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THE QUEST OF BETSINDA-SUE

(Continued from Page 7)

keyed his faculties to a tremendous crescendo at this time of the day. Therefore, he looked about him with an extreme sensitiveness to impression, caused by the approaching hour of four.

Battered by more than two hundred years' storm and stress, the old stone house confronting him seemed to grow out of the very hill which rose precipitately from its back, and formed its ground-floor cellar. It had probably been some pre-revolutionary tavern.

Through the open casement he caught an under-breath song, and saw the intent figure of a woman ironing. She saw him, too, it seemed; for she replaced the iron on the stove and, coming to the door, called out:

"Would you care to chop some wood for a good dinner?"

"Good Lord, do I look like a tramp?" wondered Bristle as his eyes descended to his unpolished, road-worn shoes.

"If I have the dinner first," he replied rising. "You see, I'm really so weak from hunger I could n't lift an axe now." He flashed her a droll smile, and she began to doubt his vagrancy a little.

"Well, it will be some time before it is ready; perhaps, you'd like to come inside to rest."

Bristle accepted. So did Scraggs; his nose had long before detected the location of certain savory odors. The woman was not of extreme youth; yet, Bristle thought she was "the kind that never grow old." Deep-set Irish eyes, frail eyebrows of pensive trend, faded old-gold hair flecked with gray, flawless opaline skin, with the blue shadows so dear to an artist's eye.

"It must seem queer," she dimpled, "my asking you in like this. The fact is I'm writing a little article on travel—that is, 'Travelers of the Road.' I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me a few suggestions."

"You write, then?" Bristle's tone was the greeting of an artist to a fellow-craftsman.

"Yes, a little—poems and things, you know. Our county paper was so pleased with a little poem I sent in on the death of my husband that they made me a weekly contributor. Perhaps I'll read it to you after dinner. But, in the meantime, do tell me how you happened to take to the road."

"A woman," Bristle sighed.

"Lovely! Just what I'd have had you say; do go on!"

"I can't. I've never discussed her with any one but my dog, and he does n't talk—at least, only to me."

"But you might tell me a few details; how did she look?"

"Like an angel, a blond angel."

"How did she dress?"

"Silk by day, brocade by night."

"Oh! She was then a celebrity, perhaps?"

"A famous singer, and some thought a poetess."

"Just wait until I find my pencil; then, go on; tell me lots and lots."

"I can't, unless I may smoke." Bristle's eyes queried permission, while his fingers fumbled hesitatingly, longingly about the match in his pocket. He took it out, and looked it over; his courage failed; he put it back, took it out again, gave it a long tender glance, and had decided to sacrifice it, when his feminine witness reached out a hand excitedly:

"Don't! Oh, don't strike it! Wait!" She hastily tore a strip from the newspaper under her ironed garments, and lighted it at the stove. He replaced the reprieved match lovingly, glancing at the woman before him with positive admiration.

She laughed away her embarrassment as she blew the paper out: "Isn't it ridiculous! I can't bear to waste a match. So silly of me, too; it's just because of the eccentricity of a friend of mine."

"Indeed! I value matches highly myself. Your friend must be a most worthy man."

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