

Literature.

The Gray Spiders: OR LIFE and LOVE in FLORIDA.

What I am about to relate is simply a personal adventure which occurred in several years ago, while spending the winter in Florida. I was quite a young man then, with a good deal of time on my hands, and a lively appreciation of anything that afforded an hour's excitement. It was not because my constitution rebelled against the rigors of a northern winter that I chose a milder climate, but because my friend, Julie Fessenden, was possessed of a hypocritical notion that the state of his health demanded such a change, that I must accompany him to prevent his dying of ennui.

At the hotel where we took up our quarters was a family from Virginia, named Wharton. The daughter, Amy Wharton, was a pretty, modest girl of nineteen summers, whose engaging manners and sweet disposition made her the pet of the whole house. Having nothing better to do, I allowed myself to drift into a flirtation with this young lady, and followed it up blindly till I had gone too far to retreat. Before I was aware of the risk I incurred by my heedlessness, I had the alarming discovery that I had fallen desperately in love with her.

For awhile she treated me with friendly consideration, and even seemed to prefer my society to that of other men. But at length, without the least apparent cause, her manner changed; warmth and gaiety gave place to cold reserve, and she treated me with distant courtesy, as if I were the least significant of all her acquaintances. Of course this made me miserable, and I passed many a sleepless night cudgeling my brain for an explanation of the change that had come over Amy Wharton. I could think of nothing I had said or done that would be likely to offend her, and was forced to conclude—although it was a terrible blow to my self-esteem—that she had simply grown tired of me, and did not wish to count me among her friends.

I observed, too, that another young man was paying her marked attention—a young man from her own State, who rejoiced in the appellation of Sidney Spencer. She was evidently pleased with him and received his attentions in a manner which my jealous imagination construed into open encouragement. I had disliked Sidney Spencer from the moment I first met him, and this irrefragable proof that she preferred his society to mine was a bitter pill to swallow.

Matters had gone on thus for some time when a party was organized to make a pleasure excursion up the St. John's River, in row-boats. Nearly all the young people at the hotel, became members of the party, including Amy Wharton, Sidney Spencer, Julie Fessenden and myself. Julie and I took our seats in the expectation of bagging some game—both being fond of the sport, and possessed of excellent rifles—and at an early hour one fine morning we set out.

It was a pleasant row up the broad, winding river, whose banks fairly teemed with luxuriant vegetation, and bright plumaged birds flitted in and out of the green foliage. I cannot say that I was in a mood to enjoy it, but the rest seemed to take a keen pleasure in the excursion, especially the ladies. Sidney Spencer occupied a seat near Amy Wharton, and deluged her with a ceaseless flow of small talk during the whole of the voyage. I tried to appear unconcerned, but my very much afraid that I made a sad failure of it, for I was burning up with jealousy, rage, and would have asked no pleasanter pastime than to wring my rival's neck.

We landed at last. It was a wild picturesque spot, truly tropical in its nature and very inviting in its general aspect. We struck off through the woods, leaving the boats tied up on the bank. The purpose of the ladies was to gather flowers and mosses, and, the better to accomplish it, they plunged deep into the forest.

By some accident I found myself walking beside Miss Wharton. It was no design on my part—certainly not on hers—more like a blunder on both our parts; but certain it was that we were thrown together, and the rest of the party were moving on ahead of us. Neither could be so rude as to leave the other, though I could not help seeing that she was annoyed.

"She paused suddenly. 'I have forgotten my basket,' she said. 'I left it in the boat. I must go back after it.'"

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