

# Syrinx ~ A Fantasy

By Lloyd Roberts

Sun-filled forest glade at noon-day. A low, pulsing music, like distant rapids, pervades the air. SYRINX, her slim white figure scantily touched with vines and berries, dances airily into the glade. She pauses to listen, becomes frightened and is gone. A moment later a stalwart youth, bare-limbed and bareheaded, a scarlet kerchief about his neck, crashes into view. He stops in the centre of the glade and stares about him, panting.

DON. I saw her. I saw her. The leaves were trembling behind her. Which way did she go? I saw her. (He moves toward trees, peering eagerly.) How fast she runs. But I will run faster. I will overtake her.

(PETE strides in. He is a typical old backwoodsman, flannel shirt, grey homespun trousers stuffed into shoe packs, battered felt hat. There are two packs on his back, one dangling from his axe. He flings the latter to the ground.)

PETE. Here, darn yer, take yer pesky pack! The next time yer drops it, yer can fetch it yerself.

DON. I saw her, Pete, plain as I see you. She was standing beyond the stream in a patch of sunlight. She was—

PETE. Yer grandma!

DON. The leaves were still shaking in the covert there as I broke through. Look, look, there's her footprint.

PETE. Don't yer know a deer-track yet?

(Draws out a plug of tobacco and gnaws off a chew.)

DON. It was not a deer. No, no, it was she.

PETE. Never you mind, sonny; these here woods'll settle yer narves quicker'n a hundred doctors.

DON. Pete have you never seen her in all these years now?

PETE. I 'low I've seen some pretty queer things one way an' another, but never a lady tearin' 'round with next ter nothin' on.

DON. But you've never been so far north as this.

PETE. North or south, or east or west these here woods are pretty nigh all the same: cedar and popel in the bottoms, hemlock an' spruce on the rises.

DON. At night now? Have you never heard anything strange?

PETE. I won't go so far as ter say I ain't. But if it weren't a porkypine or a whiskey jack, it were likely something else.

DON. Oh, it was she, singing lonely to the cold stars.

PETE. Say, sonny, yer must have kicked up awful hard down there in the city to git ter hearin' an' seein' things this away.

DON. Why shouldn't there be nymphs and satyrs in Canada as well as in Acadia?

PETE. And what sort o' varmints might they be?

DON. The spirits of the woods and waters.

PETE. Never set eyes on no ghosts of that kind myself.

DON. They are shy creatures when humans are around.

PETE. Have yer ever known a feller who's seen one?

DON. Ah, I've seen one, this very minute.

PETE. I clean forgot. And what did this nymph look like?

DON. Like? Like? Listen: I'll try and tell you. She's like the moonlight tangled in an iris bed; she's like mist of the morning among the scarlet maples; she's night rain through the spruces; she's willows in bloom—

PETE. Whoa-back. She's all outdoors. I git yer. But describe her so a feller would know her when he saw her.

DON. She is slim and pale, like—like a paper birch.

PETE. Sickly lookin', eh? This runnin' 'round half dressed—

DON. No, no, she's goldy brown as a forest pool.

PETE. Sounds like a breed ter me.

DON. Her eyes are green as young fir-cones; her lips as red as partridge berries; her hair, her glorious hair flickers like a strange flame behind her as she runs—

PETE. Redheaded, yer mean. Has she freckles?

DON. Who can describe her beauty? It is whimsical, tantalizing, maddening. It is the mystery and magic of this great green wilderness. Once you have heard her calling, calling, calling—Hark? Do you hear her now?

PETE. Only a rain-bird, sonny, only a rain-bird.

DON. One grows weary of the empty, sordid ways of men; he turns his back on the sham and hypocrisy of civilization; he takes the wings of the morning and dwells in the uttermost parts of the sea or land. Have you never heard the call?

PETE. Is it anything like a cow moose in the ruttin' season?

DON. It used to come to me in the heart of the big city, across the teeming rivers, over the iron roofs, down into the dark and clammy streets, finding me out. I would drop my pen and listen, would press my hot face to the window, would see only wide tree filled valleys and wind-tossed lakes, would sniff leafmold and wet fern and dried spruce, would feel my birch blade whip the currents and hear

the bow rasp on the shingle. I would try and write poetry. One day I wrote this:—

*Did you ever meet Miss Pixie of the Spruces?  
Did you ever glimpse her mocking elfin face?  
Did you ever hear her calling while the whip-poorwills were calling.  
And slipped your pack and taken up the chase?*

*Her feet are clad in moccasins and beads.  
Her Dress? Oh, next to nothing.  
Though, undressed,  
Her slender arms are circled round with vine,  
And dusky locks cling close about her breast.*

*Red berries droop below each pointed ear;  
Her nut-brown legs are criss-crossed white with scratches;  
Her merry laughter sifts among the pines;  
Her eager face gleams pale from milkweed patches.*

*And though I never yet have reached her hand—  
God knows I've tried with all my heart's desire!—  
One morning just at dawn she caught me sleeping  
And with her soft lips touched my soul with fire.*

*And once when camping near a foaming rip,  
Lying wide-eyed beneath the milky stars,  
Sudden I heard her voice ring sweet and clear,  
Calling my soul beyond the river bars.*

*Dear, dancing Pixie of the wind and weather,  
Aglow with love and merriment and sun,  
I chase thee down my dreams, but catch thee never—  
God grant I catch thee ere the trail is done!*

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