

# OUR SHORT STORY PAGE



# MACNAIR

by E M E R Y - P O T T L E

ACNAIR came to the studio one afternoon about four.

"Do you want a model?" he asked, briefly. "Sherman sent me. I'm Macnair."

"I'm looking for one," I admitted. "I remember Sherman spoke of you."

Without more words the boy got out of his clothes.

"Good," I said. "You'll do admirably."

The boy had not been long in the studio when from his attitude of profession and self-possession one might have imagined that he were a hundred shares in one stroller. And yet he was shamed in finding out my personal habits, wishes, moods; those he was never violated—either, in secret ways that he thought I did not detect, he sought to gratify them.

Presently his supple fingers took to idle amusement in tiny blobs of clay. In the rests from posing the boy diverted himself by forming, with considerable dexterousness, familiar animals—cats, dogs, birds, and an occasional human figure. These he would show me with an embarrassed laugh, then crumple them into a clay lump.

"Your fingers are very clever," said I one day. "Have you any real notion that you'd like to do that sort of thing seriously? The world is full of fools with deaf fingers—you've got to have more than that."

"I don't know," he answered vaguely. "I'd kind of like to do it if I got a good chance." Later on in the day he referred to the matter again. "It takes a good deal of practice to be an artist, don't it? I'd like to go to Paris. It's a sporty place. They boozes a lot there, don't they?"

"It depends. You can do as you like, just as you can anywhere else." "You can't play football and baseball and boozes—you're down and out if you do. I don't boozes any. Don't smoke but one or two cigarettes a day. Do they play football and baseball in Paris?"

"It isn't the best thing they do," I confessed. "They manage to have a good time notwithstanding."

He nodded, his eyes alert with the new idea.

"You'd better stick to football."

"You think I'd go to hell in Paris," he grumbled. "Everybody says I'm going to go to hell. Wonder why?"

One day, sitting naked on the high stool by the fire, his knees drawn up under his chin, his feet on the top stool, he announced that he was going to college. "Going to fix it up in a day or two. There's two—three thousand fellows that want me to join. It's like this: two or three friends of mine—college boys—have won me play and they're hot for having me go to their college and get on the team. See? One fellow is from Marlow and another from Ward. The idea is that you sort of go in and pick out a fool student to do: an art course, maybe, or farming, or—oh, I don't know. These fellows have got it all fixed up for me. I think I'll go to Ward. It's more sporty there, and awful good athletics. My Ward friend says I can get in right away in the art course if I study up a little first."

At the end of a fortnight Macnair entered Ward College. He came once more before he left, to say good-bye. He wore new clothes of a highly collegiate fashion and a jaunty blue cap on the back of his head.

"So-long," he smiled. "I won't forget you. Thanks awfully for the boxing and the sword practice. And I guess we'll win that competition all right, all right. Me for the art course, now. So-long."

It was during Christmas week of the following year that I next saw Macnair.

Toward midnight I had dropped into one of the big restaurants on Broadway for a bit of supper. I was too tired to choose a more subdued resort. The tables were nearly all crowded. Next me were a gross, red-chopped, diamond-studded creature and a shrewd-eyed, pert, pretty girl. Beyond was a boisterous table unmistakably of college boys. They were evidently out to make a night of it; in fact, the manager had frequently to calm their lusty desire for song and hilarity, which seemed a pity since it was the most genial note in the room.

To my mind a far greater cause for apprehension was the fat-beast next me.

"What do I spend my money on you for?" he suddenly bellowed. "Huh?" He proceeded to answer this embarrassing demand: "Because I'm a fool. That's why! You treat me like a dog. Oh, yes you do! You run away from me. You laugh at me. It's funny for you. It ain't funny for me. Huh?"

The girl whispered something. "No, I won't keep still," vociferated her outraged host. "You keep still."

The college boys by this time had turned their entire attention to this new phase of the evening. And in the group I observed now, for the first time, Macnair. I saw that he had been drinking; his tanned cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkled, his lips shone as red as poppies.

The girl beckoned to a waiter and gathered her fours about her as if she would go. A hairy lump of a hand jumped across the table, upsetting wineglasses, and caught her wrist. "No, you don't, my lady."

With a nervous cry, more of anger than of pain I fancy, she jerked herself free. "You hurt me. Don't!" Her eyes agonizingly besought the waiter, but he did not appear.

"So—me," he stormed. "You always want to run away from me. And I love you more when you're gone."

