

THE POSTSCRIPT

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649677191

The Postscript by Eleanor Stuart

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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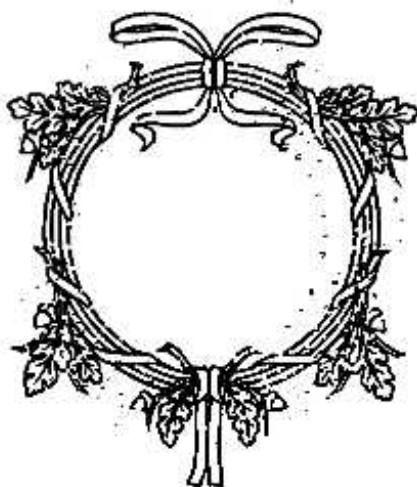
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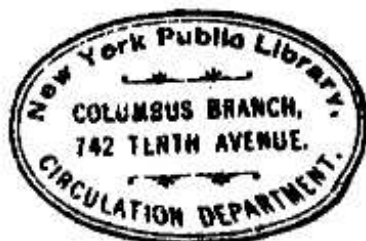
BY

ELEANOR STUART



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NEW YORK
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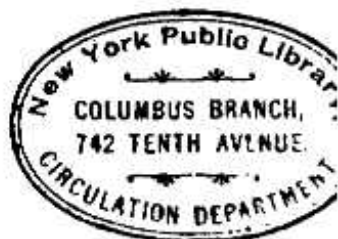
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PROPERTY OF THE
CITY OF NEW YORK.

TO
CONSTANCE
AND THAT STAR OF MORNING
SO LATELY RISEN
ON HER NIGHT OF GRIEF

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CHAPTER ONE

ESTHER DA TROFO studied her domain as the lake showed it to her in its round mirror. Rank on file of olive-trees spread orderly over six of her seven hills, with her hospitable white house in the foreground, as well as the grim orphanage—unsightly testimony to the old Contessa's charity. Her eyes roved from hill to hill in a perfectly unpossessive fashion.

"He loved it," she said softly, "and I should too, if I were not so lonely."

A burst of young life rushed wildly from the orphanage, screaming, gesticulating, leaping, with all the excess energy of youth. They were lightly clad—that horde of little boys—and rushed like frenzied things to the shore, wetting their heads, as old Father Colombo had told them to do, before they dashed along the spring-board, turning lithe

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bodies in the air to disappear head-first and happy-hearted in the lake.

Esther sat down on a garden seat, overwhelmed by her aloofness from all activity. As a rule she had not even that of others to watch. Her task was to wait—a childless widow—until she soared to Sandro da Trofo again, under the kind wing of death. She was delighted to read any prediction of a swift-coming Day of Judgment, as the one chance which might cut short her solitary journey through the world. "I wonder if the day will ever come when I can stop crying," she thought now. The poignant beauty of Italian eventide brought more tears to her tired eyes; they fell quietly, blurring the wonderful hour of painted west and sharp outlines.

Esther was American still, despite six years as an Italian wife. Her pretty reddish hair curled brightly, and her gray eyes looked out calmly—investigating, American eyes, observant even with the tears in them. She realised that the "old lady indoors," as she always styled her companion, was the nearest person she had on earth.

CHAPTER ONE

"I am every lonely thing," she cried in a sort of despairing anger—talking to herself was a product of her loneliness—"I am an orphan, an only child, and a childless widow."

Hers was an inappropriate face to be shadowed with despair, for the tints of babyhood still clung to her, the roundness of her supple body was like that of a little child, and even her hands were shell-tinted, for all her thirty years.

She moved languidly down the marble steps to the shore, to divert her mood with the children's antics in the water. Such joy as theirs had lost its meaning for her, like a language rusting away in memory, unspoken and unheard in exile.

Far out in the lake a little boy threw up his hands shrieking. Then he disappeared. Father Colombo had told Esther he himself could not swim; she remembered it when she saw him fumbling at the painter of a lazy old boat, inaccessibly moored high on shore.

Flinging off her hat, she threw down her

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coat and outside skirt on top of it, to rush out on the spring-board and dive off its end, her ruffled petticoat filling gaily with air as she passed—a white flash—from shore to water.

She liked to swim and was stronger than most women.

This was her first exercise since Sandro's death, four months before. She felt a sort of fire march in her veins, a conquering power of life, almost strangling her with joy; the meaning of the children's happiness dawned on her; she could translate their shouts, and had become a part of them. When she caught roughly at the drowning boy, she snatched him to her in a tumult of exultation. The bonds of her limbo were broken, and life stirred in her heart again.

Every assertive spring-tide happiness, every symptom of approaching joy, seemed to flicker and die down, as she stretched him out on her tiny beach. She called and he lay quiet; she shook him, but he sagged back on the gravel with a sigh. "Come to," she called to him; and then again, she called to Father Colombo.