

Diane of the Green Van



Leona Dalrymple

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Title: Diane of the Green Van

Author: Leona Dalrymple

Release Date: June 21, 2005 [eBook #16101]

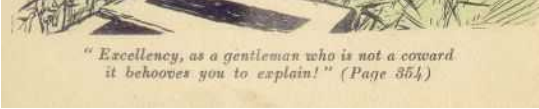
Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1

***START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DIANE OF
THE GREEN VAN***

E-text prepared by Al Haines





*"Excellency, as a gentleman who is not a coward
it behooves you to explain!" (Page 354)*

[Frontispiece: "Excellency, as a gentleman who is not a coward, it behooves you to explain!"]

DIANE OF THE GREEN VAN

BY

LEONA DALRYMPLE

*"In Arcadie, the Land of Hearte's Desire,
Lette us linger whiles with Luveres fond;
A sparklynge Comedie they playe—with Fire—
Unwyttynge Fate stands waytynge with hir Wande."*

Illustrations by Reginald Birch

Chicago
The Reilly & Britton Co.
Third printing

1914

Diane of the Green Van was awarded the \$10,000.00 prize in a novel contest in which over five hundred manuscripts were submitted.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

"Excellency, as a gentleman who is not a coward it behooves you to explain." ...

Frontispiece

Diane swung lightly up the forest path

White girl and Indian maid then clasped hands

"No, I may not take your hand."

Diane of the Green Van

CHAPTER I

OF A GREAT WHITE BIRD UPON A LAKE

Spring was stealing lightly over the Connecticut hills, a shy, tender thing of delicate green winging its way with witch-rod over the wooded ridges and the sylvan paths of Diane Westfall's farm. And with the spring had come a great hammering by the sheepfold and the stables where a smiling horde of metropolitan workmen, sheltered by night in the rambling old farmhouse, built an ingenious house upon wheels and flirted with the house-maids.

Radiantly the spring swept from delicate shyness into a bolder glow of leaf and flower. Dogwood snowed along the ridges, Solomon's seal flowered thickly in the bogs, and following the path to the lake one morning with Rex, a favorite St. Bernard, at her heels, Diane felt with a thrill that the summer itself had come in the night with a wind-flutter of wild flower and the fluting of nesting birds.

The woodland was deliciously green and cool and alive with the piping of robins. Over the lake which glimmered faintly through the trees ahead came the whirl and hum of a giant bird which skimmed the lake with snowy wing and came to rest like a truant gull. Of the habits of this extraordinary bird Rex, barking, frankly disapproved, but finding his mistress's attention held unduly by a chirping, bright-winged caucus of birds of inferior size and interest, he barked and galloped off ahead.

When presently Diane emerged from the lake path and halted on the shore,

he was greatly excited.

There was an aeroplane upon the water and in the aeroplane a tall young man with considerable length of sinewy limb, lazily rolling a cigarette. Diane unconsciously approved the clear bronze of his lean, burned face and his eyes, blue, steady, calm as the waters of the lake he rode.

The aviator met her astonished glance with one of laughing deference even as she marveled at his genial air of staunch philosophy.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Diane, "but—but are you by any chance waiting—to be rescued?"

"Why—I—I believe I am!" exclaimed the young man readily, apparently greatly pleased at her common sense. "At your convenience, of course!"

"Are you—er—sinking or merely there?"

"Merely here!" nodded the young man with a charming smile of reassurance. "This contraption is a—er—I—I think Dick calls it an hydro-aeroplane. It has pontoons and things growing all over it for duck stunts and if the water wasn't so infernally still, I'd be floating and smoking and likely in time I'd make shore. That's a delightful pastime for you now," he added with a lazy smile of the utmost good humor, "to float and smoke on a summer day and grab at the shore."

"I was under the impression," commented Diane critically, "that in an hydro-aeroplane one could rise from the water like a bird. I've read so recently."

