

THE PAINTER AND THE LADY
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or

GAINSBOROUGH AND THE DUCHESS(tentative titles)

(Story Synopsis)

by

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Prologue

In a moderne picture gallery(tubular,chromium appointments and stark, functional architecture) stands a modern young woman dressed in natty flying togs. With her companion, an artist, she is absorbing a portrait of the famous Duchess of Devonshire by the great 18th Century painter, Gainsborough(She may, by implication, portray the composite picture of all modern English female youth and its enforced choice between love and duty.

JEANETTE MacDONALD and NELSON EDDY are the present-day lovers.

By their dialogue, it develops that she has volunteered to ferry planes to Africa in the present war. She has induced her lover to come with her to the gallery for a nostalgic journey into the romantic past of the 18th Century. In her concentration upon the portrait of the Duchess of Devonshire, the pointed significance of the obstacles to their love(hers and Gainsborough's) the girl carries in her mood, her gaze upon her lover's face, etc., the pre-sentiment of death.

After a brief lashing out at the needless horror of wars and the declaration of their own deathless love, the conflict between the English girl of action and the American artist of dreams flares up. It simmers down. Jeanette says:

" If we could only have lived in the 18th Century.....It was a tranquil age, Charles, subtle and slowly moving tempo, grace and dignity, watered silks and lily fingers..." She looks ruefully at her own hands. "...Killing was not mechanized. Duelling swords were as destructive, compared to our modern slaughter, as the silvery tinkle of a music-box heard through an emerald dusk....."

Nelson says:

"There is something curiously intoxicating in that age where there was leisure to acclaim a great artist...when a painting, a musical composition or a book could stir the whole civilized world."

Jeanette replies: (indicating the portrait of the Duchess)

" And it was in this world of elaborate manners and slow-moving beauty that Georgiana, Lady Spencer, afterward Duchess of Devonshire, fell in love with Thomas Gainsborough...when she was nine years old..... Voice Fades Behind....."

Dissolve in Gainsborough's studio in Chelsea. It is poorly furnished; there are landscapes about.

Gainsborough is young; Georgiana is nine. She is dressed in the long skirts of the period, a ribbon about her waist, one in her hair. She is exquisite, large-eyed, wilful, essentially feminine.

The fight between them which is to continue to the end of G's life, begins. They battle, now, as to whether or not she shall wear a large hat for the picture. Angrily she throws it off. He, enraged, picks it up, jams it upon his own head. She laughs hilariously. He advances on her menacingly, tells her that one day he will be great and then, if he asks her to pose with a small barrel covering her head, she will be honoured to comply. She tosses her head. "My Lady Disdain," he calls her. She retorts that some day, he will implore her to pose instead of patronizing her for a naughty child.

"What are you but a child?" he inquires, laughing at her "oldness".

Demurely she informs him that she loves him. He howls with derisive laughter. She maintains her grave mien, says:

We shall always quarrel, Mr. Gainsborough, but you will love me and I shall always love you. You have married a stupid, flat-souled wife and I shall have to make a great marriage but...to the end..we shall love.....

Quick Shots of the marriage of Georgiana, nineteen, to the old roue, the Duke. Gainsborough moody and restless, attends the wedding goes home, is unable to paint and is upbraided by his wife for his sloth....

Fade In....G's studio in fashionable section of London. Molly, His daughter, fifteen, well-developed and in love with young Johann Fischer, oboe player in the Court orchestra. And his wife, bastard

daughter of the Duke of Bedford, devoted to G. in her carping way, practical, thrifty and impatient with his temperament. She looks upon her husband's genius as something with which to pay bills.

Gainsborough has forbidden young Fischer the house. Molly pouts. Mrs. G. supports G. in this as Fischer is poor.

Gainsborough brushes aside his family, is unable to contain his joy. The Duchess of Devonshire is coming to sit for her portrait--the child who told him so gravely ten years ago that they would always love one another--the young wife irrevocably lost to him before the eyes of the world by her marriage...and his. He is serene against the bad-tempered disapproval of his wife, but...the artist triumphing over the lover, he declares he will show that upstart, Joshua Reynolds, that BLACK can be the composition centre of a picture...a great picture. He will paint his Duchess in a large black hat, the fashion of the day. His wife reminds him maliciously that her Grace will not like that as every eye will be drawn to the hat, not her countenance. G. retorts angrily. Mrs. G. comes back that if he'd stick to landscapes they could ward off the bailiff, that he's let Joshua Reynolds make a fool of him with his taunts and challenges, he was goaded into painting the Blue Boy (Portrait of a Young Gentleman) when Reynolds declared BLUE could not be used as the centre composition of a portrait. G. retorts that this picture has had notice from the Court. But the mundane Mrs. G. reminds him that it hasn't sold!

