

THE NYMPH OF THE WEST.
BY HOWARD SEELY.

It was a joyful return to the Mesquite valley ranch. Difficult indeed would it be to exaggerate the enthusiastic welcome of the impulsive Kate; the overjoyed though restrained greeting of the more conservative Edith, for in the brief interval of his absence Miss Stafford had passed some very lonely hours and had found time to realize how much the presence of Bruce had grown to be to her. If she had reflected with bitterness upon the change of his attitude toward her, if she had found the contrast between Miss Dallas and herself so overwhelming that she almost pitied Bruce for the blindness of his own vision, there was nothing strange or unfeminine in all this.

Indeed, considering the tender regard the lady entertained for the ranchman, it was quite natural that she should be convinced that she was the one person in the wide world to make him happy. Quite as natural was it that she should see nothing but misery for him in indulging this unexplainable regard for Miss Dallas, that she should believe Bruce to be the victim of some species of enchantment, and that the prestige of her own birth and position should inspire her with little but aversion and contempt for her rival.

Actuated by these feelings, the fair Edith during the first hours of his return laid aside the pique that she had shown of late and displayed an arch and playful manner that Bruce had once found irresistible. It was the old Edith, whose nameless grace and charm had once well nigh betrayed him into a declaration. For a time he appeared like one fascinated by a memory of the past, and Edith was about to congratulate herself upon the return of her influence when one morning she beheld him saddle his horse and ride away without taking leave of her as of old. It was three days before he again appeared at the Mesquite valley ranch.

Miss Stafford needed no prompting as to the nature of his journey. The direction in which his horse had been headed settled that. But she was grieved and indignant. Without stopping to trace the steps by which she arrived at this conclusion, she felt herself terribly outraged and wronged. She was vindictive in consequence. Howbeit, she resolved to make one more determined effort to regain her ascendancy. She would if possible remove Bruce from the influence of this rural siren who was fast teaching him to forget the requirements of his rank of life. If in the interval Cynthia, finding herself abandoned, should decide to crown the hopes of one so suitable as the gloomy Mr. Jerrold, Miss Stafford would renew her childish belief that "all marriages were made in heaven."

In this spirit she appealed to Kernochan to fulfill a promise, given long before, to take them on a fortnight's trip to Austin, the capital of the state. She reminded him that her visit was drawing to a close, and that the time was short in which to keep his word. Her indulgent host readily acquiesced.

When this trip had been decided upon, Phil Kernochan proposed that the four should ride over to San Marcus on horseback, it being necessary that he and his partner should arrange some business matters before their departure. The proposal was received with favor.

Before setting out Miss Stafford repaired to her room, where she arrayed herself in the faultless riding dress with which she had once electrified Miss Dallas. As she peered into her toilet mirror there was a grim resolve about the lines of her mouth from which her quick witted sex might have argued no quarter to a rival. And it was noticeable that the few additional hairpins with which the lady found it necessary to secure her raven tresses were placed in position almost fiercely—very much as Miss Edith might have used a harpoon upon some creature that had excited her resentment.

When her toilet was completed, she surveyed herself from head to foot critically, but with evident approval, after which she opened a small jewel casket and taking from an inner recess a ring she slipped it hurriedly upon the third finger of her left hand. It was a solitaire diamond, large and brilliant, and she passed her small handkerchief across it once or twice, catching the morning sunlight on the flashing jewel and noting how it graced her dimpled hand. But there was an expression in the lady's dark eyes that was hardly reassuring.

The ring was a mere memory with Edith—a souvenir of an attachment from which the sentiment had long since faded—a relic of an almost forgotten past. Howbeit, although she usually wore no rings, she permitted it to remain upon her finger that morning, and drawing her riding glove quickly over the gem she joined the mounted party at the ranch gate, where the impatient Phil was calling loudly upon the ladies to hurry.

After dinner that afternoon, when Kernochan and Bruce had left them to transact the inevitable business, and Kate, weary with the morning's ride, had insisted on taking a siesta in spite of the stuffy atmosphere of the San Marcus hotel, Edith was dominated by a sudden energy. She leaned against a window of the dreary parlor and gazed down the dusty road toward the green foliage of the river. How cool it looked there! And what a short distance away! What was to prevent her going there if she would? She answered this question by ordering the sleepy proprietor to have her pony saddled and brought to the front gallery at once.

