

"Wouldn't old Gregson be mad if he knew?"
 "Mr. Grantley doesn't know about it!"
 "Oh, father, do let us tell him?"—"Syd, you tell."
 "I will if you'll only be quiet?" Gregson turned Rhoda out of her cottage while Ben was away at sea because she had been ill and couldn't pay the rent."

"And Syd wrote and told Olive."

"Be quiet, Lucy! Well, Olive came down and gave it to Gregson hot! She was staying in a grand country house too, and the Prince and Princess were there."

"And there is going to be a grand ball, and she had such a lovely dress."

"Never mind her dress—she gave all that up and came here directly."

"Directly she saw him, old Gregson got the sack for what he'd done."

"She said—"

"Children, children!" exclaimed the Rector, in a vain attempt to quell the hubbub; but the babel of eager young voices burst forth again in spite of him."

"Now, father, you know it is all true."

"And you cannot bear old Gregson yourself."

"He would never have turned Rhoda out if he could have forgiven her for not looking at his ugly face before she married Ben."

"Olive said so; and she said she would soon make him walk his chalks!"

"George, how can you?" Olive never talks slang."

"She does then." Mr. Grantley, just listen—she says—"

"Why, there she is!" cried Sydney suddenly; and all turned their heads in the direction of the dining-room door, which opened quietly at this moment."

A slender figure in travelling-cloak stood there, looking in with an amused smile upon the noisy party gathered round the tea-table."

There was a general stampede as all the children and Mr. and Mrs. Irvine gathered with warm words of welcome round the new-comer."

Philip Grantley, standing aloof from the rest, had time to receive a distinct first impression of Lady Olivia Desmond before his presence was remembered by those about him. Years afterwards, by simply closing his eyes, he could recall her exact image, as he saw her then—a slight delicately-formed woman rather above the average height, with an undefinable grace and harmony about her whole appearance and manner."

The circumstances of his life had brought Mr. Grantley into contact with but few women—with this type of woman not at all. She was so simple, yet such a lady—so plainly dressed, yet so refined in every detail! She held a great bunch of newly-plucked honeysuckle in her neatly gloved hand. For ever afterwards the subtle fragrance of that flower was associated in Philip Grantley's mind with this first glimpse of the mistress whose service he had lately entered."

It was with difficulty that he roused himself from the reverie into which he had fallen, when, some few minutes later, the first excitement as to Lady Olivia's arrival having subsided, he found that they were being formerly introduced to each other by the Rector."

She held out her hand to him in kindly fashion, utterly ignoring the ceremonious bow he was preparing to make."

"We must be friends, you and I, Mr. Grantley," said Lady Olivia, in her usual frank unconventional manner. "I seem to know you quite well already by your letters, and only hope you have not formed too low an opinion of my powers from mine. Mr. Irvine can tell you that business transactions are not exactly my forte, so it is important that I should have responsible people about me whom I can really trust. It was such a curious thing, your enclosing me that letter of introduction from Sir James Champion! I remember him quite well, although I was only a child when I saw him last. Have you known him long? He was a very old friend of my dear father's!"

There was a slight sign of embarrassment in Philip Grantley's manner, an embarrassment which Lady Olivia's quick eyes did not fail to detect, but which she ascribed merely to an excusable shyness on the part of her new steward. She had been surprised to find him on terms of evident intimacy with Mr. Irvine and his family, his predecessor, old Gregson, having been rather certain about the letter "h," and decidedly fond of nightly libations of spirits-and-water. This man, whom she had selected in Gregson's stead simply because, out of a score of other applicants, his letter, curt and to the point, pleased her fancy best, and whom until this moment she had never seen, was plainly not cast in the Gregson mould. "A gentleman of course—any one can see that. Hard up, I suppose! Well, it can't be helped now! He looks honest enough. I wonder if I can find Sir James's letter! How angry Godfrey will be!" These reflections flitted rapidly through her ladyship's mind. Like the woman of the world that she was, manifested no surprise when Mr. Grantley somewhat blunderingly informed her that he had only a slight acquaintance with Sir James Champion."

"Some years ago I had the pleasure of rendering Sir James a slight service, and, not long since meeting him unexpectedly again, he kindly wrote at my request the few words of general recommendation I forwarded to you on reading your advertisement," said the new steward, fixing his honest eyes upon Lady Olivia, and speaking in a straightforward manner that carried conviction with it. "I am afraid you will find me very ignorant of the duties of my post, Lady Olivia, but I mean to do my best, and if the results are not satisfactory to you in a short time, I can but resign."

(To be Continued.)

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