

## CHAPTER IV.

INTRODUCES WILLIAM JONES AND HIS FATHER.

My story is now bound to follow in the footsteps of Matt, who, on quitting the presence of her artistic friend, walked rapidly along the sand-encumbered road in the direction of the sea.

Skirting the lake upon the left hand, and still having the ocean of sand-hills upon her right, she gradually slackened her pace. A spectator, had he been by, would have doubtless observed that the change was owing to maidenly meditation; that in other words, Matt had fallen into a brown study.

Presently she sat down upon a convenient stone, or piece of rock, and, resting her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands, looked for some moments at vacancy. At last she rose, flushed warmly, and murmuring something to herself.

The something was to this effect:

"His hands are as white as a lady's when he pulls off them gloves, and he said I was as pretty as my picture."

I can only guess at the train of reasoning which led to this soliloquy, and express my opinion that Matt had well-developed ideas on the subject of the sexes. True, she was not above sixteen, and had little or no experience of men, none at all of men who were both young and good-looking. Nevertheless, she was not insensible of the charms of a white hand, and other tokens of masculine refinement and beauty.

By a natural sequence of ideas, she was led to stretch out her own right hand and look at it critically. It was very brown, covered with huge golden f Eckles. The inspection not being altogether satisfactory, she thrust both her hands irritably into the pockets of her jacket and walked on.

Leaving the lake behind her she followed the road along the swampy hollow, down which the very shallowest of rivulets crept along to the sea, now losing itself altogether in mossy patches of suspicious greenness, again emerging and trickling with feeble gummings over pebble and sand. Presently she left the road and came upon a primitive wooden bridge, consisting of only one plank, supported on two cairns of stone. Here she paused, and, seeing a red-legged sand-piper running about on the edge of the water just below her, made a gesture like a boy's throwing a stone, whereon the sand-piper sprang up chirping, and flew along out of sight.

By this time she was in full sight of the sea. Deep, calm, and covered with rain-colored shadows, it touched the edge of the flat sands about a mile away, and left one long creamy line of changeless foam. The sands themselves stretched away to the westward far as the eye could see. But to the left and eastward, that is to say, in the direction towards which she was going, there was a long, rocky promontory, with signs of human habitation. Breaking into a swinglike trot, Matt hastened thither, following a footpath across marshy fields.

In due time she came out upon a narrow and rudely made road, which wound along the rocky promontory, at low water skirting the sand, at high water the sea. The first house she reached was a wooden life-boat house, lying down in a creek and, it being then low tide, at some distance from the water's edge. On the roadside above the house was a flagstaff, and beneath the flagstaff a wooden seat. All was very still and desolate, without a sign of life, but a little further along the road was a row of cottages which seemed inhabited, and were in fact the abodes of the coast-guard. Instead of lingering here Matt proceeded on her way until she reached what at first sight looked like the beginning of a village or small town. There were houses on each side of the road, some of them several stories high; but close inspection showed that most of them were roofless, that few of them possessed any windows or doors, and that nearly all were decayed and delapidated from long disuse, while not a few had a blasted and sinister appearance, as if blackened by fire. And still there was no sign of any human soul. Suddenly however the street came to an end, and Matt found herself on a sort of rocky platform overlooking the sea; and on this platform, shading his eyes from the blazing sun and looking out seaward, was a solitary man.

A short, plump, thick-set man, with a round, weather-beaten face, which would have been good-humored but for its expression of extreme watchfulness and greed. The eyes were blue, but very small and keen, the forehead low and narrow, the hair coarse and sandy, the beard coarser and sandier still. He might have been about fifty years of age. His dress was curious, consisting of a yellow sou'wester, a pair of seamen's coarse canvas trousers and a blue pilot-jacket, ornamented with brass buttons which bore the insignia of Her Majesty's naval service.

Presently, without turning his eyes again from the far distance, the man spoke in a husky, far-away whisper:

"Matt, do you see summat ut yonder?"

Matt strained her gaze through the dazzling sunlight, but failed to discern any object on the light expanse of water.

"Look ye now," continued the man; "it may be drifting weed, or it may be wreck; but it's summat, Look again."

"Summat black, William Jones?"

"Yes. Coming and going. Now it comes, and it's black; now it goes, and the water looks white where it was. If it isn't wreck, it's weed; if it ain't weed, it's wreck. And the tide's flowing, and it'll go ashore afore night at the Caldron Point, if I wait for it. But I shan't wait," he added eagerly, "I'll go and overhaul it now."

(To be continued.)

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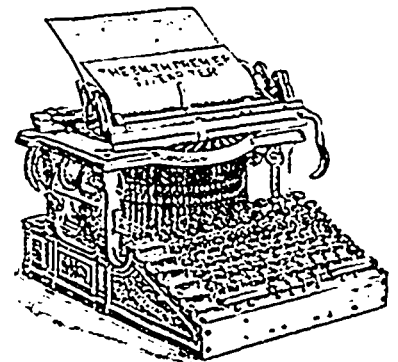
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