

"All the other rooms are very large," Olivia Mary explained, "and I seem to have grown into this little corner"; then she added with her half nervous laugh: "You are looking at my boy's portraits. He says there are far too many and is always threatening to burn some."

Mrs. Ambrose was standing in front of one of the portraits in which young Cheston had been painted in rough riding dress.

"He was just fifteen when that was done," the mother said.

"Isn't he fine? For all the world as strong looking as a man. I do love boys, nice boys, Mrs. Cheston, don't you? I don't suppose," Helen Ambrose added as she returned to her chair, "that you ever had much difficulty with your boy? There was nothing of the idler or the grouch about him if that picture is anything to go by"; then with a rush of hot colour to her cheeks she said: "I guess people talk us over a good deal so you'll probably know I am not a conspicuous success with my stepchildren?"

"I hear very little gossip," Mrs. Cheston answered; "but I know you must have many difficulties. Won't you tell me about them? I—I am—I may be able to help you a little." The suggestion was made with that strange timidity which in another person less graceful or pretty would have seemed awkwardness.

Helen Ambrose made a little movement with her shoulders.

"Oh! why I suppose it's all very ordinary, but I started out to do things so well," she said; "and I've been up against failure from the very first. I don't

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