

# I

## ROMAN CHILDHOOD

My father, Luther Terry, left Connecticut in 1833 to study art in Rome. He was twenty years old. He was born and brought up on a farm near Hartford, at the old Terry homestead where the family had lived since earliest Colonial times. They claimed descent on the distaff side from the patriarchal Governor Bradford, who came to America in the *Mayflower*.

The Terrys had never grown rich; many of them were parsons; one of them made wooden clocks, now prized by collectors of Americana. My father's name was Luther; he had a brother who bore the name of Calvin, which shows which way the winds of doctrine blew in the family. Calvin and a third brother, James, were both Congregational ministers.

The young Luther had a certain talent, and above all a passion for art, and started forth on what must in those days have seemed a great adventure. The call came to a number of other American youths about the same time — Story, Rogers, Healy, Ives, Simmons, are a few of the names that come to mind. A group of voluntary exiles bringing up their families in a foreign land for love of its beauty. Pilgrim Fathers fleeing the “stern and rock-



bound coast," escaping from the narrow pattern of Puritan communities, rediscovering the forgotten treasures of the Old World, the significance of ruins, the romance of the picturesque.

For all its ravishing beauty, Italy was perhaps not the best place for their artistic education; the soil, for one thing, was too alien, and they too entirely unprepared for the lessons it had to teach. But they were happy people and lived in an innocent Bohemian Arcadia nestled in a spur of Parnassus.

My father studied with Camuccini, President of the Accademia di San Luca, who tried with all his might to paint like Raphael. My father also worked in the Life Class at the Villa Medici — the French Academy. He was a good draughtsman and told me with modest satisfaction how Thackeray, when he once visited the school, had stopped and looked at his drawing and exclaimed, "By Jove, I wish I could draw like that!"

He painted many pictures — preferably large canvases representing religious and allegorical subjects: Deborah singing her song of victory; the vision of Ezekiel — God the Father, with a white woolly beard, grasping a starry thunderbolt over the prostrate form of the prophet; Solomon visited in his sleep by Beauty, Riches, and Wisdom, in guise of three smiling Græco-Roman goddesses; Jacob dreaming on his stone pillow under the sky-propped ladder full of angels ascending and descending; and many more.

My father's studio was in the Via Margutta under the Pincian Hill. My little brother, Arthur, and I were often taken there to sit for our portraits. For one big picture



MARGARET AND ARTHUR TERRY  
*A portrait by their father*

we posed in our shifts sitting on the knees of Adelina, Arthur's pretty peasant nursemaid. She was dressed in the gay Roman costume long since discarded by all but models and wet-nurses and sat in a swing with a child on each knee.

The sitting still, even in a swing, was tiresome, but the place was full of compensating interest: the life-sized articulate manikins with their foolish faces and untidy human hair; the property chest full of treasures and mysteries; a white satin gown that had belonged to Napoleon's mother, Madama Letizia; a red velvet mantle trimmed with ermine that seemed very regal; flowered waistcoats; brocaded skirts; beribboned sleeves; laced coats; and then the tubes of paint that squeezed so pleasantly on to the palette. Sometimes when I had sat very still I was allowed to squeeze them myself, proudly and carefully.

Behind the studio was a shady, overgrown garden, smelling of roses and violets, with a great bitter-almond tree that blossomed in earliest spring.

My father achieved a modest success as a painter in the innocent '50s, '60s, and '70s. He sold pictures to his compatriots and often painted their portraits. In the '80s his clients became rarer. The public had become more sophisticated. The new manner had made the old seem obsolete; unknown visitors rarely rang the little jangling studio bell, and the studio became a hermitage. During the last twenty-five years of his life my father went on painting with unflagging ardor for the great pleasure that it gave him. He died in 1900, eighty-seven years old. The art world had gone by him, but I think his days passed



very happily in the colorless studio light; for he lived in Rome, the city of his choice, and painting is of all the arts the one that seems to give most constant pleasure to the craftsman.

He was very gentle and conventional; he had left his own people and the land of his fathers for the sake of art; he had fallen in love with the Rome of the Popes, but he highly disapproved of anything that resembled artistic Bohemia, and he held unaltered his Calvinistic views on Catholicism and the Roman clergy.

In the year 1861 he married my mother, Louisa Cutler Ward, widow of Thomas Crawford, an Irish-American sculptor of some note. It was Crawford who decorated the dome of the Capitol in Washington with the bronze statue of an Indian. Its bronze doors and some of the marble bas-reliefs surrounding them are also by him; and when he died in 1857 he had just completed the sculptures which adorn the Washington Monument of Richmond, Virginia. My mother was left a widow with three daughters and one son — the youngest child, Francis Marion, who eventually wrote *Mr. Isaacs* and *Saracinesca* and many other novels.

Louisa Ward also came of old New England stock. The Wards and the Greenes, to whom the Wards were several times related, gave more than one Colonial Governor to Rhode Island. A Ward fell with Wolfe at Quebec. Colonel Ward, my mother's grandfather, fought in the Revolutionary War. His commission was signed by Washington. He married a daughter of Governor Greene, and his son, another Samuel Ward, was my mother's father.