any more. I was getting old. Though I would like to be released now it is a matter of less urgency than before, because I have with me always my masterpiece. *See!*"

The old man tugged at something inside his blouse, and brought forth a dirtied roll which he unsnapped with fingers that trembled in eagerness.

"See, Madame!" he repeated triumphantly.

And, before my horrified eyes, he unrolled *a blank square of white canvas!*