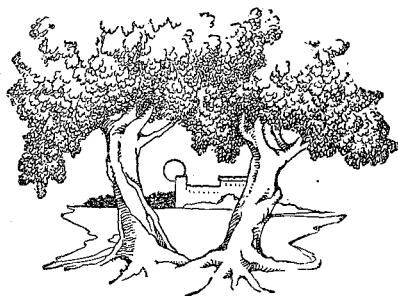


The Love Trees

by

C.N. and A.M. Williamson



JOE FORREST had spent three days at Riverest, and had not yet proposed to Lady Brinnie Saville. He had arrived on Saturday in time for tea—every one arrived at Riverest in time for tea—without the slightest intention of proposing. He knew his value, of course; but it wasn't that. The reason was purely and simply that the idea of proposing had never entered his head.

There were lots of pretty girls in the world. He was admiring them all, as far as his eye could see; and he was quite far-sighted.

After the Saturday had come Sunday, and it had occurred to Joe that Lady Brinnie at Riverest was somehow sweeter than Lady Brinnie in London. He found himself gazing at her constantly, admiring her simple white dress and the wide-brimmed hat with no trimming except a circling spray of wild roses. Why, she was like a wild rose herself!

There were several men staying in the house, but Forrest was the only American, and, incidentally, the only millionaire. Not that he labeled himself in any such crude way—he was quite simple and unspoiled still—but perhaps other people occasionally had the bad taste to do so. There was a soldier visitor, convalescent after a severe wound, and an undergrad from Oxford, and two girls had been provided for these to play with. The girls could not compare to Brinnie, however—in fact, they were

rather lumps; cousins, and that sort of thing, poor dears!—and the men ungratefully preferred to play with Brinnie.

She and Forrest managed to escape in the afternoon—he had had a view of her profile against a black-oak background in a country church that morning—and she kindly took him out on the river in a punt. It was a beautiful punt, and Brinnie looked beautiful in it; tall and graceful as a wand, managing her pole to perfection, and smiling down at the man as he lounged obediently on a bank of red silk cushions. Still he did not propose. He merely began to wonder dimly whether he was falling in love.

There was a girl he had known when he was at Harvard. Temporarily a Cambridge girl she was, named Mary Jeune—a sweet name, and a sweet girl, and he would most certainly have fallen in love with her if she hadn't been so ridiculously young, a mere child of seventeen. But she had eyes—such eyes!

That was four years ago, and Joe hadn't seen the eyes since, but he had never been able to forget them. For an instant they seemed to flash at him from under Lady Brinnie's shadowy hat—bright, gray, black-lashed eyes, instead of Brinnie's own soft, heavy-lidded violet ones. The vision had a queer and almost startling effect, but it was easily explained. Joe Forrest and Mary Jeune had been out several times in a canoe together on the Charles River, and Mary had paddled.

Her mother had stopped those excursions, and had whisked Mary away to live in far-off California with a married sister. Forrest was not a millionaire then, and had no apparent prospect of being one. His money had come to him unexpectedly, two years later, when his cousin was killed in a motor accident. In those earlier days it was considered that Uncle John had done very well by Joe in sending him to Harvard, with the promise of a place in the family banking-house if the young man showed himself worthy.

The gold-green light sifting through layers and layers of chestnut-leaves, when their punt hugged the shore, made the swaying white figure as ethereal as an earth-bound angel. If the thought of that far-away girl in the canoe had not come into Joe's mind, the spell must surely have worked. As it was, the picture of gray-eyed, black-haired Mary Jeune in a canoe blurred the golden-haired, violet-eyed vision in a punt whenever it began to seem irresistible.

When Brinnie skilfully brought the punt to the Riverest landing-stage, just in time to dress for dinner, Forrest had said nothing that all the other couples on the river might not have heard. Perhaps, if there had been moonlight that night—Brinnie was dressed for moonlight—something might have happened; but after dinner it rained.

