

Ever the Twain Shall Meet

Their eyes met and instantly his heart beat faster as butterflies stirred. Her hazel eyes stared into his soul, unblinkingly as he fell. Her golden hair neatly laid over her shoulder in beautiful waves, bringing out the dark gold in her brown skin. Her tan lips, with their perfect shape, widened in a smile. She sat still in her regal pose. There was no doubt in his impulsive mind she was the love of his life. He only had to formally meet her first and convince her.

“Believe it or not, this artist, as fabulous as he is, still couldn’t capture her beauty.”

Sam reluctantly took his eyes off the portrait of his future wife to look at his companion. Charles was his name. Sam met him on the cruise’s trip back to his home, New York, and they’ve been inseparable since then. He was glad for it because he got to see the miniature portrait that Charles had commissioned for his sister as a birthday gift.

Charles was the son of a prominent coal business-man. He stood taller than Sam, and dressed considerably better, as he should since Charles came from a socially relevant family in

New York, while Sam was just a reporter writing under a pen name. His hair wasn't golden like his sisters, but a light chestnut which complimented the green in his hazel eyes and suited his mahogany skin.

Sam and Charles grew close in the Holy Land. They were both freed blacks and abolitionist, and though the thirteenth amendment was established only two years ago, it was still an important status.

Sam learned that Charles had no love for the family business or the social climbing he was born into, and Charles learned that Sam wanted to be a writer with some very radical ideas for novels. Sam told him that he meant to shake up worldviews. But Charles had never really talked about his family, especially not his sister.

“What's her name?” Sam asked.

Charles turned from admiring the painting and smiled knowingly at Sam.

“Oh man,” Charles said, nodding his head.

“What?” Sam asked.

Charles burst out laughing, the most joyful laugh Sam had heard in a long while.

“What?” Sam asked, confused.

“There is a line of suitors waiting for dear Livy back in New York. Join the queue, brother,” Charles said, breathing and wiping at tears, “but I like you, Sam Clemens, I'm rooting for you.”

“Livy,” Sam sighed. He stopped listening to Charles after the mention of his beloved's name.

“Olivia Langdon,” Charles informed him.

“Olivia,” Sam repeated, incapable of hearing anything else.

“I think my baby sister would like you,” Charles said, turning back to the painting of his sister. “Come to New York, Sammy! Have dinner with my family and we’ll see if you can beat out the others.”

“You’d do that for me, Charley?” Sam asked.

“Of course!” Charlie slapped his shoulder. “You should see the schmucks that come calling.”

They resume talking and relaxing as Olivia stares from her painting. “Olivia,” Sam sighs. He’s heartbeat wild at the thought of meeting his future wife for the first time.

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He stood at the decorative door to the Langdon’s household. He didn’t want to be late and give a bad first impression, but the idea of knocking on the door in that moment left him wiping the sweat from his brow. The love of his life was just a breath away.

He took hours in the mirror getting ready so he knew where every inch of his hair laid on his head. Every kinky strand of black hair straightened and styled. He knew the deep green of his jacket looked good on him, but maybe it was too gaudy for the likes of the famous Langdons.

He looked at his watch and it was still fifteen minutes till the start of dinner, but polite society demanded you to show up early to strike up a conversation.

“Were you going to stand there all night or did you want to come in?”

Sam smiled at the sound of his new friend's voice behind him, but continued to look at the door. "I would lie if I said I wasn't nervous, Charlie," Sam said, feeling Charles walk up the steps behind him.

"I know, my brother," Charles said, clapping Sam on his shoulder, "but I am here to help. Here." Charles reaches over and plucks a bottle from Sam's hands and replaces it with Lilies and an even bigger and fancier wine.

"I had got the one you fancied on our cruise," Sam told him, nodding to the bottle Charles was now holding.

"And I appreciate it, but Livy *hates* it. That one is her favorite."

"And the flowers?"

"Oh, no... no no *no* no. Olivia is not the flower type, those are for my mother. Come... the devil awaits."

