

The Maternal Feminine [1919]

Sophy seemed calm, her hands folded, her face serene yet expectant.

Marian King was younger than they had thought she would be. She brought with her an atmosphere of briskness, of efficiency softened by a feminine warmth. She greeted them, shook hands. Then she sat down, turned to Flora, and began to speak quietly, simply, recounting Eugene's last days. She told them of his courage, his strength, his will to live. She described his attacks, his struggle for breath, his determination to fight through each crisis. Throughout her narrative, her admiration and deep affection for Eugene were evident.

She spoke of a night when the gas attacks were particularly severe, how Eugene had clung to her, taking comfort from her presence. Despite the doctors' verdict that there was no hope, Eugene had fought. "Then I'll fight for it!" he had declared, sitting upright with a strength that amazed her. For three days, he battled, buoyed by his indomitable spirit, but in the end, the gas had done its damage.

Marian King's voice was steady, but her eyes were bright with unshed tears as she recounted these details. Flora, listening, wept openly now, her sobs filling the room. Baldwin's frown deepened, and he removed the cigar from his mouth, his face showing a mixture of pain and pride. Adele, standing by the window, had turned to listen, her face pale, her lips pressed tightly together.

When Marian King finished, there was a silence, a heavy, charged atmosphere as her words echoed in their minds. Then, quietly, she added that Eugene had mentioned his family in those last days, expressing his love and his regrets. She conveyed his final messages of affection with such tender respect that even Flora's sobs ceased.

Finally, Marian King stood to leave, expressing her hope that her visit had brought some comfort. They thanked her, their voices low, each lost in their own thoughts and memories of Eugene. After she left, the room remained silent, the family sitting together, united in their grief and in their pride for the son and brother who had fought so valiantly.

Aunt Sophy, her calm demeanor intact but her eyes shining with a mixture of sorrow and pride, looked at each member of her family. In her gaze was an unspoken understanding of their loss, but also a reminder of Eugene's bravery and strength. And in that moment, despite their differences and past grievances, they were simply a family mourning their hero, remembering his courage, and beginning to find a way to move forward together.