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A QUEEN UNCROWNED

THE STORY IN THE LONE INN.

CHAPTER XV.

"And papa told you not to tell me they were there?"

"Yes!"

"Well, it's strange, I must say, but time will tell; and so I don't object to a small surprise."

And she laughed, and hummed: "Romance for me, romance for me, And a nice little bit of mystery."

"I rather calculate it won't be a very pleasant surprise when you do hear it," said Frank. "Old Grizzle looked as if she meant mischief."

"She generally means that."

"And she and uncle had a long confab together in the nursery-room."

"Indeed?"

"And when he came in he looked like a thundercloud! like the picture of that old thingamajig in the library, you know—that old Roman brick that killed his daughter!"

"Perhaps it was something about Augusta!"

"Don't know—it might; but then, what can they want of you in such a tremendous hurry?"

"Very true! Well, there is no use troubling ourselves about it till we get there. Orrie, are you not afraid to go to Fontelle, and old Grizzle there?"

"No," said Orrie, "I must see the captain; and she may beat me if she likes, but I will!"

"What a lady-killer he is—oh, Jack!" said Frank, laughing.

"What do you want to see him for?" said Jacquetta, coloring slightly, and not noticing Frank's remarks.

"Oh! I want to ask him to take me with him—he said, perhaps he would."

Frank laughed uproariously at the very idea of the thing; and then, as the rapid pace at which they went precluded conversation, they relapsed into silence and galloped swiftly along.

Some time in the afternoon they reached Fontelle. As they entered the hall they met Reynolds.

"I say, Reynolds," said Frank, taking him by the button, "are all the good folks in the parlor yet?"

"Yes, Master Frank."

"Is uncle there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Nursing his wrath to keep it warm!" laughed Jacquetta, as she tripped along, and opening the parlor door entered, followed by Frank and little Orrie.

The group in the parlor had scarcely changed their positions since the morning except that Captain Tempest, overcome by the silence and watching, had fallen asleep, and now snored audibly. Luncheon had been served, for, even in his anger, Mr. De Vere could not forget hospitality, but no one had touched it save Grizzle and her companion.

Mr. De Vere, with his arms folded across his chest, sat moodily in his elbow-chair, and Augusta and Jacinto still maintained their drooping, dejected position.

Jacquetta's keen eyes took it all in at a glance, and then advancing toward Mr. De Vere, she began:

"One moment, young girl!" interposed Mr. De Vere, sternly, sitting upright. "Do not speak, if you please—at least for the present—only answer to my questions. Ah! how came this child here?"

Grizzle uttered an exclamation at the same time, as little Orrie entered with Frank, but that young lady paid not the slightest attention to either.

Darting her bright, black eyes thither until they rested on Disbrowe, who was in the act of laying aside the book he had been reading, she darted forward, according to her usual fashion, flung her arms around his neck, and fell to kissing him rapturously.

Jacquetta, who had first started at her father's address, and fixed her clear, penetrating eyes full on his face, in calm surprise, now recovered herself, and said, quietly:

"If that question is addressed to me, I found her playing near the old inn, and took her with me to Red Rock, and from thence home, by her own desire."

"Home!" said Mr. De Vere, with a slight sneer. "How know you this is her home?"

"I did not say it was! She wished to see Captain Disbrowe, and I brought her here to my home for that purpose."

"Ah! You are very fond of the child, doubtless?"

"I like her—yes, sir."

"You like her! Nothing more?"

"I do not understand you, papa."

"We will drop that title, if you please. Until certain matters are cleared up, I am not at all amply to hear it from your lips."

Two red spots, like twin tongues of flame, leaped to the cheeks of Jacquetta, and she passed her hand over her brow in a bewildered sort of way.

Disbrowe's face flushed, and he bit his lips until they were bloodless. Augusta and Jacinto looked up, and fixed their eyes on Mr. De Vere in utter amazement. A smile and significant glance passed between Grizzle and Captain Nick. Frank's eyes flashed, and even little Orrie, perching her

PAINS ACROSS THE BACK

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head on one side, looked from one to the other, as if trying to understand what all this meant. Mr. De Vere's face was growing sterner and darker every moment; for, as she stood there before him, there was little difficulty in tracing the strong resemblance between her and Nick Tempest. Jacquetta was proud—too proud—to let any one there present see how keenly she felt the insult; so drawing her small, slight figure up to its full height, she bowed and said coldly:

"As you please, sir."

"I might not so much object to hearing it myself," said Mr. De Vere, in the same slightly sneering tone he had before used—more galling to hear, by far, than an angry one would have been; "but there is another gentleman present who has a better claim than I have to that dutiful title, perhaps he may be jealous of being robbed of his due."

"I do not understand you, sir?"

