

THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF CLEVERNESS

CONTENTS FOR JANUARY, 1910

THE LORELEI (A Complete Novel)	Willard French	1
THE BREATH OF WINTER (Verse)	Lurana W. Sheldon	46
THE PRIME ESSENTIAL	Paul M. Rosenwey	47
THE WORSHIPERS (Verse)	Mildred McNeal Sweeney	50
THE OUT TRAIL	Mary Glascock	51
REGRET (Verse)	L. B. Coley	59
THE RHYMERS (Verse)	Arthur Stringer	60
TO THE RESCUE OF TEDDY	Jessie Atkinson McGriff	61
LOVE—A TRIBUTE (Verse)	J. L. O'Connor	66
A MAN'S RIGHT	Edith Barnard Delano	67
AN OLD SPINNING WHEEL (Verse)	Clinton Scollard	74
FORD'S CHANCE	Newton A. Fuessle	75
LOVE, THE PEDDLER	Mrs. Leonard Marshall	83
ONE MISTY, MOISTY MORNING (Verse)	Claire M. Carberry	84
THE ROAD OF REBELLION	Jeannette I. Helm	85
APPALLING INFORMATION	Carolyn Wells	94
THE WASHINGTON WAY	Spencer Harley	95
AMARYLLIS (Verse)	Imperia McIntyre	100
HER SUPERSTITION	Ruth Lee	101
WHEN LOVE GREW OLD (Verse)	Blanche Wagstaff	104
FATE	S. Ten Eyck Bourke	105
TO THE NEW YEAR AND THE OLD FRIENDS (Verse)	Henry Christopher Christie	110
FROM THE JOURNAL OF MADAME LEANDRE	Helen Woljeska	110
THE CUTHBERT CASE	Alice Hathaway Cunningham	111
WHAT ARE THE TRUMPS OF LIFE? (Verse)	Alfred B. Mackay	116
ARTISTIC TEMPERAMENTALISTS	Harold Susman	117
THE WATCHDOG (Verse)	John Kendrick Bangs	118
THE PAINTER OF DEAD WOMEN	Edna Worthley Underwood	119
THE WOOD FIRE (Verse)	Rosalie Arthur	126
REFLECTIONS OF A SPINSTER	Helena Sharpsteen	126
THE VAMPIRE CAT OF NABESHIMA (A Play in One Act)	Fuji-Ko	127
MAJOR BLUFFKINS'S WOOING	William J. Lampton	135
THE EXILE (Verse)	Theodosia Garrison	138
M'SIEU	Edith M. Coyle	139
LE GENIE DES EAUX (In Original French)	Jean Reibrach	143
LA VIE AU GRAND AIR (French Verse)	Lucie Delarue-Mardrus	144
DRAMA'S TRIAL MARRIAGE WITH ART	George Jean Nathan	145
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AS A HERO	H. L. Mencken	158

Yearly Subscription \$3.00

Single Copies 25 Cents

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted

Entered at New York Post Office as second-class mail matter

Issued monthly by Ess Ess Publishing Company

WILLIAM D. MANN, President

452 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

W. L. DANIELS, Sec. and Treas.

THE PAINTER OF DEAD WOMEN

By EDNA WORTHLEY UNDERWOOD

WE were lingering over one of our honeymoon breakfasts in Naples, my husband dividing his attention between *Il Corriere di Napoli* and his coffee, and I planning for my favorite pastime, swimming, in that sea which looks like a liquid sapphire.

"No clue to the mysterious disappearance of the Contessa Fabriani," he read. "After a month's search the police are baffled.

"That does not sound particularly remarkable to you, I suppose. Women—and men, too, for that matter—have disappeared from other cities. But this adds another chapter to a mysterious story of crime. For twenty-five years, not only native Italian women, but visiting women of other nations have disappeared from Naples and nothing has afterward been heard of them. The peculiar part about it is that they have all been young and beautiful and women of the upper class."