Charles made a sneering face before smiling, stepping ahead of Sam and swinging the door wide open. He didn't wait to see if his friend was behind him, but strolled with confidence in his family's home. Sam tried to match his friend's long strides. He almost didn't get to look around at his surroundings before he met the family.

They stopped in a nicely sized living room filled with soft nude couches and bright Afro-centric artwork. Music with a strong brass sound played on a vinyl record. The house was warm and smelled like home.

"Do you like this music?" Charles asked him, pointing to the record player, "They call it Jazz. That sound is straight from our brothers in New Orleans."

"I thought I heard you, boy—Honey, they're in here!"

Sam and Charles spun to see a tall man moving into the room.

“No,” Sam thought, “*Tall wasn’t the right word for it.*” He was a big man, thick, but so you could tell it was all muscle and no fat. Charles was the spitting image of his father, except for the most impressive full mustache that Sam ever saw.

“Mr. Langdon, how is the business?” Sam asked, holding his hand out in greeting.

“Ah, Sam Clemens, how much I heard about you!” Mr. Langdon’s voice filled the entire room. Every single tiny space as he came to Sam, grabbed his hand and pulled him into a hug. He enveloped Sam in a brick wall of warmth as meaty arms wrapped around him in a spine-crushing squeeze. “I hope my boy hasn’t been too bad an influence on you,” He said, letting Sam go.

Sam could only shake his head while his body tried to put his bones back together and his lungs tried to remember how to breathe.

“He has,” came the sound of a sweet soprano voice, “Charles would be a destructive influence on Jesus, whether we believed he was really the *Son of God*, or not.”

“My daughter Olivia, Mr. Clemens, another *destructive* influence,” Mr. Langdon said, sweeping his arm and body aside so they could see the beautiful Queen.

Sam was still a young single man, so the first thing he saw was her lovely dark green dress that fit every curve like a roadmap. She was a respectable lady and her legs, chest and most of her arms were covered, but Sam could imagine everything they were covering up. As she moved closer to Sam, he could see that her dress made her beautiful eyes look more green than hazel brown, and her skin sparkled under the flow of her wheat-colored hair.

Olivia passed right by Sam and moved to take the bottle out of Charles' hand. Sam turned his body to her, following her every move. He felt lightning strike by the beauty that entered the room and didn't seem to notice him at all.

"Oh Charles, this stuff is disgusting," Olivia said inspecting the bottle, "This is really what you went to the store for? No doubt Mr. Clemens favors this as well?" She turned to Sam, handing the bottle back to her brother and reaching for the bottle in Sam's hand without so much as a word hello to him.

Grabbing the bottle and inspecting it, a small smirk lighted her face. How Sam imagined how it would feel kissing that small uplifted corner of her lips. "Mr. Clemens, you have good taste."

Sam looked up into her eyes as she finally looked at him, and he tried to search his brain for something intelligent to say.

"Did it hurt?" *Dammit. Good job, Sammy,* he thought.

"Did what hurt?"

Olivia looked at him in confusion, but the furrow in her brow looked too cute to upset Sam at himself for being too stupid at that moment.

"When you fell from Heaven?"

Olivia rolled her eyes and set back to studying the bottle she took from him. "I think the more appropriate question is 'did you, Mr. Clemens, feel the Earth tremble as I crawled from its depths?'" She looked back up from the bottle, glanced at the flowers and then at him with a straight face, "Did you?"

Sam could feel his lips stretch into a wide smile, but Olivia's face stayed the same. "Are those for me?" She said reaching for the flowers.

Sam pulled the flowers away, seeing her hesitation. "They're for your mother, and the wine for your father. I'm sorry for not knowing you would want presents."

At that, Olivia smiled a full smile.

"Dinner is ready!" Came a call from another room.

Olivia turned away from her brother and Sam and towards the call for supper.

"Father," She said, dropping the wine into his hands.

Mr. Langdon shook his head, Charles smiled at his sister's retreating form, and Sam tried to be polite and not stare at Olivia's rear end in front of her father and brother.

