

THE CHAPEL BELL

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ring of affectionate regard in his daughter's voice seemed to offer him a means to his end, and he stole a crafty look at her from the corner of his eye.

The sight of the fair girl gazing wistfully out upon the heaving sea that had borne her lover away should have quenched that which was in his mind, but with him the sign of weakening only strengthened his base intent.

"Leonora," he said softly.

"Yes, father."

"Are you strong enough and brave enough to hear that which in merciful pity I—that is we, Clarence and I—have been hiding from you these six months? Well then, in my sore extremity I will speak, and may Heaven soften the blow. Gervase Boscawen was slain on the evening of his capture while attempting to escape by swimming. We had it from a shipman of Penzance, who was also taken that same night, but returned from bondage among the Moslems last Christmas."

The girl turned and looked at her father, as though she would read his inmost soul; but Hugh Basset, recognising with the gambler's spirit that this was his last throw, nerved himself for the ordeal, and came out victorious.

"Thank you, father," she said simply. "It was kind of you to keep this knowledge from me, though had I possessed it you might have had your way before. I care not now what befalls me. You may arrange whatever best suits your aims and pleasure." And with a wild cry of "Gervase!" she fell swooning to the ground.

His point once gained, Hugh Basset was not slow to exact the performance of the contract. Preparations were at once hurried on for the wedding, and Clarence Tresidder, in his delight at long-deferred success, made his uncle a present of the mortgages, and cleared his latest gambling debts. The chapel of St. Michael's, where the ceremony was to take place, was being swept and garnished for the occasion, when suddenly Basset remembered that the clapper of the bell had never been restored since it had been "lost" with such disastrous results. Perhaps its failure to do its duty that night had made him careless about the matter, but now the wedding brought it to his mind. His daughter could not possibly depart so far from old tradition as to be married without a bell.

But when he informed Clarence that he had ordered the bell to be put in repair the young man visibly shuddered, and protested that he wanted none of such childish folly. A peal, he said, would be different, but the clangour of one solitary bell, high in that wind-swept turret, would make him downcast rather than merry. It was of ill omen.

Yet Hugh Basset, because of the dislike that made him regard his nephew with a cunning leer of comprehension, insisted on having his way, and the bell was duly put in order in time for the wedding by a workman of Truro. And so that, having served its prime purpose, it should also revert to its ancient uses. Hugh Basset appointed a new and more vigorous watchman; whose business it should be to ring the bell lustily on danger threatening the fastness.

So it was that, all things being ready a month after the bride's consent had been obtained, the wedding party gathered in the chapel on a grey October morning. Outside a low

and fitful sea-fog rose and fell by turns, anon wrapping the Mount and all the sea around in drifting wreaths then suddenly rolling clear of the granite pile and leaving the hoary pinnacles of the ancient building free to a few struggling rays of sun. Inside the chapel all was dark and sombre; and above in the turret the bell clanged with a ceaseless monotony more worthy of a funeral.

Leonora, entering with her father, was pleased by the fancy that the ceremony which was the burial of her hopes, should be announced by that dirge-like knell. But as she approached the altar where the bridegroom was already waiting, the melancholy conceit was destroyed by a sudden access of vigour on the part of the ringer. From the regular strokes the bell broke into a wild and hurried jangle, growing louder and faster with each discordant crash, till it seemed as if the bell would split. The din pleased Hugh Basset's humour, and those present in the chapel—they were all the household, for no guests had been invited—turned and smiled at each other, catching their cue from the master's face.

And though the service commenced, the bell still rang on, and there was thought of sending to stop the ringer, when the clamour suddenly ceased, and the man himself, bursting into chapel, changed all their pleasantry to mortal fear.

"Oh, why was my warning not heeded?" he cried. "The Algerines are upon us—landed, and climbing the steep. I fear me it is now too late to bar the gates."

And before the blank dismay caused by his words could be followed by action, the tramp of many feet resounded on the corridor, and immediately the doorway was darkened by a ferocious throng. Headed by the priest the retainers fled in a mass through a door at the opposite end. Hugh Basset's sword was out in an instant, and Clarence Tresidder, with the courage of despair, drew also; but their fate was sealed by the show of resistance. The expectant bridegroom fell across the altar rails stabbed in the heart, just as the old gambler reeled into his daughter's arms, cloven to the chine by the yataghan of a coal-black Nubian.

And presently Leonora, borne swiftly down towards the sea by the pirates, was conscious amid her horror of a vague wonder about the chapel bell. Was this a righteous judgment, that having been the cause of her lover's undoing, it should now, by its misunderstood warning, have avenged him on his undoer?

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Gently heaving on the groundswell, close inshore under the Mount, lay the galleys of the sea-rovers, awaiting the return of the marauding party that had landed. The fighting men were all ashore, save a guard sufficient to keep order among the long rows of slaves chained to the oar. Up and down planks between these rows of half-naked wretches ran the taskmasters, armed with whips with which they lashed the bare shoulders of any who dared raise his voice above a whisper.

The vicious looking vessels were wreathed in fog, and the buildings on the summit of the Mount were only visible by fitful gleams when the mist lifted. Suddenly from up on the height a bell began to ring, and the slavemasters paused in their cruel lashings to eye each other uneasily. There were those among them who had been thwarted at this spot before

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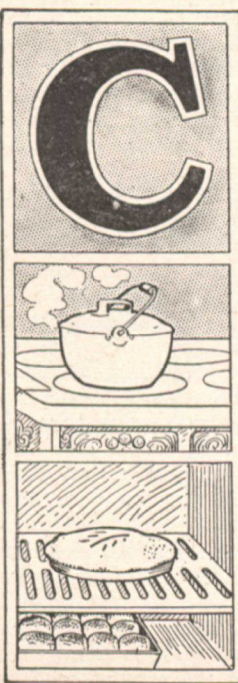
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