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COLES PHILLIPS

by John Taintor Foote

IF I WERE to choose between Red Russia at its worst or a prolonged association with the Parlor Bolsheviki of Manhattan Island, I should leave by first boat for Petrograd. This accounts for my seeking out an aloof female whom I discovered at my first and last Greenwich Village tea. Three things drew me to her. She was sitting alone in a window seat, her hair was neither bobbed nor frowsy and she was silent. I did not know who she was until I had edged around the room to her retreat. Then I recognized her. She was a famous moving picture star who had been an artist's model and I remembered that Coles Phillips had told me she had posed for him in the past.

Wondering how she would accept a reference to her obscurity of former days I told her we had a mutual friend. She questioned me silently with great Madonna eyes. "Coles Phillips," I said. And now a strange thing happened. There, in that lunatic babel, those wonderful eyes filled with tears. I stared at her uneasily, quite dumb. "Good Lord!" I thought, "is she going to practice on me?" And then she explained.

Ten years before she had been a forlorn little outcast, existing, some how, in one of the filthiest districts of the East Side, looking forward to the time when she could purchase enough to eat and something to wear. Another girl of the district told her of earning money by posing and gave her the addresses of some artists. The next day she walked from the East Side to West Fortieth Street and arrived at the first of the addresses. It had rained and sleeted during her walk uptown. She was dripping wet and blue with cold when she rang the bell of the studio. Ragged, dirty, speechless, she stared up at the man who opened the door. The man was Coles Phillips. Not the assured, prosperous Coles Phillips of to-day, but a young artist struggling desperately, sometimes despairingly, for a foothold in New York. Ten minutes later the half frozen child was drinking hot cocoa wrapped in Phillips's dressing gown. The model had been sent out to buy her some warm clothes.

To tell in detail how Coles Phillips, in the next few years, saved this waif would require a small volume. It ran all the way from teaching her cleanliness of body and mind to a knowledge of good manners and good literature. She herself, successful, happy, only sketched it for me while the old-fashioned virtues were torn to shreds all about us. She finished with an exclamation. "Oh," said she, "he's so sane, so clean, so fine!"

Yes, Coles Phillips is sane and clean and fine; his friends, of course, know that. And the public must sense it, too. In sanity of idea, in clean beauty of color and line, in fine dexterity of composition, Coles Phillips proves himself to all.

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