"Mr. Clemens," Mr. Langdon finally said when Olivia was no longer in earshot, "I know you are here for Olivia and you know it both makes me happy, sad and a little angry. Olivia... is a lot of trouble, and as her husband, she would be your trouble and I could relax a little more in my old age. However, she is my only daughter and my baby, it saddens me to know I wouldn't be the only man in her life she would love with her whole heart. And please know if you ever break her heart... I would break your spine."

Mr. Langdon's enormous chest swelled, filling up the room even more than he already had, and Sam felt his throat going dry as he imagined himself folded over and bleeding.

Laughter roared out of Mr. Langdon's mouth, and it made Sam jump. "Then again, I can't just give Olivia to you, it's her choice. Good luck trying to win her heart, she's a wild one."

Mr. Langdon took his time laughing, and by the time he finished, he was wiping tears out of his eyes and Sam was ready to take the challenge that was showing Olivia how much he loved her, and why she should love him.

“Boys! Now I know I called you all to dinner, yet only me and this child sit here ready to eat,” Came a call from another room.

Mr. Langdon turned with the wine Charles bought and exited the room, Charles following him with the wine Sam bought, and Sam bringing up the rear with the beautiful bouquet of lilies.

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“Mrs. Langdon, this spread is exquisite. You’ve outdone yourself—not that I am complaining,” Sam complimented his hostess.

Mrs. Langdon smiled across the table at Sam, and he could see how Olivia would look as she gracefully aged. Mrs. Langdon had the same golden skin and beautiful green hazel eyes as her daughter, but dark black hair that made her seem as bright as her smile.

“I had help,” Mrs. Langdon said humbly, “We have servants, *our* people, but I don’t work them like the slaves they used to be. I have my hands in the clay right with them and I pay them well.”

Mr. Langdon reaches his hand over to clasp his wife’s with a loving smile. “My wife, the humanitarian. Going to change the world, one worker at a time”

“We hear you plan to change the world too, Mr. Clemens, with your words,” Mrs. Langdon said, diverting the attention back to her guest.

“Yes, ma’am. I plan to write a book that helps every male and female see the error of their ways.”

Sam looked around the table and landed his smile on Olivia across from him. She had a frown on her face, a furrow between her brow, as she slid a piece of green across her plate while staring back at Sam.

“So you’re a—”

“A writer, yes.”

“I’d say idiot, but ok.”

“Olivia Langdon!” Mr. Langdon chided.

Charles sat at the other end of the table and chuckled at his sister while still stuffing his face with the things on his plate. Mr. and Mrs. Langdon both abandoned their food to stare at Olivia, but Olivia set her eyes on Sam.

“How will simple words change the minds of all the white men, who still believe we are not even human, when they’ve either read words before and ignored them or refused to read them at all? How will *words* change the beaten spirit of recently freed blacks when years of oppression have weakened them and most still don’t know how to read? Or did you not intend for our lowly brethren to read your book, Mr. Clemens?”

Olivia sat back, folding her arms around her, looking a little paler. Sam leaned forward towards her as much as the table would let him.

“I will write under a pen name, Miss Langdon, and by the time white men will figure out I am one of those ‘lesser beings,’ they will have read my words and won’t be able to do anything

but feel my words. They will see through the eyes of a child how wrong they are. And my book will be around for years, so when our people learn to read, it will uplift them.”

The dining room was quiet while Olivia looked at Sam, and everyone looked at her.

“Olivia... you may call me Olivia. May I call you Sam?”

Sam smiled wide, showing all his teeth in his happiness, and leaned back, nodding.

“My girl,” Mr. Langdon said, reaching Olivia, “are you well?”

Olivia shook her head and reached for her father’s outstretched hand. The big ox looked to shrink two sizes and worry wrinkled his face and a small frown lighted it. His daughter stood slowly grabbing the arm of the chair for support and quickly went to kiss her father on the cheek.

“Sam, accompany me for some fresh air,” Olivia said, making her way around the table.

“I shall come too,” Mrs. Langdon says, wiping her face with the napkin from her lap.

“No, Mother.”

“Olivia, how inappropriate. At least take your brother as a chaperone.”

Charles stuffed his face with chicken as quickly as he could until Olivia set her hand on his shoulder. “I think my innocence is safe from our writer, Mother. We will be on the front porch for everyone to see.”

