



A NYMPH OF THE WEST. BY HOWARD SEELY. PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH THEM.

So saying she put the paddle behind her, and with a dexterous sweep of it turned the boat's head to the shore. A large flat rock in a sheltered nook, near which several stakes had been driven into the river's bed, was visible a short distance ahead.

A few strokes of oar and paddle brought them there. Bruce stepped forward with the rope in his hand and fastened the boat firmly. But hardly had the bow touched the rock when the clumsy hound sprang into the scow, and after greeting his mistress with uncouth caresses began a jealous inspection of the stranger's dog.

"Down, Anulus!" cried the girl, tapping him smartly with the paddle. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself, sir?"

The hound subsided and became abject at once. Bruce had already taken a strap from his pocket and after securing the turkeys' legs together thrown the heavy birds across his shoulder. He was waiting to assist her. Cynthia stopped, and quite unaffectedly handed him his gun, which he had for the moment forgotten. There was something amazonian in the gesture. The gentleman received it with grave courtesy; then he took the plump little hand which she extended to him frankly, and she leaped lightly upon the rock, followed by her attendant dogs. It was as if Diana, the huntress, were returning from an aquatic excursion.

A steep, winding path, skirting rock and boulder, led to the heights above. The girl at once took the lead, calling to her companion to follow her. There was something in this friendly espionage that was stimulating to the sportsman. He felt the inferiority of his sex under circumstances where it should have been triumphant. At length, out of breath and quite exhausted with his hard climbing, he reached the elevated plateau. The girl was awaiting him.

As he stepped out from the dense fringe of pine and hemlock that bordered the river the level rays of the declining sun at first dazzled him. It was like emerging from some twilight cloister into the open day. A small cotton field with shreds of the woolly crop still clinging to the dry and withered plants stretched before him in dull monotony. Beyond it, amid a grove of great pecans that formed a favorable barrier against unwelcome northerners, stood a small stone house, with its tall adobe chimney. Smoke was curling from the latter, bringing with it suggestions of comfort that appealed to the wayfarer. The sun was going down—a gray globe of fire—behind the low hills to the west. There were the changing of stock bells upon the air, the bleating of sheep and other sounds which, albeit unmelodious in themselves, are not without their compensations upon the frontier. The young man turned to Cynthia.

She was seated on a fallen tree engaged in loosening an antelope which she had tethered to one of the branches before descending the cliff. The fawn, recognizing an addition to the party in the ranchman's dog, was timid and wary. She finally succeeded in reassuring it somewhat, and with her pet tripping daintily on before and tugging at the confining rope proceeded. Her companion quietly took his place at her side.

"Something of a scramble, wasn't it?" Cynthia inquired, glancing at him slyly from under her drooping lashes, not without a feminine appreciation of his splendid height. Bruce acquiesced, shifting his gun from his burdened shoulder to a more comfortable position. She regarded him a moment critically.

"You're feelin' pretty well tuckered now, ain't you?" she finally said as the result of this inspection. The young man met this direct query with the customary untruth of suffering manhood under similar circumstances. "Land!" said Cynthia, waving a diminutive hand in protest. "The climb isn't a circumstance. I can take you to 100 worse places than that right here on this river."

"Not with these turkeys on my back if I know it," he remonstrated. The girl laughed at the suggestion. They had passed through a thorny chaparral and were close upon the ranch. The sound of a violin, on which was being played a lugubrious air, at times bursting into sudden erratic strains, with fitful minors and jarring discords, plainly reached them. The effect was weird and indescribable.

"Are you married?" Cynthia inquired abruptly, stopping short in the way and leveling her blue eyes full upon him with steadfast scrutiny. The unexpectedness of this inquiry was too much for the sportsman. He threw back his head and shouted his amusement. The girl appeared relieved at the action.

