

Paine Albert Bigelow

The Mystery of Evelin

Delorme: A Hypnotic Story



Albert Paine

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The Mystery of Evelin Delorme: A Hypnotic Story

INTRODUCTION

While engaged in writing the story of Evelin Delorme it was my good fortune to make the acquaintance of Dr. Herbert L. Flint, the well-known hypnotist briefly referred to in chapter three. The science of Hypnotism being a theme of absorbing interest to me, I eagerly availed myself of the opportunity thus offered for exhaustive investigation of the subject, and was accorded frequent and prolonged interviews with Dr. Flint. During one of these I reviewed to him briefly the outline of my story and the strange mystery of Evelin Delorme which had given rise to the plot. I saw at once that he was unusually moved and interested. At my conclusion he arose hastily and left the room, returning a moment later with a quantity of papers which proved to be an unpublished memoir which he was then preparing. From this he hurriedly separated several sheets and placed them in my hand, remarking with suppressed feeling, "Here is the missing link in your narrative."

He has allowed me to publish it here in his own words.

EXTRACT FROM THE UNPUBLISHED MEMOIRS OF DR. FLINT

"The following is a brief account of a very curious case of hypnotic suggestion, and one which, because of the mystery surrounding its final outcome, has caused me no little anxiety.

"On the 9th of July, 1878, there came to my office in St. Louis a strikingly beautiful young woman of evident wealth and aristocratic breeding, who gave her name as Eva Delorme. Her dress indicated recent bereavement, and her face impressed me as being that of one whom death had deprived of all those near and beloved. She stated her errand at once, and briefly. She had been pursuing the study of Mesmeric Sciences, and, believing herself a good hypnotic subject, desired that I make a trial with that end in view. A simple test convinced me that she was susceptible to hypnotic suggestion, and further experiment revealed to me that she was one of the most perfect subjects I have ever known. She called again the day following and asked me if it were possible, through the aid of hypnotism, to give to her a double personality; adding that she desired to become for a few hours a heartless, haughty, gay woman of the world – precisely opposite, in fact, to what she really appeared. Believing that she wished to forget her sorrow for a time, I assured her that I thought this might be accomplished and that it would probably obliterate all knowledge of a previous existence for the time being. To this she eagerly consented, and after some further conversation concerning the details I asked her what name she desired to assume in her new character. She replied that her full name was Evelin March Delorme, of which, in her assumed personality, she would retain the first two. She likewise gave me a memorandum of a street and number to which she was to be directed; this being, doubtless, one of several of her dwelling properties, for she impressed me always as a person of abundant wealth. With a few passes I then placed her under the hypnotic influence, and while in this state I impressed upon her earnestly the fact that she would awaken a haughty and heartless woman of the world, dashing and gay, free from past regrets and future misgivings, as she had told me to do. That her name would be Evelin March; and I repeated to her the street and number, and some minor details which she had given to me. That she would retain this personality for twelve hours. This I repeated to her several times, then bade her awaken.

"The change in her was complete and startling. Her whole expression – even her very features – appeared altered. Accustomed as I am to such things I could not avoid feeling somewhat nervous at this wonderful transformation. In her new character she was as beautiful and imperious as a queen, with a supercilious, almost coarse, expression of countenance. She seemed much mortified at the somber simpleness of her dress, and I judge went immediately to make changes.

"I did not see her again until a week later, when she came to my office, apparently restored to her true character. She had a vague semi-recollection of what had been her experience in the other state and desired a second trial, to which I somewhat reluctantly consented, though I must confess I was by this time deeply interested in the case.

"These transformations were frequently repeated, during the next few months; then her visits ceased and I did not see her until a year later, when I was astounded one day to meet her riding in Forest Park *in her assumed character*, evidently having taken on the condition unaided, either unconsciously or of her own volition.

"I never saw her again, and as I had mislaid the memorandum of her address and the number had slipped my memory, I lost trace of her entirely. I have always felt a great and somewhat guilty curiosity as to the final result of this strange experiment."

PROLOGUE

Julian Paul Goetze died December 21st, 1885. This event removed the final reason for concealment of that strange story whose dark reality flung a shadow about his later years.

At his death Goetze was in his thirty-fifth year, and for more than a decade previous had been considered one of the foremost portrait painters of the younger school. I knew him intimately – was a frequent visitor at his studio, and, I believe, the only confidant he was ever known to have.

