

CHAPTER SEVEN

An Unexpected Visitor

DAY TURNED INTO NIGHT; night turned into day. Each splendid week unfolded into the next. Before long, we were knee-deep in June.

Nancy, please hold still.

I'm trying, but it's hotter than the hinges of Hades up here.

I assure you it's not any warmer here than it is in New York City.

Howard worked all morning upstairs in the barn's studio, a spacious room two stories tall, ascending from the top floor. A large window facing the north provided the perfect amount of light. Underneath the pine rafters, Howard worked on the last scenes of "The Penalty" and was about to begin work on Jack London's new serial, "The Valley of the Moon."

The yellow canaries Howard had purchased weeks earlier swooped down and encircled us until they found a place to roost. Others just sat, comfortably perched on Howard's easel.

I don't mean to complain. It's just that this long dress is made of heavy dark wool.

Everything must be authentic. I can't have you wearing summer clothes when it's supposed to be winter.

Shortly past noon, I began to fade from the heat and humidity, while Howard was contemplating his next great work. He seemed to be moved by it.

In a few more weeks, I am going to work on "The Seven Darlings."

Seven Darlings?

It's another romantic serial—a family with six daughters and one son with the surname of Darling. I'll need you to pose in a bathing suit, darling.

Ah, well, I'm sure it will be much cooler.

It certainly will, darling. And each of the six sisters will be you, but captured in different poses and in different lights.

I decided to return the favor of his flirtation. Splendid, darling. I can almost envision it now. By the way, darling, what's that curious bug on the ceiling? I pointed to where a black insect was roaming near a group of small mud pipes cemented to a beam.

That's a mud dauber—a wasp. Quite common in these parts.

Well, that creature makes the most perfect little home for itself. You see it? Looks like the pipes of a church organ.

Howard studied it for a moment and then turned back.

A pipe organ mud dauber—each pipe is of a different color; culled from mud gathered from a different place.

How do they do it?

One might say that the mud dauber was born to have a special talent.

Very much like you.

What do you mean?

You were born to paint, Howard, and paint well.

There you're too kind, but I must say, you are quite observant. Talent always comes from within, like that of a budding flower. Take, for instance, Queen Anne's lace. Have you ever looked closely at that flower? Queen Anne's lace is one of the most exquisite creations in all of nature. So perfectly it forms, like a globe of downy snowflakes. After seeing it, I don't see how anyone can ever doubt there is a God.

I feel the same way about roses . . . and you have such an exquisite garden filled with so many varieties—all sweet-smelling, and each created as if it were a special gift.

There's so much more that I would like to show you.

I would like that very much.

We shall begin today. Let's take a short journey together.

That is how I shall always remember that summer as we explored the paradise surrounding his enchanted home—Howard and I in our tall boots, riding horseback in search of the ancient Indian mounds he and his brother once excavated as boys; the late-afternoon tennis matches and rounds of lawn croquet that I always seemed to win; Howard finishing an afternoon landscape while I, with umbrella in hand, stood over him to protect his still-wet canvas from the soft, fragrant rain; the two of us in his covered motorboat, flying at full speed up the river and then, hours later, soaking in the last minutes of the sun's golden rays along some deserted beach at the river's edge across from his home.

It was there on that beach, as we reclined on the warm sand in our bathing suits, that I first raised the question of meeting Howard's notable friends.

Someday soon, I'd love to meet your guests—the ones Noel spoke of when I first arrived.

You will. You already have.

Not the locals. I mean the famous ones—the writers, publishers, actors, and authors, like Rex Beach and Charles Scribner. I mean, do you actually know Harrison Fisher and James Montgomery Flagg, the famous artists?

Just as I know Charles Dana Gibson, the most famous illustrator in America and the very man who introduced you to me. I count these men among my closest friends. We're all in the same brotherhood—the Illustrators of Beauty.

I would love to meet them!

Don't be such a social climber, Nancy.

Howard! I'm not. I'm just curious.

You'll meet them.

When?

Have patience.

I do, and I'm still waiting.

Well, to answer your question, I've just received word that Mary Roberts Rinehart, the best-selling mystery writer, will be staying with us shortly. Over six years ago, I illustrated her first

book, *The Man in Lower Ten*. I'm certain you will find her quite interesting. And I'm . . . I'm thinking of a having a July Fourth celebration for her.

Mary Roberts Rinehart . . . and a July Fourth celebration. How simply divine!



Howard (far left), his dog Sargent, and several of his models waded in the Muskingum River in front of his motorboat around 1912. In 1908, Howard had the boat constructed after his friend Colonel Foster gave him the engine as a present. (Special Collections, Lafayette College, Easton, PA)



After swimming, Howard, his dog Sargent, and several of his models relax on the beach directly across the river in front of his home. Nancy is to the far left with a hat on her foot. (Special Collections, Lafayette College, Easton, PA)