

*A Family Reunion*  
by Judge Clark

“Mr. Meade would like to see you at once, if you can come, sir,” was the message delivered to Orrin Carson, a young lawyer, but the leading one, in the flourishing little country town which had been christened Dellvale by somebody not having the fear of tautology before his eyes.

Mr. Meade, let us explain, was an invalid who had come, it may have been a year before, accompanied by his daughter Elspeth, to seek from the salubrious air of Dellvale that health for which he had elsewhere sought in vain; and that was about all anybody knew of him—save that the style in which he lived betokened wealth.

Elspeth Meade was a beauty; and had she been of manners less retiring, or at all disposed to use her power, she would, no doubt, have made enemies of the whole bevy of Dellvale belles, for she could easily have had all their sweethearts at her feet.

Mr. Carson followed Mr. Meade’s messenger, and was immediately ushered into the sick man’s chamber, where he found the physician in attendance looking deeply concerned, for his patient’s symptoms had suddenly become alarming.

“I wish to speak with Mr. Carson alone,” said Mr. Meade, with a look at the doctor, who took the hint and withdrew.

Mr. Carson took the chair to which he was invited near the bed, and awaited whatever communication was coming.

“I feel that the struggle is nearly over,” Mr. Meade began, speaking feebly. “The old enemy is about to triumph, as he always does in the end.”

The speech with which the young lawyer would have cheered the invalid’s spirits was cut short—not rudely, but with a pensive smile which evinced how completely all hope had been abandoned.

“I appreciate the kindness of your motives,” said Mr. Meade, “but nothing can alter my conviction that the end is near, and that something I desire to say to you, under the seal of professional confidence, must be spoken now or never.[”]

“Speak freely,” returned the other; “whatever you may say shall be held sacred.”

There was a pause, during which a momentary flush overspread the wan and wasted features of the fast-sinking man.

“I was the elder of two sons,” he resumed, at length, “my younger brother, George, being the fruit of my father’s second marriage. He was, moreover, the favorite of my father, who disinherited me, leaving all to him.

“This estranged me from my brother, and we never met after the day on which the will was read.

“George married and went abroad, where a son was born to him. His wife died soon after, and he survived her but a brief period.

“On his death-bed he confided his child to a trusty nurse to be conveyed to his deceased wife’s sister, to whom the little orphan’s rearing was to be intrusted.

“After my father’s death I became a wanderer in many parts; a moderate sum inherited from my mother, and of which it was not in my father’s power to deprive me, sufficing to defray the expense.

“On a homeward-bound voyage, chance found me in the same ship with my brother’s child and his nurse. I discovered their identity by accident. The child, I learned, had been christened Allyn, after his mother’s maiden name. My relationship to him I was careful not to disclose, either to the nurse or any of the passengers.

“My small fortune was nearly exhausted, and it may have been that that put it into my head—anyhow the thought came, that but for that child I would now be the possessor of the wealth of which I had been supplanted. This thought was followed by another, that if my infant nephew died, as his next of kin of the blood from which the estate came, I would be his heir.

“One night, when all the passengers were abed, the ship struck upon a rock either not laid down in the charts, or one for which a sufficient watch had not been kept.

“The vessel held her course, and, at first, it was thought that she had suffered no material damage. But soon the dread alarm was given that the ship was sinking!

“No time was to be lost. The passengers and crew, with whatever provisions were at hand, were hustled into the long-boat, which was pushed clear of the foundering vessel.

“I protest and declare that it was not till we had lost sight of the ship, that I discovered that the nurse and the child were not amongst us! Had I noted the fact in time to turn back to their rescue, I trust—I believe—I should have called attention to it. As it was, to search for the ship in the darkness, if she had not already gone down, seemed hopeless, and I held my peace. Then quickly came the thought—I could not help it—*‘the fortune now is mine!’*

“But when, at length, another uttered the cry, ‘The woman and the child!’ and amid wild exclamations from those bound to the lost by no ties of blood, the boat was put about, and hours spent in anxious though fruitless search, I felt that my previous apathy and silence had branded me as a murderer!

“I had no difficulty in establishing my claim to the fortune I had coveted so long. On the death of my brother and his child, the law made it clearly mine. But though none suspected that I knew my relationship to the poor babe, the night it was forgotten on the wreck, my conscience was far

from quiet. Oh! why had I left it to the mouths of strangers first to raise the startling cry, *'The woman and the child!'*

"I removed to a distant part of the country and married. In a newspaper, one day, I saw an advertisement, which seemed to have been many times repeated, inquiring for the relatives of a male infant, picked up at sea in a ship's jolly-boat about the time of the wreck which I have just described. The child's clothing was marked with the initials 'A.M.,' and about its neck was suspended a gold locket containing a lady's likeness, of which full description was given.

"'A.M.?' —Allyn Meade was the name of my brother's son! The description of the miniature tallied exactly with the features of my brother's wife, whom I had known before her marriage. The truth flashed upon me. I was not the lawful possessor of the fortune in my hands. The faithful nurse, when aroused to the perils of that dreadful night, must have launched the small boat, depositing in it her charge, and then been carried down before she had time to follow.

"I could easily have reclaimed my little nephew; for the kind gentleman, a passenger on the vessel that had picked him up, and who had taken him to his home, had given his name and address in the advertisement. But I had a child of my own then, and for her sake desired to remain rich."

"The name of the gentleman?" asked the lawyer eagerly.

"Orrin Carson."

With a trembling hand the young man drew a locket from his bosom and touched the spring, displaying the likeness of a beautiful woman before the eyes of the invalid.

"It is her face! —my brother's wife!" cried the latter, starting up in a tremor of excitement.

"And Orrin Carson was the generous benefactor who gave me his name and brought me up to his profession!" exclaimed the other, not less excited. "I was picked up at sea just as you have described, and that locket was found with me."

"Then you must be my—"

"Nephew," interrupted Allyn Meade, for so we must now call him.

"Thank God!" was the devout response. "I could not die peacefully with the crime upon my conscience of keeping another out of his right. It was to ask your aid in discovering my nephew, and restoring to him his own, that I sent for you to come." Then, with a sigh: "Poor Elspeth!" he added.

"I have loved her since the first day I saw her," said Allyn, "and have reason to believe my affection is requited. But give your sanction to our union, and let her remain in ignorance of all except that in her lover she has also found a cousin."

Elsbeth was summoned and her hand was placed by her dying father in that of the man whom her heart had chosen.

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