

I am very unhappy. I have got nobody to take my side. They are all against me, and I think I shall die if I can't get somebody to be my friend. It came to me in the middle of the night that I had an Uncle Jim, and now I've come to you. If you can't help me nobody can," and the tears started to Connie's eyes, whilst her sensitive lips began to quiver.

A great many different emotions had passed in quick succession over the rugged features of the big man, who looked every whit like some typical adventurer from the wilds of the desert. Not that his outer man was rough or unrefined for, but because he was possessed of that peculiar far-seeing gaze, unfettered freedom of gesture and movement, and deep, sonorous voice that so often distinguishes the man of travel and action. He looked the very embodiment of strength and resolution. Connie felt that he would indeed be a tower of strength if she could place herself beneath his protection.

"Then, did nobody send you here, my dear? It was your own thought to come?"

"Nobody would dare to send me," said Connie. "Father says you won't have anything to do with him, and of course he is vexed about it. And besides I want you to take sides with me against them. They wouldn't have sent me for that. It just came into my own head when I was wondering and wondering what I could do. It seemed just the one thing left—the forlorn hope."

"Then sit down there and tell me all about it, and we'll see what can be done. Bless me, child, how like you are to that portrait of my mother when she was a girl, the one that has gone all over the world with me."

He drew from his breast-pocket a little miniature in a well-worn case, and opened it. As he bid Connie tell her tale he sat looking from the delicate pictured face in his hand to the flower-like face of the girl before him.

"It doesn't sound much to tell," said Connie, "but it's just everything to me. I met Leonard last autumn in a country house. We were so happy, and father seemed friendly too. It was just before he turned sides in politics, and things were so much nicer then. Leonard isn't rich, but he isn't very poor. I don't care a bit about being rich. We made such nice plans. Then the winter came, and all this fuss about politics, and when we came to town, and I came out and went everywhere, I scarcely ever saw Leonard, and they won't have anything to do with him, and they want me to marry a horrid baronet—Sir Andrew Fox. I hate him. I think he's a horrid man. But Margaret, my sister, married somebody else did not much care for at first, and now they're very happy; and so they are all determined that I shall do the same. I've nobody to help me, Uncle Jim, and you don't know how hard it is for a girl to make a fight all alone with everything against her." And again the bright tear drops welled up and nearly rolled over.

"There, there, my dear, don't cry about it. We'll see what can be done. I've heard of this Fox fellow, and I don't think much of him. Who's the other? Who's Leonard? Tell me all you know of him."

"His name is Leonard Carrington. He's had a rather sad history in some ways. He's an only child. His mother lived till about three years ago, but he doesn't know about his father. It was very sad about that. He was led into some money scrape by other men, and when the trouble came he was left to bear the blame. It turned him against his old life, and he went off to Africa to make his fortune. His wife and little Leonard went to live with her relations, and an uncle left them a little fortune, just enough to be comfortable upon, and Leonard got a secretarialship when he had left college and was old enough. But the father never came back. They think he must be dead now. He used to write and say how he was getting on, but they could never write to him. He had dropped his name, and he said in the mining camp he hadn't got a real name. They just called him Blooming Bill, and that was all—"

Connie stopped short, for her uncle had bounded suddenly to his feet and had taken too great strides towards the window, which he flung wide open as though he felt the need of air.

"What did you say his camp name was?" he asked, wheeling round again after a brief interval.

"Blooming Bill," answered Connie,

wonderingly. "He never knew why they had fixed upon that; but oh, uncle, what is it?"

"Can you give me some Carrington's address?" asked the uncle, whose face was working oddly, as though his mind were in some indescribable ferment.

Connie was able to supply that amount of information, and her uncle made a note, and then put his hand on her shoulders and looked earnestly into her face.

"If Leonard had been a rich man would they have refused him for a son-in-law?"

"I don't exactly know how rich he would have to be," answered Connie, with naive and unconscious cynicism; "but I don't think it's really because of his father or his politics. I think it's because he isn't rich and Sir Andrew is. Money always seems to make such a lot of difference. But Leonard and I don't think it matters a bit. We should like being poor."

"Now go home, little niece," said Uncle Jim, "and don't say a word about this visit. I'll help you out of this hobble. You just wait and see!"

It was with a joyful heart that Connie drove back, first to her sister's and then home. She and Margaret were alike puzzled by their uncle's excitement at hearing of Leonard's father; but it was no use speculating, and they were forced to abide the issue with what patience they could.

Three nights later Lord and Lady Vanstone dined with the Drummonds; and in the evening, when Connie had gone out upon the balcony the father drew his chair to Margaret's side and drew out a letter.