"One can," smiled the shipwrecked philosopher readily, "provided his motor isn't deaf and dumb and insanely indifferent to suggestion. When it grows shy and silent, one swims eventually and drips home, unless a dog barks and a rescuer emerges from the trees equipped with sympathy and common sense.

I've a mechanician back there," he added sociably. "He—he's in a tree, I think. I—er—mis-laid him in a very dangerous air current."

"Are you aware," inquired the girl, biting her lip, "that you're trespassing?"

"Lord, no!" exclaimed the aviator. "You don't mean it. Have you by any chance a reputable rope anywhere about you?"

"No," said Diane maliciously, "I haven't. As a rule, I do go about equipped with ropes and hooks and things to—rescue trespassing hydroaviators, but—" she regarded him thoughtfully. "Do you like to float about and smoke?"

The sun-browened skin of the young aviator reddened a trifle, but his eyes laughed.

"I'm an incurable optimist," he lightly countered, "or I wouldn't have tried to fly over a private lake in a borrowed aeroplane."

"I believe," said Diane disapprovingly, "that you were cutting giddy circles over the water and dipping and skimming, weren't you?"

"I did cut a monkeyshine or two," admitted the young man. "I was having a devil of a time until you—until the—er—catastrophe occurred."

"And Miss Westfall, the owner," murmured Diane with sympathy, "is addicted to firearms. Hadn't you heard? She *hunts*! The Westfalls are all very erratic and quick-tempered. Didn't you know she was at the farm?"

The young man looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Great guns, no!" he exclaimed. "I presumed she was safe in New York... And this is her lake and her water and her waves, when there are any, and no matter how I engineer it, I've got to poach some of her property. Some of it," he added conversationally, "is in my shoe. Lord, I am in a pickle! Are you a

guest of hers?"

"Yes," said Diane calmly.

"I'm staying over yonder on the hill there with Dick Sherrill," offered the young man cordially. "They are opening their place with a party of men, some crack amateur aviators—and myself. Do you know the Sherrills?"

"Perhaps I do," said Diane discouragingly. "Why didn't you float about and smoke on Mr. Sherrill's lake?" she added curiously. "It's ever so much bigger than this."

"Circumstances," began the young man with dignity, and lighted another cigarette. "My mechanic," he added volubly, after an uncomfortable interval of silence, "is an exceedingly bold young man. He'll fly over anything, even a cow. Isn't really mine either; he's borrowed, too. Dick keeps a few extra mechanics on hand, like extra cigars. It's Dick's fault I'm out alone. He lent my mechanic to another chap and nobody else would come with me."

"I thought," flashed Diane pointedly, "I thought your mechanic was somewhere in a tree."

The aviator coughed and reddened uncomfortably.

"Doubtless he is," he said lamely. "He—he most always is. Do you know, he spends a large part of his spare time in trees—and swamps—and once, I believe, he was discovered in a chimney. I—I'd like to tell you more about him," he went on affably. "Once—"

"Thank you," said Diane politely, "but you've really entertained me more now than one could expect from a gentleman in your distressing plight. Come, Rex." She turned back again at the hemlocks which flanked the forest path. "I'll ask Miss Westfall to send some men," she added and halted.

For Diane had surprised a look of such keen regret in the young aviator's face that they both colored hotly.

"Beastly luck!" stammered the young man lamely. "I *am* disappointed. I—I don't seem to have another match."

"Your cigarette is burning splendidly," hinted Diane coolly, "and you've a match in your hand."

For a tense, magnetic instant the keen blue eyes flashed a curious message of pleading and apology, then the aviator fell to whistling softly, struck the match and finding no immediate function for it, dropped it in the water.

"I don't in the least mind floating about," he stammered, his eyes sparkling with silent laughter, "and possibly I'll make shore directly; but Lord love us! don't send the sharp-shooteress—please! Better abandon me to my fate."

Slim and straight as the silver birches by the water, Diane hurried away up the lake-path.

"The young man," she flashed with a stamp of her foot, "is a very great fool."

