I knew her very little so far as the usual measures for knowing people go. It was only three or four years before her death that I first came in contact with her. We both were taking meals irregularly in the dining room of the National Arts Club, and the first time I laid eyes on her I knew there was an unusual person.

I think we began nodding to each other across the room and stopping at the tables for a few moments conversation. It seemed natural for us to come together. I do not know whether she knew my name or my profession. I did not know hers. It was a very cheerful acquaintance to start with. We laughed together, told each other jokes.

Then gradually there came more revealing talks. Before I had ever seen a picture of hers, she sat down in desperation one day at my table for a moment. "You don't know what a termagant I am. I slashed a canvas this morning, shook my fist at it, 'So you won't come! You won't come! I will make you!' You see I am a wicked person."

I did not know at first what she meant by 'So you won't come!' But the first picture of hers hung at an exhibit at the Club made me understand. More plainly than in any picture I had ever looked at, there was something trying to get out of that canvas. It seemed to me so clear...
that the artist felt something beyond what she had been able to paint, and that feeling suggested itself in a kind of atmosphere, if that is possible, which surrounded the portrait. I did not measure the picture by any of the few standards which I usually applied. It was this struggle to express which I read into it that fascinated and awed me. This woman had got something.

Soon after that she had an exhibit on the Avenue. A good gallery. She sent me a card. Now in these latter years I rarely go to an exhibit -- little time, little strength for them. But I had to find out whether or not in this exhibit there might be a similar effort to express, similar creation of an atmosphere. So I went to the exhibit. Some of those full length portraits startled me. I found in them a stronger degree of the thing which had puzzled and eluded me.

I would not presume to say how good or how poor a painter Harriet Blackstone was. I am not equipped to judge. But I know that I found something in what I saw of her work that I almost never have found in any painting and that I rarely find in the work of human beings in any field -- a struggle to get beyond the factual, however brilliantly the factual may be interpreted and presented.

Having once felt this about the woman's work, I never let an opportunity escape to meet and talk with her. We never talked art. We never talked about writing. Only once in a while when she was struggling to desperation,
she burst out as she had done that first day. Usually we laughed together over the queer ways of human beings. She was never cynical or bitter, and the people she appreciated and told me about were always something out of the common.

I discovered that she had had a life of struggle, but the great and overwhelming struggle of her life was to get on to her canvases something that was behind her subject, and I think it quite possible that the fury with which she worked helped kill her. She must have known that there was some physical fiend after her, but nobody ever fought him off more gallantly than she. She was too preoccupied by work to notice the approach of death. In our last talks she showed me plans for a studio in the country, for a permanent place of her own, for which she longed. She had a charming plan.

If I had been a long-time friend of hers I could hardly have felt a greater sense of loss than, when coming back to New York after considerable absence, I learned that she was gone. I knew that something very rare and unusual had gone out of my life, and I know this without ever having known Harriet Blackstone in the way that we ordinarily know people.
Harriet Blackstone

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able to paint, and that feeling suggested itself in a kind of atmosphere, if that is possible, which surrounded the portrait. I did not measure the picture by any of the few standards which I usually applied. It was this struggle to express which I felt that held me. I kept going back to it. This woman had got something.

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