

Wheeler Edward Lytton

**Fritz to the Front, or, the
Ventriloquist Scamp-Hunter**



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Edward L. Wheeler

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CHAPTER I

MADGE

One bright, hot August morning a cheap excursion was advertised to leave South Street wharf, Philadelphia, for Atlantic City – that lively little city by the sea, which is so fast growing in size and popularity as to rival the more noted of the Atlantic coast summer resorts. A cheap excursion which is within the means of the working class is ever a success, and this one was no exception; it gave the masses a chance to escape from the overheated city for a small sum, and they grasped at it eagerly.

Bright and early the ferry-boat was crowded and still there was no cessation of the stream of humanity that surged toward the river front. There were representatives of every trade in the city, nearly, and likewise a mixture of several nationalities; there were young folks and old folks and little children; then there were roughs, bruisers, and bummers, an indispensable adjunct to summer excursions; and, all in all, a heterogeneous collection of

humanity.

Just as the hot August sun peeped up over Jersey's sandy horizon, the bell of the boat rung, and the huge ferry-boat began to move out across the Delaware, toward Kaighn's Point, where connection was to be made with the railway.

It was a noisy crowd aboard the boat, there being a good many roughs among the pleasure-seekers, who were more or less under the effect of Dock Street "soothing syrup," and who were disposed to have something to say to every one.

Among the passengers was a young lady of eighteen or nineteen years of age, who sat in the stern of the boat, seeming to have no friends or acquaintances.

She was by no means unprepossessing in face, and was trimly built, and dressed rather stylishly, compared to the others of her sex aboard the boat.

It was not long before several of the roughs noted the fact that she was unaccompanied, and determined to know the reason why.

Therefore, one lubberly, raw-boned young bruiser, with a freckled face, blood-shot eyes, and a large, red nose, approached her and tipped his hat with tipsy gallantry:

"Scuse me, young lady, but (hic) may I ask ef yer got (hic) company?" he asked.

"Plenty of it, sir," the young lady replied, her eyes flashing. "I do not know you; you'd confer a favor by not addressing me."

"I'll do as I please, my gal; don't ye sass yer cuzzin. Don't ye

know me? I'm a 'full moon' solid Mulligan Muldoon, I am."

Greatly annoyed, the young woman turned her head away without answering.

This, however, did not abash the "full moon," for he advanced closer, and laid one burly hand upon the railing beside her.

"Now, (hic) see here, my beloved Miss Moriarty," he began, but before he could proceed further, a foppishly attired young Jew, with red hair and a hooked nose, stepped forward and slapped the Fourth Ward man on the shoulder.

"Yoost you bounce oud, mine friend," he said. "Der young lady don'd vas vant some off your attention."

"Hello! who in blazes are you?" Muldoon demanded, gruffly, not offering to move. "I are Muldoon, ther solid man, I am, an' I allow I kin lick any man on (hic) ther boat."

"That don'd make any difference. Dot young lady don'd vant you near her, und uff you don'd vas gone away, right off quick, I'll throw you oud – dot's der style off an excursionist I am!" cried the Jew.

"Oho! you wull, wull you? You'll throw me out, hey? – me Full-moon Muldoon, ther solid man? I'll hev a kiss from the girl an' then I'll heave yer Israelite carcass overboard for the fishes."

And, making a drunken lunge forward, he threw his arms about the young lady's neck, amid indignant cries of a crowd of bystanders, and attempted to kiss her.

But he failed in his purpose, for she pluckily threw him off, and the next instant the Jewish-looking young man came to her

rescue.

Seizing the rough by the coat and trousers he jerked him away; then with the strength of a Hercules, raised him from the floor and hurled him forward down the cabin stairway to the lower deck.

A cheer of approval at once went up from the larger share of the spectators, and the Dutchman became the hero of the hour.

Some of Muldoon's companions rushed to his rescue and found him doubled up like a jack-knife, and groaning over severe bumps.

His rough usage, however, had evidently cowed him, for he made no attempt to show fight or create further disturbance.