"I want to consult you, Margaret. I have had a curious letter from my brother Jim. He tells me he has seen Connie somewhere, and her extraordinary likeness to our mother in her youth has touched him, it seems. He really appears interested in her; but the odd part of it is that he speaks of having a husband in prospect for her, the only son of a man who was his 'chum' out in Africa, and who left him trustee and executor of a big fortune to be made over to this son. My brother Jim has an idea of bringing the two young people together, and trying to get up a match between them; and he distinctly implies, as you will see, that he would be ready in that case to look upon Connie as his heiress. Of course for a consideration like that one would do much. What do you say to the idea?"

Margaret read the letter and answered briskly.

"Invite Uncle Jim and his friend to dinner on the first opportunity, and ask us to meet them. Connie hates Sir Andrew Fox, and to escape from him she might be willing to look favourably on Uncle Jim's candidate; and she is pretty enough to bewitch any man who sees her under favourable circumstances; and in any case don't fail to respond cordially to any overture from Uncle Jim!"

A few days more and all was arranged. Mrs Drummond had been deputed to tell Connie that if she really disliked Sir Andrew, she should not be pressed beyond a certain point; but that she must not be too capricious and exacting—and in fact—well Mrs Drummond was not quite explicit, but somehow Connie was left with shining eyes and a beating heart. Uncle Jim was coming to dinner: He was going to bring somebody with him. Her heart beat so fast that she thought it better not to talk. She only promised with unwonted meekness to make herself look "nice."

She was more than nice; she was exquisitely lovely in her flowing white draperies as she stood in the lamp light waiting for the half expected announcement of the butler.

"Mr James Drummond—Mr Carrington."

They were face to face once more, holding hands for a brief second; eyes speaking in a fashion that the lips would never have dared to do. They went down to dinner together. That had been arranged beforehand. Uncle Jim had kissed her, and she heard his big laugh as he had introduced Leonard afresh as the son of an old African chum of his. But she was too happy, too bewildered, too excited to take anything in save the fact that Leonard was there, and that her friends were smiling instead of scowling upon him now.

"Most extraordinary thing, Tom," said the traveller when the ladies had left the room. "One of those strange coincidences one reads of in fiction. Poor Carrington and I shared a claim

and worked for years together; but he never told me his name. He sometimes dropped a bit about his past; but never slipped the name out. When at last he was dying he gave me a wallet of papers, and said I should find everything there, and he entrusted all his fortune to me for his wife and son. It was a fairish lump sum then; we had of late been lucky, and he had spoken sometimes of realising and going home. But he died, poor fellow; and when I opened the wallet to carry out his instructions, why the papers were nothing but soft pulp. They fell to pieces at a touch. He must have got them wet without knowing it, and there was I with his money and no way of finding out to whom to hand it over."

"A difficult trust in all conscience. What did you do?"

"I just bided my time at first; things were very brisk up at the camp then. I used the money with my own cautiously, in increasing the claim. We were partners still. Luck followed me. I made my pile, and increased his. When I cleared out at last and looked into things I found I had between sixty and seventy thousand to hand over to Blooming Bill's unknown son. But how on earth I was to set about the task I didn't know. To advertise or proclaim the thing aloud would be to have a score of rascals turning up daily claiming to be Blooming Bill's son; and how was I to know?"

"Well, I just put the money out at interest and bided my time. I won't tell you what I did do, because nothing came of my abortive endeavours. Then when I was about thinking the whole show would have to go to Government to be dealt with, what happens but that little girl of yours comes to Uncle Jim to be helped out of a difficulty, and puts the clue slick into my hands. She can produce the man who

can produce the letters I used to see poor Carrington write, and who tells his wife and boy in them how he is only known in the mining camp as 'Blooming Bill.' If that's not evidence enough for lawyers it's good enough for me. Young Carrington is worth the fortune I've named to you besides his mother's money and his wife's. And I've taken a fancy to that little girl of yours, and if you'll give her to Carrington, who'll keep her a good Tory all her life, why she shan't be married without a bit of a dowry from her old uncle, and may look for something more when he goes!"

Leonard and Connie were out on the balcony together before the brothers came in. When the young couple did appear it was to find the whole room smiling at their appearance.

"O, Uncle Jim, you are a real darling!" whispered Connie as she kissed him farewell, "it seemed such a desperate measure to throw myself on your protection; but just think what has come of it!"

O, lovely Isle, proud Maoriland,
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This is the testimony of Mrs. Julia Osborne, Grand Junction Road, Rosewater, Adelaide, So. Australia. She sends us her family photograph, which we give above.

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