Her black, slightly almond-shaped eyes struck sparks. "I hate you. You're a beast," she threw at him, rising to her feet. With a quickness surprising and disconcerting, her companion seized his glass of beer.

Suddenly she leaned over and touched Macnair on the arm.

"Her name is Heleen Beauvoir. She's part French, she says."

"Miss Beauvoir then—home?"

"She was all to the bad in the nerves. I couldn't leave her, could I?"

"Don't you believe she ain't all right," he said, challengingly. "Cause she is."

"My dear chap, I don't know the girl. What should I think of her one way or the other?"

"Well, there's a lot of folks," he went on doggedly, "who think that because a girl is on the stage she—"

"Oh, nonsense, Mac," I laughed. "Tell me about yourself. How's the art course? And football and baseball?"

He grinned, more like his old self than he had been that day. "I'd hate to tell you about the art course," he replied. "The Prof. has got you stung to death. He talks about it perfectly, lovely and you write down what he says in your little book. Oh, it's great; I love art. But I got on the team, pitched last spring and played end on the eleven this fall. I was the main squeeze. Marlow College tried to get me disqualified because they said I was a professional, but they couldn't prove anything." He laughed reminiscently. "We had some awful good games. Oh, I was the candy rabbish kid."

"It's vacation now, take it."

He gave me a droll look. "College begun again day before yesterday."

"Oh! And—"

"I guess I won't go back. I know enough art now.

They are all right, those Ward boys, but it's pretty dull there for me. They seem kind of young. I'm not much on the college end of it. I like the athletics, but the rest—Oh, I don't know. It's too tame for my business. I guess I'll stay in New York and get a chance here."

He did not care to pursue the subject, for he rose, lit a fresh cigarette, and strolled about the studio. "What's new?" he asked. "Got any more prizes? I'd like to see that one of me finished."

I showed him a bronze casting of the figure. He scrutinized it in silence. After a time he made his only comment. "It's bulky, but it—it's different from me. Looks as if it had something inside it that I haven't got." As he was leaving he said. "I'd like to bring my friend up to see that one of me. Do you mind?"

"No, not at all. What friend?"

"Miss Beauvoir."

"I should be delighted," I soberly replied.

"Thanks. So-long. Good-bye."

wine and sung the contents straight at her. It struck her bare throat and ran down, dismally soaking the chiffon and pale silk of her gown. "Oh!" she gasped.

It was Macnair who acted. He rushed over to the young woman and with one hand began mopping her throat with his napkin, the other, in fist form, he shook under the retreating nose of the beast. "You dirty coward," he stuttered, "you big—"

I stepped to Macnair's side. "Put her in a cab and send her home," I said, in a low tone.

His face softened in momentary recognition of me. "But this big slob—" he began.

"Don't talk! Do what I tell you!"

He hesitated, then put his arm through the girl's and drew her away, past the staring eyes.

I went home and Macnair's companions also departed, but Macnair himself did not return. I rather expected that the encounter would bring a visit from the boy, but it was not until a week later that he appeared.

"Halloo, Mac," said I. "I'm glad to see you. I've run expected you'd be turning up."

"I'd have been around before, only I've been—" he stammered over the phrase—"sort of busy."

"Playing knight-errant?"

"What?"

"Protector of the ill-treated female?"

"She's on the stage, in 'The Whistling Girl.' That was the manager of the company she was with. She says he's bothered her to death hanging around her. He's a swine all right. Say, it's awful what girls have to take from chaps like that, isn't it? And when they stand to lose their jobs if they try to resent it. It makes you sick."

"As you didn't come back that night, I suppose you drove the lady—"

"I'm not the awful boy," she demanded.

We soon got more at our ease. I took her about the place, pointing out what I thought might most amuse her, and Macnair followed behind, silently. The thing for which Mac had posed I kept until the last. "This will probably interest you as much as anything."

Miss Beauvoir put up her lorgnette to look at the statue. She encountered Macnair's eyes and giggled. "Mac, I do believe!" she protested. Then they both giggled. "Excuse me, won't you?" she turned to me with an effort of seriousness—"it's perfectly divine, I think, but I might as well be frank, I don't think it is quite so nice-looking as Mac."

My laugh dispelled her nervous fear of having offended me. "It was not meant for a portrait," I explained.

"Ah, yes," she murmured, her gaze furtively on Macnair. "Art is so interesting."

When it was evident that we were in the friendliest possible relation to one another, Macnair turned to Miss Beauvoir and said bluntly, "Heleen, let's have a drink."

"Mac, aren't you dreadful? Well, tell him then."