The young lady thanked the Jew, but that was all, until the boat grated up alongside Kaighn's Point wharf, when she caught his eye and motioned for him to approach.

"If you will be so kind as to assist me in finding a seat in the train," she said, modestly, "I would esteem it a great favor."

"Vel, you bet I vil! Id is a purdy rough crowd for a young lady withoud some company. My name ish Fritz Snyder; vot ish yours?"

"You may call me Madge," was the quiet reply.

Then Fritz took her little traveling-bag, and they left the boat with the crowd, and boarded the excursion-train which was close at hand.

Being among the first to reach it, they had no difficulty in finding a seat, and made haste to occupy it, as the cars were fast

filling.

"I reckon ash how you vas goin' to der sea-shore?" Fritz asked, having some curiosity to know.

"I presume so, if the cars take me there," the young lady replied, with a faint smile. "Is it a nice place?"

"Vel, I don'd know. I vas neffer there, but I hear id vas a nice place. You see, I vas goin' there on pizness – I – I – don'd know off I stay long or not."

Little more was said during the overland trip to the ocean.

The young woman did not appear inclined to talk, and Fritz finally excused himself, and moved to another seat.

"Der ish somedings vot don'd vas right apoud dot vimmens," he soliloquized. "She ish not goin' to der sea-shore for vone object alone, I'll bet a half-dollar."

Just ahead of him, in the next seat, sat two old ladies, who were discussing that topic uppermost in their minds – spiritualism. One was a believer – the other an unbeliever.

"Pooh! you can't stuff such nonsense into my head, Marier," the unbeliever declared, taking a pinch of snuff. "Speerits don't trouble me."

"But, that is because you have no faith, Mehitable. Now, my Sammy's speerit converses with me, every day and night, and keeps me posted about the realms of eternal bliss, and when I ax him to appear, he comes before me as natural as life."

"Has he got that wart behind his left ear yet?" apparently asked a man in front of the ladies, though Ventriloquist Fritz was of

course the author of the question.

"Sir-r-rh!" the spiritualist cried, indignantly, "I'll have you know my Samuel had no wart upon his person!"

"But he had bunions, though!" a portly old gent across the aisle seemed to declare.

"It's a lie – a shameful lie! I'd like to know how you dare cast your insinuations about one you never knew, sir?" and Mrs. Marier arose in her seat, excitedly. "My husband was a good moral gentleman."

"For the land's sake, Marier, do set down," the other woman cried, feeling embarrassed.

"No I won't set down!" Marier declared. "That old bald-headed, pussy fabricator said my Sammy had bunions!"

"My good woman, I never said anything of the kind," the portly party declared, getting red in the face.

"The old woman's crazy!" another man seemed to cry.

"Crazy, am I?" Mrs. Marier cried, snatching up a freshly baked pumpkin pie from the seat beside her, and holding it ready to hurl at the offenders. "I'll show you if I'm crazy. Jest ye open yer mouths, ary one of ye, an' I'll show ye how crazy I am! Oh! I'll learn ye to insult a respectable woman, who minds her own business!"

And the woman came off victor, for Fritz ventriloquized no further, and the passengers had nothing to say, having no desire to get plastered up with freshly prepared pumpkin pie.

In the course of three hours the train arrived at Atlantic City,

and before the ocean's blue expanse, as it billowed away to meet the horizon.

The grand stretch of level beach was thronged with people, despite the pouring heat of the midday sun, and many queerly costumed pleasure-seekers were buffeting about in the water for recreation and health.

Fritz was among the first to leave the cars, and he stationed himself where he could watch the movements of the girl, Madge.

Some subtle instinct prompted him to do this, with the impression that she was – what?

That was an enigma. He could not, for the life of him, have told why, but he was impressed with an idea that there was some strange romance connected with her visit to the sea-shore – that she did not come alone for pleasure, but for an object that might be worth investigating.

She left the cars, and at once took a carriage for the principal hotel.

Not to be balked, Fritz jumped into another carriage, and directed the driver to take him to the same hotel.

