

The coast of Bohemia



from the INTRODUCTORY SKETCH:
Your methods were at first so secret and uncandid that I wonder I ever came to be the innocent book I am; and I feel that the credit is far less due to you than to the friends who helped you. But I am glad to remember how you got your come-uppings when, long after, a student of the Synthesis whom you asked, in your latent vanity, how she thought that social part of me was managed, answered, Well, any one could see that it was studied altogether from the outside, that it wasnt at all the spirit of the Synthesis. It was enough almost to make me doubt myself, but I recovered my belief in my own truth when I reflected that it was merely a just punishment for you. I could expose you in other points, if I chose, and show what slight foundations you built my facts and characters upon; but perhaps that would be ungrateful. You were at least a doting parent, if not a wise one, and in your fondness you did your best to spoil me. You gave me two heroines, and you know very well that before you were done you did not know but you preferred Charmian to Cornelia. And you had nothing whatever to build Charmian upon, not the slightest suggestion from life, where you afterwards encountered her Egyptian profile! I think I ought to say that you had never been asked to a Synthesis dance when you wrote that account of one in me; and though you have often been asked since, you have never had the courage to go for fear of finding out how little it was like your description. But if Charmian was created out of nothing, what should you say if I were frank about the other characters of my story? Could you deny that the drummer who was first engaged to Cornelia was anything more than a materialization from seeing a painter very long ago make his two fingers do a ballet-dance? Or that Ludlow was not at first a mere pointed beard and a complexion glimpsed in a slim young

Cuban one night at Saratoga? Or that Cornelias mother existed by any better right than your once happening to see a poor lady try to hide the gap in her teeth when she smiled? When I think what a thing of shreds and patches I am, I wonder that I have any sort of individual temperament or consciousness at all. But I know that I have, and that you wrote me with pleasure and like me still. You think I have form, and that, if I am not very serious, I am sincere, and that somehow I represent a phase of our droll American civilization truly enough. I know you were vexed when some people said I did not go far enough, and insisted that the coast of Bohemia ought to have been the whole kingdom. As if I should have cared to be that! There are shady places inland where I should not have liked my girls to be, and where I think my young men would not have liked to meet them; and I am glad you kept me within the sweet, pure breath of the sea. I think I am all the better book for that, and, if you are fond of me, you have your reasons. I

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