

"Betsindy-Sue," dryly supplied the woman. "I knowed it was a-comin'. Don't I know all the symptoms; ain't I been axed that question fer nigh on seven year? I kin spot you Betsindy-Sue-fellows, quick as I sets eye on to you. All of 'em has a queer look, jes' like you. Funny thing they never is women—always men a-looking fer a Betsindy-Sue. I s'pose some fool writer must a-written a story 'bout a Betsindy-Sue, and made out as how she lived 'round these parts; but there ain't *nowthin'* into it. I've lived 'round here goin' on twenty year, and I guess as I knows mos' every female 'round these hills, and I never knew nary a Betsindy-Sue."

Bristle felt sick; perhaps he had swallowed too much water.

"But the person I'm seeking—" he stammered.

"Blond hair—sad eyes," the relentless woman continued. "I knows the hull outfit; sings like an angel, plays the pianer, makes up novels and sech like. Well, I'll tell you, jes' like I tole that fellow with long hair like yours, what was 'round here las' week; you men had better be jes' a-stayin' to hum making your own women-folks happy, and not be a clatterin' up the country huntin' a yellow-haired woman—them kind never comes to no good, no how," she added, in the voice of an angel of doom.

"I—you say some one was here just last week?" questioned Bristle, in a tone so meek that Seraggs looked up quickly to see who had taken his master's place.

"Yes, and he's 'round here still; snoopin' 'round all day, peerin' into windows at night. The authorities got their eye on him, all right. He's got it worse than any of the others; he's clean cracked on the subjee'."

"I'm so sorry to have disturbed you," Bristle apologized. "I can not go into explanations; but all you have told me has rather upset me. Dear me! I feel quite sick. If you don't mind, I will sit down a minute. I promise to keep perfectly quiet."

Bristle was actually pale; the woman's intuition told her that some how he was hard hit, and that she was to blame. Bustling indoors, she returned with a steaming cup of coffee in a lamentably coarse cup. Bristle understood that it represented sympathy, and accepted it gratefully. The woman a-kinboed her arms, and regarded him silently for a minute or two.

"Now, you seem more pitiful, some how, than the others," (Bristle almost choked at that); "I'm goin' to tell you somethin' I ain't never said to none of 'em. See that place over there on the hill, where all the little cedars are? Well, sir, you jes' go and look there. I don't know no Betsindy-Sue a-living 'round here; but if you believes there really was one, souny, mebbe you'll find her in that little graveyard over there." She stooped and gave him what she intended for a soft touch of condolence on the shoulder.

A graveyard seemed the most suitable place in the world just then for Bristle; so, he shortly found himself trending toward the little cedars.

"Dam' Fondé!" was his one thought, reiterated with small regard for the unwritten law that we should never speak ill of the dead. He repeated it aloud to Seraggs, who quickly bristled up, ready to "sie" something or somebody.

"Fondé always talked too much," Bristle's thoughts began to solidify. "Why the deuce did he have to tell everybody about Betsinda-Sue? What right had he to let Tom, Dick and Harry into the sacred recesses of her life?"

Betsinda-Sue, Bristle had believed to be a sacred sort of foolish confidence between them only. Had the seed sown broadcast by Fondé been fertilized by years of silly dreaming in others, too? Great Heavens! how many other lives had felt the need, as age beckoned, for the songs of Betsinda-Sue and Betsinda-Sue's smiles?

So absorbed was Bristle that he looked at nothing, not even where he walked. He suddenly stumbled over a foot-stone and found himself, to

his own horror and Seraggs' mortification, sprawling on a grave. Picking himself up furiously, and with a quick glance behind to see if any one was looking, Bristle hurried on. Seraggs came up, wagging his tail with the delight of an animal who expects to be commended, holding in his mouth—a pink slipper.

Bristle swore, snatched it from the amazed and wounded Seraggs and rammed it violently into the right-hand pocket of his coat.

"One of hundreds, I suppose. Fondé probably had a corner in pink slippers to supply his idiotic friends."

Bringing out his pipe, he ruthlessly sacrificed a match without thinking, so great was his perturbation. Seraggs' bark heralded the approach of some one.

Bristle turned, to be confronted by a figure of strange and romantic features. Blond hair, escaping far below the barber line, long-lashed eyes of a brooding melancholy, the silky beard of the never-shaved.