His conveyance arrived first, and he was standing on the veranda, when the carriage drove up with Madge, and she got out.

She scarcely noticed him as she came up the steps and passed into the hotel; but, after she had registered, she came out, and touched him on the arm.

"You are watching me – what for?" she asked, when he turned around facing her. "Am I an object of suspicion to you, sir?"

Fritz flushed uncomfortably, and hardly knew how to answer.

"Vel, I – I – "

"There! don't make any apologies or excuses; I know you are, and shall look out for you. Please understand I am no criminal!"

Then she turned around again, and swept haughtily into the hotel, while Fritz walked away toward the beach in meditation.

"She vas sharper ash lightning," he mused, "und dot makes me t'ink some more dot for some reason or odder she vil bear watching."

He took a bath in the ocean, and then went back to the hotel. He was not quite satisfied to drop the matter where it was. Something urged him to pry further into the affairs of this young lady, whose case had struck him as being singular.

On examining the register, he found that she was registered as Miss Madge Thurston, and assigned room 43.

As nothing more offered, he sat down on the veranda, and watched the stream of people that surged in and out of the hotel, and to and from the beach – men, women, and children by the hundred, and yet there were scarcely two faces alike.

During the afternoon an elegant close carriage, drawn by a superbly harnessed pair of high-stepping bays, which were in turn driven by a liveried negro, came dashing down the avenue, and drew up before the Brighton.

A man of some thirty-five years of age leaped from the carriage, and entered the hotel – a man with a sinister yet handsome face, ornamented with a sweeping mustache, and

a pair of sharp, black eyes. He was attired in spotless white duck, with patent-leather boots, and a white "plug" hat, and was evidently a person of some importance!

He soon came out of the hotel, accompanied by the young woman Fritz had defended, and entering the carriage, they were whirled away down the avenue out of sight.

"Dot settles dot! My game's gone und I don'd got some professional detective gase, there," Fritz growled, as he watched the receding carriage. "I'll bet a half-dollar I neffer see dem again."

But he was mistaken.

That evening when the moon was sending a flood of brilliant light down upon the long level beach, he was one of a thousand who took a stroll along the water's edge, over the damp sands of the sea.

He was thus engaged, and watching the great luminous moon which seemed to have risen out of the distant watery waste, when a man touched him upon the shoulder.

"Excuse me," he said, respectfully, "but are you Fritz, the young man who took a young lady's part, on a ferry-boat near Philadelphia, to-day?"

"Vel, I dink I am, uff I recomember right. Vot of it?" Fritz replied.

"Well, sir, you are wanted to bear witness to a marriage ceremony, to-night, up the coast, and I was sent for you. Step this way, to the carriage, sir."

Scarcely knowing what was best to do, Fritz followed, got into an open carriage, and was driven rapidly north along the beach, through the romantic moonshine.

But, how romantic was his little adventure destined to turn out? That was what he asked himself, as he gazed doubtfully out upon the greenish blue of mother ocean.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE MARRIAGE

In the course of little over an hour, the carriage stopped at the inlet, where Fritz was told to get out and take a small boat and row across the water to the other shore, where he would find another carriage to complete his journey in.

He accordingly did as directed, and had soon crossed the inlet, found the second carriage, and was once more rolling northward, along the sandy beach.

It seemed hours to him ere his conductor drew rein in front of a jutting bluff which interrupted their further progress along the beach, from the fact that it reached to the water's edge; for another hour he followed the driver, a grim, uncommunicative fisherman, on foot up a jagged path, which finally led into a lonely ocean cave which the high tides of many centuries had washed out to about the size of an ordinary room. A torch thrust in a crevice in the rocky wall, lit up the scene in rather a ghostly way.

About in the center of the cave stood three parties – Madge, a clerical-looking party, and another well-dressed man, with black hair and full beard.

He stepped forward as Fritz and the fisherman entered the cave, and said:

"Ah! I am glad you have come. Was fearing that you would not accommodate us, sir."

"Vel, I didn't vas know vedder to come or not," Fritz answered, "but ash I am here, vot you want off me?"