I paid little heed to his words. I was thinking of other things. Besides, Luigi was a Neapolitan and interested in all the happenings of his native city. On my first visit to Naples I did not have time to interest myself in a sensational story such as I could read any morning in the London papers.

"You haven't forgotten that this is the night of the ball?" he said suddenly, consulting his watch and jumping up. "I want you to look particularly lovely. All my friends—and your old rivals—will be there. Business takes me from the city for the day, and, in case I should not return in time to accompany you, I have arranged for Cousin Lucia to meet you at ten at the

door of the Cinascalchi Palace. I shall come later—in time for part of the dancing. Tell Pietro to get you there at exactly ten," he called out after he had kissed me good-bye.

When I took a last look at myself in the glass that night I felt that I had obeyed my husband's instructions. I was looking particularly lovely. I had dressed with the purpose of appearing as unlike Italian women as possible.

My slim six feet of stature was arrayed in a plain white satin princess gown, from which the shoulders rose scarcely less white and satinly. My hair was the color of the upland furze, and my cheeks glowed like the roses of an English garden.

"Pietro!" I called, after we had driven what seemed to me a very long time. "Are you sure that you are going in the right direction? I did not suppose that it was outside the city."

He reassured me and drove on. We entered the courtyard of a country estate. As I stepped from the carriage I saw in the distance the grouped lights of Naples. Pietro whipped the horses and drove off before I had time to speak.

There were no other carriages in the yard. Could I have mistaken the time? Lucia was not there to meet me, either. She was probably within, I reflected, since the palace was bright with light.

Doors swung back softly, as if by magic, and I entered. The blaze of light that rushed out all but blinded me. Words cannot express the horror of it nor of the silence that accompanied it. There were no servants moving

about. No one was in sight. I was alone.

Imagine a sweep of majestic rooms whose floors were polished to the surface consistency of stone; straight white walls of mirrored marble, and, blazing from walls and ceiling, prisms of cut crystal. Wherever you looked, the glitter of light flashed back at you, confusing your eyes and dazing your brain. I did not suppose that light could hold such terror.

"There is surely some mistake," I whispered. "This is no place for dancing or merriment. It is more like a white and shining sepulcher. I would rather trust myself to the night outside," turning toward the door with the purpose of leaving.

But the space behind, where I knew I had entered, presented a smooth and even paneled surface. There was no door. Nor was there place for lock or knob. As I stood confused and hesitating, I learned to the full the demoniac power of light. The slightest motion of my body, my head, my breathing, even, sent from polished corner and cornice quivering arrows into my eyes. The mirrors and the shining marble reflected floor and ceiling until it was impossible to tell where one left off and the other began. It seemed, after a time, that I was floating head downward in a sea of light.

Then something righted me sharply. It was not sound nor was it thought. It appealed to subtler senses. It was as if the material body was endowed with a thinking machine and each pore contained a brain. It aroused some consciousness which the hypnotism of light had dulled.

I knew then that I was standing slim and white and frozen with terror in the focus of the light.

I felt the cold diamonds shift their position upon my throat and breast and tremble as I breathed irregularly. I heard the sibilant slipping of the stiff satin as it fell into a changed position.

A powerful and dominant brain had touched my own. For one unconscious moment it had ruled it and set upon it the seal of its thought.

Such a passion of fear assailed me that it seemed as if I must choke.

My fascinated eyes turned toward the end of the farthest room. From there the message came. There, I knew, was something compelling, something electric. Exactly in the center of that far room and very erect stood a man. He was coming toward me, too, slowly, very slowly—yet I heard not the slightest sound. Evidently he was shod with rubber. He moved as I have seen a malevolent spider move toward a prisoned fly, slowly, enjoying the pleasure of motion, because he knows that there is no escape. Just so gracefully and easily did he move toward me. And as he came I knew that he read my soul, measured my strength and my powers of resistance, and at the same time admired the white erectness of my body.

Fear, as with a bitter acid, etched his picture on my brain. He was very tall—taller than I by a good inch—and faultlessly attired. A patrician, but a degenerate patrician, the body alone having preserved marks of its ancient dignity.