Having succeeded in gaining the saddle unassisted, with an ease and dash that left that worthy speechless and staring, Miss Stafford rode quietly out of town. When she reached the river, she did not stop, but galloping her mustang skillfully across the shallow ford she turned in the shade of the trees upon the opposite bank, taking the direction of the Dallas ranch. She knew its general position from a remark of Bruce during the week of the San Marcus ball. She

did not think the distance great. Hardly had she taken the trail road when she encountered Buck Jerrold, riding along listless and dejected upon the gaunt Buckshot.

The man raised his serious face and saluted her gravely. Edith drew rein. Just now this meeting was most opportune. Did Mr. Jerrold know the distance to the Dallas ranch, and would he direct her to it? Buck stared, gave the information in the usual blind southern fashion, but did not volunteer any personal guidance. Edith, moreover, did not request it. But was Miss Cynthia at home? Mr. Jerrold stared again and reckoned she was. Miss Stafford thanked him and dashed away in the direction indicated, leaving the cowman gazing solemnly after her. But as she rode Edith reflected upon his gloomy bearing and was not without feeling that she was acting very generously toward him in the utterly selfish purpose she had in mind.

Cynthia was in her bower, whither of late she had been much given to repairing. She was lying in her hammock, swinging listlessly to and fro, her half closed eyes dreamily regarding the ever swaying curtain of green above her head.

She was happy—happier than she had ever felt or known before. He was safe. He had returned. She was content. And yet in the restful quiet of the little wood Cynthia could not but feel a pang of pity for the man who had just left her with no hope in his eyes, to whose generous conduct much of the present joy she felt was due.

There was the sound of a footstep without, and the girl sprang to her feet with a sudden flush. She put both hands to her head as if to efface any disorder of her tresses due to her previous attitude. A broad shaft of sunlight slipping through the branches overhead steeped in glowing warmth her picturesque face and figure.

A moment of expectation, and Miss Stafford, cool, erect and fastidious, holding her immaculate skirts in the gloved fingers of her right hand, stepped within. As she did so she toyed carelessly with the riding whip held in her left and gazed curiously about her. Their eyes met. Miss Stafford bent her head coldly and permitted Cynthia the slightest inclination of her arched eyebrows. The recognition of Miss Dallas was equally cordial.

An embarrassing pause followed these civilities. Edith was the first to break it. "I suppose you are surprised to see me here," she began, with more embarrassment of manner than she had deemed possible. She glanced down at the whip she held lightly between her gloved fingers. Cynthia remained quiet.

"The fact is, Miss Dallas," Edith recommenced, the hesitation of her manner lending an apparent sincerity to her words, "the fact is, I am going away very soon, but I felt I could not do so without thanking you for your kindness to me in being so good to Mr. Bruce."

Cynthia raised her eyebrows and stared blankly at Edith, turning her head a little one side, very much as a bird will when doubtful if it has heard aright. She grew a shade paler, but replied that she was gratified if anything she had done had found favor with Miss Stafford. If look and manner, however, counted for anything, it was quite evident that the temperature of Cynthia's gratification was indefinitely below zero.

"I mean by your riding over to his assistance in the reckless fashion you did," Miss Stafford continued. "It was really quite romantic and kind of you, you know—quite what one reads about, and I wanted to—to thank you. I told Mr. Bruce so. I know he feels much as I do."

There was a very perceptible change in Cynthia's manner while listening to this ingenuous statement. Apparently she grew several inches taller under Miss Stafford's patronage. Her lip curled perceptibly, and her eyes flashed as she implied very decidedly that she was quite aware what Mr. Bruce thought about it. "Very possibly," Miss Stafford assented quietly, "but I was only telling you what he said to me. I am going away, you know—we are both going away." Miss Stafford emphasized the "both."

"I thought you ought to know how we felt in the matter."

The ominous plural fell like a knell upon Cynthia. She felt her breath grow quick and short, and a sudden faintness seized her. But she did not change her attitude. She remained gazing steadfastly up into the beautiful face before her. There was disdain in the brown eyes, and she felt it.

"And so you turned yourself into Henry Bruce's errand boy to let me know," she replied calmly. "Well, now, that's kind of you, I'm sure; you reckoned I was just natch'ally lyin' awake nights to get your approval, and you couldn't rest until you took this way of showin' it. Praps you'll be willin' to say, Miss Stafford, how long you've been carryin' his messages and runnin' his errands?"

