

A LOVER FROM OVER THE SEA.

(Continued.)

At that moment a startling incident occurred. There was an awful flash of lightning, accompanied by a terrible peal of thunder, and Olivia, clinging desperately to the swaying bough on which she sat, saw what looked like a ball of fire fall straight from the sky and bury itself in the body of the bull. The poor creature bellowed piteously, bounded forward convulsively, and then fell to the ground a helpless mass.

Then the long-delayed rain descended like a torrent; and Philip Grantley, galloping up to the beech-tree, found Lady Olivia standing beneath it pale, trembling, and with her clothing already drenched.

"How very imprudent! What could have induced you to cross this field after the caution I gave you about the bull? You are not hurt, I trust?" he exclaimed hastily, springing off his horse and hurrying towards her.

She shook her head and tried to answer him, but could not force the words from her lips. To give her time to recover herself, he turned back a few paces to pick up her hat, which was lying where she had dropped it in her flight. He returned to her with his prize, contemplating it however with rather a rueful countenance.

"I really don't think it will be of any use to you if you do put it on; but I don't know. By-the-way, if you don't mind—"

Thrusting one of his hands into the pocket of his saddle, he produced a large orange-colored silk handkerchief. This he gravely folded shawl-fashion and presented to Olivia. Then, taking of his brown velvet coat, he placed it upon her shoulders, turning deaf ears to her vehement refusal to make use of the extra covering.

"You must wear it, please. I'm afraid it smells of tobacco; but it will keep off some of the rain, although I fear you are very wet already. You don't suppose that I should think of allowing you to cross this field unprotected from the weather as you are? Why, I could hardly persuade myself to leave a beggar-woman in such a place!"

As he spoke he held up the coat for her to pass her arms into the sleeves in such a determined manner that she thought it was wiser to yield.

"I cannot thank you enough," she said rather forlornly, as she held out her arms helplessly in the heavy brown velvet sleeves, which were several inches too long for her, and was constrained to hold up her chin, under which she had already knotted the orange silk handkerchief, while the steward deliberately turned up the stiff collar of the coat round her throat and buttoned the garment securely over her bosom. "But what am I to do, and where am I to go, Mr. Grantley? I can never get home in such heavy rain as this; and that poor bull—can nothing be done for it? Is it quite dead?"—with a shudder.

"Quite dead, I regret to say," he answered gravely. "No doubt every bullet has it billet, and I suppose much the same rule applies to thunder-bolts, but I must confess that I wish this one had taken aim anywhere else, or, at any rate, that I had the money I paid old Bartholomew for that bull safe in my pocket at this present minute. My first investment on your behalf, Lady Olivia, has been rather an unlucky one."

"Never mind. I shall always consider it all my fault. If I had not forgotten your warning, most likely the bull would not have been killed. I wish I knew how to get home. There seems no prospect of the rain ceasing, and poor Val will be frightened to death. Depend upon it she is at this moment on the point of despatching a telegram to Colonel St. Arbyn to tell him that I have mysteriously disappeared!" exclaimed Lady Olivia, with a slight hysterical laugh at her own misfortunes.

Mr. Grantley scanned the sky between the dripping branches of the tree that sheltered them before he turned to answer his companion.

"There is nothing for it that I can see but for us to run to my cottage, where my housekeeper can at least light a fire for you by which to dry your clothes, while I send a messenger to the Manor House to tell Miss Vallance where you are, and to bring back wraps and shawls for you at once," he said at last. "In this deluge the Steepway would be actually impassable to you on foot, even if I could accompany you, which, with my horse, would be impossible. The rain is likely to last another hour at least, and in the meantime you are running a terrible risk of cold. On, no—I'm not afraid for myself!" he added, laughing, as Olivia glanced involuntarily at his striped red-and-white flannel shirt sleeves. "Such an old hand as I am ought to be impervious to any weather. But, if you are ready, I really think we might make a start; we shall not better ourselves by remaining here, and I think all the thunder has passed away—at any rate, for the present."

Determined to make the best of a difficulty into which she had been led by her own imprudence, Lady Olivia followed the steward obediently across the sodden field, deciding that her desire to engage a Punch-and-Judy show for the hay-field treat was likely to cost her rather dear on the whole.

It was not more than five minutes' walk to the cottage, a picturesque little house standing at a corner where three roads met just at the entrance to the village; but, encumbered by the weight of her wet skirts and by Mr. Grantley's close-buttoned coat, the walk seemed interminable to her ladyship. She was very thankful when she found herself snugly established in an old-fashioned leather rocking-chair in the little sitting room, while her host knelt on the hearth at her feet, busily engaged in setting light to the fire already laid in the grate, and devoting all his energies to coaxing the wood and coal into a cheery blaze.

"There! You are wondering where I could have served my apprenticeship to be such an adept at managing a refractory fire?" he exclaimed at

last, rising to his feet with a sudden flush and rather a forced smile, as the bright flame roared up the chimney, and he detected Lady Olivia's searching eyes fixed on him in some curiosity. "I don't suppose any of the men belonging to your London world could turn their hands half so effectually to housemaid's work, but it is a good thing to be independent of all help, and it is a lesson learnt in infancy, you know, by all Australians."