Early next morning the lovely tinkle of girlish laughter lured Joe to his window as he was dressing. There was Brinnie coming up the lawn from the river. She wore a bathing-dress—a wet, glistening bathing-dress that clung as closely to her white shape as its sheath to a lily-bud. A pale-blue cloak, like a bit of sky, had been flung over her shoulders, but it had fallen back as she stopped to laugh at her spaniel shaking out a cloud of spray, each drop a diamond in the sunshine.

"Gee!" irreverently muttered Forrest.

His heart gave a jump. He thought no more of Mary Jeune just then.

He was to have motored back to London and the Savoy before noon, with the other men invited down to Riverest from Saturday to Monday; but Mrs. Carson—Lady Brinnie's aunt, and his hostess—took him aside after breakfast and asked him to stop till Tuesday. She said she had had a wire informing her that an old friend was coming, a friend who knew America, and

who would be very interesting for Forrest to meet.

Joe did not see that this necessarily followed, but something in him desired to stay in the same house with Brinnie. Another something, queerly enough, wished to get away from her; but the first something was strong and almost brutal, ready to push everything else aside. He accepted Mrs. Carson's invitation and thanked her for it. She said she was "so pleased," and did not mention Brinnie, but walked off with a smile on her round, good-natured face.

II

MRS. CARSON was the sister of Lady Brinnie's dead mother, who had been the beauty of a certain Smith family, and had gone into musical comedy. From musical comedy she had married an earl with a soft heart, a weak chin, a strong love of gambling, and very little money to gamble with. Mrs. Carson was not a beauty, but her husband had money to burn—which was more or less appropriate, as it came out of coal-mines.

Brinnie, who had been baptized Sabrina, after an ancestress, lived in a flat in London with her father, Lord Finchton, whose two country places were let. One of these was Riverest, taken permanently by the Carsons. Only the other day somebody had said to Joe Forrest:

"To see Brinnie Saville in her most becoming frame, you ought to see her at Riverest. Probably Mrs. Carson will ask you down. She's very hospitable to her niece's friends."

Now Forrest understood about the frame. The something in him that wanted to stay was glad that Mrs. Carson had asked him down, and that he hadn't missed seeing Brinnie at Riverest. There she had her right background, and stood out against its watery blues and greens so fair and flower-like that a man ceased to think of her merely as one among a lot of pretty, pleasant girls who made themselves agreeable to a rich young American in London, on his first visit abroad.

The friend wasn't coming till afternoon, and though Forrest had been invited to stay on for the special purpose of meeting her, it seemed that his presence was not required at the moment of her arrival.

"Have you shown Mr. Forrest Baucis and Philemon yet, Brinnie?" inquired Mrs. Carson about four o'clock, half an hour be-

fore the guest who knew America was expected to arrive.

"Not yet, dear," answered the girl.

She had been playing tennis with Joe, and generously letting him beat her. Both were warm, and had been drinking lemon squash, with plenty of ice in it, as a tribute to Forrest's national idiosyncrasy.

"Well, why don't you take him now?" suggested her aunt. "After all that cold lemon squash you won't want tea at five, will you? So Jane Fairweather and I will have it alone, and you can ring for some when you come back. Mr. Forrest will miss the best thing at Riverest if you don't introduce him to Baucis and Philemon."

Having forgotten any mythology he had ever read, Joe wondered who or what Baucis and Philemon might be, and why, if they were at Riverest, it would take from now till after tea-time to see them. For Riverest was not a large estate. There was just the immense, velvet-smooth lawn, in the midst of which stood the creeper-covered Jacobean house, with the old-fashioned walled garden to the left, and to the right, past the private landing-stage and boat-house, a grove of chestnut-trees. Joe had not visited the grove, but he had passed it in the punt, and thought it could not be very extensive.

"I fancy what Aunt Fan really yearns for is a little nap before Mrs. Fairweather turns up," said Brinnie, with one those lovely, confidential smiles of hers. It was done with a straight look up into your eyes, the head somewhat bent, so that the long, brown lashes curled to the level of the low brows. "She secretly wants to get rid of us. But really and truly Baucis and Philemon *are* sweet. I pined to take you there; only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, unless Aunt Fan had told me to, I'm not sure that I should."

"Why?"

Forrest began to be very curious about Baucis and Philemon, as he, with Brinnie by his side, walked slowly in the direction of the chestnut grove.

