

Copyright Story.

# The Grove of the Hundred Pines

By OWEN RHOSCOMYL.

**R**AIR lie the waters of Llyn Alo, between the dark woods of Rola and the grey front Craig Eidal. On the level spread of wondrous green at the head of the llyn rises the old embattled House of Rola, looking down the shining length of the lake to the Grove of the Hundred Pines, that lift so tall and stately straight, above its foaming outlet.

In the old Colonel's days any wanderer might roam at will in the oaken shades of Itola, but his eldest son, the Captain, changed all that, as soon as he succeeded. He wasn't going to have all this crowd from the Spa down the valley trampling and screeching all over his place, he said. And up went the notices to trespassers, that fringed the woods and barred the paths, whichever way you turned for a mile and more.

You may depend upon it that the Spa—Trevell was its name—had its own opinion of the Captain, Captain Morgan. Spendthrift and gambler, said the milder people, sipping at the Pump Room. "Scoundrel!" retorted the others, summing him up and dismissing him in that one finishing word.

Still, there frowned the signs on the oaks—"Trespassers will be prosecuted, by order," and yet there was one trespasser that—well, one would have liked the Captain to meet her, to see if he dare prosecute such a trespasser as that.

She was anything you like from 16 to 20, according to the mood in which she turned her eyes on you—dark eyes that were so appealing or so inschivevous, so sympathetic, or so demure, all according to which notion was shooting across her fancy at the moment.

Slender—yes; and that frock of hers shimmered like mother-of-pearl in the sunlight, while the gipsy tint in her cheek had just enough of the wild rose in it to go well with the chestnut mass of her hair, ordered and piled so demurely under her broad-leaved hat. And yet a stray tress or two had escaped, curling and glinting down by ear and cheek for dear rebellion's sake.

When she lifted her skirt to pass wet places, you might see how straight she was poised on her slender ankles, and how daintily she picked her way. Every movement of her as she walked was a notice, plain as those on the trees—"Susceptibles, beware!"

The Grove of the Hundred Pines attracted her. She looked up and approved of their majestic height; she nodded encouragingly at the huge girth of their trunks. She plainly summed them up as emphatically something like ancestral trees. Through the midst of them she walked to the edge of the lake.

There she sent a defiant gaze and a rebellious nod across the shining waters to the House of Rola yonder. "It's like your impudence!" she said indignantly. "But you'll see. I wonder what you'll say when you find I'm not there. I hope father will tell you why; but I suppose he won't. There ought to be fairies here in such a place instead of you."

Fairies there were none, however, so, maybe for lack of them, she turned and started round the edge of the lake to her right. "I wonder if the gardeners are as wonderful as they say!" she said to herself.

As she came to the outermost of the Hundred Pines she stopped astonished. At the base of the giant trunk was a great scath, as if the axemen years ago had begun to chop it down, but had been stopped just in time to save it from falling yet not in time to save its life, apparently, for death was stealing through the branches overhead, leaving most of them black and bare against the white and blue of the sky.

She looked at that for a moment, and then she turned a flashing eye on the house again. "That's a downright sin!" she exclaimed. "And just like you!" she ended. Then she moved on again.

Close and green grew the grass along the edge of the lake, where the long-armed oaks just failed to reach the water, and as she walked she put her foot down as though she were a connoisseur of greensward, revelling in this. More than

once she lifted her eyes as though she wished to say something sarcastic in the direction of the house, but a little rocky promontory, jutting into the water just ahead of her, lifted its gorse-clad crest exactly high enough to bar the view of it. It was just as she cleared the base of this jutting cape that she came to the biggest oak of all, one so huge in girth and spread that it seemed to have a acre to itself, while its roots stood out like buttresses about it. Her eyes sparkled. "I'll sit in those roots and watch. Perhaps I'll see him when he comes back fuming. I wonder if he'll switch the heads off the roses like they say he does when he's angry?"

She was so pleased with her plan, and kept her eyes so close on the house, that she was within a yard of the side of the trunk facing the lake before she was aware of a man, sitting in the very nook of the roots she had intended for herself. Her lips parted in the prettiest dumb gasp imaginable.

She was very indignant. What right had a horried man to hide himself and startle people like that! And in such coarse clothes, too! She reddened with horror at herself for showing herself so startled and then, as she turned to go, the man turned his face to her. Oh, not horrors! Nay, not anything but pity—for the face, the goodly face, was blind.

She checked and caught her breath in sudden pain at seeing the long lashes of the closed eyes quivering in the pale face that lifted enquiringly in her direction, as if waiting humbly to know who was there. The helpless patience of that waiting look seemed to pull at her heart-strings, so that she felt she could not take herself away till something should break the silence between them. And while she waited it came, in his low-voiced greeting. "Boreu da," he said ("Good morning").