"I will tell you. The young lady yonder and myself are about to be married, and, to make things legal, we prefer to have a couple of witnesses to the ceremony. You will only be required to attach your signature to the marriage certificate, and will then be taken back to Atlantic City."

"Vel, off dot ish all, go ahead mit der pizness," Fritz said, perching himself on a rock. "I don'd know off id is a legal dransaction or not, but I'll do vot ish right by der lady."

"Then let's have the ceremony," the prospective bridegroom said. "Are you ready, Madge?"

"Quite ready," the young lady replied, smilingly.

Then they clasped hands, and the aged clerical-looking gentleman read a marriage-service, asked the usual questions, and pronounced them man and wife.

The parties to the consummation were announced as Miss Madge Thurston and Major Paul Atkins.

At the conclusion of the ceremony the clergyman filled out a certificate, signed it himself, and then requested Fritz to come forward and do likewise, and also the old fisherman.

His request being obeyed, Major Atkins said:

"Your favor is duly appreciated, Mr. Snyder, and, if an opportunity offers, I shall be happy to be of service to you. You

may now return to town in the manner you came."

Accordingly, Fritz did so, not a little puzzled at his adventure and the strange wedding in the coast cave.

Day was just beginning to lighten the eastern horizon when he arrived back at Atlantic City, and went to his room for a nap.

But he found that sleep would not come to his relief, and so he was among the early fashionable bathers at the beach.

After a good, refreshing bath he went back to the Brighton and took a seat on the veranda.

He had not been seated long when a rapidly driven carriage whirled up before the hotel, and an elderly, portly man leaped out and hurried into the hotel, his face flushed with excitement.

He was well-dressed, wore a little bunch of gray side-whiskers on either cheek, and was evidently all of sixty years of age.

Fritz surveyed him closely with the short glimpse he got of him, and then scratched his head as if in quest of an idea.

"I'll bet a half-dollar I see into der whole pizness now," he muttered, with a chuckle. "Id vas plainer ash mud to me. Dot couple vot got married vas elopers mit each odder, und dis pe der old man on der war-path after 'em, madder ash a hornet. Der next t'ing is, who vas der bully veller, vot ish honest und haff der rocks to support dot virtue?"

After a few minutes the old gentleman came out of the hotel, and stood looking out upon the ocean, with rather a savage expression of countenance – and his was a face that could be very stern, when occasion required it.

"I don'd know vedder I better poke mine nose inder dis pizness, or not," Fritz muttered, taking a second survey of him. "He looks like ash if he might swaller a veller off he got mad, und I don'd vas care apoud imitadin' Jonah."

As if interpreting his thoughts, the old gent turned rather gruffly, and took a searching glance at the young man.

"Well?" he said, "I suppose I look as if I wanted to cut some one's throat, don't I?"

Fritz laughed lightly.

"Vel, I vas t'inking somedings like dot," he admitted.

"I thought so. I ain't a fool; I know when I am mad, I *look* mad. Do you know of any party around here who's particularly anxious to end his career, and ain't got the grit to do the job? – I would like to operate on such a chap."

"You feels like ash off you could pulverize some one, eh?"

"Humph! I'll contract to lay out the first man that durst look cross-eyed at me. I'm mad, I am – mad as thunder, and I come from Leadville, too, where they raise thunder occasionally. Bah! I wish some one would step up and kick me!"

"Well, I'm your man, if you really want a *bona fide* job done!" Fritz caused a pompous-looking man to say, who stood near – ventriloquially, of course. "I'm the champion patent kicker from Kalamazoo!"

The old gent from Leadville turned and gazed at the pompous-looking man a moment, his dander rising several degrees.

"Oh! so you're anxious to kick me, are you, my Christian

friend? You want to kick me, do you?" he ejaculated.

"Who has said anything about kicking you, sir?" the pompous party demanded, in haughty surprise. "You'd evidently better go to bed and sleep off your 'cups,' my friend."