"Johnny," she said a little later to a little, bewhiskered man with cheeks like hard red winter apples, "there's a sociable, happy-go-lucky young man perched on an aeroplane in the middle of our lake. Better take a rope and rescue him. I don't think he knows enough about aeroplanes to be flying so promiscuously about the country."

Johnny Jutes collected a band of enthusiasts and departed.

"Nobody there, Miss Diane," reported young Allan Carmody upon returning; "leastwise nobody that couldn't take care of himself. Only a chap buzzin' almighty swift over the trees. Swooped down like a hawk when he saw

us an' waved his hand, laughin' fit to kill himself, an' dropped Johnny a fiver an' gee! Miss Diane, but he could drive some! Swift and cool-headed as a bird. He's whizzin' off like mad toward the Sherrill place, with his motor a-hummin' an' a-purrin' like a cat. Leanish, sunburnt chap with eyes that 'pear to be laughin' a lot."

Diane's eyes flashed resentfully and as she walked away to the house her expression was distinctly thoughtful.

CHAPTER II

AN INDOOR TEMPEST

"If you're broke," said Starrett, leering, "why don't you marry your cousin?"

Carl Granberry stared insolently across the table.

"Pass the buck," he reminded coolly. "And pour yourself some more whiskey. You're only a gentleman when you're drunk, Starrett. You're sober now."

Payson and Wherry laughed. Starrett, not yet in the wine-flush of his heavy courtesy, passed the buck with a frown of annoyance.

A log blazed in the library fireplace, staining with warm, rich shadows the square-paneled ceiling of oak and the huge war-beaten slab of table-wood about which the men were gathered, both feudal relics brought to the New York home of Carl Granberry's uncle from a ruined castle in Spain.

"If you've gone through all your money," resumed Starrett offensively, "I'd marry Diane."

"*Miss* Westfall!" purred Carl correctively. "You've forgotten, Starrett, my cousin's name is Westfall, *Miss* Westfall."

"Diane!" persisted Starrett.

With one of his incomprehensible whims, Carl swept the cards into a disorderly heap and shrugged.

"I'm through," he said curtly. "Wherry, take the pot. You need it."

"Damned irregular!" snapped Starrett sourly.

"So?" said Carl, and stared the recalcitrant into sullen silence. Rising, he crossed to the fire, his dark, impudent eyes lingering reflectively upon Starrett's moody face.

"Starrett," he mused, "I wonder what I ever saw in you anyway. You're infernally shallow and alcoholic and your notions of poker are as distorted as your morals. I'm not sure but I think you'd cheat." He shrugged wearily. "Get out," he said collectively. "I'm tired."

Starrett rose, sneering. There had been a subtle change to-night in his customary attitude of parasitic good-fellowship.

"I'm tired, too!" he exclaimed viciously. "Tired of your infernal whims and insults. You're as full of inconsistencies as a lunatic. When you ought to be insulted, you laugh, and when a fellow least expects it, you blaze and rave and stare him out of countenance. And I'm tired of drifting in here nights at your beck and call, to be sent home like a kid when your mood changes. Mightily amusing for us! If you're not vivisectioning our lives and characters for us in that impudent, philosophical way you have, you're preaching a sermon that you couldn't—and wouldn't—follow yourself. And then you end by messing everybody's cards in a heap and sending us home with the last pot in Dick Wherry's pocket whether it belongs there or not. I tell you, I'm tired of it."

Carl laughed, a singularly musical laugh with a note of mockery in it.

"Who," he demanded elaborately, "who ever heard of a treasonous barnacle

before? A barnacle, Starrett, adheres and adheres, parasite to the end as long as there's liquid, even as you adhered while the ship was keeled in gold. Nevertheless, you're right. I'm all of what you say and more that you haven't brains enough to fathom. And some that you can't fathom is to my credit—and some of it isn't. As, for instance, my inexplicable poker *penchant* for you."

