

# The Daily Astorian.

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## A DAUGHTER OF THE GODS

The first time I saw her—and I never saw her but twice—there was nothing visible but a slat sun-bonnet and a pair of red, angular elbows keeping time to the monotonous chant:

"Mary and Marthy served the Lawd, Mary and Marthy served the Lawd, Mary and Marthy served the Lawd, And I kin serve him tew."

This was followed by a vigorous rubbing the slat sun-bonnet flapping and the elbows flying on a home-made, rickety pine wash-board—for she was washing, standing on a bench, and leaning over so far in the hot, steaming water, that there was danger of her losing her balance and drowning. The sound of the rubbing and splashing and her own voice, had prevented her hearing my approach, and she jumped like a frightened partridge and looked at me with a frightened stare when I addressed her.

"Don't be alarmed, little one," I said, "I have only lost my way, and stopped to ask you where the hotel is."

She wrung the water out of her lean, red hands, pushed back her sun-bonnet, and stepped off the bench.

"Dew you live at the tavern?" she asked, putting her brown head over one shoulder, like a bird, and looking at me with a bright, inquisitive eye.

"Yes; what a shame to let such a child as you, wash; you ought to be playing with dolls," I remarked indignantly.

She looked at me, covertly, from under the lashes of her soft, shy eyes, as if wondering if I would do her harm, drew her small form up, proudly, and pointed to the mountain.

"Keep rite on up; tha's yoh places go via the road turns, and yew'll site the tavern."

She buried her head in the tub, and resumed her chanting:

"Mary and Marthy served the Lawd."

When I was half way up the mountainside I turned and saw her standing, bare-headed, in the sun, looking after me; but she was gone like a squirrel, when she saw me watching her.

The next time I saw her was when I was looking for a particular species of beetle—I am fond of bugs and worms—and being caught in a storm, sought shelter in the first cabin, which was hers! She did not open the door until I had knocked and pounded a number of times.

"An' its yew," was her laconic greeting, as she swung the old boards that served for a door and reluctantly admitted me.

There was a fire on the stone hearth; there was a very old man asleep in a chair, and a great brindled cat, with green eyes, arched itself at his side. The room was a clean, warm bright place, that was more picturesque than anything I had seen in the dreary place called the Pocket country, which lies between Kentucky and Virginia, and where fate had cast me for a few lonely weeks.

I looked every moment for some woman to make her appearance; yet it would be hard to tell where she would come from, unless she had been in the loft above. There was a curtain hung across a small division of the cabin, but it concealed nothing.

"Do you keep house here alone?" I asked.

"With feyther and gran'feyther," said the child, "an'—an'—Kedsie."

"Oh, your brother."

She nodded her answer; I sat on the bench, and dried myself in the firelight; the old man roused himself and looked curiously at me with red, ferret-like eyes, that had no lashes to their weak lids, the little girl whispered to him, and he went to sleep again.

"How old are you?" I asked, when we had talked a little, and she was not so much afraid of me.

"What do you think?" she asked, in her quaint way.

I looked at her small, childish figure, and guessed "ten."

She laughed a little and shook her small head.

I remarked the sharp-curved chin and ventured "fifteen."

"Try again."

She threw back her sun-burned hair, and looked full into mine with her bright, restless eyes.

"Seventeen," for I caught the glimpse of a woman's nature in their clear depths.

"Yoh all out," she sighed as she spoke.

"I believe you are fifty," I said sharply, there was such a change in each movement of the little woman.

"Yime twenty," she replied in her childish voice.

I think if she had said one hundred, I would not have been surprised, she was so weirdly quaint and old. As we were sitting silent, she watching every movement I made, there was a great clattering at the door, and she flew with that swift motion of hers, to open it. There was a loud, angry voice, which she at once answered, in her soft tones, and then a man stumbled into the room, and without noticing me, threw himself on the little bed and snored instantly—an ugly, unkempt, drunken man, shabbily garbed, and forbidding-looking.

"It's feyther," she sighed, "he's taken agen; 'it's the moutin' agoo he's got, an' it takes holt rite shup, so's he can not do a stroke of work. Poor feyther."

"And the old man?" I queried, pointing to the slumbering figure in the chair.

"Gran'feyther; he's a comort to me, mostly; he hasn't the agoo, yoh see."

"Do you take care of these?"—these dreadful people, I had nearly said, but checked myself—"your father and grandfather?"

"Yes, and Kedsie; wait till yoh see Kedsie!"

The first happy look I had seen came into her eyes. She was listening, a step was at the door, which opened, and a young, fresh, fair looking man came softly in. He was rather neatly dressed, but one look at his long, smooth chin and open mouth told the story—he was witless.

But the girl's face brightened into a sunny smile; she reached on tiptoe to kiss the pale, flabby cheek of her brother, and she opened the folded fingers of one nerveless hand to see what he had there—it was a little field mouse, the life crushed out by the tension of the long fingers that had imprisoned it.

"You killed it, Kedsie," said the girl sadly. "Look yeah how his eyes wimple; tha's tears in 'em." The foolish boy laughed; then he drew a pretty green lizard from his pocket and held it with his thumb and finger, its long, narrow, green head undulating like a snake; he made a sound that resembled the chattering of a monkey; and it was evident that he knew no power of speech.

"It's wuth money," said the girl looking at it critically. "You can dicker for it at the tavern."

The sun came out and I rose to the cat followed me to the door; the old gran'feyther rose feebly and tottered out to look at the weather; the drunken man leaned against her foolish brother in the doorway and patted one soft leaden hand which she held in hers; I was never one to say a graceful or pretty thing when I should, and I blurted out abruptly to the girl:

"Do you help them all?"

She drew herself up on tiptoe and looked up lovingly into the foolish, imbecile face.

"Na," she said in a loving voice, "tha help me."

I did the next worst thing I could have done—took out a silver half dollar; fortunately I saw that the little mountain washerwoman was a princess in disguise, and I asked humbly:

"May I buy the lizard?"

I took the reptile home with me in a piece of broken cup; I have a bit of delf yet to remind me of the little unselfish being whose history, known in all the Pocket country, is the saddest I ever

heard. The last I ever saw of her she stood in the rough doorway, regarding with a look of rapt devotion her imbecile brother, while the old man leaned on his hickory staff beside her, and the cat purred trustingly at her feet, and in the back room a horror of death awaited her. So small, so trusting, so unconscious of any labor of love to commend her to the notice of angels, I saw as in a dream, that small stature growing to heavenly heights.

"A daughter of the gods, divinely tall And most divinely fair."

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There is no death! The leaves may fall, The flowers may fade and pass away— They only wait through wintry hours The coming of the May.

There is no death! An angel form Walks o'er the earth with silent tread, He bears our best beloved away, And then we see—  
—J. L. McCreey.

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