

wearer, who had evidently outgrown it; it reached only just below the knee, and, when the young person moved, one caught a glimpse of something very much resembling a delapidated garter.

"The young person's smile was so bright and good humored that I found myself answering it with a friendly nod.

"How are you?" I said gallantly. "I hope you're quite well."

"She nodded in reply, and stooping down, plucked a long blade of grass, which she placed in her mouth and began to nibble—bashfully I thought.

"May I ask where you come from?" I said. "I mean, where do you live?"

"Without speaking, she stretched out her arm and pointed across the lake in the direction of the sea. I could not help noticing then, as an artist, that the sleeve of her gown was loose and torn, and that her arm was round and well formed, and her hand, though rough and sunburnt, quite genteelly small.

"If it is not inquisitive, may I ask your name?"

"Matt," was the reply.

"Is that all? What is your other name?"

"I've got no other name. I'm Matt, I am."

"Indeed! Do your parents live here?"

"Got no parents," was the reply.

"Your relations, then. You belong to some one, I suppose?"

"Yes," she answered, nibbling rapidly. "I belong to William Jones."

"Oh, to him," I said, feeling as familiar with the name as if I had known it all my life. "But he's not your father?"

"She shook her head emphatically.

"But of course he's a relation?"

"Another shake of the head.

"But you belong to him?" I said, considerably puzzled. "Where were you born?"

"I wasn't born at all," answered Matt. "I came ashore."

"This was what the immortal Dick Swiveller would have called a 'staggerer.' I looked at the girl again, inspecting her curiously from top to toe. Without taking her eyes from me, she stood on one leg bashfully and fidgeted with the other foot. She was certainly not bad looking, though evidently a very rough diamond. Even the extraordinary headgear became her well.

"I know what you are doing there," she cried suddenly, pointing to my easel. "You was painting!"

"The discovery was not a brilliant one, I took no trouble to confirm it; but Matt thereupon walked over to the canvas and, stooping down, examined it with undisguised curiosity. Presently she glanced again at me.

"I know what this is," she cried, pointing. "It's water. And that's the sky. And that's trees. And these here"—for a moment she seemed in doubt, but added hastily—"pigs."

"Now, as the subject represented a flock of sheep huddling together close to a pond on a rainy common, this suggestion was not over complimentary to my artistic skill. I was on the point of correcting my astute critic, when she added after a moment's further inspection:

"No, they're sheep. Look ye now, I know! They're sheep."

"Pray don't touch the paint," I suggested, approaching her in some alarm. "It is wet and comes off."

"She drew back cautiously, and then as a preliminary to further conversation sat down on the grass, giving me further occasion to remark her length and shapeliness of limb. There was a free-and-easiness, not to say boldness, about her manner, tempered though it was with gusts of bashfulness, which began to amuse me.

"Can you paint faces?" she asked dubiously.

"I replied that I could even aspire to that accomplishment, by which I understood her to mean portrait-painting, if need were. She gave a quiet nod of satisfaction.

"There was a painter chap who came to Aberglyn last summer, and he painted William Jones."

"Indeed?" I said, with an assumption of friendly interest.

"Yes, I wanted him to paint me, but he wouldn't. He painted William Jones' father, though, along o' William Jones."

"This with an air of unmistakable disgust and recrimination. I looked at the girl more observantly. It had never occurred to me till that moment that she would make a capital picture—just the sort of study which would fetch a fair price in the market. I adopted her free-and-easy manner which was contagious, and sat down on the grass opposite to her.

"I tell you what it is Matt," I said, familiarly, "I'll paint you though the other painter chap won't."

"You will?" she cried, blushing with delight.

"Certainly; and a very nice portrait I think you'll make. Be good enough to take off your hat, that I may have a better look at you."

"She obeyed me at once, and threw the clumsy thing down on the grass beside her. Then I saw that her head was covered with short black curls, clinging round a bold white brow unfreckled by the sun. She glanced at me sidelong, laughing, and showing her white teeth. Whatever her age was, she was quite old enough to be a coquette.

"Promptly as possible I put the question: 'You have not told me how old you are.'

"Fifteen," she replied without hesitation.

"I should have taken you to be at least a year older."

(To be continued.)

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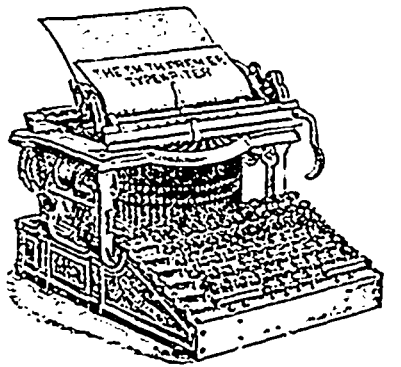
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