To Starrett, hot of temper and impulse, his graceful mockery was maddening. Cursing under his breath, he seized a glass and flung it furiously at his host, who laughed and moved aside with the liteness of a panther. The glass crashed into fragments upon the wall of the marble fireplace. Payson and Wherry hurriedly pushed back their chairs. Then, suddenly conscious of a rustle in the doorway, they all turned.

Wide dark eyes flashing with contempt, Diane Westfall stood motionless upon the threshold. The aesthete in Carl thrilled irresistibly to her vivid beauty, intensified to-night by the angry flame in her cheeks and the curling scarlet of her lips. There were no semi-tones in Diane's dark beauty, Carl reflected. It was a thing of sable and scarlet, and the gold-brown satin of her gypsy skin was warm with the tints of an autumn forest. Carelessly at his ease, Carl noted how the bold eyes of the painted Spanish grandee above the mantel, the mild eyes of the saint in the Tintoretto panel across the room and the flashing eyes of Diane seemed oddly to converge to a common center which was Starrett, white and ill at ease. And of these the eyes of Diane were loveliest.

With the swift grace which to Carl's eyes always bore in it something of the primitive, Diane swept away, and the staring tableau dissolved into a trio of discomfited men of whom Carl seemed But an indifferent onlooker.

"Well," fumed Starrett irritably, "why in thunder don't you say something?"

"Permit me," drawled Carl impudently, with a lazy flicker of his lashes, "to apologize for my cousin's untimely intrusion. I really fancied she was safe at the farm. Unfortunately, the house belongs to her. Besides, your crystal gymnastics,

Starrett, were as unscheduled as her arrival. As it is, you've nobly demonstrated an unalterable scientific fact. The collision of marble and glass is unvaryingly eventful."

Howling indignantly, Starrett charged into the hallway, followed by Payson. Presently the outer door slammed violently behind them. Wherry lingered.

Carl glanced curiously at his flushed and boyish face.

"Well?" he queried lightly.

Wherry colored.

"Carl," he stammered, "you've been talking a lot about parasites to-night and I'd like you to know that—money hasn't made a jot of difference to me." He met Carl's laughing glance with dogged directness and for a second something flamed boyishly in his face from which Carl, frowning, turned away.

"Why don't you break away from this sort of thing, Dick?" he demanded irritably. "Starrett and myself and all the rest of it. You're sapping the splendid fires of your youth and inherent decency in unholy furnaces. Yes, I know Starrett drags you about with him and you daren't offend him because he's your chief, but you're clever and you can get another job. In ten years, as you're going now, you'll be an alcoholic ash-heap of jaded passions. What's more, you have infernal luck at cards and you haven't money enough to keep on losing so heavily. Half of the poker sermons Starrett's been growling about were preached for you."

Now there were mad, irreverent moments when Carl Granberry delivered his poker sermons with the eloquent mannerisms of the pulpit, save, as Payson held, they were infinitely more logical and eloquent, but to-night, husking his logic of these externals, he fell flatly to preaching an unadorned philosophy of continence acutely at variance with his own habits.

Wherry stared wonderingly at the tall, lithe figure by the fire.

"Carl," he said at last, "tell me, are you honestly in earnest when you rag the fellows so about work and decency and all that sort of thing?"

Carl yawned and lighted a cigar.

"I believe," said he, "in the eternal efficacy of good. I believe in the telepathic potency of moral force. I believe in physical conservation for the eugenic good of the race and mental dominance over matter. But I'm infernally lazy myself, and it's easy to preach. It's even easier to create a counter-philosophy of condonance and individualism, and I'm alternately an ethical egoist, a Fabian socialist and a cynic. Moreover, I'm a creature of whims and inconsistencies and there are black nights in my temperament when John Barleycorn lightens the gloom; and there are other nights when he treacherously deepens it—but I'm peculiarly balanced and subject to irresistible fits of moral atrophy. All of which has nothing at all to do with the soundness of my impersonal philosophy. Wherefore," with a flash of his easy impudence, "when I preach, I mean it—for the other fellow."

Wherry glanced at the handsome face of his erratic friend with frank allegiance in his eyes.