"I haven't drank a drop, sir, in ten years. And for you to deny expressing a desire to boot me, sir – why, man, I heard you!"

"You are a liar, sir; I said nothing of the kind. Besides, I am not in the habit of picking quarrels with strangers."

And with a shrug, the pompous man turned on his heel, and walked off, indignantly.

Leadville's angered delegate gazed after him a moment, with unutterable contempt – then turned to Fritz:

"Poor fool. He's no sand, or he'd not cut and run, after calling a man a liar. Up in Leadville things are supremely different, but here alas! is a lack of back-bone. I say, young fellow, have you ever cherished dreams of becoming rich? – a man of millions, as it were?"

"Vel, I don'd know but I haff some off dose anxiety to get rich, vonce in a vile," Fritz admitted.

"Well, sir, I can tell you just how you can do it the easiest, if you will stroll upon the beach with me."

Accordingly Fritz arose, and sauntered down to the beach with this eccentric Leadvillian, whoever he might prove to be.

"Now, I suppose you'd like to know what I'm mad at," the old gent began, pushing his gold-headed cane into the sand, as they strolled along. "Well, before I tell you, I want to know who you

are, and what your business is?"

"My name vos Fritz Snyder, und I vas vot you might call a detective – or, dot is, I vas trying my luck at der pizness."

"Indeed? Then perhaps it is well I have met you, for I have a case, and if you can win that case, you can also win five thousand dollars. How does that strike you?"

"It hits me right vere I liff, ven I ish at home," Fritz grinned. "Yoost you give me der p'int, und I'm your bologna, you can bet a half-dollar on dot five t'ousand-dollar job. Vot's der lay – suicides, murder, sdole somedings, or run away mit anodder vife's veller?"

"Neither. A girl has run away from her home, and is wanted – five thousand dollars' worth. She is my daughter, and is a somnambulist, and consequently of unsound mind, at times. She frequently goes into a trance, and remains thus for weeks at a time, eating and drinking naturally enough, but knowing nothing what she has been doing, when she awakens – though to outward appearance, she is awake, when in this trance, but not in her right mind. I have consulted eminent physicians, but they pronounce her case incurable, and say she will some day die in one of these trances."

Here the man from Leadville grew pathetic in his story, and wiped a tear from his eye; but finally went on:

"Well, as you may imagine, I have had a deal of trouble with her, for in her state of trance she has often robbed me of sums of money. And wandered off, too, sometimes; but this last blow

has been the most severe. It came to my knowledge that she had become the prey of an unprincipled Eastern rascal. He had met her during her somnambulistic wanderings, and prejudiced her against me, and caused her to rob not only me but others, and surrender the stolen booty to him. On learning this, myself and neighbors formed into a vigilance committee to hunt the rascal down, but he took to his heels, and fled Eastward. A few days later, my poor child turned up missing, and with her the sum of twenty thousand dollars, which had been paid me from the sale of a mine, and which I had lodged in my safe for safe keeping until I could deposit it, the next day!"

"Twenty t'ousand – so much ash dot?"

"Yes – a big sum, and likewise nearly all the money I then possessed. I immediately took up the trail, but egad! 'twas no use. The girl is sharper than lightning, and eluded me at every turn. I found that her destination was Eastward – doubtless to join her evil genius – and so I telegraphed to Chicago and St. Louis for the detectives to look out, and intercept her, if possible. But all to no avail. She was seen in those places, but owing to some irregularity beyond my comprehension, was not captured. When I arrived in Chicago, I found that she had two days before left the city, Eastward bound. I trailed her to Philadelphia, and there lost all track of her. Thinking quite likely she would come to this summer resort, I came on, to-day, in hopes of striking the trail, but all to no avail. I have as yet heard of no clew to her whereabouts."

"Vel, dot ish purdy bad," Fritz assented. "Vot ish your name?"

"My name is Thornton – I am a mining speculator from Leadville, Colorado."

"Und your daughter's name vos – ?"

"Madge. She is a pretty young maiden, aged eighteen, and left her home very well dressed."