"Oh, I don't know!" The girl hung her head. She was charming when she was shy. "But I think you'll like them."

"I'm sure I shall. What are they? Or should I say 'who'?"

"Baucis and Philemon? Don't you know who they were? Did you never hear the story?"

"Not that I remember. Tell me."

"I will when we get there—when you've seen them," said Brinnie. "Then you'll understand better."

The girl and the man walked on without speaking. Brinnie's head was bent. She had left her hat in the pergola by the tennis-court, and flecks of sunlight fell like coins of fairy gold on her brown hair.

Forrest looked at his silent companion. How lovely she was at Riverest, and how sweet! Still, he was not quite sure that when it was a question of forever and ever, he really wanted—

Suddenly they came to the end of the grove. Beyond was a narrow strip of velvet grass, bordered with forget-me-nots. Past it ran the backwater he remembered noticing from the punt, a mysteriously beautiful backwater bounded on its farther side by somebody else's land—an American somebody—and a thicket of young willows.

On the Riverest side the green of the narrow lawn beyond the grove was splashed with the rose-pink of rhododendrons in full bloom, and the hidden place was turned into an emerald temple by the architecture of two immense chestnut-trees growing together. The high-roofed hollow within the leaves was like a vast bell of green spun glass; and the leafy temple-wall began at the water's edge. It was thick and unbroken all round, except where it had been artificially thinned to make a doorway.

Brinnie slipped through with the smile of a vanishing dryad, and again Forrest's heart jumped. He followed her quickly.

There was no altar in the green temple, but there was a hammock, a splendid, welcoming, giant hammock. It was stretched open with a rod at each end, and it was red, with long, swaying fringes and ruffled red cushions. Brinnie, in her white dress, dropped into it like a pearl falling into an overblown tulip. Indeed, the green light enameled her fair skin with the sheen of pearls. Mooring white suede toes to moss-carpeted earth, she made room beside her for the man.

"Two cushions under my head, please, and two under yours; then I'll tell you about Baucis and Philemon," she said.

Forrest obediently placed the red silk pillows. In the act he touched her hair, and her throat, white and soft as swan's-down. It was an accident—more or less—but she seemed not to notice, so he didn't beg her pardon. Then, with fingers that had not ceased to tingle, he tucked a brace

of cushions under his own head to bring it on a level with hers.

They let the hammock swing. As they turned toward each other, brown eyes drank from violet eyes.

"It's the end of me—if she'll have me!" was the thought that swam in Forrest's brain.

She had been charming in the punt, alluring in the part of Diana fresh from the bath; but here she was not to be resisted. Fate handed him to her, with all he was and had.

III

"RIVEREST belongs to my father, you know," the girl was saying when the man got his hearing back, "though we're too poor to live in the dear place. Generations ago—oh, perhaps in my great-grandfather's time, when it was the fashion to know about mythology and the classics and that sort of thing—somebody named these two trees Baucis and Philemon. I have heard that it was Fanny Burney. But anyhow, Baucis and Philemon in the story were a man and woman who loved each other so much that when they died the gods turned them into two trees, growing together just as these chestnuts do, so that they might go on living and loving in another form, and never be parted."

"Love trees!" muttered Forrest, looking not at the trees but at Brinnie.

She looked at him, too, until her eyes drooped. There was an instant's pause, an exquisite silence that had the quality of an echo after the last lingering sigh on the string of a violin.

Only one sound on earth had the right to kill such a silence—a man's voice telling a girl that he loved her; and such a sound was on the brink of utterance when the delicate spell received its death-blow from outside the temple-wall. There came a rustle of footsteps on the grass, and a respectful plebeian scraping of the throat. A footman heralded his presence.

"Your ladyship, madam has sent me with tea, if you please. Shall I bring it in?"

Tea! Why not a flood, an earthquake, or a menagerie?

The pearl-white face of the dryad disturbed in her leafy fastness flamed crimson. For an instant—unless there was some strange illusion of changing shadow—her expression was that of a young fury rather than a wood-nymph.