Carl flung his cigar into the fire, poured himself some whiskey and pushed the decanter across the table.

"Have a drink," he said whimsically.

Dick obeyed. It was an inconsistent supplement to the sermon but characteristic.

"Carl," he said, flushing under the ironical battery of the other's eyes, "I don't think I understand you—"

Carl laughed.

"Nobody does," he said. "I don't myself."

CHAPTER III

A WHIM

The fire in the marble fireplace died down, leaping in fitful shadow over the iron-bound doors riveted in nail-heads. They too were relics from the Spanish castle which Norman Westfall had stripped of its ancient appurtenances to fashion an appropriate setting for the beautiful young Spanish wife whose death at the birth of Diane had goaded him to suicide. That Norman Westfall had regarded the vital spark within him as an indifferent thing to be snuffed out at the will of the clay it dominated, was consistent with the Westfall intolerance of custom and convention.

By the fire Carl smoked and stared at the dying embers. For all his insolent habit of dominance and mockery he was keenly sensitive and to-night the significant defection of Starrett and Payson after months of sycophantic friendship, had made him quiver inwardly like a hurt child. Only Wherry had stayed with him when his career of reckless expenditure had arrived at its inevitable goal of ruin.

There remained, financially, what? Barely four thousand a year in securities so iron-bound by his mother's will that he could not touch them.

Black resentment flamed hotly up in his heart at the memory of the Westfall custom of willing the bulk of the great estate to the oldest son. It had left his mother with a patrimony which Carl, inheriting, had chosen contemptuously to regard as a dwarfish thing of gold sufficient only for the heedless purchase of

one flaming, brilliant hour of life. That husbanded it might purchase a lifetime of gray hours tinged intermittently with rose or crimson, Carl had dismissed with a cynical laugh, quoting Omar Khayyam.

Starrett had sneeringly suggested that, to remedy his fallen fortunes—he might marry Diane! Carl laughed softly but recalling suddenly how Diane had looked as she stood in the doorway, the flame of her honest anger setting off her primitive grace, he frowned thoughtfully at the fire, swayed by one of the mad, reckless whims which frequently rocketed through his brain to heedless consummation. Wherefore he presently dispatched a servant to Diane with a note scribbled carelessly upon the face of the ace of diamonds.

"May I see you?" it ran. "I am still in the library. If you like, I'll come up."

She came to the library, frankly surprised. Carl rarely saw fit to apologize or seek advice.

With his ready gallantry, habitually colored by a subtle sex-mockery, Carl rose, drew a chair for her and leaned against the mantel, smiling.

"I'm sorry," said he civilly, "I'm sorry Starrett so far forgot himself."

"So am I," said Diane. "Bacchanalian tableaux are not at all to my liking."

"Nor mine," admitted Carl. "As an aesthete I must own that Starrett is too fat for a really graceful villain. I fancied you were indefinitely domiciled at the farm. Aunt Agatha has been fussing—"

"I was," nodded Diane. "A whim of mine brought me home."

Carl dropped easily into a chair and glanced at his cousin's profile. The delicate oval of her face was firelit; her night-black hair one with the deeper shadows of the room. There was mystery in the lovely dusk of Diane's eyes—and discontent—and something mute and wistful crying for expression.

"I've a proposition to make," said Carl lightly. "It's partly commercial, partly belated justice, partly eugenic and partly personal."

"Your money is quite gone, is it not?" asked Diane, raising finely arched expressive eyebrows.

"It is," admitted Carl ruefully. "My career as a bibulous meteor is over. Last night, after an exquisite shower of golden fire, I came tumbling to earth in the fashion of meteors, a disillusioned stone. In other words—stone broke. May I smoke?"

"Assuredly."

Carl lighted a cigarette.

"And the proposition which is at the same time commercial, eugenic and—er—personal?" reminded Diane curiously. Carl ignored the delicate note of sarcasm.

"It is merely," he said with a flash of impudence, "that you will marry me."

