

hands, which rested in her lap, and again noticed that they were unusually delicate and small. Her feet, which he next inspected, he could not criticise, for the boots she wore would have been a good fit for William Jones. But the whole outline of her figure, in spite of the hideous attire that she wore, was fine and symmetrical, and altogether—

His inspection was interrupted by the girl herself. Starting as if from a delightful trance, she sprang to her feet and cried:

"I can't stop no longer. I'm going."

"But the picture, Matt?" said Brinkley, rising also. "Shan't I finish it to-day?"

"I can't wait. William Jones wants to send me a message over to Pencross, and if I don't go, he'll scold."

"Very well, Matt."

"But I'll come," she said smiling, "to-morrow; and I'll come in my Sunday clothes, somehow."

"Don't trouble. On reflection, I think you look nicer as you are."

She lifted up her hat from the ground, and still hesitated as she put it on.

"Upon my word," cried the artist; "those Welch hats are very becoming. Good-by, Matt."

She took his outstretched hand and waited an instant, with her warm, brown cheek in profane tempting near his lips. But he did not yield to the temptation, and after a moment's further hesitation, in which I fear she betrayed some little disappointment, Matt released her hand and sprang hurriedly away.

"Upon my word," muttered the young man, as he watched her figure receding in the distance, "the situation is growing more and more troublesome! I shall have to make a clean bolt of it, if this goes on. Fancy being caught in a flirtation with a wild ocean waif, a child of the wilderness, who never even heard of Lindley Murray. Really, it will never do."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEVIL'S CALDRON.

It so happened that the young man of the caravan had two considerable faults. The first fault my reader has, no doubt, already guessed; he was constitutionally lazy. The second fault will appear more clearly in the sequel; he was also constitutionally inquisitive. Now, his laziness was of that not uncommon kind which is capable of a great deal of activity, so long as that activity is unconscious, and not realized as being in the nature of work; and its possessor, therefore, would frequently, in his idle way, bestir himself a good deal; whereas, if he had been ordered to bestir himself, he would have yawned and resisted. Here his other constitutional defect came in, and set him prying into matters which in no way seriously concerned him. A little time before the period of his present excursion, when he was studying law in Dublin, and rapidly discovered that he loved artistic amateurship much better, he had often been known to work terribly hard at "cases" in which his curiosity was aroused; and I may add, in passing, that he had shown on these occasions an amount of shrewdness which would have made him an excellent lawyer if his invincible objection to hard work had not invariably interfered.

No sooner was he left to his own meditations, which the faithful Tim (who had fortunately been away on a foraging expedition during the episode related in my last chapter) was not at hand to disturb, than our young gentleman began puzzling his brains over the curious information she had given him. The facts, which he had no reason to question, ranged themselves under four heads:

(1) Matt had been cast ashore fifteen years previously, at an age when she could pronounce the word "papa." It followed, as a rational argument, that she had been, say, one year old, or thereabouts.

(2) Mr. Monk had found her, and given her into the care of William Jones, and had since handed that worthy sums of money for taking care of her. Query, What reason had the said Monk for exhibiting so much care for the child, unless he was a person of wonderfully benevolent disposition, which my hero was not at all inclined to believe?

(3) Said Monk and said Jones were on very familiar terms, which was curious, seeing the difference in their social positions. Query again, Was there any private reason, any mysterious knowledge, any secret shared in common, which bound their interests together?

(4) Last and most extraordinary of all, said Monk had now expressed his wish and intention of marrying the waif he had rescued from the sea, committed to the care of said Jones and brought up in ragged ignorance, innocent of grace or grammar, on that lonely shore. Query again, and again, and yet again. What the deuce had put the idea into Monk's head, and was there at the bottom of it any deeper and more conceivable motive than the one of ordinary affection for a pretty, if uncultivated, child.

The more Charles Brinkley pondered all these questions the more hopelessly puzzled he became. But his curiosity, once roused, could not rest. He determined, if possible, to get to the midriff of the mystery. So intent was he on this object, which fitted in beautifully with his natural indolence, that he at once knocked off painting for the day, and after breakfasting on the fare with which Tim had by this time appeared, he strolled away towards the seashore.

He had not gone far when he saw approaching him a tall figure which he seemed to recognize. It came closer, and he saw that it was Mr. Monk, of Monkshurst.

(To be continued.)

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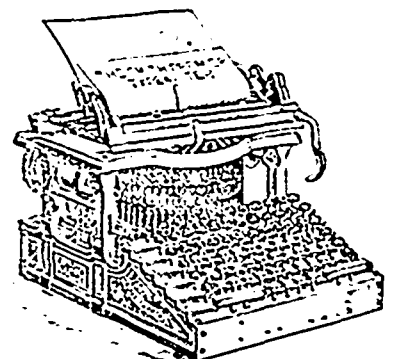
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