

MATT.

A TALE OF A CARAVAN.

(Continued.)

Mr. Monk started and frowned.

"Her friends?" he said—"What friends?"

"Why them as owns her," continued William Jones. "If they wasn't all drowned in the ship what she came ashore from, they must be somewhere. Mayhap some day they'll find her and reward me for bringin' her up a good gal—that's what I allus tell her."

"So that's what you always tell her, do you?" returned Monk, grimly. "Then you're a fool for your pains. The girl's got no friends—haven't I told you that before?"

"Certainly you have, Mr. Monk," returned William Jones, meekly; "but look ye now, I think"—

"You've no right to think," thundered Monk; "you're not paid for thinking; you're paid for keeping the girl, and what more do you want? Matt," he continued in a softer tone, "come to me."

But Matt didn't hear—or at any rate, did not heed; for she made no movement. Then Monk, gazing intently at her, gave vent to the same remark as William Jones had done a few hours before.

"Where have you been to-day," he said, "to have on that frock?"

Again Matt hung her head and was silent. Monk repeated the question; and seeing that he was determined to have an answer, she threw up her head defiantly and said, with a tone of pride in her voice:

"I put it on to be took!"

"To be took?" repeated Monk.

"Yes," returned Matt; "to have my likeness took. There be a painter chap here that lives in a cart; he's took it."

It was curious to note the changes in Mr. Monk's face. At first he tried to appear amiable; then his face gradually darkened into a look of angry suspicion. Matt never once withdrew her eyes from him—his very presence seemed to rouse all that was bad in her, and she glared at him through her tangled locks in much the same manner as a shaggy terrier puppy might gaze at a bull which it would fain attack, but feared on account of its superior strength.

"Matt," said Mr. Monk again, "come here."

This time she obeyed; she rose slowly from her seat and went reluctantly to his side.

"Matt, look me in the face," he said. "Do you know who this painter is?"

Matt shook her head.

"How many times have you seen him?"

"Twice."

"And what has he said to you?"

"A lot o' things."

"He asked me who my mother was, and I told him I hadn't got none."

Mr. Monk's face once more grew black as night.

"So," he said, "poking and prying and asking questions. I thought as much. He's a scoundrelly vagabond!"

"No, he ain't," said Matt, bluntly.

"Matt, my girl," said Mr. Monk, taking no notice of her interruption, "I want you to promise me something."

"What is it?"

"Not to go near that painter again!"

Matt shook her head.

"Shan't promise," she said, "cause I shall go. My likeness ain't took yet—he takes a time, he does. I'm going to put them things on to-morrow and be took again."

For a moment the light in his eyes looked dangerous, then he smiled and patted her cheek—at which caress she shrunk away.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Matt. "I don't like to be pulled about, that's all."

"You mean you don't like me?"

"Don't know. That's tellin'."

"And yet you've no cause to hate me, Matt, for I've been a good friend to you—and always shall, because I like you, Matt. Do you understand, I like you?"

So anxious did he seem to impress this upon her that he put his arms around her waist, drew her towards him, and kissed her on the cheek, a ceremony he had never performed before. But Matt seemed by no means to appreciate the honor; as his lips touched her cheeks she shivered, and when he released her she began rubbing at the place as if to wipe the touch away.

If Mr. Monk noticed this action on the part of the girl, he deemed it prudent to take no notice of it. He said a few more pleasant things to Matt, and again patted her cheek affectionately; then he left the cottage, taking William Jones with him. Ten minutes later William Jones returned alone.

"Where is he?" asked Matt.

"Meaning Mr. Monk, Matt—he be gone!" said William Jones.

"Gone for good?" demanded Matt, impatiently.

"No, he ain't, Matt; he'll be down here to-morrow, he will; and you'd best be at home!"

Matt said nothing this time; she only turned away sullenly and shrugged her shoulders.

"Matt," said William Jones, presently.

"Well?"

"Mr. Monk seems uncommon fond of you, he do."