Diane's eyes widened.

"How frankly commercial!" she murmured.

"Isn't it?" said Carl. "And an excellent opportunity for belated justice as well. My mother, save for our infernal Salic law of inheritance, was entitled to half the Westfall estate."

Diane stared curiously at the fire-rimmed hem of her satin skirt. There was something of Carl's lazy impudence in the arch of her eyebrows.

"There yet remains the eugenic inducement and, I believe, a personal one!"

she hinted.

"Thank heaven," exclaimed Carl devoutly, "that we're both logicians. The eugenic consideration is that by birth and brains and breeding I am your logical mate."

Diane's eyes flashed with swift contempt.

"Birth!" she repeated.

The black demon of ungovernable temper leaped brutally from Carl's eyes. Leaning forward he caught the girl's hands in a vicious grip that hurt her cruelly though for all her swift color she did not flinch.

"Listen, Diane," he said, his face very white; "if there is one thing in this rotten world of custom and convention and immoral morality which I honestly respect, it is the memory of my mother. Therefore you will please abstain from contemptuous reference to her by look or word."

Diane met the clear, compelling rebuke of his fine eyes with unwavering directness.

"My mother," said Carl steadily, "was a fine, big, splendid woman, unconventional like all the Westfalls, and a century ahead of her time. Moreover, she had a code of morality quite her own. If Aunt Agatha's shocked sensibilities had not eliminated her from your life so early, contact with her broad understanding of things would have tempered your sex insularity." He glanced pityingly at Diane. "You've fire and vision, Diane," he said bluntly, "but you're intolerant. It's a Westfall trait." He laughed softly. "How scornfully you used to laugh and jeer at boys, because you were swifter of foot and keener of vision than any of them, because you could leap and run and swim like a wild thing! Intolerance again, Diane, even as a youngster!"

He rose restlessly, smiling down at her with a lazy expression of deference in his eyes.

"Wonderful, beautiful lady of fire and ebony!" he said gently, with a bewildering change of mood which brought the vivid color to Diane's dark cheek. "There's the wild, sweet wine of the forest in your very blood! And it's always calling!"

"Yes," nodded Diane wistfully, "it's always calling. How did you know?"

"By the wizardry of eye and intuition!" he laughed lightly. "And the personal consideration," he added pleasantly; "we've come at last to that."

A tide of color swept brightly over Diane's face.

"Surely, Carl," she exclaimed with a swift, level glance, "you don't mean that you care?"

"No," said Carl honestly, "I don't. I mean just this. Will you permit me to care? To-night as you stood there in the doorway I knew for the first time that, if I chose, I could love you very greatly."

"Love isn't like that," flashed Diane. "It comes unbidden."

"To different natures come different dawns of the immortal white fire!" shrugged Carl. "My love will be largely a matter of will. I'm armored heavily."

"For a golden key!" scoffed Diane, rising.

"Ah, well," said Carl impudently, "it was well worth a try! I'm sure I could love with all the fiery appurtenances of the Devil himself if I shed the armor."

CHAPTER IV

THE VOICE OF THE OPEN COUNTRY

"Aunt Agatha!" Diane rapped lightly at her aunt's bedroom door. "Are you asleep?"

"No, no indeed!" puffed Aunt Agatha forlornly. "Certainly not. When in the world did you come back from the farm, child? I've worried so! And like you, too, to come back as unexpectedly as you went." She opened the door wider for her niece to enter. "But as for sleep, Diane, I hope I'm not as callous as that. I shan't sleep a wink to-night, I'm sure of it."

Aunt Agatha dabbed ineffectually at her round, aggrieved eyes.

"Carl's a terrible responsibility for me, Diane," she went on, "though to be sure there have been wild nights when I've put cotton in my ears and locked the door and if I'd only remembered to do that I wouldn't have heard the glass crash—one of the Florentine set, too, I haven't the ghost of a doubt. I feel those things, Diane. Mamma, too, had a gift of feeling things she didn't know for sure—mamma did!—and the servants talk—of course they do!—who wouldn't? I must say, though, Carl's always kind to me; I will say that for him but—"

The excellent lady whose mental convolutions permitted her to speculate wildly in words with the least possible investment of ideas, rambled by

serpentine paths of complaint to a conversational *cul-de-sac* and trailed off in a tragic sniff.

