

a great big dog came to our house last night. She had on a cap, and a ugly, hairy gown; an' then she pulled it off an' put on ma's dress, an' made ma get her some supper."

Mabel laughed at the earnest expression of the boy, and thought, as the old trapper ordered the child to leave the room, and when she saw how very red Mrs. Kingston's face had grown, that there was some truth in the little fellow's assertion, and that there was something connected with the story which they would fain keep secret. She dismissed the matter from her mind, however, and soon after took her leave, promising to call again as soon as convenient. The boy was reprimanded for his lack of discretion, and charged never to speak of the "squaw," as he called her, without permission. Dess had been a listener to the whole conversation, and she could not suppress a smile when the boy innocently related to Mabel the event of her arrival; and she almost laughed outright when he referred to her as a "squaw." She joined her host and hostess after the visitor's departure, and the rest of the day was spent in talking over the events of the past two years. The girl laughed and chatted merrily enough, though her head ached fearfully, and her round face was flushed, presenting all the appearance of one suffering from a high fever.

Next morning she was unable to leave her bed, and old lady Kingston went to work administering castnip tea and other beverages, in the hope of inducing free perspiration; but alas! without avail. The fever continued, growing worse and worse, till on the third day the invalid became fearfully delirious. The old trapper, becoming alarmed, saddled a horse and started to Yreka, some thirty miles distant, for the purpose of laying the girl's case before a physician.

He was scarcely out of sight ere Belle Randall approached his residence. She had brought her sewing along, with the intention of spending the day with Mrs. Kingston; and the latter, as she ushered her visitor into the house, was vainly trying to invent some story that would suffice as an explanation for the wild ravings of poor Dess, who lay tossing and moaning most piteously. She could think of nothing, and Mabel saw that, for some cause or other, the old lady was ill at ease, and that there was something bearing on her mind of which she would be only too glad to relieve herself.

"Oh, George! Oh, Mortimer! You are glad, aren't you, that I escaped the cruel savages?" wailed the sick girl, and Mabel stared at Mrs. Kingston perfectly bewildered. "Oh, no, I remember now, Mortimer is not glad. He is going to marry Mabel, pretty Mabel, sweet Mabel. You will love me, won't you, Mabel? I am sure I love you, because you love Mortimer, and because you are going to marry him."

"Mrs. Kingston," exclaimed the visitor, rising to her feet, her fair face almost livid in her excitement, "this house holds a secret. Will you not disclose it to me? Perhaps I am asking too much of you, but you can do no more than refuse to admit me into your confidence."

"Set down, Belle, an' try to calm yourself. I'll tell you, though I promised to keep the secret; but seein' as you're here, an' the poor girl's most likely to die—" here the kind-hearted old lady brushed away a tear that had crept down her fleshy face—"I'll tell you, an' I hope and trust you'll keep the secret, Belle, for her dear sake."

Then she related how Dessie Watson had come in one night about a week previous, telling everything as it had occurred, save how changed the poor girl had become on hearing of her lover's betrothal. That was something she thought important to keep from Mabel, knowing that she was soon to wed the man whom the unfortunate girl loved so tenderly.

"I must see her, Mrs. Kingston," Mabel exclaimed, joyfully, and the next moment she was in the sick room, covering Dess' hot, flushed cheeks with kisses.

"Who are you?" the sick girl asked, gazing up into the visitor's sweet, gentle face with a bewildered smile. "Kiss me again, your lips are so soft and cool. There, that's right; I love you very much, and you must love me, too. Now tell George to come, and Mortimer—no, don't let him come, he must not know. But I love him, and I love Mabel—I love her because she loves Mortimer."

"Mabel's blue eyes filled with tears, and she turned away to hide her emotion. "Do you think she is dangerously ill?" she asked, evidently much alarmed.

"God only knows; I hope not. The ole man's gone to see a doctor. Poor little thing, she talks about her brother purty near all the time. That puts me in mind that to-day's mail day; an' I'll bet the ole man's gone an' carried off that letter Dessie wrote. I'll tell you what you do, Belle, dear; jest set down an' write a line to George yourself, tellin' him that his sister's here sick, and to come immediately. The poor thing may have a dreadful sickness, you know, an' may die, for all we know."

Accordingly, Mabel soon penned a brief little note to George Watson; and the old lady Kingston thought she had never seen the girl looking any prettier or happier than while thus engaged.

"Mr. Watson, dear sir," Mabel read aloud, having finished the missive, "you are wanted at Oak Dale immediately. Your sister, whom you have long mourned as dead, is alive, but very ill, at Mr. Kingston's residence. Come at once."