Sam didn’t know whether to be happy that they would get time alone or upset she didn’t think of him so she would need a chaperone. Either way, he quickly got up from his seat and followed behind the fair-haired beauty.

She led him through the parlor and out of the front door he came into. He slowed to watch her glide with confidence through her home. Her back stood tall, her chin up, and her hair freely flowing to the middle of her shoulder blades. Her spirit was beautiful and as bold as a

phoenix, but she sauntered and seemed diminished from her fire earlier. Like a phoenix on its way to the grave, but still confident in its power to be reborn.

The air was crisp and a little chilly as it flowed through the open door from the outside. Sam stepped through to the open, quiet street, shutting the door and shutting away the liveliness inside the Langdon House.

“Are you well?” Sam asked Olivia.

Olivia sits on a white porch swing, embedded with pale green flowers. She looks out on the quiet street and sighs.

“I’m sickly and have been since I’ve been born, but let’s not talk about that. Sit.”

Sam sat by her and looked towards the street as she was. He swelled up his chest and sat straighter, trying to get her attention before saying anything.

“We look like a matched pair, sitting out here in our dark green,” Olivia said, still not looking towards Sam.

“Maybe that’s destiny’s way of saying they meant us to be together.”

Olivia scoffed and tried to cover up her laugh, but Sam saw the smile at the corner of her lips and those damn butterflies stirred.

“I hate you,” Olivia said, feigning anger.

“Why, I am lovely?”

Olivia laughed without trying to hide it and smiled openly while still looking at the street. Sam turned in the porch swing til one leg was tucked under and he faced his love and slowly rocked them both in the swing. She turned to glance at him and twisted back to the street, placing both hands on her face to hide.

“Don’t look at me like that!” She muffled between her hands.

“Are you blushing?” Sam asked, butterflies swarming.

Olivia took her hands away and a full smile added to the beauty of her face. Her eyes had small specks of gold, swirled inside the green and light brown.

“How beautiful,” Sam said aloud.

“Ugh! I’m trying to have a serious conversation!”

“And I’m trying to subtly avoid it!”

The sweet soprano of her voice flowed through Sam. And there was no doubt in his mind that Olivia Langdon was meant to be Olivia Clemens and to be his partner for the rest of their lives.

“What am I going to do with you, Sam Clemens?” Olivia asked him, smiling wider than she had all night.

“You could go on a date with me,” Sam said smiling back at her, and before she could object, “My friend, Charles Dickens, is doing a reading here in New York, you could accompany me?”

“Your friends with Charles Dickens?” Olivia said unbelievably.

Just then the door opened and Mrs. Langdon popped her head out. “It really is getting too late for two young people without a chaperone.”

Olivia laughed and laid her hand on Sam’s tucked in leg. Sam’s blood roared in his ears and the warmth of her hand melted into his leg underneath his pants. “Mr. Clemens was just leaving, Mother,” she said, removing her hand and smiling at him.

“R-right. Leaving,” Sam said, flustered.

Sam hopped up from the set sending Olivia swinging, nodded at Mrs. Langdon and jogged down the porch. He got to the sidewalk before looking back up towards Olivia swinging on the porch.

“Don’t you want an answer to your question?” Olivia asked, smiling down at him. “To accompany you to your friend?”

“Yes, and the answer to another... Olivia Langdon, will you marry me?”

“Excuse me?!” Mrs. Langdon gasped from the doorway.

“Yes.”

“Livy!” Mrs. Langdon shouted.

“I will go to see Charles Dickens with you,” Olivia laughed, trying to hold back an unladylike fit.

“I do not understand what’s going on,” Mrs. Langdon said, waving her hands and walking back into the house.

Sam smiled with his hands in his pockets. “Goodnight, Miss Langdon.” He started walking when he saw Olivia jump off the porch swing and lean against the rail, jostling the box of flowers.

“Wait! You can’t leave without telling me the pen name for the book that will change the minds of ignorant men. How can I read it if I don’t know?”

Sam Clemens looked back at the beautiful black woman hanging over the porch with a star-like smile. “Mark Twain.”

The End