"He paused suddenly, as though anxious to note the effect of his last words, and Lady Olivia took them up with eager interest.

"Australia! And you never told me? And we have been wondering all this time what made you so different, so—"

"Unlike everybody else—eh?" he said, laughing good-humouredly, though with a look of decided relief. "Ah, you have found out my secret now, Lady Olivia! You see what comes of young ladies transacting business matters for themselves and putting advertisements into the newspapers on their own responsibility! How can you tell that you have not engaged a ticket-of-leave man as your new steward? I may justify before long all the very uneasy suspicions which I am certain your worthy companion, Miss Vallance, entertains respecting me." Then, changing his tone as he saw the color rise in Lady Olivia's delicate cheeks, he said seriously, "Forgive me! Do you think I do not appreciate the kindness and good faith with which you and all those about you have received a stranger; and do you suppose it possible that I could do anything to forfeit your confidence? I have never had the least intention of concealing from you that I am of Colonial birth; half a dozen times since I have known you I have felt inclined to explain to you the very commonplace chain of circumstances that has thrown me across your path. I can tell you something about myself now if you care to listen—only first you must write a note to Miss Vallance to inform her of your whereabouts. My old housekeeper, Mrs. Clitheroe, can take it over to the Manor while I entertain you with a cup of tea in true Australian fashion."

Opening a small davenport he placed writing-materials before his visitor, and proceeded with methodical neatness and care to arrange a little brown tea-pot, two cups and saucers of some dark blue ware, and a small japanned tea caddy upon a tiny occasional table.

Her note finished, Lady Olivia watched Philip Grantley's operations with undisguised interest. The now blazing fire warmed her, and gave an air of home-like comfort to the little room. The large arm-chair in which she sat was a luxurious lounge after her uneasy position in the beech-tree; Wrinkles lay on the great bearskin rug at her feet, sleeping peacefully; a refreshing breeze laden with sweet scents coming in at the open lattice-window, mingled with the fragrance of the tea on which Mr. Grantley had just poured boiling water from a little brass kettle standing on a spirit-lamp at his elbow.

All the Bohemianism in Olivia's nature was roused at the prospect of the impromptu meal in such unconventional circumstances. Her natural gaiety and her sweet happy laugh were contagious. Old Betty Clitheroe, hastily putting on a clean check apron to carry a crusty brown loaf and pat of butter into the cottage parlor, was fairly "mazed," as she expressed it, to find the mistress of Thornwood contentedly pouring out tea for herself and the steward from the little brown tea-pot, and making Wrinkles balance a lump of sugar on his flat black nose.

After a while Lady Olivia remarked—

"I am going to emulate the man who, on meeting a friend just returned from India, said that of course he must have come across his wife's cousin, John Smith, out there! But seriously, Mr. Grantley, having passed all your life, as you tell me, in Australia, it is not impossible that you may have known something of a Mr. Desmond, whose father emigrated to Sydney many years ago and died there, leaving a son who was next heir to the St. Kevin's title at my father's death? I have always felt rather curious about that man," she continued, reflectively, "because when the time really came, and everyone was dreading the advent of a Colonial cousin, he wrote and announced his intention of remaining in the place where he had been born and bred, without assuming any of the family honors that were his by right. It seemed rather a plucky, independent sort of thing to do. He must be very different from most people, who, as a rule, would almost sell their souls to get a handle to their names, even when, as in our case, there was hardly a farthing to support it."

"Probably your relative, having been born and bred in a region where titles are unknown, did not estimate his inherited honors at their proper value," suggested Philip Grantley, carelessly. "Kangaroo Bill, who has taken up a successful cattle-run, or Fleecy Jim, who owns seven thousand sheep, and drives one of his own bullock-teams laden with their wool to the distant railway-station, would be a far more important person in Australia than an out-at-elbow peer, though he owned a pedigree as long as my arm. I seem to have an indistinct remembrance of meeting a man, the owner of a big cattle-run near Sydney, who, according to one of his stockmen, might have been a lord in England had he chosen; but, as far as I can remember, he did not call himself Desmond, and, if he is the person to whom you allude, he had nothing about him, I am sure, to attract a woman's fancy!"

He spoke with some impatience, and Lady Olivia laughed mischievously.

"How do you know, Mr. Grantley? Women have strange notions sometimes! At this moment I feel myself seized with an overwhelming desire to make the acquaintance of my relatives in the Bush, and should like nothing better than a ride on a wool-wagon, perched up by the side of Fleecy Jim! By-the-by, was that your title when you were out in the wilds? I suppose not, or you would hardly condescend to act as steward of Thornwood now."

Philip Grantley smiled as he took down a large volume from one of the book-shelves near him and turned over the leaves, contriving however that his guest should obtain only a mere passing glimpse of a number of