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"WHOSE CHILD IS THAT?" CRIES IRENE SUDDENLY.

"NO INTENTIONS."

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT.

Author of "Love's Conflict," "Veronique," etc

CHAPTER VI.

"What is the reason that that woman is permitted to behave towards us as she does?"
Irene closes the dining-room with a loud slam as she speaks, and, as she turns to confront him again, Oliver Ralston sees that the pallor that overspread her features at the house-keeper's insulting speech has given way to a rosy flush of anger.
"Indeed I cannot tell you, Mrs. Mordaunt: I have asked myself the same question for years past, but never been able to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. But you are trembling: pray sit down—this scene has overpowered you."

"Overcome me! How could it do else but overcome me? I have not been used to see servants assume the place of mistresses; and I feel, since I have come to Fen Court, as though the world were turned upside down. Mr. Ralston, do you know that the woman occupies one of the best rooms in the house?"
"I know it well! I was sent back to school once, in the midst of my holidays, for having had the childish curiosity to walk round it."
"That she lies in bed till noon," continues Irene, "and has her breakfast carried up to her; that she does nothing here to earn her living, but speaks of the house and servants as though they were her own property—"
"I can well believe it."
"And that she has actually refused to receive any orders from me."
"Not really!" exclaims Oliver Ralston, earnestly.
"Really and truly!"
"And what did my uncle say to it?"
"That I had better give my orders to the cook instead!"
There is silence between them for a few minutes, till Irene goes on, passionately:
"I could not bear it—I would not bear it—if it were not for Phillip. But he is the very best and kindest man in the world, and I am sure he would prevent it if he could. Sometimes, Mr. Ralston, I have even fancied that he is more afraid of Quekett than any of us."
"It is most extraordinary," muses Oliver, "and unaccountable. That there is a mystery attached to it I have always believed, for the most quixotic devotion to a father's memory could hardly justify a man in putting up with insult from his inferiors. Why, even as a child, I used to remark the difference in my uncle's behavior towards me when Quekett was away. His manner would become quite affectionate."
"Doesn't she like you, then?"
"She hates me, I believe."

"But why?"
"I have not the least idea, unless it is that boys are not easily cowed into a deferential manner, and Mrs. Quekett always stood greatly on her dignity. Do you not see how frightened Aunt Isabella is of her."
"Indeed I do. I waylaid her, only yesterday, going up to the old woman's room with the newspapers, that had but just arrived by the morning's post. I took them all back again. 'Not to-day's, if you please, Isabella,' I said. 'I should think yesterday's news was quite fresh enough for the servants' hall.'" "Oh! but Mrs. Quekett has always been accustomed," she began—you know her funny way—but I had mine in the end. And Phillip said I was right. He always does say so whenever I appeal to him. But why can't he get rid of her?"
"Why, indeed! Perhaps there is some clause attached to the conditions on which he holds the property, of which we know nothing. I suppose it will all come to light some day. Discussion is futile."
"I am not sure that it is right," replies Irene, blushing. "Perhaps I should not have spoken so freely as I have, but I was much annoyed. Whatever Colonel Mordaunt's reasons may be for keeping Mrs. Quekett, I am sure of one thing—that they are good and just, for he is of too upright and honorable a character to lend his hand to anything that is wrong."
"My uncle is a happy man to have so staunch a defender in his absence," says Oliver, admiringly.
"If his wife does not defend him, who shall?" she answers; "but all this time I am forgetting that you have had no refreshment, Mr. Ralston. What a careless hostess you must think me! Now, confess that you have had no dinner."
"Well, none that deserves that name, certainly."
"I thought so; but what can you expect, if