"Oh, fire away! Don't mind me," exclaimed Captain Nick with a wave of his hand. "I shan't be jealous! All in good time, you know."

"Perhaps you understand now, young lady?" sneered Mr. De Vere.

"I do not, sir. May I ask you to explain?"

"Explain what?"

"This singular scene. What have I to do with these people?" and she pointed to Captain Nick and his lady friend.

"Oh, come now, Jacquetta, my girl—or, Lella, rather—you may as well leave off your airs at once. Old Grizzle's split, and so she's no use carrying things with a high hand any longer," said Captain Tempest, in a loud tone of voice.

"No, Jacquetta! It's too late; the play is played out," said Grizzle. "I have told Mr. De Vere all, and it is of no use for you to add any more falsehoods to the rest."

"And so you may as well strike your colors and surrender at once, my little firebrand!" said Captain Nick.

Jacquetta turned her flashing eyes from one to the other, and her small hands clutched as though she could have sprung on them both like a wounded panther, on the spot; but after a moment's scrutiny, her mood changed, and she turned away with a curling lip, as though she thought them unworthy of her notice.

"May I ask, sir," she repeated, turning almost imperiously to Mr. De Vere, "for an explanation of all this? Was I brought here to be publicly disgraced before a mixed crowd like this?"

"Really, madam, you must be careful how you talk! If by 'mixed crowd' you mean those two worthy folks behind you, the term is slightly disrespectful to one of them at least!" said Mr. De Vere.

"Heavens! Will no one tell me what this means? Am I an idiot to be treated like this?" she demanded, with a passionate stamp of her foot.

"Why, I have just told you, my little duck!" said Captain Nick. "It means the fat's in the fire; the cat's out of the bag; that you've put your foot in it; that you've got to the end of your tether; and old Grizzle, thinking you might bolt the ropes, has given you a short pull. I admire your pluck, upon my soul I do! and can see with half an eye you're your father's daughter, every inch of you;

so you had better acknowledge the corn, and come to terms at once. I dare say it won't be pleasant, at first—most especially in that young gent's presence over there; but he'll know it sooner or later, so you might just as well drop your mask, and sail under your own flag for the future. You're a tiptop little brick, my little girl, and I swan you ought to be a lady, in spite of the old saying that you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. You remind me of a young colt, my dear," said the captain, with a touch of philosophy, giving his arm

a wave by way of directing attention to the perforation. "As soon as the bridle and curb is first put on, after it has been allowed to run loose around the pasture, all its life, it kicks up its heels and grows restive and plunges, and struggles, and raises a devil of a row generally (saving your presence, ladies and gents, for naming my friend in your company); but still it will be submitted, and finally settles down into a capital beast of burden, in the long run. And, so, my bright little flash of lightning, you will have

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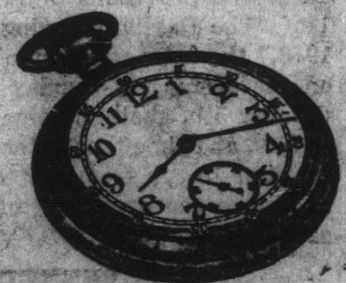
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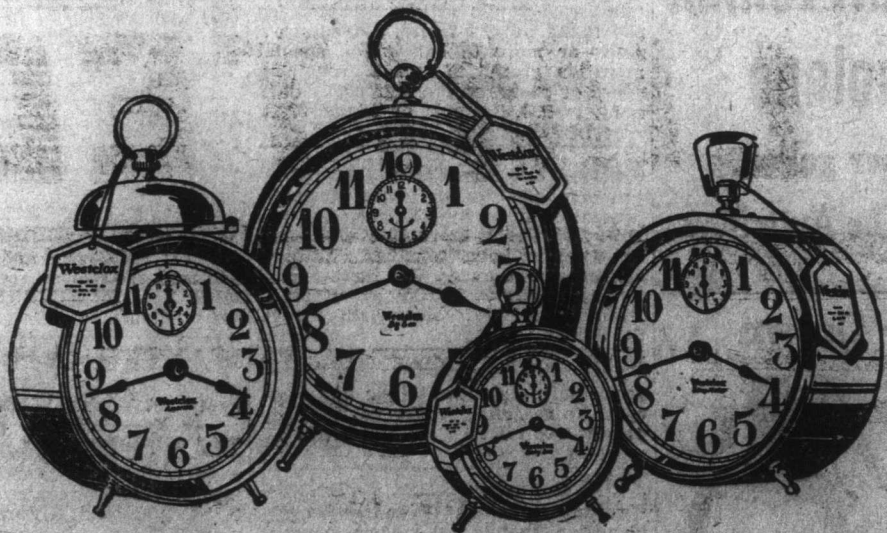


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