As I recall those years there is an unreality about them that I am unable to dispel. The problems discussed – the theories maintained of life, death, art, poetry, and any number of other unfathomed subjects, appear to me now so preternatural – the conceptions of his wonderful brain so startling, that I can hardly realize having ever been a part, even though but a faint reflex, of that dazzling and unsated life.

In appearance he was no less remarkable. His figure was rather slight than otherwise, and of medium height. His features, though greatly modified, were distinctly those of the American Indian. High cheek bones, slightly aquiline nose, dark olive skin. His eyes and hair were a blue black. You would hardly have called him handsome, but there was something in that fiercely intense face, in the lithe grace of movement, in the small and exquisitely shaped hands and feet, that made him a fascinating, if not a dangerous, companion for the other sex. All of these had been bequeathed him by his mother, in whose veins ran the French and Indian blood in equal parts. From his father, a fair-haired German, he had inherited only his name.

His nature was a strange blending of opposing forces, forever at civil war and each swaying him in turn. He had few friends, but those few adored him for his splendid genius and prodigal generosity, pitying his darker side.

When, as not unfrequently happened, he locked his studio and plunged for days into abject depravity, they sought him out and led him back to his better self. After the culmination of that singular affair narrated in these papers, and for which he doubtless felt himself greatly to blame, these lapses became more and more frequent and protracted. The facts which I have collected relating to this period of his life were many of them gathered bit by bit as the events occurred, and later from brief interviews during temporary periods of consciousness just prior to his death.

It was in one of these that he apprised me of the existence of certain private papers, the contents of which would make the chain of circumstances complete. Then the fires that had blazed forever within him burned out his life.

H. L.

St. Louis, Nov. 4th, 1890.

Note by the Author. – The above, accompanied by a manuscript roll of considerable size, a crumpled, and yellow letter torn in halves, and a number of loose pages covered with peculiar writing (unsigned, though evidently the work of the unhappy artist) lie before me. It is with hesitating and unsteady hands that I separate these silent voices of the past, and gather them at last together into a living though unworthy echo of my own.

I

"A little more to the light, please – so, that is better." The artist worked rapidly; now and then letting his eyes rest for a moment on his sitter, then returning to the face on the canvas, that was rapidly growing under his hands.

The studio, a small Swiss cottage some distance from the business center of St. Louis, was rather richly, though plainly, furnished. The walls were tinted a neutral gray, an occasional piece of sober-hued drapery hung here and there, while a heavily curtained arch at the back connected with the artist's private apartments beyond.

On the opposite side of the room a door opened to the little entrance hall, and near to this doorway was a carved oaken mantel, above which were grouped together a number of curious weapons, evidently gathered here and there as bric-a-brac, and used, perhaps, now and then, as properties, in the arrangement of some picture.

There was the long-barreled and elaborately ornamented gun of the Arab – the scimitar of the Turk – the blow-gun of the South American Indian – the bow and arrow of his northern brother. At the bottom of this array was a pair of French rapiers of the seventeenth century. The blades were crossed and rested upon a brass-headed nail, and upon this nail there hung, point downward, a jewel-hilted Italian stiletto or dagger, suspended by a silken cord.

The room was lighted by a sky-light and one window – only the light of the former falling upon the sitter – a large Japanese screen diverting all other direct rays. Through the half-open casement a light breath of summer crept in, from the little garden outside, freighted with the mingled odors of sweet-briar and white flowering locust. A yellow butterfly flitted in and out, now and then making a circuit of the room, resting here and there for a moment to fan noiselessly with its bloomy wings. A stray bee buzzed drowsily in, but, finding nothing so attractive as the sweets without, hastily retreated, striking heavily against the window-pane, where it sputtered and fumed for a time, and gladly escaped. Then all was silent in the room save for the light chafing sound made by the artist's brush against the hitherto untouched canvas.

He at the easel was a man of about thirty years – Julian Paul Goetze, a name already ranked high among his profession. His sitter was a woman of perhaps twenty-three. Her figure was somewhat above medium height and perfectly developed. She was clad in a plain, trimly fitting dress of silver gray, with a neat white collar at the throat. Her face was a perfect oval in its contour, her complexion almost childish in its delicacy. Her hair, a silky brown in color, was fastened in a knot at the back of her shapely head, while in front it was a fluffy mass that partially concealed the forehead, and softly shadowed what seemed to the artist to be the sweetest face in all the world. The features were as delicately chiseled as one would expect to find them in a statue of Purity. The eyes were a deep gray, inclining to hazel, and the coloring of the cheek and lips so tender that the artist looked a little despairingly at the tints upon his palette; while through all there pervaded such an expression of absolute innocence and freedom from the world's taint, as to find expression in but the one word, saintliness.

