

THE ORCHID

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649050550

The Orchid by Robert Grant

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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ROBERT GRANT

THE ORCHID



"I ask you to drink to the happiness of the loveliest woman in creation."

THE ORCHID

BY
ROBERT GRANT

ILLUSTRATED BY
ALONZO KIMBALL

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK ::::::::::::::: 1905

PS
1762
664

ILLUSTRATIONS

- "I ask you to drink to the happiness of the
loveliest woman in creation"* Frontispiece
Facing
- The smile of incredulity which curved her
lips betrayed entertainment also* 108
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- "I should not permit it!" he thundered.
"I should go to law; I should appeal
to the courts"* 156
- A huge machine of bridal white . . . tore
around the corner* 222

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I

IT was generally recognized that Lydia Arnold's perceptions were quicker than those of most other people. She was alert in grasping the significance of what was said to her; her face clearly revealed this. She had the habit of deliberating just an instant before responding, which marked her thought; and when she spoke, her words had a succinct definiteness of their own. The quality of her voice arrested attention. The intonation was finished yet dry: finished in that it was well modulated; dry in that it was void of enthusiasm.

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Yet Lydia was far from a grave person. She laughed readily and freely, but in a minor key, which was only in keeping with her other attributes of fastidiousness. Her mental acuteness and conversational poise were accounted for at Westfield—the town within the limits of which dwelt the colony of which she was a member—by the tradition that she had read everything, or, more accurately, that she had been permitted to read everything while still a school-girl.

Her mother, a beautiful, nervous invalid—one of those mysterious persons whose peculiarities are pigeon-holed in the memories of their immediate families—had died in Lydia's infancy. Her amiable but self-indulgent father had been too easy-going or too obtuse to follow the details of her home-training. He had taken refuge

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from qualms or perplexities by providing a governess, a well-equipped, matronly foreigner, from whom she acquired a correct French accent and composed deportment, both of which were now marks of distinction. Mlle. Demorest would have been the last woman to permit a *jeune fille* to browse unreservedly in a collection of miscellaneous French novels. But Lydia saw no reason why she should inform her preceptress that, having entered her father's library in search of "Ivanhoe" and the "Dutch Republic," she had gone there later to peruse the works of Flaubert, Octave Feuillet, and Guy de Maupassant. Why, indeed? For, to begin with, was she not an American girl, and free to do as she chose? And then again the evolution was gradual; she had reached this stage of culture by degrees. She read everything