Ribbon decorations brightened his coat, and I saw a garter on his leg. He was thinner than anyone I ever saw, and correspondingly supple. His movements had the fascination of a serpent's. Thus might a serpent move if its coiled length were poised erect.

His head would have been beautiful, had not the features been so delicately chiseled that strength and nobility had been refined away and in their place had come effeminacy and a certain cold and delicate cruelty.

He was an old man, too, and his heavy hair was white. His brows, however, were black and youthful, and from beneath looked out blue eyes. The eyes were the color of light when it shines through thick ice. They were the color of the sharp edge of fine steel when it is bared too quickly to the sun. In the same hard way the light ran across them.

But the strangest part was that there seemed to be no limit to their depth. However far you looked within, you

could find nothing. You could not surprise a consciousness. There was no soul there. In its stead there was merely a keen and destructive intelligence.

I realized that the man coming toward me did not live by means of the physical acts of life. He had learned to live by his brain; he was a cerebral.

I sensed his dominant personality and struggled against it. I sensed the presence of a numbing mental fluid that crippled my will and dulled my brain, as does that sweet smelling death which surgeons call the anesthetic.

He had stripped himself of human attributes. He knew nothing of fear, pity, love.

"I have the honor of meeting, I believe, the bride of the Leopardi," he said, bowing and speaking in an even, unemotional voice.

I bowed in return. "How is it possible for you to know that? I do not remember having met you."

"It is not necessary to have met me. No beautiful woman comes to Naples whom I do not know. I"—he bowed again—"am Count Ponteleone, Painter of Dead Women. You have probably heard of me."

"Who has not?" I exclaimed, somewhat reassured and wondering that this could be the man whose name was resounding through two continents.

"This intrusion—which I beg you to pardon—is due to the coachman's mistake. I am expected at the Cinascalchi ball. My husband and cousin await me there. If you will send me on in your carriage I shall be grateful."

"Oh, no; your coachman made no mistake," he responded, calmly ignoring my request. "I brought him here, and you, too, as I have brought other women—by this," tapping his forehead.

"You are graciously jesting to excuse my rudeness," I managed to stammer, summoning the ghost of a smile.

"Well, we may as well call it a jest if you wish. It is a jest which ought to flatter. I entertain only beautiful women here."

The glance that accompanied this

enveloped me from head to foot. It was a glance of admiration, and yet, in it there was none of the desire of would-be love. It was devoid of warmth and emotion. Nothing could be more impersonal. No mark of material beauty had escaped it. It was the trained glance of a connoisseur which measures accurately. I might have been a picture or a piece of furniture.

I felt that he knew my racial standing, my rank as a human animal, by the delicate roundness of my bones and the fine fiber of my flesh. I had been as glass to his intelligent gaze. Somehow, then, I felt that the body of me belonged to him because of this masterly penetration which substance could not resist.

"Since you are to be my guest, we might seek a more comfortable place to converse."

He led the way to the center of the great rooms, where, touching an invisible spring, doors flew back disclosing a drawing-room draped in red. As he bowed me to a seat he remarked: "Here you look like a pearl dropped in a cup of blood."

I, too, thought that I had never seen so wicked a red nor one so suggestive of luxurious crime. The comparison jarred upon me and prickled me with fear.

As he sank back in an easy chair opposite, I saw how the red walls touched with color the whiteness of his hair and sent occasional ruddy gleams into the depths of his eyes.

"You are an Englishwoman, too," he observed with evident relish. "I knew it. Only the mists and rains of England can paint color like yours."

"Did you notice how well we looked together as we walked along between the mirrors? Are we not as if made for each other—tall and regal, both of us? What a picture we would make!"

It occurred to me then with unpleasant appropriateness that he was the painter of *dead* women.

"It is an Englishwoman, too, that I lack for my collection," he mused meditatively.