She threw back her head and laughed merrily as she said this—a laugh so musical and clear that it seemed to ripple upward from the very heart of joy. Miss Stafford blushed crimson beneath her merriment. It steeled her to adhere to her original purpose. With a sudden gesture she stripped off the glove upon her left hand. The glittering facets of the diamond she wore flashed in the broad shaft of sunbeams that cleft the bower.

"Do you see that ring?" she demanded coldly, suffering the fascinated eyes of the girl to rest a moment upon the sparkling gem. "Perhaps that will explain my interest in the welfare of Mr. Bruce."

She turned quickly, flashed one brief glance of triumph upon Cynthia from beneath her supercilious lashes and swept haughtily out of the bower. Cynthia was alone with the agony of the sudden revelation.

She put one hand to her head in a half fazed way, as if she felt a sudden pain there. The ground seemed slipping away beneath her feet; the horizon whirled around her. She felt in one brief instant as if the sunlight had gone from the earth, the vivid blue from the sky, and she next she was lying prone upon the mosses at her feet, with down by the

gray, despairing monotone that seemed suddenly to possess all things. She pressed her hands over her eyes, burying her face deep down in the soft lichens as if to shut out of sight the dreadful reality which suddenly confronted her. Then a quick tremor shook her, and she was crying as if her heart would break.

And so he was really engaged to Miss Stafford. That was the end then. The man whom she had so trusted and believed had been playing a double part with her and had called her out of the ignorant content of her early life, only to crush her with the new joy he had awakened. Oh, the pity of it! And she had shown she loved him so! Overcome by the bitterness of this reflection, she sank down again and lay there pale and wretched, twining her fingers listlessly in the soft mosses, her eyes fixed on vacancy and oblivious of all else save this one mortifying, agonizing fact.

The moments went slowly by. The shadows shifted on the pine strewn floor. High overhead a squirrel that had marked her grief dropped a cone down upon her as if in protest. A motionless red lizard, that at first seemed to sympathize with her, leered at her from an adjacent stone and was growing visibly hysterical. And then this irony of nature was dispelled by a footstep that came quickly into the bower. The squirrel flashed suddenly around a limb, and the lizard rustled off into the thicket. Cynthia raised her eyes. Henry Bruce was standing over her, regarding her with a curious, questioning glance.

She gave him no word or sign of recognition. The one brief glance with which she swept his face had in it the scorn and contempt of the injured woman. She sprang to her feet, dashing away from her with a passionate gesture the hand he had extended to her aid. Turning her back upon him, she sought the farthest corner of the bower.

Bruce was astounded at this reception. He took a step or two toward her and attempted to take her hands in his. She whipped them indignantly behind her and faced him with flashing eyes. In his ignorance of what had passed the young ranchman cast about him for some act of his that could have caused this sudden anger.

"Cynthia," he said, breaking the silence, "what is the meaning of this? I am going away on a brief trip to Austin. I have come to bid you goodby. Have you no word to say to me?"



Bruce took a step nearer to her.

She waved him away with an imperious gesture.

"There is no need of it," she said. "I have received your goodby's already from her!"

Bruce stared. He gave a surprised glance about him. Lying at his feet among the pine needles was a dainty glove of undressed kid. He recognized it instantly as belonging to Edith. Involuntarily he stooped and picked up the perfumed trifle. It was redolent of its owner. He turned with a look of inquiry to Cynthia.

"Has Miss Stafford been here?" he asked almost sternly. He was hardly prepared for the icy brevity of her reply.

"Yes."

"And she told you I was going away?"

"She said you were both going," said Cynthia simply. The words seemed to choke her, but she recovered herself with an effort. "She showed me the ring that you gave her and said she wished to thank me for my kindness to you."

In spite of herself the tears started to the girl's beautiful eyes. An angry flush came suddenly over the face of Bruce.

"It is strange that as one personally interested I learn of this now for the first," he said dryly. "Am I to understand that Miss Stafford told you I gave her a ring?"

"She gave me to understand that she was engaged to you," said Cynthia quickly, looking him straight in the eyes.

Bruce took a step nearer to her. "It is false!" he said, with white lips. A sudden revulsion of feeling crimsoned Cynthia's face and neck. She regarded him earnestly.

"False?" she whispered.

Bruce took the little brown hands in his and looked down into her face.

"False!" he said. "Don't you know, darling, there is but one girl in the wide world I would be willing to make my wife?" She looked up at him ably through the tears of a moment before.

"Who is that?" she said.

"Cynthia Dallas!"

THE END.

OUR COUNTRY'S FLAG

WHY THE UNITED STATES ENSIGN HAS THIRTEEN STRIPES.