Macnair grinned. "We got married last night." He reached out for her hand.

"Isn't it too awful that I should have this for a husband?" she demanded, as they were departing.

"What am I going to do with him?"

"I can't imagine," I replied.

It happened to be another year before I saw Macnair again. This was not remarkable, for he was a creature to whom absences and silences meant nothing. One gray, dismal, autumnal afternoon I ran across him in Central Park. He sat on a bench staring indifferently at a little girl, with her hand bandaged across her mouth.

"O Mac!" I smiled. "You? Halloo! How are you?"

"Halloo?" he responded listlessly. "Where'd you come from?"

I noticed that he was shabby, shabbier than I had ever seen him. His eyes were lusterless, his face pale and without its usual tan. The note of his whole personality was dejection. On his sleeve a black band accentuated his despondency.

"You have had a loss?" I said, touching the mourning badge. "I'm sorry."

He nodded. "My mother—four months ago."

"I'm very sorry. And your wife?" I went on. "I hope she's all right. I have been away in Europe or I'd have looked you up before this. I—"

Macnair raised his eyes with a gleam of sardonic mirth.

"I guess she's all right; I haven't seen her for six months. We've busted. That's all right," he interposed, as I stammered an apology. "You didn't know."

To my suggestion that he walk over to the studio with me, he complied without a sign of interest in the matter one way or another. Once in the studio he slipped down morosely into a chair by the fire and lapsed into silence. We smoked on, the two of us, neither yet at the talking point. Occasionally I shot a glance at him, but never caught his eyes. It was hardly believable that this prematurely experienced young man in the slovenly suit of summer gray—too sadly thin for the autumn—worn-out, unpolished boots, soiled linen, his face rough with a three days' beard and marred with sleeplessness, boredom, dissipation, was the boy who had once sat on that high stool by this very fire, warming his naked, unspoiled, victorious body.

"She chucked me," said he, abruptly. "Said I was lazy and wouldn't work."

"Did you go on the stage?"

"Uh-huh! for a while. Had a little Johnny part, walking on and off and saying, 'Here comes the Duchess, boys!' A flicker of a smile lighted the corners of his mouth. "It was too good for me. I couldn't stand the excitement of putting on a dress suit every night and painting my face and running out gayly, sort of holding hands with a bunch of Lizzie-boys, and then waving my little cane and getting rid of that 'Here comes the Duchess, boys!' She was the Duchess, you know. It made me sore to see the fish-faced chump who had to make love to her in the piece. One night I punched the fish-faced boy's eye because he got too gay with her. And there was a row and he got me fired. And she said I was lazy and wouldn't work. After a while the piece went on the road. I ain't seen her since."

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"Nothing much." A faint smile was on his face.

"I'm sympathetic," he continued, after a long pause. "What are you doing now?"

"Nothing much." He was a good chance. He had a garage and rented automobiles. But after I'd learned the thing burned up. I've been chuffing around a little since, but I don't like it much."

I reflected for a moment. "I've been married since I saw you last, Mac," I said.

"Many happy returns of the day," he put in, with a touch of his old impudence. "I'm married myself."

"Well, I don't live in the studio now. We have an apartment outside. There's a bed here and the rest of the things you need. You can stay here if you like. I'd be glad if you'd pose for me, too. I've some work to do and you are pretty well adapted for one of the figures. I don't know what you have been doing and it is none of my business, I suppose. But if I were you I'd take a brace. You're young and sound. Get together, Mac. Will you come?"

"Will I? You won't see me coming for dust," he answered. "You've always been white to me. I don't know why. I'll come and be glad of it. It's a fine chance. I've been a little on the loose lately, but I give you my word I'll pull up sharp."

Unexpectedly, Macnair began in his spare moments to return to his earlier amusement of modeling in clay. He was most successful with animals, for which he had a genuine love. One afternoon we were both in the studio, I engaged on some work of my own, and he putting the finishing touches to a decidedly amusing *maquette* of a little cur dog he had picked up in the streets and adopted. "It isn't bad, Mac," I commented.

"No, not at all. What friend?"

"Miss Beauvoir."

"I should be delighted," I soberly replied.

"Thanks. So-long. Good-bye."

He laughed, but made no other reply. "At that moment the bell rang and young Mrs. Granville came in.

"I've been intending to come all winter," she explained in her debonair, enthusiastic voice, cutting short my greetings. "I really wanted to see your work, not to come to one of your managerial teas. So to-day I happened to be passing and I made the man stop. I hope