The man hastened his steps excitedly on seeing Bristle.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, as he uncovered his pale dome, "I am a stranger in these parts, and I am seeking a long-lost friend

whom I fear now dwells in this spot. You possibly are more familiar with the former inhabitants of this region than I. Do you happen to recall a beautiful young creature, cut down in the very bloom of her youth, by name—"

"Betsinda-Sue!" suggested Bristle.

The stranger would have grasped his hand. "Oh, my dear friend! did you—*did you* know her?"

"Know her?" Bristle repeated. "Yes, somewhat. You see I—I was Betsinda-Sue's husband."

Even Seraggs looked dumbfounded. For some seconds the dead themselves were not more silent than the living who stood above them. Then the poet exclaimed:

"Oh, is it possible—you are—the inventor?"

"Yes, I make a few inventions at times," Bristle assumed a careless air of pride. "Would you mind telling me where you met my wife?"

"Where did I meet her?" stammered the poet, who was evidently not a natural inventor. "Well, my dear sir, I have to confess that I never had the actual joy; but her name is haloed in my heart because of a friend's devotion to her—a dear departed friend, Fondé by name."

Bristle apparently searched his memory.

"Fondé? Oh, yes! I knew him slightly myself. Rather queer fellow; had taste at times, somewhat given to coarse practical jokes, talked too much."

"Perhaps we did not know the same Fondé," was the poet's gentle reply. Bristle almost loved him for that. "But tell me," the sad one resumed, "you who had so much of her, share with me at least the details of her last moments."

"Her horse, Glory," said Bristle huskily.

"I might well have surmised it. Poor reckless child, (I beg your pardon) was she alone? Did she suffer much?"

"No, it was instantaneous, I believe. Glory ran away, as usual. Betsinda-Sue, in accordance with old habits, had remained late in town at some friend's, and on driving home—but I cannot continue the details, naturally the thought quite unsettles me."

"I understand; don't harrow yourself needlessly for my sake." The poet laid his hand with

sympathy upon the gloomy Bristle's bereaved arm. "A neighboring farmer saw the pink hat lying in the road—a little farther on—dear Betsinda-Sue herself." Bristle's voice failed. "I have never recovered from the shock of that home-coming. You see I—well, you see I—I loved Betsinda-Sue."

"Oh, my friend! my friend!" Bristle feared the poet would embrace him. "Did you indeed, did you really love her? Thank God for that."

Again there was a silence, broken only by Seraggs' pursuit of a flea. The poet replaced his damp handkerchief in his pocket.

"Would it be too much to ask—might I visit her grave?" He drew forth a narrow, long package. "I have here a small tribute that I beg you will allow me to place thereon."

Bristle looked about wildly, searchingly. An unmarked grave lay to the right; his eyes dropped with a quiet melancholy of identification upon its sod, and he eloquently singled it out with a quivering forefinger.

"The unmarked one?" The poet expressed undisguised indignation.

"Betsinda-Sue desired no monument, nor did she require one. Her name is engraved indelibly on hundreds of hearts. Her memory is cherished by too many men," declaimed Bristle. The poet dropped respectfully behind, as Bristle and Seraggs led the procession to the grave.

"Perhaps she would not be displeased with my tribute." The poet was unwrapping his package.

"Pink roses, I bet," Bristle guessed to himself.

"They were her favorites, I believe." The poet was stooping with his pink offering over the grave. "Oh, it's so hard to believe any one so young, so buoyant, so vivid, can be lying here!" he grieved aloud in heart-rending tones. Bristle turned his back. This man's grief was not a thing to look upon lightly. Another match was wantonly sacrificed, as he pulled savagely on his pipe.

"I'll have to bid you good-bye," said Bristle unsteadily. "Come here as often as you journey in this direction. It would have made Betsinda-Sue happy, could she have known of this; and I—understand."

A silent pressure of hands, and the two men parted.

III.

BRISTLE was many miles from the little cedars before he even smiled.

"Well, Seraggs, it's the homeward path for us now. We've attended the last obsequies of an ideal. There's nothing left to do but retrace our steps home to the cheerless fireside, where there will henceforth be an empty chair; for Betsinda Sue is no more, dear Seraggs, no more."

Seraggs knew the word "home," and at hearing it again, the weary old legs performed a dance of joy which was, to say the least, not a compliment to the departed.

It was past three in the afternoon when Bristle threw himself down, weary and empty hearted, on a bench near an old house. But lifelong habits

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"Kiss me quick!"



The poet dropped respectfully behind