"Collection! Have you a collection

of women? That is certainly unique. I have heard of collections of bugs, birds—but women, never. Perhaps you would like me to join it!"

"Indeed I would! I never saw a woman I admired so tremendously."

I drew back in fear, silenced by the ardor of his words.

"Oh, you need not be afraid! I am not like other men. I do not love as they love; I love only with my brain. While you have been sitting here I have caressed you a thousand times and you have not even suspected it. I do not want the bestial, common pleasures which my coachman can have or my scullion can buy with a quarter. Why should not I be as much superior to them in my loves as in my life? If I am not, then I am not their superior in any way. My pleasures are those of another plane of life, of a brain touched to keener fire, of nerves that have reached the highest point of pleasurable vibration. Besides, when I love, I love only *dead* women. Life reaches its perfection only when death comes. Life is never real until then," he added.

"Perhaps you would like to kill me for your amusement tonight," I replied, still trying to keep up the jest. "I have always flattered myself, however, that I was better alive."

No sooner were the words out than I regretted them. His face grew thin and strained, like that of a bird dog on the scent. His lips became expressive of a terrible desire and his frail hands trembled with anticipation.

As I looked, his pupils disappeared and his eyes became two pools of blue and blazing light. Unwittingly I had hit upon his object. I had surprised his purpose in a jest.

Who could have dreamed of this? At the worst, I thought I might be detained for two or three days, forced to serve him as a model and cause worry to my husband and gossiping comment.

But whose imagination could have reached this? Strangely enough, the decree of death that I read in his face cooled the ardor of my fear. I became calm and collected. In an instant I

was mistress of myself and ready to fight for my life. The blood stopped pounding in my brain. I could think with normal clearness.

The worst of it was, I reflected, this man was not mad. If he had been, I might have been able to play upon some delusion for freedom. He had passed the point where madness begins. He had gone just so much too far the other way.

"Then you really think that you could love me if I were dead!" I laughed, leaning toward him gaily. "Isn't it rather a strange requisite for winning a woman's love? What would my reward be? Are you sure you could not endure me any other way?"

"Do not jest about sacred things. Death," he answered slowly and reprovingly, "is the thing most to be desired by beautiful women. It saves them from something worse—old age. An ugly woman can afford to live; a beautiful woman cannot. The real object of life is to ripen the body to its limit of physical perfection, and then, just as you would a perfect fruit, pluck and preserve it. Death sets the definite seal upon its perfection—that is, if death can be controlled to prevent decay. And that is what I can do," he added proudly, rising in his thought abstraction and pacing up and down the room. "And what difference does it make what day it comes? 'All days march toward death.'"

I admired unreservedly the elegant, intellectualized figure, now that I had thrown fear to the winds.

"Come," he pleaded, "let me kill you! It is because I love you that I ask you. It is because I think that your physical self is worth being preserved. Your future will be assured. You will never be less happy than now, less lovely, less triumphant. You will always be an object of admiration."

What a magician you are to picture death attractively! But tell me more about it first.

Joy leaped up and sang in my heart at the prospect of the struggle. I felt as the race horse feels when, knowing the strength and the suppleness of his

limbs, he sees the long white track unfold before him.

"In ancient days," he began, "my ancestors were Roman governors in Spain. At the court of one of them, Vitellius Ponteleone, lived a famous Jewish physician—in old Spanish days the Jews were the first of scientists—by name Ibn Ezra. He made a poison—poison is not the right word; I regret greatly its vulgar suggestiveness—from a mineral which has now vanished from the face of the earth. This poison causes a delicious, pleasurable death, and at the same time arrests physical decay. Now if you will just let me inject one drop of it into that white arm of yours you will be immortal—superior to time and change, indestructibly young. You do not seem to realize the greatness of the offer. For this honor I have selected you from all the women in Naples."

"It is an honor, of course; but, like a proposal of marriage, it seems to me important, and to require consideration."

"Oh, no, it is not important. We have to prepare for life, but for death we are always ready. Besides, I am offering you a chance to choose your own death. How many can do that?"

