

herself. Throughout her journey, the remembrance of his coldness remained with her, and she only shook it off by a persistent effort, when she reached Birdbrook, and prepared for what she inwardly called her plan of campaign. "It is most kind, most good of Sir Giles to let me spend a night here," she said to Helen with her sweetest and most ingratiating smile. "I am sorry he is away. I should have liked to thank him in person. You do not know what a privilege it is for a foreigner like myself to see one of these beautiful mansions of yours. And to sleep here!" she put up her hands expressively. "I was only grateful enough for the opportunity your kind suggestion gave me to offer myself for the afternoon."

Miss Helen racked her brains in vain to recollect what words of hers could have led Miss Muller to suppose she intended any suggestion of the kind: but as no such words had ever been uttered, the racking of her brain was naturally useless. And Miss Muller, having similarly accepted her stumbingly expressed greeting, turned to Sylvia, who watched her with shining eyes.

"I'm glad you've come," the child said. "I did want to see you again. Only I'm sorry you won't see monsieur. You see he has gone to London to arrange about his wedding. It will be in a few weeks now. I think you would like monsieur."

"I am sure I should," Rosa answered warmly, congratulating herself that a certain good nature that belonged to the better part of her character, had made her friendly to Sylvia on the occasion of their first meeting, "but all the same, I haven't come here to see Sir Giles. I want to talk to you and Miss Helen all the time. And you must show me the beautiful house and grounds."

"May I show you everything, my own self?" Sylvia's voice was eager.

"Yes, everything," Rosa well knew how to infuse into her voice an intensely fascinating quality, "you shall take me to your very pet corners of the garden and park, and let me see your own room, and show me that I am a real, true friend."

Sylvia's face flushed with delight, and simple-hearted Miss Helen looked gratefully into the beautiful face of their guest, while Rosa felt that she was winning her victory with an ease that gave her again a hideous sense of shame.

"But I shall go through with it now," she thought, metaphorically setting her teeth. "I have come so far, and I won't turn back."

So it came about that, whilst Miss Helen sat on the terrace, placidly knitting, and thinking how charming it was of Miss Muller to interest herself so wholeheartedly in a little girl; and the little girl sat with her pretty new friend in the pergola covered with roses, and without let or hindrance opened her childish heart to the blue-eyed lady.

Such an easy victory. Little Sylvia's confidence was freely offered to one who had already gained her heart; and with a voice that shook, and eyes misty with tears, the child told Rosa the story of her mother's tragic death.

"It was a black car that ran into us," she said, "a horrible black car, very big, and it came, oh! so fast along that white road, and mummy and I could do nothing, only hold each other very tight. And then I can't remember any more, till I was standing there in the dust, and mummy lay all white and still, and monsieur came and helped us."

"But the man with the black car? Surely he helped you? What was he like?" At the mention of that black car, Rosa had drawn in her breath sharply, and now she spoke fast and eagerly.

"He didn't help us—no—he drove away as soon as he could, and we never saw him again. And he was very tall and his face was dark, and—and horrid," the child shivered, "when he looked at me he made me afraid."

"At one time she played a part in my life—I do not know for certain if she died." Like an undercurrent the words ran in Rosa's brain, the deep voice of the man who had uttered them seemed to mingle with little Sylvia's clear treble. "She played a part in my life." Could it be that the woman who played that part, was the same woman of whom Sylvia spoke—Sylvia's mother?

The excitement of the chase was hot upon her; by skilful question and sym-

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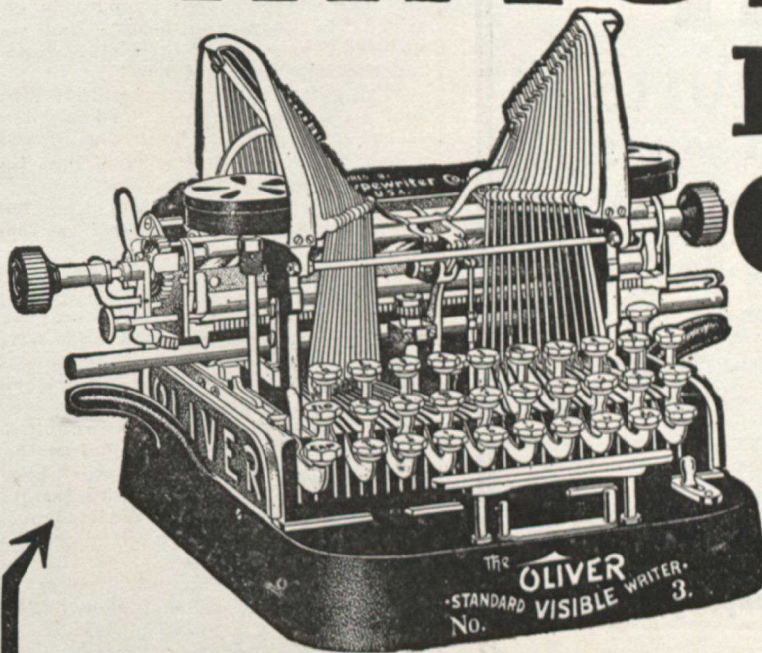
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