

"Then it's no time for asking favours," said Hans, and the landlord, who had come to the doorway, marvelled to see this loud-voiced gentleman move quickly to the most retired spot he could discover.

With a sudden confusion of pawing hoofs, gruff voices, and jingling harness, the cavalcade came to a halt upon the road, and a moment later a woman swept into the enclosure, followed by two or three gentlemen who looked neither happy nor comfortable. She glanced at the troopers who had retired to one side of the open space, then at the house with the fat landlord standing in the doorway; and when she reached the table she hammered sharply upon it with her riding whip. The landlord did not move, he could not; his feet seemed to be fastened to the heavy stone doorstep. All his preconceived ideas of the Duchess were scattered like loose leaves before a gale in autumn; he could do nothing but stare at the woman before him.

"Wine there if you have any that is fit to drink," and she gave another vigorous rap on the table.

The landlord jumped as if he had been struck, and disappeared into the house in a fashion ludicrous enough to have provoked a roar of laughter had there been even the ghost of a smile on the Duchess's face.

Rumour had made free with the character and appearance of Her Grace of Podina. She had the devil's own temper it was said, and her attitude as she seated herself on a stool by the table, and flicked the dust from her skirt with her riding whip, seemed to confirm the statement. A man by mischance made in woman's shape, someone had once called her, and the gibe had made her furious. She had no desire to be like a man. She believed in women, resented the superiority which

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