

Complete Story.

## Grimston's Black Sheep.

THE STORY OF A WOOING BY PROXY.

It was all Aunt Elizabeth's fault, for she wrote out to the guardian, and gave him a highly-coloured list of my misdeeds. I know it was a highly-coloured one, for he told me so when he came home, and saw for himself that I was not as black as she painted me; and, besides that, I saw the letter afterwards.

You see, she was an old maid, and perhaps she didn't understand what it was to be in my shoes. Anyway, we never, as the boys said, "pulled together" very well; and it was after that long, long list of all my sins which went out to India in the aunt's stiff Italian handwriting that I got the name of "Grimston's black sheep," and somehow it stuck to me. Give a dog a bad name, you know! For when, my guardian—Major Gerard Grimston, V.C.—wrote home again he said:

"Give my love to the little —"  
And then there followed the cleverest drawing you ever saw of a little coal-black sheep, done in pen-and-ink, in the letter.

The boys were awfully pleased with it, and they never called me anything else till he came home, when everything was changed in a most extraordinary way.

I lived with Aunt Elizabeth Jameson, in the country, and it was only in the holidays that I enjoyed myself in the least—first of all because the boys at the vicarage were at

home then, and I was able to escape from my prison-house, and have a real good time with them; and, besides that, I got away from lessons and practising and everything else, which Aunt Elizabeth was so terribly particular about.

"Remember, Veronica," she used to say, "that you are growing up; in fact, I may say you are grown up, and it is time you left off your boydenish ways, for I really cannot imagine what Major Grimston will think of you when he comes home!"

Really, if I hadn't known what a good sort the guardian was, I believe that the aunt's cuckoo-like cry of "What will Major Grimston say?" would have made me hate his very name.

I know the boys detested the mention of him, because they said that as soon as he came home there would be an end of all our good times together; and, though I was nearly nineteen, I didn't see why anyone should want me to become a stuck-up young miss in fine feathers and airs, like so many of the girls one sees in the towns. Anyway, I hated the idea quite as much as the boys did, and after a while Aunt Elizabeth gave up the "black sheep" as a bad job, and I was left till the V.C. came home.

He came a day too soon, as I remember to my cost.

It was late October, and the wind

had torn down the branches of the trees in the wood, and the river had overflowed its banks, and the boys at the vicarage had left me strict injunctions to see that their pet rabbit-hutches were not swept away, as they were once long ago in a terrible flood, so there I had been at work with them most of the afternoon, and by the time I turned homewards I was in an awful state.

I know I prayed that I might be able to slip in without being seen by Aunt Elizabeth, for my frock was torn, and soaked with mud-and-water, my hair had tumbled down, and I believe I had managed to bash in my hat somehow tearing home through the wood; so altogether I was not fit to be seen—by her, at least.

Someone else saw me, which was a nuisance, and that was Toay Mansel, the vicar's eldest son, who was just going out to India with his regiment.

He met me in the wood, too, where it was nearly dark, and I hoped I might pass him unseen; but it was no good, for he caught me, and I couldn't get away.

He was a nice boy, and very good-looking, and had always taken my part when the others teased me beyond all bearing.

"My dear girl, where's the hurry?" he said, when I tried to impress upon him that I was in haste, and not in the mood to dawdle with him in the damp shadow of the leafless trees.

"I am soaked to the skin," I said shortly, "and if the aunt catches me—"

"There'll be the devil to pay!" he said, wickedly. "Never mind that, old girl. I've been wanting to speak to you for ever so long, and somehow we've never been alone, so—"

"Never been alone!" I echoed scornfully. "And there was I on my knees feeding those precious rabbits of the boys', to say nothing of looking after the hutches, which might have been washed away by the river, and you have been dawdling about, I suppose, doing nothing all day. Well, we might have been alone together, you see, if you had liked!"

"Don't be cross, Bonnie! Goodness knows, I haven't had much time for anything lately, with getting my kit and all the rest of it; but you might let me speak to you—some day soon. How ripping your hair is—just like gold! It's awfully wet, though; you'll get your death of cold. Do you know, you have grown uncommonly pretty, Bonnie, since your hair went up?"

There was something in his eyes which I had never seen there before, and I didn't feel altogether comfortable somehow. I gathered up my mass of wet hair, and tucked it away under my battered hat.

"Well, I can't stop to listen to your platitudes now, Tony," I said, "so good-night! Remember, Major Grimston is coming to-morrow, so we shall all have to be on our best behaviour."

"Especially the black sheep!" he shouted after me, as I fled away through the little gate which led into the stables.

I thought I should be able to scramble in unseen by the side-door; but, alas! just as I was making my way through the yard, a terrible voice sounded in my ears:

"Veronica!"

Then I knew that the worst had happened, for on raising my eyes I beheld the indignant countenance of Aunt Elizabeth.

To my horror, there was a strange man with her—a man who bent a pair of half-amused, half-astonished blue eyes upon me and my wild attire—a man with a bronzed face, with a scar across his forehead, a scar which somehow seemed familiar to me.

"And is this," he said "the black sheep?"

"You!" I gasped, suddenly realizing that this was Major Grimston, V.C.—"you! Why, you have come a day too soon!"

"And if I have, what matter?" he said, holding my hands, and looking down at me with a quiver of a smile breaking across his nice face.

I caught the severe glance which the aunt flashed upon me, and my courage forsook me. I suddenly be-

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