"Und der feller vot vas pocketing der money – vot vos his name?"

"It is hard to guess what his true name was. At Leadville he was called Pirate Johnson – at Pueblo he was known as Griffith Gregg."

"Gregg – Gregg?" Fritz said, meditatively. "I am on the look-out for a man by that name. But my man is a smuggler."

"This villain may be connected with any nefarious piece of rascality. If I only had him here one or the other of us would get laid out – that is as good as sworn to. God only knows what perils my poor child will pass through before I succeed in finding her, if I ever do."

"Vel, I reckon ve can find her, uff der ish such a t'ing in der dictionary," Fritz asserted.

He then went on to relate the particulars of his assisting the lady on the boat, and of the marriage in the cave, which excited Mr. Thornton greatly.

"By Heaven! I see through it all! Madge Thurston is no more or less than my daughter, and she has wedded this rascal, Atkins, who is one and the same person who was the Gregg or Johnson

out West. God forbid that my child is married to such a wretch. Describe him."

Fritz obeyed, giving a description according as he remembered the bridegroom – also of the man who took Madge Thurston from the hotel.

"The latter was undoubtedly Gregg," the speculator declared, "and the other also, was, it is likely, disguised for the occasion, with a false beard. Now, Fritz, I want you to help me find my child, and break the neck of this rascal, and you shall have for reward the sum I promised you. We'll search this world high and dry but what we'll recover my child. Come, let's seek a conveyance to take us to the cave."

They accordingly went back to the Hotel Brighton, ate dinner, and afterward secured a carriage and set out for the scene of the strange wedding the night before.

And thus Fritz entered into a five-thousand-dollar chase, which was destined to lead him into more adventures than he had yet experienced.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLUFF HOUSE

In due time they arrived at the cave, where the ceremony of the previous night had taken place, but a thorough search of the cavernous wash-out failed to yield any tidings of the romantic lovers.

"Pshaw! there's no use of further search in this direction; they have long ere this set out for some other portion of the country, and we are wasting time in tarrying here."

"Mebbe dot ish so, but I dink dey vas go on up der coast, instead off cum pack by Atlantic City."

"Not impossible. In that case, it will be our best lead to go back to Atlantic, take the cars to Philadelphia, and strike for some sea-coast point ahead of them."

"Dot would pe a purty good idea vor you, but I t'ink better I remain on der coast stardting vrom here, und follow der trail in der rear. I'll bet a half-dollar I find 'em first, afore you do."

"Very well. It shall be as you deem best. I will leave you here and join you, or rather be there to meet you, when you reach Long Branch. If nothing results in our favor by that time I'll decide what is the next best course to pursue. Here is a hundred dollars, toward defraying your expenses. If you need more, telegraph to Jim Thornton at the Chalfonte, Long Branch,

and I'll remit."

And placing the sum of money in Fritz's possession, he soon after took his departure.

After he had gone, Fritz sat down on a rock in the mouth of the cave, which overlooked the ocean, and gazed thoughtfully out upon the sunlit waters.

"Vel, here I vas – but der next question ish, vere vas I?" he soliloquized. "I haff undertaken a job mitout any bases vor a start-off. I kinder vish Rebecca vas here, too – but ash vishin' don'd vas do some good, pizness is der next consideration."

Night was not far distant, but he resolved to continue on up the coast in hopes of finding a fisherman's house, where he could obtain food and lodging.

He accordingly left the cave and continued his journey. He soon came to a level stretch of beach again, and followed its northward course for a number of miles – until sunset, when he found himself as far from any human habitation as he had in the start.

He accordingly sought a grassy spot, back from the beach, and lay down to rest.

Arising early the next morning, he struck out once more on his journey, feeling decidedly anxious to find some kind of a human habitation, as he was very hungry.

He soon spied a farm-house, inland from the beach, and made for it in double-quick time.

A gruff-looking man sat upon the front veranda, as he entered

the well-kept yard, and eyed him with an expression of suspicion.

"Well, what d'ye want, young man?" he demanded, sourly.