Gainsborough drives his wife and Molly from the studio, tells them he has to endure Miss Foyle for a time before Georgiana's appointment. In the flying jibes here, it is shown that Miss Foyle is a problem, a comical one, for she is the owner of an exquisite harp G. covets. And she is in love with him while he is only in love with the harp.

G. prepares his brushes and the easel with Miss F's unfinished portrait. He is making faces at it when she breezily enters followed by menservants who carry in the harp. G. plays the harp. Miss F. is impatient, arranges herself alluringly (she thinks) calls him to work. Finally he throws down his brushes, succumbs again to the harp, forgets her. She grows demandingly seductive and poor G. succumbs, with his eye upon the harp. He kisses Foyle and...the Duchess walks in! Early for her appointment!

The Duchess, despite her virginal luminosity which her marriage (not a marriage) has not dispelled, is almost crying with rage and disappointment. She turns her fury upon the hapless Miss Foyle who is glad to make her escape WITH harp, hurried out by confused servants. The Duchess then lets fly at G. who tries to explain that he is only in love with the harp. (this is all historically authentic. G. was a fine musician, playing the viola de gamba).

Georgiana persists in misunderstanding. G. upbraids her for selling herself to the disgusting old Duke who cannot let the maidservants of her friends alone. Suddenly she accepts the status of Foyle and her harp, laughs uproariously which infuriates G. more than her former anger. And then...their talk becomes nostalgic...if they could have been married....Georgiana regrets that she cannot give him the finest harp in the world but her husband's inordinate pride would not bear the gossip engendered if she did. G. chafes under her words and the fight is on, again. Finally Georgiana shrugs, tells him to get to work and that if her husband likes the portrait, he can buy two harps. G. fierily resents this, reminds her she is only the model and that he does not paint for husbands' approval. She grows tender, tells him his greatest inspiration will come from her because they love.

G. is painting all the while the battle rages, jubilant, actually

over the fire, animation he has aroused in her. And, when she speaks of their love, he deftly catches the wistful quality of her expression. Eventually her talk turns to the trivialities of the day; he throws down his brushes, tells her she has reverted from Georgiana to the Duchess of Devonshire...he will paint no more, today. They part formally.....Fade...

MONTAGE of sittings for the portrait with excited talk among the fashionables of London about G's new picture. In all shots, fights between them are indicated. HOLD on final sitting when G., exhausted, steps back, invites Georgiana to see the picture. She is tired and capricious, complains that he has made her look too old...perhaps it is the hat! That's it, the hat. He must remove it. He protests, reminds her that this is a triumph over Reynold's taunts. He must show that mountebank. Georgiana is nettled; she discards Reynolds. He must take out the hat, for her. He grows sarcastic, says:

"Perhaps you'd like me to take the hat out today, then, tomorrow when you change your fickle mind, paint it in again."

Georgiana doesn't care a damn about the hat, merely wants to assert her power over him. But...the hat must come out!

In a wild burst of rage, G. grabs up a large brush and smears the whole face of the picture, with black. The Duchess is horrified.... penitent..tearful. G. lets her suffer, enjoys comforting her. She leaves....

Fade In...."Ranelagh " the Pavilion where Court dances, masks, etc. are held. A garden party given by the Prince of Wales (later George IV) is in progress. Moonlight over the formal gardens gives a shimmering ineffable beauty to the grace and dignity of the scene, a diffused charm.

On the Pavilion couples are dancing the minuet; other couples are making love. The young lovers, Molly and Johann, talk of the blackened portrait of the Duchess and Lord Aspen, the effeminate gossip of the Court, overhears. He has been snubbed by the Duchess so delights in spreading the news, exaggerated into scandal (G. has probably beaten the Duchess, as well).

This reaches the ears of the Duke who fumes, tut-tuts and garumphs. But he is no match for his sprightly Duchess who also has heard the gossip. She stops the dance and sings a duet with Gainsborough, "Most Beauteous Goddess of the Night" (p. 194, Opera score).

The Prince of Wales is overcome by the song and Georgiana's beauty, seeks her out and implores her to let him serve her in some way. She plays with him, then tells him he will please her if he gives his protection to Molly and Fischer. The Prince eagerly agrees, halts the festivities again and announces the engagement of Molly and Johann "with our gracious permission."

Gainsborough is angry. And Lord Aspen maliciously tells the Duchess that in retaliation, G. will make her ridiculous before all London. Georgiana believes it is G. who has boasted of spoiling her portrait. She insults him before the assemblage. Then, the Duke feels he must engage G. in a duel. G. readily agrees.

They all move to an open greensward. They fight and G. disarms the Duke but not before he, Gainsborough, is wounded in the right arm. G. forces the Duke to drink a toast to "all the serving-maids in England. G. throws his glass down, smashes it on the ground.

The Duchess terrified that G. will be disgraced, run out of London, his career ruined, seeks out the infatuated Prince, asks his advice. The weak Prince insists he cannot give his sanction to G. unless he ^{Gainsborough} can produce another portrait, quickly circumvent the scandal.