Congress on June 14, 1777, First Passed the Law Designating the Color of the National Emblem and the Arrangement of the Stars and Stripes.

Beginning about five or six years ago public schools in the old Bay State instituted what is rapidly growing into the custom of honoring the birthday of the starry ensign. The day, the recurring anniversary of the historic 14th of June 1777, the date of the adoption of the "star spangled banner," was celebrated with patriotic declamations and recitations and songs. From Massachusetts the innovation, commended for the patriotism it aroused among the coming citizens of the country, spread rapidly through New England, boards of education in some of the states officially recognizing the occasion and aiding in its celebration. It is also journeying on its way southward and westward and is fair to become the red letter day of the year in our public schools. Of the 18, 125,000 school children about one-fifth already pay tribute in some form to the occasion.

As observance of the anniversary gains in age and popularity knowledge of our country's ensign will increase both among our youngsters and their parents, the "children of a larger growth." Few symbolism should be more cherished by all good Americans than should be our flag. And yet—is it due to lack of patriotism or to our national hurry?—the average American, the schoolboy always barred, stutters and stammers when you ask him the simple, primary question, "How many stars are there in the United States flag?" After a minute of hard thought he is apt to reply with any number from 38 to 42. Even the third class in history would have answered immediately with one voice, "Forty-four!" There is much more of romance in the history of the adoption of Uncle Sam's colors and more of symbolism in the choice of their details than is commonly thought. Captain Preble devoted several chapters of his 90,000 word "History of the American Flag" to explain these matters. Here is the story in short:

In the opening days of June, 1777, when the colonial troops had for more than two years been combating under any local flags that captured their fancy, congress, sitting at Philadelphia, appointed a committee to devise a common flag. The names of the members of this committee have been lost in the ancient dust of congressional history, but it is known that John Adams was mainly instrumental in guiding it to its decisions. On June 14 congress unanimously adopted its report, urging that "the flag of the 13 United States be 13 stripes, alternate red and white; that the Union be 13 stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."

A sample flag of silk, made by a good Quaker matron, was displayed in congress, having its union square and the stars forming the rim of a circle.

Red, white and blue were chosen, firstly, because orange, white and blue were the colors of the only other republic of modern times, the old Dutch republic of the preceding century, and, secondly, because they were the colors of the New York regiments. An easy change turned orange into red. Stripes were chosen because they were a symbolism of both the New York and the old Dutch flags. Stars are supposed to have been selected because 13 figures being required for the union, they were the most appropriate for that number of devices for a blue field.

Though this flag was unanimously adopted and was shown to a goodly number of the inhabitants of the Quaker City during the summer following, it was not officially announced until Sept. 8. Paul Jones, the noted naval hero, impatiently waiting for the equipment of his fast brig, the Ranger, at Portsmouth, N. H., was the first one outside of the Quaker town to display the ensign. He ran it up to the masthead of his stanch little man-o-war and put to sea at once to disclose to the winds of the mid-Atlantic a banner as free as themselves and to gain the honor off the Scotch coast of being the first to introduce the star sprent flag to European eyes.

On land, outside of Philadelphia, the flag was first flown during the battle of the Brandywine, floating above Lafayette when that 30-year-old major general was wounded. A month later it flouted at the headquarters of Gates, when he received the surrendering army of Burgoyne.

Uncle Sam's first flag remained unchanged for 18 years, though in the meantime the government was formally organized under a constitution, and two new states were added. In 1795 by the exertions of Senator Bradley of the new state of Vermont the number of stars and that of stripes were each increased to 15, the additions representing the Green Mountain State and Kentucky. This amended flag was the one borne by Harrison and Jackson on land and by Hull and Perry at sea in the war of 1812. In 1818 stripes were reduced to 13, and the present law of adding a new star for each new state admitted to the Union was passed.—Daniel D. Bidwell in New York Ledger.

The Queen of the Antilles.
Jamaica has perhaps made greater strides in the way of progress than any of England's smaller colonies during the past 25 years and has some right now to call herself "the Queen of the Antilles." Among the evidences of improvement may be cited the hotels which have sprung up in the island, for the building of one of which \$24,000 was expended. Then the Americans are laying lines of railway through the best part of the island, and the fruit cultivation is now as productive as that of sugar, while the price of land has risen enormously. Carlyle's shade would be astonished to hear that the once thrifless blacks have managed to put by nearly \$200,000 in their savings banks.—London World

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