

THE PEARL STRINGER

805

Olly 'Ooper had recently announced her engagement to a prosperous young greengrocer of that name.

"Do you think she will really have him? Is it serious at last?" asked the pearl stringer, smiling.

"Yes, I am sure it is," answered Rose. "They hope to be married in the spring. I'm very glad, but we shall miss our Olly——"

"Don't burn 'em, Nannie dear!" put in Old Sol, jumping from one foot to the other in his anxiety.

"We shall miss our Olly," repeated his mother. "I don't want any change at all in this house, unless—some day perhaps—Old Sol's little sister appears upon the scene."

She laughed, a soft, happy laugh, and passed her hand over her boy's hair.

"What a strange thing for you to say, Rose!" exclaimed her friend. "There was a time when you always wanted change."

"Ah, there was a time——" began Rose, and stopped abruptly, as if she could not, or would not, put her thoughts into words.

She forgot her duties with the knife, and stooping forward, her cheek cupped in her hand, looked into the glowing hollow of the fire.

A few short months had wrought a change, the forerunner of many changes, in Rose Challis.

The freshness of her beauty remained, but it was of a different quality, more developed and matured; something lost of its wild, alluring charm, but much gained in its gentleness and promise.

Rose's face would always mirror her quick,