

On this occasion of the Christmas-tree I remember that Mrs. Carson turned to a tall, foreign-looking gentleman who stood beside her, and, tapping him affectionately on the shoulder with her gold eye-glasses, said—

“Look, cousin—look at that droll little boy with the big brown eyes; his hair is like a—what you call him?—scrubbing bush. Oh, what a droll little boy!”

The tall gentleman pulled at his moustache, and, taking Mrs. Carson's hand in his, began to smooth my hair down with it till I heard her whisper—

“Leave go my hand, cousin. Thomas is looking like—like the thunderstorm.”

Thomas was the name of Mr. Carson, her husband.

After that I hid myself as well as I could behind a chair, for I was shy, and watched little Stella Carson, who was the squire's only child, giving the children presents off the tree. She was dressed as Father Christmas, with some soft white stuff round her lovely little face, and had large dark eyes, which I thought more beautiful than anything I had ever seen. At last it came to my turn to have a present—oddly enough, considered in the light of future events, it was a large monkey. She reached it down from one of the lower boughs of the tree and handed it to me, saying—

“Dat is my Christmas present to you, little Allan Quatermain.”

As she did so her sleeve, which was covered with cotton wool, spangled over with something that shone, touched one of the tapers—how I do not know—and caught fire, and the flame ran up her arm towards her throat. She stood quite still. I suppose that she was paralyzed with

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