But it was only for an instant. She snatched at serenity as at a veil, and hid the fire in her eyes. The white-angel look was achieved again. Tea could not be blasphemed or even refused. Such things were not *done*!

"Bring it in, William," Lady Brinnie said, with perfect maidenly sweetness, though her tone was somewhat high and thin.

"It's only tea for one, my lady," William hastily added, to explain the furnishing of his lace-covered silver tray. "Madam wished me to say that Her Grace the Duchess of Hampshire has called in her motor, and particularly wishes to see your ladyship—something to do with a bazaar—but her grace will only stay a few minutes, and madam thought Mr. Forrest might like tea in your ladyship's absence."

As the footman rattled off his speech, he arranged near the hammock a small folding table he had carried over his arm, and noiselessly set the tray upon it. His face was the mask assumed for all-day wear with livery, but his less well-trained back ventured to be apologetic, even comprehending. It seemed to know that while the visit of a duchess was as a visitation of Providence, the mistress of the house had done her best to mitigate it by means of tea—tea, a propitiatory offering which would keep the worshiper in the temple until the return of its priestess.

Having accomplished his painful duty, William left without delay, bearing the message that her ladyship would "come at once."

The two in the temple were conscious that the emerald walls of the sylvan shrine had been cracked and flawed. Forrest felt as much dampened in spirit as if William had poured the tea down the back of his neck, but Lady Brinnie was busy making the best of things.

"I'll give you your tea before I go, shall I?" she said brightly. "Help me out of the hammock. Thanks *so* much! I remember you like one *small* lump, and *lots* of cream. Oh, my favorite strawberry tartlets! Will you save one for me if I come back to you? I suppose that *wretched* duchess will want tea, and I'll have to drink some with her, but I won't eat a *thing*; that is, unless you're tired of poor Baucis and Philemon, and would rather—"

"Do you think it's likely I'd be tired?" Forrest broke in, with a look into which he

strove to throw all that he felt, and perhaps even a little more than he continued to feel at that moment.

For some of the gilt had been roughly rubbed off the gingerbread, and not yet transferred to the strawberry tartlets. Perhaps it might be, however, when Lady Brinnie claimed her share.

She would not let him accompany her for a step beyond the love trees, as if his doing so might break to pieces the damaged spell. Off she started at a run, leaving something of her charm behind with the vision of light-footed grace that she was. Besides, it was a compliment to the man that she should so hasten her going, in order soon to return.

Forrest watched her out of sight, and then crept back to the hammock. She had poured his tea, and it would be ungracious not to drink it. Thoughtfully he had lifted the cup to his lips, when a small voice chirped the one word:

"Hello!"

It was as if a tree-toad had become vocal. Joe believed that one had done so, or else that there was a leprechawn at Riverest.

Spilling his tea, he stared and peered. From under the long branches that overhung the backwater an impish face gazed up into his eyes.

"Gee!" said Forrest, but not at all as he had said it in the morning when he saw Diana returning from the bath.

"Do you say that, too?" inquired the tree-toad voice. "That's *my* word. Mama doesn't like it. She thinks it's so American. But I *am* American. And so are you American!"

"How do you know?" asked Forrest, able to observe now that the intruder was not a tree-toad, but a sharp-faced, big-eyed little girl.

"I know all about you," she informed him with grave emphasis. "Can I come in? I'm in a punt. It's our punt, but I've moored it to the bank over here. I often do. I like this place better than anything that we have next door at Riverholme. I just *love* it. We know Mrs. Carson, and she lets me play here when nobody grown up wants to."

"All right; come in!" said Joe.

He got out of the hammock to help; but the creature had swarmed up the bank and wriggled under the branches before he could reach her. She was a thing of seven or

eight, perhaps; but the young man was no judge of children's ages. The thin little face was a baby face, yet the large, greenish eyes might have criticised the world for a hundred years or so.

IV

THE imp scrambled to her feet, brushed earth from her brown holland frock, walked straight to the table, and examined the cakes.

"I heard Brinnie tell you to save one of her favorite strawberry tartlets," she remarked. "They're my favorites, too. There's three of 'em on the plate. Do you want two, or can I have one?"