"Grub – somedings to eat," Fritz replied, spiritedly. "I vas hungry like ash a sucker after a hard winter."

"Get out! I don't want no tramps about here. Clear, I say, or I'll set the dog on you," the farmer growled, stamping on the veranda with his cane.

"But, I don'd vas no tramp, nor I don'd vas skeardt at der dogs!" Fritz replied. "I wants some preakfast, und ish able to pay vor id like a shendleman."

"Go to a tavern, then. I don't keep no puttin'-up place."

"But I don'd find some tavern, und I ain'd going no funder ondil I get somedings to eat. So trot oud der best vot you haff, und I pay for 'em."

"Didn't I tell you, you couldn't get something to eat here?" the man cried, getting exasperated. Then he began whistling for the dog. "I'll show you who runs this place."

"All right! Fetch oud der canine," Fritz grinned, perching himself on the fence, and taking a pistol from his pocket. "I yoost ash leave haff dog steak ash peef stew. Anydings to fill up ven a veller vas hungry."

"What! how dare you, sir! I'll have you arrested for carrying concealed weapons, you scamp!"

"Den I haff you arrested vor causing cannibalism, py not giffin' a veller somedings to eat. Come, now, mister; yoost set oud der vittles und der von't pe no droubles; otherwise, der may

be an exposure off somedings!"

The farmer started at Fritz's unmeaning declaration, and giving him a swift, startled glance, arose and entered the house.

Fritz noticed what effect his thoughtless shot had had, and gave vent to a low, peculiar whistle, denotive of surprise.

"Hello! vot ish dose I've done?" he mused. "I give der old chap a sour grape, dot time, all of which proves dot he is 'fraid off der exposure off somedings, und don'd vas got a clear conscience. Vel, dot ish purdy goot, too. Von t'ing leads to anodder – mebbe I vil discover somedings else. Anyhow, I'm going to stay right here undil I gets somedings to eat, und I reckon der old man vil fetch or send id."

Nor was he wrong in his reckoning, for shortly afterward a plump and pretty maid brought him out a tray of victuals that looked most tempting.

There was bread and butter, cold meat, cake, pie, apples, and a bowl of rich milk. No wonder Fritz's eyes sparkled with satisfaction, as he sat down upon the carriage-block, and received the offering.

"I thank you more ash a t'ousand times," he said. "Der old man didn't vas goin' to give me somedings, but I told him I would expose him, und dot fixed him. Vot's der old crab's name, young lady?"

The girl stared.

"Mr. Sample, do you mean?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, I reckon dot's der one – der old vinegar-barrel vot yoost

sot on der veranda. So his name vas Sample, eh? If he vas a sample off der neighbors around here, I dinks I stop no more. He vas got a segret, don'd he?"

"How should I know, sir?"

"Oh! vel, I didn't know but you might haff heard somedings."

"If I had, I don't believe I should confess it to you," the maid retorted. "When you get through eating leave the server on the block."

"But, hold on – you ain'd going?"

"Yes."

"But wait aw'ile! I say no. I want to ask you some questions."

"What?"

"Vel, one t'ing – ish der a town somever's near, on der coast?"

"Yes, several."

"Vot one is der nearest?"

"Forsyth Landing."

"Vot is der population?"

"Four people."

"Shimminy dunder! So mooch ash dot? Any old maids among der lot?"

"Nary a maid!"

"Vel, dot's all. Much obliged."

After she had departed, Fritz finished his meal, and then resumed his tramp along the lonely beach.

Half an hour brought him to the landing, but he did not pause.

Two rough-looking old sea-dogs were lounging outside a sort

of a hut, but their appearance did not inspire Fritz with any desire to cultivate their acquaintance.

About sunset he arrived at a far prettier spot than he had yet encountered.

A great bluff of land rolled up to an abrupt and precipitous ending at the ocean's edge.

In high tide it would be impossible to walk along the beach at the base of the bluff, owing to the depth of water, while at low tide the beach was quite bare.

The evening tide was rolling in close to the base of the cliff, when Fritz reached it, and so he paused and took a reconnoissance.

