

XXXVI

LILY AND OAK

JOLIFF rose from his knees and dusted them.

She stood at his side like a lily in flames.

"*You dared?*" she panted.

Joliff touched his cap, stolid, respectful oak of the Forest.

"Orders, 'M," he said, surly and not at all ashamed.

"*Whose orders?*" passionately.

"And orders bein' orders, 'M," said the oak, who was nothing if not loyal——

"Did the Master order this *murder?*" cried the lily in flames. "*Did he? did he?*"

"And that bein' so," continued the oak.

"*No, Joliff! It's no good! You shall tell me. You shall!*"

"No, I won't!"

"You shall."

"I mun carry em out," continued the oak, unmoved; and loaded his gun. "Will yo' please to step aside, 'M?" he said, inexorable.

She did not understand, pale still with passion.

"*You-actually-were-going to——*"

"I were, 'M," said the oak, "and I are, 'M," said the oak. "Will yo' please to step aside, 'M?" and began to circle round her.

Then she understood and was dumb.

"If yo' please, 'M," said the oak, circling round.

She stood before him pale as a sword.

"By your leave, 'M." He thrust out an arm like an iron bar to sweep her aside.

Like a lily she bowed to the sweep of his arm, bent beneath it, and sprung erect again.

Then she faced him, snow-cold and still; and Danny in her arms.

"And now!" she said.