"Do not think that I am ungrateful, good Count, but—"

"One little drop of the liquid will run through your veins like fire, cutting off thought and all centers of painful sensation. Only a dim, sweet memory of pleasant things will remain. Gradually, then, cells and arteries and flesh will harden. In time your body will attain the hardness of a diamond and the whiteness of fine marble. But it is months, years, before the brain dies. I am not really sure that it ever dies. In it, like the iridescent reflections upon a soap bubble, live the shadows of past pleasures. There is no other immortality that can equal this which I offer.

"Every day that you live now lessens your beauty. In a way, every day is a vulgar death. It coarsens and overcolors your skin, dulls the gold of your hair, makes this bodily line or

that a bit too full. That is why I brought you here tonight, at the height of your beauty, just as love and life have crowned you."

"It must be a remarkable liquid. Let me see it. Is it with you?"

"No, indeed. It is kept in a vault which requires an hour to open. It is guarded as are the crown jewels of Italy," he responded proudly.

There was no immediate danger, I thought. There was time. Now the road lay long before me.

"I suppose there is an antidote for—this liquid; I will not call it poison, since you dislike the word so greatly."

"None that is known now. You see, it destroys instantly what only patient nature can rebuild."

"I am greatly interested in it. Show me the other women upon whom you have tried it. I am eager to see its effect."

"I knew you would be. Come this way."

We ascended a staircase, where again I felt the sting of lights. Upon a landing, halfway up, he paused and pointed to our reflected figures.

"Are we not as if made for each other, you and I? When I sleep the white liquid sleep I shall arrange that it be beside you."

My death evidently was firmly determined upon.

At the top he unlocked a door and we entered a room where some fifty women were dancing the minuet. Above them great crystal chandeliers swung, giving to their jewels and their shimmering silks and satins reflected life. Each one was in an attitude of arrested motion. It was as if they had been frozen in the maddest moment of a dance. But what a horrible sight—this dance of dead women—this mimic merriment of death!

"You know my picture of this scene, do you not?" he said, turning on more light. "They were perfect models, I can assure you. I can paint them for hours in any light.

"When I die I shall bequeath to Naples this art gallery. Will it not be a gift to be proud of? Nothing can

surpass it in uniqueness. Then the bodies of these women will have attained the hardness and the whiteness of fine marble. They can in no way be distinguished from it except by their hair.

"Of course, now, if the outside world knew of this, I should be punished as a murderer."

How firmly it was settled in his mind that the outside world was to be mine no more!

"But then I shall be revered as a scientist who preserved for posterity the most perfect human specimens of the age in which he lived. I shall be looked upon as a god. It is as great to preserve life as it is to make it."

The next room we entered was a luxurious boudoir. Before an exquisite French dressing table sat a woman, whose bronze hair swept the floor. On either side peacocks stood with outspread tails. Their backs served as a rest for a variety of jeweled hairpins, one of which she was in the act of picking up.

"That is the Contessa Fabriani. She is not yet dead. She hears every word we say, but she is unable to speak. I am painting her now. You can see the unfinished picture against the wall."

In an adjoining room a dark-skinned woman of the Orient, whose black and unbound hair showed purplish tints, was reclining upon the back of a Bengal tiger. Other Eastern women lay upon couches and divans.

"See, even in death, what enticing languor! See the arrested dreams in their dark eyes, deep as an Orient night! These women I have loved very greatly. Sometimes I have a fancy that death cannot touch them. In them there is an electric energy, the stored up indestructible ardor of the sun, which, I like to fancy, death cannot dissipate. Now here," opening another door, "I will show you an effect I have tried for years to reproduce. This has been the desire of my life."

He flung back a row of folding windows, making the room on one side open to the sea.

"It is the effect of the blended radi-

ance flung from the water here and the moon upon dull silver, upon crystal and the flesh of blonde women."

He turned out the lights. The moon sent an eerie shivering luster across the crystal and silver decorations, and touched three women in robes of white who were standing in attitudes of dreaming indolence.

