

LONG LIVE THE KING!

A STORY OF OLD ENGLAND



The child spoke no word of greeting.

There was once a quaint little town, which lay tucked in a valley between two mountains, many, many miles from everywhere. Early one morning all the townfolk were gathered in the streets to welcome the new king. All the children carried banners which they themselves had embroidered, and these when unfurled made a beautiful pageant of colour, blue on a background of silver, rose on green, scarlet on gold.

The sun shone brightly, and everywhere was heard the murmur of happy voices. Suddenly the harsh voice of an old woman rose in protest.

"Wherefore is thy banner lying at thy feet? Knowest thou not that the King will be here anon?"

Surprised that the child made no movement, but stood there with a defiant look on her face, the old woman shook her roughly.

"Speak, child!" she continued. "Is this a day to wear a face of gloom? Raise thy banner and smile!"

Joanna, an undersized child of eleven, with a plain sallow face, redeemed only by a pair of deep-set hazel eyes, lifted a tear-stained face to the old woman, but still made no attempt to pick up her banner.

"Dost want to be sent to the dungeons?" whispered an old man.

"I care not," sobbed the little girl.

A soldier bent down and restored the banner to Joanna's hand, not, however, before he had rapped her knuckles sharply with the stick.

"I'll teach thee to show disrespect to thy sovereign," he muttered.

"Methinks the new King is of more goodly countenance than his father," said Elgiva, a pretty wench of seventeen. "'Tis well for us that he be young in years," she added.

"I warrant all the townfolk have turned out to see him," joined in the pedlar, then seeing Joanna weeping, he went on: "Nay, 'tis no rain-face but a sun-face thou should'st offer to His Majesty."