"I reckon you ain't," she said at length. "You couldn't laugh like that, I s'pose, if you were. Father says that tunc he's a-playin' is 'Married Life.' I think it's dreadful. It's one of his own, and he says it's the result of experience. I thought perhaps I'd better give you warnin'. Come in now, and I'll make you acquainted."

She lifted the latch of a rude gate, and together they passed into the ranch inclosure.

showing the joinings and rafters of the roof. In the center of the rough floor stood a long wooden table already set for the evening meal. A few poor prints, recklessly lavish in coloring and villainously out of drawing, hung upon the walls.

A door at the opposite end of the room gave upon the neighboring kitchen. Thence proceeded the rattle of cooking utensils and a savory steam that appealed to the fatigued and hungry sportsman. A few minutes later Cynthia appeared, turbaned and of middle age, who carried a large brown jug and a couple of glasses. This was the ebony Amelia, the prosiding genius of the mysterious and appetizing realm she had just quitted.

She handed a tumbler to Bruce as he stood with his back to the blazing hearth exhaling a cloud of steam in his efforts to act upon the old man's advice, and throwing the jug over the hollow of her elbow by a dexterous movement of a black forefinger slipped through the handle stood ready to administer the liquid refreshment.

"Say 'when, sah!' she directed, tilting the liquor at a rapid gale into the proffered glass. "When!" said Bruce hastily, glancing at Cynthia over his half-filled tumbler. "Sho!" laughed the ebony Amelia, chuckling and favoring the young man with a dazzling dental display in her amusement. "Dat ain't a 'marker' fo' a young chap wot's jes' ben baptiz'd! Heah, boss!" turning to old Dallas, who had been silently regarding Bruce and his protestations against her generosity. "show this gemman wot you 'lows to be de aborigine Texas 'rejuvenator.' Dey ain no sc'city ob de article!"

Alcides Dallas stole a quick glance at Cynthia as she sat between the two dogs dozing in the corner of the hearthstone, with one arm around the prostrate Anulus and her eyes gazing into the blazing grate. Then he stumped eagerly forward.

"My shoulder ben a little bad today whar I was throwed last spring at the 'roundups,'" he remarked apologetically, his eyes still upon the silent Cynthia, "and that old centy-pede bite of five year ago still agoin' fur me at times and contributin to make fur a weariness of the flesh, I reckon a small snifter taken under such depressin sarcomstances might operate as a blessin in disguise."

He paused after this lengthy explanation, put his tongue in his cheek and looked warily around. There was a dead silence. Mr. Buck Jerrold, who had just entered stooping under a heavy load of wood, cast down his burden upon the blazing hearth amid a shower of sparks, and leaning against the chimney piece grinned incredulously as he listened to the old man's catalogue of his infirmities. Cynthia sat still between the dogs and said nothing.

"It's powerful sing'lar, Al," remarked Mr. Jerrold slowly, rubbing his bearded chin and pursing his lips, "how long it do take, natch'ally, to git that thar centy-pede pizen out'n a man's unfortunet system when wunst he's ben bit. You don't seem to hev no kind o' success, although you've ben picklin' yo'self off and on for it right onto five years. Thar's Jed Smalley, who allows that he got outside o' a clean gallon o' Jim Willy's rat pizen that time he sot down on one durin shearin, an although that's 10 years ago, an he's signed the pledge sence then, he allows thar's days now when the old symptoms gets ahead o' him, an he's obliged to hobble his conscience an take a drink or go clean crazy."



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"What a picnic!" said he to a neighboring spectator. "Perhaps some of you gentlemen would like to come in—make it interesting. The more the merrier," suggested one of the players, an old gentleman bronzed and fringed after the style of the lone fisherman.

"Why, yes," said the fat drummer from the east, "if the other gentlemen do not object."

They made way for him, and he took a seat, drew out his pocketbook, and drawing out a crisp \$100 bill asked for \$50 in chips. "Oh, that's all right," said the banker. "Haven't got any change. Pay up after the game. Here's your chips."

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