The Duchess digests this suggestion as we ...Fade Out.....

Fade In.. Early morning in the Duchess's boudoir. May Day songs are heard outside her window(chorus). The Duchess overcoming her melancholy, for the time, sings, "What Should I Do?"(p. 291, score) with chorus for obligato.

The Duke enters. Quickly the Duchess pretends a headache. He reproaches her for causing a scandal but is promptly reminded of his own notorious affairs. Discomfited, he is glad to escape.

Various friends arrive to condole, apparently, but, secretly delighted with the intrigue. They hint strongly that this will be G's downfall. He will be ostracized by the Court and then by all the great names of England. As they chatter, Georgiana is convinced that she must humble herself to save her lover from oblivion...against himself. She asks them to leave her, tells her maid to bring the dress and hat she used to pose in.....Fade...

Fade In...Gainsborough's studio. Miss Foyle is having her final sitting. G. still with a longing eye on the harp, throws down his brush tells Foyle the picture is finished. He wants no payment....except the harp. Foyle wounded that he has painted her for the harp, rejects the portrait, tells him he can hang it in the Academy in place of the one she hears she has spoiled--of the Duchess. G. is ready to blast her for her presumption when his wife comes in, followed by the bailiff who has come to take their furniture per Sheriff's orders. G. gets an idea. He offers the Foyle portrait to the bailiff, tells him he can get enough for that to satisfy all his, G's debts. The bailiff is doubtful that one piece of cloth covered with paint can do that. G. points out the red hair. And Mrs. G. finally talks the bailiff down. He takes the picture and leaves. But Foyle who has been stunned by all this irreverent barter, comes to life,

runs after the bailiff, writes a cheque and has the bailiff deliver her portrait to her home...sentimental about G. to the last.

Molly and Johann come in, happy. Mrs. G. rails at G. for allowing them to be engaged. G. reminds her that he cannot fight a duel with the Prince of Wales and that as she is striving so hard for his success, as she sees it, she'd better shut up. For without the approval of His Royal Highness, no artist can survive. And then-- suddenly he blames his wife for his own former disapproval of Molly's marriage to Johann. Whys shouldn't she marry a musician? Does her own father not compose? Play the viola de gamba? Mrs. G. throws up her hands at his inconsistency.

G. talks of his Duchess, the one person who loves him for what he is, not what he does. Mrs. G. reminds him, spitefully, that they quarrel endlessly. That is nothing, he retorts. They are of necessity separated, yet always together. Mrs. G. departs in high dudgeon. G. is kind and understanding with Molly and Johann, telling them they do not realize what a privilege they have, to marry for love. And then he tells them he wants to be alone. They understand and leave.

Alone, now, Gainsborough moves his portrait of the Duchess tenderly, keeping its back to the camera, faces the camera, himself. He works over it with a cloth, singing the while, "My Lady Disdain." (p. 351, score).

As the songs ends, Georgiana enters. She has stopped at the door to listen to the last notes. She tells him she is ready to pose for another picture...twelve hours...all night...anything that he may not be ruined. He realizes that she is completely selfless in this and they are in perfect accord..for the moment. G. is about to show her the portrait, explain that he has only smeared it with lamp-black which can be removed with a cloth..and has been..when the Prince and his Courtiers come in, among them, Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Gainsborough triumphantly uncovers the portrait, causing astonishment and chagrin among the assembly. He excoriates them for fools to accept unquestioningly idle, malicious gossip. The Duchess, after her shock, recovers quickly and enjoys Gainsborough's clever turning of tables against the fashionables. There ensues much flattery of the Duchess and congratulations for Gainsborough.

Joshua Reynolds steps forward, walks over amid a hush fallen, and gazes long at the Blue Boy leaning against the studio wall. He moves the large picture near the portrait of the Duchess, looks appraisingly from one to the other. He then turns to G. takes his hand warmly, tells him he has surmounted all convention of painting, transcended all formulae....is a great artist. G. and Reynolds reconcile. The Prince congratulates G. Courtiers follow suit....all leave, but Georgiana.

Now comes a tender love scene in which the Duchess and Gainsborough once more sing "Most Beauteous Goddess of the Night" (P. 194). He kneels before her, calls her his "Divinity", his "Angel of Inspiration". It is evident here that, despite his wife and her husband, a beautiful love will make them one, spiritually...always. G. tells her sadly that they will pass, as all things mortal pass but that their love will achieve immortality...through his paintings.....

We fade back to the present. The young flyer has finished her story. She takes the hand of her lover who gazes sadly at her. We dissolve into an airport where her plane is warmed up and waiting. Her lover gazes at her face as if photographing on his memory the beloved features. She climbs into her plane, waves her hand and is gone. The music swells up...there is the hum of the plane up and over and then.....a crash! The music trails to a fade out.