"And to you," she answered in the same quiet tone—and the same language.

He smiled at once, that smile which seems so like a radiance in the faces of the blind. "The llyn must be very beautiful this morning," he said, tone and manner unmistakably no boor's.

"It is," she answered. And then, as if the tragedy of blindness only came home to her through that one word "must," implying that he had once had sight, and now in the dark of his blind-

ness remembered the glory of the world then, a sudden rush of fresh horror of such a fate made her burst into words of unwise pity. "Oh, if you could only see how lovely it is!" she cried, making a quick step towards him.

He heard that step of impulse, as well as the distress in her voice, and his own tone took on a winning pathos as he asked again. "You have come past the grove of pines; but perhaps you didn't notice if they are all still standing in their beauty; did you?"

"I came past the pines," she answered quickly. "But—"

A sudden caution for his sake checked her. That grove might be one of his dearest recollections, and his last look at it might have been in a day when every tree of it was perfect. How could she blight the picture of it in his mind by telling him that one kingly tree of the grove had been mortally stricken, and was dying in a gaunt skeleton as it stood. A woman's instinct to put off pain drove her to temporise. "But," she began again. "If I just go out to the point of this rock, that runs into the lake here, I can see the pines from there and tell you."

"If you will," he said, and said it in that winning way still. "There is a path to the point of the rock."

How keenly he was remembering all his eyes once used to dwell on in its loveliness, she thought. Perhaps he used to come to this very point of rock to stand and gaze at the pines. Her own eyes were suddenly misty with tears for him as she hurried along the rocky path at the rim of the water, and when she came to the farthest standing place, where the grove of giant pines burst on her view, she could not answer him truly. "There they stand!" she cried. "Oh, how splendid they look across the water!"

She was cozening herself that she was telling the truth because she was telling a truth, and all the time she felt a guilty certainty that she was wickedly telling an awful you-know-what. Only her heart did warm so when she heard the gladness in his voice as he cried out: "Ah, they are splendid! I must have another look at them—in my dreams" he added softly, finding the path and starting with quick feet towards her.

He reached her with a sureness that eased her pain for him a little. He was less helpless than she had feared, and that somehow eased her guilt about the trees too. She was ready to continue the deception and carry it off with a high front. The water-lilies, gleaming beautiful a couple of yards out from her feet, gave her an excuse.

"And how beautiful the lilies are in the water just here," she went on, as he reached her and turned his face with unerring remembrance towards the pines.

"Ah," his face turned down to the

lilies at once. He was remembering them too. "Are they open then? They used to be splendid here, and—there was a stone I used to step on, and then I could just reach them. Here's the stone, isn't it?" he ended, extending his foot, feeling with it towards where a stone did actually lie with its tip above the water.

"It is," she answered him—and then broke off with a quick scream of dread as he let that foot down on the stone. For the stone tilted, and down he went, feet first, into the black deeps of the cleft between them and the lilies. In her horror she made a frantic clutch to save him, lost her balance, made a wild stride for the stone too, missed it, and went headlong after him into the lake.

She was scarcely in before she was up again to the surface, and her terrified clutch at the shore found firm hold of the ledge she had been standing on. In the same moment she found foothold on a niche of the ledge below the water, and her thankfulness broke out in a gasp of "Oh, I'm saved!"

That brought her wits back to the blind man, and in the same breath she felt his body at her knees. With another frantic clutch she caught it and brought it to the surface, the pallid face coming first and showing a thin trickle of blood from the temple the moment it rose above the water. "Oh, he's killed!" she gasped in fresh horror.

But the man moved with returning consciousness, and his hand went out gropingly to seize some hold, touching the ledge and holding fast instinctively at the touch. Then his strength came to him, and in another minute they were both back on the ledge, where she began to lead him gingerly back to the oak, half in a fright at the horror she had just escaped, half in horror at the fright she must look, all wet and bedraggled like this.

He began to speak as they went. "I'm very, very sorry. But there used to be a firm stone there. And now you'll have spoiled all your pretty clothes, and you'll catch your death of cold, too, if you don't get a change at once."

"I'll make them give me dry clothes at Rola," she said, with a sudden gust of anger that warmed her blood wonderfully.

"But I don't live at Rola," he said patiently.

"No," she interrupted, at poise between quick laughter at the notion of his living at Rola, and a sigh of sure pity at his simplicity. But he was continuing.

"Come now to the house; it's just through the wood here, and Gwen Phillips will lend you some clothes while she dries yours. She'll be glad, because she's from the same district as you, by your dialect—Yatrad Towy, isn't it?"

"It is," she said, suddenly thankful that she had learned Welsh in the summers at her father's old home in the



THAT VISIT TO THE DEAR OLD FOLKS ON THE FARM.