"You can have one, and then perhaps you'd better go home," said Joe, reverting to the hammock. "Your mother may be worrying about you."

"My mother never worries about me," the creature reassured him, her mouth already full of strawberry tartlet. "She's got a whole lot of other things to do. Besides, she knows I like to come over here. I come 'most every afternoon, except when Brinnie brings her gentlemen friends to propose to her. But that's fun, too; because I lie in the punt close under the bank and listen. You're the seventh one that she's brought here this summer; though maybe I oughtn't to count you, because you haven't proposed yet. Anyhow, I peeped in, and I saw you looked as if you were *going* to!"

"Great gumbo!" gasped Joe.

"Is that what you say when you swear?" calmly questioned the child. "My papa says much worse things, and so did I, till nurse boxed my ears."

"Did she? Well, there's no knowing what *I* may do, if you don't look out," threatened Forrest.

"Pshaw, I'm not afraid!" sniffed the child. "Big men don't hit little girls. It's not polite. I haven't done any harm."

She finished the tartlet, and wistfully regarded the larger one of the two reserved for Lady Brinnie.

"Don't you call it harm to listen to other people's secrets and tell tales on them?" demanded Joe. "Where were you brought up?"

"I was brought up in California," was the prompt reply, "except this year, since last spring. Then we had Riverholme letted to us, because mama's very pretty, and wants to be in English society and go

to court. I'm not bad at all, and I won't let you say so. It isn't true I listen to people's secrets, or tell tales. It's not a secret when a man proposes to a girl—anyway, not when he proposes to Brinnie. *She* tells. I've heard her!"

"You seem to hear everything!"

"I like to hear interesting things," explained the child. "That's no harm. Children have to learn. When I get proposed to, I shall tell every one, the way Brinnie does. She loves proposals, though she gen'ally has to say no, because the man's too poor; and you *must* have money or you're nobody at all. We've got plenty. Brinnie hasn't. Look here! Do you want to know something? If *you* propose, she's going to say yes. Aren't you glad?"

"No, I'm not, for I don't believe a word of it. I don't believe a word you say. Bad little thing, go home!" snarled Forrest.

"I won't go home. Riverest isn't *yours*! I liked your looks at first, but now I don't think you're nice at all. I think you're horrid. You're not half as handsome as heaps of Brinnie's other men that she has to refuse. It's only because you're so rich. You're a millionaire. I heard mama and papa talking about you. They knew you were coming, and your name, and everything. Mama said to papa, 'I wonder if Lady Brinnie will need to lead him under the love trees!' And papa laughed. He came here himself and sat with her once, but only for a few minutes, because he's a married man and no use. It's only men she wants to make propose to her that she cares to bring here, he told mama. They can't resist, it seems. I *was* going to make a doll of you, but now you're so mean, I won't!"

"Make a doll of me?" helplessly echoed Forrest.

He felt hypnotized. The doll stage was perhaps the next.

"Yes. You see, I have plays with real people in them. I dress dolls, and name them after girls and their lovers. I've got a Lady Brinnie doll, and she makes a *splendid* play; only it's difficult because of all the men that must be in it for her, and they're so awf'ly troublesome to dress. I've done a Captain Raymond, and a Sir Gilbert Bassett, and a—"

"Never mind the rest!" groaned the stricken wretch denied dollhood.

"Why? Don't you think I know all their names? I *do*! And I know yours

perfectly well. It's Joe Forrest. You come from a State in America called Masser-choo-sits. It's a long way from California, but my grandma and my aunty lived there once for a little while, and they knew you. My name's May, after aunty, only I'm May Corlett, and she's—"

"A plague on both your names!" roared Forrest. "You're a little demon!"

"I don't know what a demon is," Miss May Corlett, now introduced, defended herself plaintively; "but plagues are in the Bible. There were ten, and it's wicked to poke fun at the Bible. I think you're very rude, too! At home, when I'm with aunty, lots of men make friends with me, and I'm not used to their being cross. I was real nice to you, telling you Brinnie wouldn't refuse you like she has the rest that she brings to the love trees when she wants them to speak—"

"Speak!" groaned Forrest. "You'd think we were dogs!"