Far up on the top of the bluff he saw a large, rambling, old house, in a grove of trees, but whether it was deserted or not, he could not tell.

It looked so grim in the weird sunset light, and so isolated in its lone watch by the sea that one might easily have fancied it an abode of spooks, and their like.

"I s'pect dot I'll haff to climb up und go around that bluff," Fritz muttered, not at all liking the idea. "Uff a veller vas to try und wade along der front, he'd like ash not get drowned, und dot would pe a duyfel off a fix. I wonder ef der folks who lif up yonder ar' samples off dot Sample I met dis morning? Looks like ash uff it might be a ghost factory."

He was considering what was best to do, when he felt a tap upon his shoulder, and wheeled about with a nervous start.

Before him stood a ragged, frowsy-haired, bare-footed girl, some sixteen or seventeen years of age – a girl with a well-rounded figure of but medium stature, and a face at once peculiar and attractive, from the sparkle of its eyes, the broad grin of its mouth, and the amount of dirt gathered about it.

She had evidently but recently emerged from the water, for her long black hair as well as her wet garments were dripping with drops which the dying sunlight transformed into diamonds.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed, putting her pretty arms akimbo, and staring hard at Fritz. "Don't I look silly, though?"

"Vel, I don'd know apoud dot. I dink der abbbication uff some water mit your face vould make you look petter ash vot you are now!" Fritz answered, somewhat puzzled.

"Water! ha! ha! I just came out of the water. But oh! I'm so silly – that's what everybody says, and I guess it must be so; anyhow, they call me Silly Sue. Was you ever silly, boss?"

"Vel, I don'd vas know so mooch apoud dot, vedder I vas or not," Fritz replied, with a doubtful grin. "Do I look silly?"

"Oh! lordy! you are the silliest-looking goose I ever saw. I never saw a Yankee but what he was silly."

"But I don'd vas be a Yankee!"

"Get out! Don't dispute me! I know just who and what you are. You are Neptune, come up from the bottom of the sea."

"You lie like dunder!" Fritz retorted, backing up, and beginning to get considerably alarmed, for he began to suspect that she was crazy. "I vasn't no Neptune at all – no von but Fritz

Snyder. Id's a vonder you don'd call me Joner, vot swallered de valebone."

"Nop! you're Neptune. Do you see the house up yonder?"

"Vel, yes; vot off it?"

"Oh! that's a high old roost. Ghosts and skeletons perch up there after dark and grin and rattle their bones at you. They don't do it to me, because I feed 'em snuff. Ha! ha! can you snuff the silly part of that outrageous gag? Say, boss, where you going, ef it ain't askin' too much?"

"Vel, I don'd know dot myself."

"Don't know where you're going?"

"No; I vas huntin' vor somebody."

"Oho! so am I! I was huntin' for some one, when I discovered something, and they called me silly because I refused to tell what. Well, good-day; swim over to England when you want to see me again."

Then, with a peal of elfish laughter, she ran and sprung into the water, and swam around the base of the cliff out of sight.

"I'll pet a half-dollar dot gal vas drunk or crazy, von or der odder, und der pest t'ing vor me to do is shlip away vile I can!" Fritz ejaculated.

To think was to act with him, and he accordingly set out clambering up the steep side of the bluff.

In due time he reached the top and found a level spot of a couple of acres extent, in the center of which the house was situated, surrounded by sentinel rows of sighing hemlocks. A

general aspect of desolation was perceptible on every hand, showing the premises to be untenanted.

The garden was grown up with rank weeds and the house weather-worn and old, some of the shutters hanging by one hinge.

It was a large structure of many queer gables, wings and projections, and fronted upon a road which had been used to communicate with some thoroughfare further inland.

"Dot looks like ash uff it vas going to rain," Fritz muttered, gazing at an ominous bank of clouds that was gathering in the west. "I dink maybe I petter sday in der old house till morning, uff I und der ghosts can agree. I don'd vas much affraid off ghosts, anyhow."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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