And yet there was something about the face of his sitter that brought a troubled expression to that of the artist. As with bold, rapid strokes he laid in the ground-work for the hair he looked puzzled. As he traced the exquisite outline of the ear his look was almost one of vexation. Once he left his easel, and, going to another canvas that rested on the floor, face to the wall, he turned it partly about and looked at it intently for a few moments. Then he resumed his work, evidently in deep thought. For awhile he painted on in silence. He was inclined by nature to be diffident at first with his sitters, and with this fair being the beginning of a conversation seemed to him a thing as difficult as it was desirable. There was a suggestion of weariness in her face, too, which he felt would disappear with awakened interest.

"I – I beg pardon," he said, somewhat abruptly at length; "have you ever had a portrait before?" His voice was rich and musical, and the face before him brightened.

"Oh, no! And it is only by accident that I am having one now. I was passing and saw your name; I knew it by reputation, and it occurred to me all at once that I would sit for my picture. Perhaps I should have waited and worn a different dress. It was only a passing impulse. It never occurred to me before; I cannot tell why it did now."

The animation and the faint blush that had crept over her face while she spoke were enchanting. The artist was delighted.

"Your dress could not have been better chosen, and the impulse was surely an inspiration," he said, smiling, "and perhaps," he added, "you may have a friend or – a – a relative who has had, or is having a portrait, which suggested the idea."

As he paused he looked at her inquiringly. The look of weariness had returned to her face.

"No; I have no relatives, and" – she blushed deeply and was silent.

"Forgive me," he said, earnestly; "I did not intend to be inquisitive."

She did not reply in words, but as she lifted her eyes there was a tenderness there that awakened within him all the sympathy, the nobleness and the affection of his purer and better nature. Their eyes met, and in a single moment there was formed between them an invisible bond which both felt and neither sought to conceal. No word was spoken. The artist painted on in silence; but a new light had come into his sitter's face, and a new source of inspiration into his own heart.

For a long time neither spoke. A dreamy hush seemed to creep in with the sweet odors from the garden, and, with them, a summer restfulness and peace. The yellow butterfly that had been hovering about them, flitting this way and that, came closer and closer, and at last settled fearlessly upon one of the gloved hands that lay folded in the sitter's lap. She watched it for a moment, then looked up at the painter with a smile.

"The insect has a true instinct," he said, gently; "it has no fear of capture."

"No; I should only hurt it and destroy its beauty."

"Butterflies," said the artist, "are like beautiful thoughts. They hover mistily about us, flitting away whenever we attempt to capture them; and if at last we are successful we find only too often that their wings have lost the delicacy of their bloom."

"Yes; I have felt that many times."

While she spoke the insect rose hastily in the air as if frightened, and, circling about for a moment above them, darted out through the open window.

"I have heard they are emblems of inconstancy, too," she said, thoughtfully, as it disappeared.

A faint glow of crimson suffused for an instant the olive face before her, but he forced a smile and did not reply.

The rest of the afternoon slipped away with but little interchange of words between artist and sitter. When either spoke the words were few and simple, but there was a tenderness in their voices that uttered more than the spoken syllables.

The face on the canvas was growing rapidly. He had already worked longer than he usually did at the first sitting, and yet he could not bear to let her go. He had seen her for the first time less than two hours before; he did not even know her name. The little white card which she had given him he had glanced at without reading. He had only seen her features, and heard only the gentle voice that had made known her errand. And now he wondered if it were possible that only a few hours before she had had no part in his life; a life wherein there had been many lights and shadows, and the shadows had been ever as broad and somber as the lights had been bold and brilliant.

II

An hour later Julian Goetze was standing alone in his studio. The sketch fresh from his brush was before him, and beneath it, resting upon the floor, was another somewhat farther advanced.

He had painted until the light had begun to grow yellow and dim, then he had reluctantly told his sitter that he could do no more for that day.

"And when shall I come again?" she had asked.

He would have said, "Come to-morrow," had he dared; but remembering other engagements, and knowing that the work could not be continued so soon, he had hesitated before replying.

"I can go on with the picture in two or three days; come as soon after that as – as you wish," he said, softly.

Their eyes met for a moment; the delicate color deepened in her cheeks, her lips murmured a half inaudible word of adieu, and she was gone.

