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Editor of American Cookery

"Love in the Wilds"

—OR—
The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

CHAPTER XIX.
ON THE TRAIL OF THE ANTELOPE

To business we love we rise betimes
And go to't with delight.—ANTONY
and CLEOPATRA.

The morning broke with a thousand hues that lighted up the flower bedecked prairie as a cathedral pavement is lighted up by the reflection of the stained windows.

At six o'clock Laurence and Cecil had started.

The boy looked well enough this morning, with a bright flush on his soft cheeks and a joyous look in his deep, dark eyes.

Laurence seemed as grave as usual, and with the exception of a cold nod when Cecil catered up to him he had taken no notice of him.

Laurence was not a man to waste words even in asking after another's health. He could see that the youth was better and spared himself the inquiry.

Cecil was silent, too; but happy, wonderfully and mysteriously happy, and his head was thrown back with that peculiar air of freedom which one unconsciously wears when the heart is light and the blood properly circulating through the veins.

Cecil was young, though not so young as he looked, and whatever troubles he may have had affected him lightly.

With his companion it was different.

The edge of the high hills was reached before he spoke, and then Laurence broke the silence.

"Why do you not ride oftener, Cecil?" he asked, in his grave, deep tones, looking approvingly at the fearless, graceful bearing of the youth so firmly seated upon his horse.

He colored and cast his eyes down.

"I—I haven't overmuch time for riding, Laury," he said, in his sweet, feminine voice, inexpressively sweet after the full, ringing tones of the man. "My books require keeping, not playing with."

"You keep them too much," replied Laury, curtly. "Give them and yourself a holiday now and then."

Cecil shook his hair, which had been short when he came to the Corner, but had grown with marvelous rapidity and hung in natural half ringlets beneath his collar.

"What would become of the Corner if the books were neglected? You forget I have the past to catch up with. I do bother with 'em in my mind sometimes; but I must do my duty. You told me that you know?" And he looked up at his companion's face inquiringly.

"True; yet I did not tell you it was your duty to work your face sad and your heart heavy," replied Laurence.

"Never fear," replied the youth;

After a quarter of an hour's ride they came upon a patch of forest.

Laurence held up his finger to enforce silence and checked his steed. Cecil, following him, did the same and, obeying a gesture, came to his side.

Laurence took the spare gun he had brought and held it out to the lad. But Cecil turned rather pale and shook his head.

The cattle-runner smiled grimly, as if he would say "Where is your courage now?" and was about to take it back; but the youth flushed up at the hint and caught the rifle.

Laurence nodded curtly and, with his own in his right hand, went on again.

When they had got within the wondrously beautiful forest of trees and creeping plants that laced and interlaced each other with fairy-like grace and color, he dismounted, and, throwing the bridles over the horses' neck—they required no other securing—he dropped on his hands and knees and crawled with the swiftness and noiselessness of an Indian toward the pool of silvery-like water at which he knew he should find his game.

Cecil, more slowly but with a faster-beating heart, followed in like manner.

Presently, after a few yards, Laurence stopped and, pulling away some drooping branches, pointed with his finger.

Cecil approached, and looking through the cleared space felt that delicious sensation of delight which only those have experienced who have crept upon their first herd of antelopes.

There they were, a herd of a hundred or more, splendid, noble creatures, graceful and fleet of foot, drinking with that cautious, watchful air native to their species.

Cecil almost fancied they would hear and take flight at the beating of his heart. It seemed to him to click with the noise and regularity of a clock.

Laurence bent his lips to the youth's ear.

"Who's to have the first shot?" he asked, carelessly.

Cecil's lips trembled.

"Me, please!" he murmured, disregarding grammar.

Laurence nodded and smiled.

"You must not miss," he whispered. "Wait here, and I will drive them for you," and he crept away noiselessly.

Presently Cecil heard the whizz of a stone and saw it fall behind the herd.

Never guessing that the stone could have come from any direction save the one in which it had dropped at their backs, they raised their heads with a startled gaze and sniffing—of course, Laurence and Cecil were to windward of them—led to the forest and to the muzzle of the deadly rifle.

Cecil waited, half blind with excitement, until the foremost antelope had passed his ambush, then fired; but he could not see with what success. Before the smoke had cleared away the sharp crack of Laurence's rifle rang in the air and a noble buck leaped in the air and then dropped dead.

Cecil sprang to his feet; but Laurence's warning voice caused him to drop again, and the next moment there came another crack of the rifle and another buck bit the dust.

Then Laurence came from out his hiding-place and called the lad.

"Well," he said, mockingly, "where's your game?"

Cecil colored.

"I don't know," he said; "I didn't see—Here, take your nasty gun!" and gave it to him with a vexed pout.

Laurence smiled again.

"But," he said, "don't be discouraged, Cecil, lad; it was your first shot, I know. Come, own it—you never had a gun in your hands before?"

The youth looked up with a sharp glance.

"You're wrong, you see—I have," he said, and with a sudden change of color, this time almost to a pallor, knelt down to look at the slain bucks.

Laurence secured the skins and cut some steaks. The rest of the carcasses were left to the bird scavengers, who were already darkening the air.

They found the horses where they had left them and, after disposing of the skins behind Laurence's saddle, they mounted and rode on.

"Where are we going now?" asked Cecil.

"To the hut that lies three miles further on, to dine and stow the skins," said Laurence.

They skirted the forest and made for the prairie again, riding on until

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They came to a low range of barren hills, where at the foot of it, half sheltered by a few trees and commanding a fine view of the immense flowered slope, stood a small rough, wooden hut.

They stopped here, and Laurence, unfastening the door, told Cecil to alight.

The youth, with eager curiosity, jumped to the ground and ran to the door.

Looking in he saw that the interior of the hut contained a rough deal table, a block of wood for a chair, some tin and iron cooking pans, and a lantern. Several pegs were driven round the walls for guns and clothing, and in a corner a heap of dry underbrush and hay were thrown.

Laurence stowed the skins in a corner and then said:

"Come in, lad, and sit down; the lions will take their rest."

The youth came in and still looked round him.

"What a romantic, queer little place!" he said. "It is like Robinson Crusoe's cave. Who does it belong to—who occupies it?"

"Yes," said Laurence. "This I call my den. It is too good a one for such a 'bear' as I am—eh, lad?"

Cecil turned away with a vexed air. "You will never forget that foolish word of mine, Laury, he said, almost sorrowfully.

"Tut, tut, Cecil!" retorted Laurence, with a smile; "I did not mean to vex you. Here, come and help me turn the steaks, and I'll get you some water. I suppose you haven't got over your dislike to strong liquor yet?"

Cecil shook his head with a merry laugh.

"No," he said, turning the steak; "I can't a-bear your nasty brandy. Get me the water, there's a good Laury."

Laury rose and, can in hand, left the hut.

No sooner had he gone than the youth sprang from his knees and gazed devoutly round at every inch of the hut.

"His house, his home—poor, sad Laury!" he murmured. "And yet I—I would give something to share it with him," he added, with a blush, and fell to the steaks again.

Laurence returned.

"Here's the water, and as clear as crystal. And the steaks, lad—are they done? Tush, you have burned one! 'Twould serve thee right to make thee eat it."

But he took it on his own iron plate, and picked out the tenderest and best for Cecil who, after an unheeded remonstrance, fell to heartily.

(To be continued.)

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