

The Secret

By T. Mackenzie

YES, you would have me know that it is within the little casket held level below your tiny, pointed chin, but you forget I can look into your solemn, omniscient eyes, and read that the secret lies within them too. Never was mystery more safe than in your keeping, you weird little creature, with eyes of a Sphinx and mouth of a baby. Was your secret known to the artist who painted you, to him who gave you that thrilling look, over-teeming with what you can never tell? Where two persons know, there concealment is weak, so I am assured that neither the painter who conceived you, nor I who am in love with you, can share the knowledge you were created to hide. You are so sure of it that you look me through and through, guiltless of having any treasure which no one may share. "Why need I fear you?" I read in your eyes, "I hold what you can never know. I am Mystery, and exist only so long as no one has my Secret."

Little positive negation! Like to-morrow, which never is but always to be with us, you offer perpetually what you will never grant. Do you know that you tempt me well-nigh beyond endurance with that wistful, eldritch beauty, and, madman that I become, I would that you were a living thing that I might kill
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you, and so annihilate the rigid negation of your obstinate self-control. Have you no compassion for us poor humanity, with our infinite capacity for needing, that you should sur-taunt us with that inexorable look of denial? You glory in your power, there is satisfaction about your lips, and you hold the casket lightly to show that it is hopelessly beyond our reach. Indeed, it seems to me at times, that you are offering the little bronze treasure to the world at large, saying:

“Here, take my Secret!” knowing that you but invite in order to refuse.

I wonder did you ever live on earth? Sometimes you seem to me to be a worldly little person, made to drive a man distracted for the want of you. It gives you more satisfaction to say No than Yes; your baby mouth may be willing and weak, yet your eyes are always stern, and see too far to care for what is near. Who once gained your soul, however, would gain it for all eternity. Steadfast is the watchword of that soul, union or purpose, oneness of design, truth absolute are its attributes.

I like to sit here beside you, while the dim light of London day suggests the neutral hue of dusky hair that might be brown and shadowed eyes that might be blue, and fancy that once you were a living girl, an artist's model, and, had you lived, might still be in the fulness of sweet womanhood.

I am sure that you are dead. I like to fancy that you fulfilled one duty to the artist and that then you died. Life could not have wanted you longer, having made you what the picture on my wall reflects. For all trivial purpose in the world, surely of all maids you were most unfit. When I think of you as leading the life of any girl whom fate has brought near my path, I cannot but smile at the incongruity of the notion. That you lived is, I grant, a fair thought, but that you should be and act as
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other women is an absurd one. Who ever possessed a personality like yours that you should be expected to resemble another? I would as lief imagine that I had two mothers, that two moons ruled the sea's tide, as fancy that any one like you in being and in face ever set foot upon this stony world of stumbling. The very sweep of your hair falling parted round your face is unique, the colour of your eyes, neither blue nor green nor grey is unparalleled. Who else had hands like those upholding the casket, unless perhaps it were he, whose stroke upon the lyre made the mountain tops to bow in adoration?

All around you is dark, mystic, suggestive; the delicate tenderness of your face against the gloomy canvas is like the petal of a wild rose adrift upon a murky stream, white and pink and leaf-shaped.

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There are those to whom Mystery is a thing of horror. The unseen offers suggestions so unthinkable that the mind turns drowning to what is comprehensible. To such as these my picture will never be a thing of joy. It offers nothing that the mind of man can fathom, and the thoughts it awakens bear no name.

Some there are, and I am of this category, to whom pure happiness is only possible when all that pertains to the intellect of man is in abeyance, and the unreasoning, unstudied, uncalculating part of him is in the ascendant, jubilant in the recklessness of nature—divinely the brute. Ascetism may recoil at the words, philosophy be shocked, nevertheless our most glorious passions are those which are instinctive. Motherhood, Heroism, Love, do they spring from the intellect? Irrational, if you will so name them, these instinctive, animal feelings have not lowered mankind;

kind; contrariwise, they have prompted him to Godlike action when reason would have made him coward.

We may revel in our science, classify and label our emotions, we can never argue away the beauty of what passes the understanding, and to say that Mystery is an abomination is to despise God and Life and Love and Hope.

With dismay I think on the dissatisfaction inevitably linked with the solving of what was unknown, that bitter taste underlying so much that is rapturous on earth, and I look up at my maiden with her Secret, and know that the greatest wisdom in the world is hers.