Julian left alone had flung himself into a large chair that stood near the window, and looked out upon the little garden beyond. It was June. The days were long and the sun was still touching the tops of the locust trees. He was away from the bustle of the city, and an atmosphere of peace almost like that of the country was about him. All at once he covered his face with his hands, pressing his fingers hard into his eyes.

"I love her, I love her," he groaned; "she is an angel from heaven, and I – oh, my God! if she knew she would hate me."

He rose and stood before the face on the easel; then, as if suddenly recollecting, he approached the canvas that was turned face to the wall, and which once before that day had claimed his attention, and, facing it nervously about, placed it beneath the other.

It was the portrait of a woman. Like the one above her, she was fair and beautiful; but here all resemblance apparently ceased. Nothing could be more widely different than the characters that had stamped themselves upon the faces of these two.

The picture on the floor was that of a woman whose age might be anywhere from twenty-five to thirty-five; a woman of the great world of fashion, of folly, of intrigue, perhaps of vice. Her dress was a rich ball costume, exposing the white flesh of her beautiful arms, her perfect shoulders, and her pearly tinted throat and bosom. Like the other, her face was oval in shape, but seemed less perfect in its contour. There was a certain lack of delicacy and softness about the outline that suggested the fierce chase after the sham pleasures of the great social world.

The rest of the features were in harmony with this idea. The beautiful mouth was hard and cruel. The lips and cheeks were bright as if artificially tinted, or flushed with wine. The eyes were bold and the pupils seemed expanded as with belladonna. The nostrils of the finely shaped nose were full and sensual. Her luxuriant brown hair, singularly like that of the portrait above her in color, she wore in the late French mode, combed back from her high, broad forehead and twisted into a massive device at the top. Her eyebrows were unnaturally dark. An artificial air pervaded the entire picture – one felt that she had an artificial soul. A perfect prototype of Folly's feverish and heartless world.

As the artist stood gazing from one to the other, the curious vexed and puzzled expression that had come into his face once before that day returned. He approached closely to the work as if to examine it more minutely. As he bent low over the face on the easel he heard the street door open. He started guiltily, and hastily turned both pictures to the wall. A moment later a tall, fair-haired man of about his own age entered without knocking. It was Harry Lawton, the artist's most intimate friend.

"Julian, old boy, how goes it?" he said, cheerily.

"Pretty well, Harry; come in."

"Yes, I should do that any way. I don't seem to be any too welcome, however."

"Nonsense, Harry, of course you are welcome; I am very glad, in fact, to see you, just now."

"Well, that's better; although I must say your face doesn't indicate excessive joy."

"Sit down; not there – here by the door; I want to show you something."

"Oh, some new and wonderful work of your transcendent genius, I suppose. By the way, how is the picture for the Salon getting along?"

"Tediously, Harry; I seem to have lost the spirit of the thing."

"Found too much spirit of another kind, perhaps."

"No, not that. I have been a model of abstinence of late."

"And the heavens do not fall?"

"No – yes – that is – let your tongue rest for a moment, please, and use your eyes."

While the artist had been speaking he had taken the large screen from before the window and moved his easel into a stronger light. Upon it he now placed the two portraits in their former position. The effect upon the other was vigorous and immediate.

"Heavens! Julian, where did you get that angel and that dev – I beg pardon, that extraordinary pair of beauties? Oh, I see! – why, of course! a new idea for the Salon. A modern Guinevere and Elaine; Siren and Saint; Sense and Innocence. I congratulate you, old boy; they are wonderful" —

"Please be quiet for a moment, Harry; they are not for the Salon. They are two sitters of mine. The one beneath has been here twice – the first time about a week ago; the second time day before yesterday. The other came for the first time to-day."

"And they are real, live women, then?"

"Yes. I was in hopes you might recognize one or both of them."

The other shook his head, and gazed from one to the other in silence.

"Do you see any – any resemblance between them?" asked the artist, after a pause.

"Resemblance! Good Lord, no! Why? Are they related in any way?"

"Not that I am aware of; in fact, I am quite sure they are not. She told me she had no relatives."

"Um – and which do you refer to as she?"

"Oh, the upper one, of course."

"Well, I don't see any 'of course' about it. She was here to-day for the first time. I don't see why she should begin by exchanging family confidences. All things considered, I should have thought it more than likely you referred to the other. However, I suppose you are familiar with her family history, too."

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