"This thin, ethereal, surface light, this *puissance de lumière*, is what I have tried in vain to imprison. I have always been greedy of the difficult and the unattainable. If I could do this I should be the prince of painters. It is a fact, a real thing, and yet it possesses the magic of dreams, the enchantment of the fleeting and illusory. I wish to be the wizard of light. I wish to be the only one to prison its bright, defiant insubstantiality.

"Can you not see how wonderful it is? It is the dust of light. Reflected upon silver and clear crystal, it is what shadow is to sound. Sometimes it seems to me like a thin, clear acid; then again like some blue, sweet-smelling, volatile liquid eager again to become a part of the air.

"Have you noticed how it penetrates blonde flesh? It reveals, yet transfigures it. I wish you could watch its effect often. Sometimes the wind churns the sea light into transparent foam. Then I love its curdlike, piled up whiteness. Sometimes, when there is no moon, and only a wan, tremulous luster from the water, the light of a far star is focused on their satins, on their diamonds, struggles eerily among their laces or flickers mournfully from a pearl. The room then is filled with a regretful, metallic radiance. The stars caress them. They have become impersonal, you see, and the eternal things love them.

"When the autumn moons are high the light that fills the room is resonant and yellow. It tingles like a crystal. It gives their cold white satins the yellow richness of the heart of the peach and to the women the enticing languor of life. On such nights the moonlight is musical and makes the crystal vibrate.

"Now, tonight, the light is more like the vanishing ripple of the sea and has a vocal quality. Is it not wonderful? Look! It is the twin of silence, the ghost of light!"

In his excitement and exhilaration his eyes shone like the moon-swept sea. I knew that in them, too, slept terrors inconceivable.

"This is the room I have in mind for you. You will queen it by a head over the other women. The color of your dress is right. Your gems, too, are white. Here, some time, I promise to join you, and together we shall be immortal.

"Excuse me just a moment. Wait here. Let me get the liquid and show it to you. You will be fascinated by it, just as other women have been. I never saw one who could resist it."

As he left I heard the key turn in the lock. When we entered the other rooms I remembered that he bolted the doors on the inside. This door, then, was the only one by which he could gain entrance. Swiftly I slipped the bolt. Now I was safe—for a time, unless there was a secret entrance.

It was not far from the window to the water. I laughed with delight. I had dived that distance many a time for pleasure. I was one of the best swimmers in England, and I had always longed for a plunge in this sapphire sea. Now was my chance and life the goal to gain. I took off my satin gown as gaily as I had put it on. Like the Count of Ponteleone, I, too, admired the play of light on its piled up whiteness. How merrily the sea wind came! How it counceled courage!

I took the plunge. Down, down,

down I went, cleaving the clear water. The distance up seemed interminable. It was like being born again when at last I saw the white foam feather my arms and felt my lungs expand with air.

I swam in the direction of Naples. I could not reach the city, but I could easily reach some fisher's hut and there gain shelter.

Oh, the delight of that warm, bright water under the moon! I felt that the strength of my arms and my legs was inexhaustible. I exulted in the water as a bird in its natural element, the air.

After I had covered what I thought to be a safe distance I turned on my back and floated. Then I caught sight of the window from which I had leaped. It was brilliantly lighted. Count Ponteleone was leaning from it excitedly, his white hair shining like a malevolent flame.

Despite the distance, I could feel the power of his wild blue eyes, which sparkled like the sea. Again I dived, lest they should reassert their power over me and draw me back.

I came up under the shadow of the shore, where I made my way along until I reached a boat where Neapolitan fisherwomen were spreading their nets to dry. They took me in, and for the doubled price of a good month's fishing brought me that night to Naples.

"Ah, Luigi," I sobbed, as he folded me in his arms, "little did I think, when you spoke of the dance this morning, that I should spend the night with the dead dancing women of Ponteleone!"

"Nor I that you would solve Naples's mystery of crime."