Matt reflected for a moment, then she replied:

"I wonder what he's fond o' me for, William Jones."

"Well, I dunno; cause he is, I suppose," returned William Jones, having no more logical answer at his command.

"Tain't that," said Matt; "he don't love me 'cause I'm me, William Jones. There's summat else, and I should just like to know what that summat is, I should."

William Jones looked at her, conscious that there was a new development of sagacity in her character, but utterly at a loss to understand what that new development meant.

CHAPTER VI.

ALSO CONCLUDES WITH A KISS.

When Matt awoke the next morning the first thing she did was to look around for her Sunday clothes, which on retiring to rest she had carefully placed beside her bed. They were gone, and in their place lay the habiliments she was accustomed to wear on her erratic pilgrimages every day.

Her face grew cloudy; she hunted all round the chamber, but finding nothing that she sought, she was compelled to array herself as best she could.

"William Jones," she said, when she sat with that worthy at a hermit's breakfast of dry bread and whey, "where's my Sunday clothes?"

William fidgeted a bit, then he said:

"They're put where you won't find 'em. Look ye now, Matt, you'd best be after doing sommat usef'ul than running about after a painter chap. I was down on the shore this mornin', and I seen heaps o' wood—you'd best get some of it afore night!"

Matt gave a snort, but said nothing. A few minutes later her benign protector left the cottage, and after he had disappeared Matt issued forth; but instead of beating the shore for firewood, as she had been told to do, she ran across the fields to the painter.

She found him already established at his work. The fact was he had been for some time strolling about with his hands in his pockets, and scanning the prospect on every side for a sight of her. Having got tired of this characteristic occupation, he at length sat down to put a few touches to the portrait. Seeing that he was unconscious of her approach, Matt crept up quietly behind him and took a peep at the picture.

Her black eyes dilated with pleasure.

"Oh, ain't it beautiful!" she exclaimed.

"So you have come at last," said Brinkley quietly, going on with his painting.

She made no movement and no further sound; so he continued:

"Perhaps, now you have come, you'll be good enough to step round that I may continue my work. I am longin' to refresh my memory with a sight of your face, Matt."

"Well, you can't," said Matt; "they're locked up!"

"Eh—what's locked up—my memory or your face."

It was clear Matt could not appreciate the banter. She saw him smile and guessed that he was laughing at her, and her face grew black and mutinous. She would have slunk off, but his voice stopped her.

"Come here, Matt," he said. "Don't be silly, child; tell me what's the matter, and—why, what has become of your splendid raiment. Your gorgeous Sunday clothes?"

"Didn't I tell you?—they're locked up."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, William Jones done it 'cause he told him. He don't want me to come and be took."

"Oh! Tell you what it is, Matt, we will have our own way in spite of them. For the present this picture shall be put aside. If in a day or so you can again don your Sunday raiment, and sit to me again in them—if not, I dare say I shall be able to finish the dress from memory. That portrait I shall give to you. In the meantime, as I want one for myself, I will paint you as you are. Do you approve?"

Matt nodded her head vigorously.

"Very well," said Brinkley. "Then we will get on."

He removed from his easel and carefully covered the portrait upon which he had been working. Then he put up a fresh cardboard, and sat down, inviting Matt to do the same.

With the disappearance of the Sunday clothes the girl's stiffness seemed to have disappeared also, and she became again a veritable child of nature. She looked more like a shaggy young pony fresh from a race on the mountain side, as she threw herself on the ground in an attitude which was all picturesqueness and beauty. Then, with her plump sunburnt hand, she began to carelessly pull up the grass, while her black eyes searched alternately the prospect and the painter's face.

Presently she spoke:

"He says your a prying scoundrel," she said.

Brinkley looked up and smiled.

"Who is he, Matt?"

"Mr. Monk," she replied, and gave a jerk with her head in the direction of Monkshurst.

"Oh, indeed," said Brinkley. "It is my amiable equestrian friend, is

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