"Yes, wouldn't you?" agreed the child, snatching with interest at the suggestion. "With lumps of sugar on their noses. 'Speak' is such a funny word to use about men, as if they were dumb the rest of the time—which of course they're not, though I find they don't talk as much as girls. But that's the word they *all* say about proposals, it seems. Mama's got to be great friends with Brinnie, and gives her presents, and Brinnie tells mama everything. 'Has he spoken yet?' mama asks. At home, she asks aunty the same about *her* men, though aunty's different from Brinnie, and doesn't let them propose if she can help it. She—"

"I don't want to hear anything more about your aunt," burst from Forrest in desperation.

"Don't you? Well, that's as mean as ever it can be of you. I don't see why she liked you so much when you're so hateful," said the child, absent-mindedly taking a second tartlet.

"Your aunt—liked me?" repeated Joe. "I never—"

"Yes, you did, in Masser-choo-sits. Grandma told mama all about it. I know, for mama told papa day before yesterday. She said that if she was a cat, she'd tell Brinnie, but she isn't."

"What's your aunt's name?" Joe heard himself asking dully.

"Guess I sha'n't tell you, just out of spite. You said 'a plague upon it.'"

May finished the second tartlet; then, without seeming to know what she did, she took up the third and bit it.

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed Joe.

Miss Corlett ate daintily all round the edge of the tartlet, leaving the best part—the strawberry-filled middle—for the last.

"You said you didn't want to hear anything more about my aunty," she mumbled.

"Well, I've changed my mind."

"I thought only girls changed their minds. Nurse says so."

"Nurse isn't quite right. Men change theirs sometimes. Come now, what's your aunty's name?"

May Corlett gazed at the remaining fragment of the tartlet, reflectively measuring it with her eye and comparing it with the size of her mouth. But there was room in her small head for several thoughts at a time.

"Say," she murmured, as if in a dream, "don't you think Brinnie will make a beautiful bride?"

"Yes. What's your aunt's name?"

"I wish she'd have me for her bridesmaid. If I'm good, and do *just* what you want, will you ask her to?"

"I'm not sure that I shall have any influence. What's your—"

"*She's* promised to have me for hers—her bridesmaid, I mean—if she ever marries; but she doesn't believe she ever will. She thinks she'll be an old maid. She wouldn't come to England with mama to see what there is that's worth her while over here. She liked better to stay home in Los Angeles, with grandma, keeping house while we're away."

"Is her name Mary Jeune?" blurted out Forrest.

"Why, you guessed it! I bet you knew all the time!" squeaked Mary Jeune's niece.

Down went the last crumb of Lady Brinnie's tartlet, just as Lady Brinnie herself came back to the temple of the love trees.

But she was too late!

SONG OF THE SPIRIT

SHIP o' dreams, ship o' dreams,
Come sailing, sailing,
Out of yon mystery
Of time and distance
That has enshrouded thee;
Over the boundless sea,
Over the soundless sea,
Come sailing, sailing,
To me!

Star o' night, star o' night,
Keep shining, shining,
Out of infinity
In all sublimity
Of your divinity;
Through the ethereal sea,
Through the aerial sea,
Keep shining, shining,
On me!

Light o' faith, light o' faith,
Keep burning, burning,
Into the soul of me,
Into the whole of me;
Take thou control of me;
Thou, from a holy sea,
Thou, from a lowly sea,
Keep burning, burning,
In me!

Gustav Davidson



FLOWERS OF THE HEART

From the painting by H. Schwenzen, by permission of the Berlin Photographic Company, New York

Paintings of Children

Why some pictures are great, some are popular, and some are both

by Clayton Hamilton

AN entire theory of art criticism might be founded on that weighty utterance which Henrik Ibsen made in 1882:

I, at any rate, shall never be able to join a party which has the majority on its side. Björnson says, "The majority is always right"; and as a practical politician he is bound, I suppose, to say so.

I, on the contrary, of necessity say, "The minority is always right."

Whether or not this proud position is tenable in the domain of politics—for it must be remembered that many great statesmen, including our own Lincoln, have steadfastly believed in the majority—it