Diane resolutely smothered her impatience.

"I—I only ran down overnight. Aunt Agatha," she said, "to—to tell you something—"

"You can't mean it!" puffed Aunt Agatha helplessly. "What in the world are you going back to the farm for? Dear me, Diane, you're growing notional—and farms are very damp in spring."

Diane walked away to the window and stood staring thoughtfully out at the metropolitan glitter of lights beyond.

"Oh, Aunt Agatha!" she exclaimed restlessly, "you can't imagine how very tired I grow of it all—of lights and cities and restaurants and everything artificial! Surely these city days and nights of silly frivolity are only the froth of life! Have you ever longed to sleep in the woods," she added abruptly, "with stars twinkling overhead and the moonlight showering softly through the trees?"

"I'm very sure I never have!" said Aunt Agatha with considerable decision. "And it's not at all likely I ever shall. There are bugs and things," she added vaguely, "and snakes that wriggle about."

"I've always wanted to lie and dream by a camp fire," mused Diane, unconscious of a certain startled flutter of Aunt Agatha's dressing gown, "to hear the wind rising in the forest and the lap of the lake against the shore." She wheeled abruptly, her eyes bright with excitement. "And I'm going to try it."

"To sleep by a lake in springtime!" gasped Aunt Agatha in great distress. "Diane, I beg of you, *don't* do it! I once knew a man who slept out somewhere—such a nice man, too!—and something bit him—a heron, I think, or a herring.

No! It couldn't have been either. Isn't it funny how I do forget! Strangest thing! But to sleep by a lake in springtime, think of that!"

"Oh, no, no, no, Aunt Agatha!" laughed Diane. "I didn't mean quite that. I'm merely going back to the Glade farm to-morrow to—" she glanced with furtive uncertainty at her aunt and halted. "Aunt Agatha, I've been planning a gypsy cart! There! It's out at last and I dreaded the telling! When the summer comes, I'm going to travel about in my wonderful house on wheels and live in the free, wild, open country!"

"I can't believe it!" said Aunt Agatha, staring. "I can't—I won't believe it!"

"Don't be a goose!" begged the girl happily. "All winter the voice of the open country has been calling—calling! There's quicksilver in my veins. See, Aunt Agatha, see the spring moon—the 'Planting Moon' an Indian girl I used to know in college called it! How gloriously it must be shining over silent woods and lakes, flashing silver on the pines and the ripples by the shore. And the sea, the great, wide, beautiful, mysterious sea droning under a million stars!"

"Think of that!" breathed Aunt Agatha incredulously. "A million stars! I can't believe it. But dear me, Diane, there are seas and stars and moons and things right here in New York."

With a swift flash of tenderness Diane slipped her arm about Aunt Agatha's perturbed shoulders.

"You're not going to mind at all!" she wheedled gently. "I'm sure of it. I'd have to go anyway. It's in my blood like the hint of summer in the air to-night."

Aunt Agatha merely stared. The Westfalls were congenital enigmas.

"A gypsy cart!" she gurgled presently, rising phoenix-like at last from a dumb-struck supineness. "A gypsy cart! Well! A wheelbarrow wouldn't have

surprised me more, Diane, a wheelbarrow with a motor!"

"Don't you remember Mrs. Jarley's wagon?" reminded Diane. "It had windows and curtains—"

"Surely," broke in Aunt Agatha with strained dignity, "you're not going in for waxworks like Mrs. Jarley!"

"Dear, no!" laughed Diane, with a sparkle of amusement in her eyes. "There are so many wild flowers and birds and legends to study I shouldn't have time!"

"Great heavens," murmured Aunt Agatha faintly, "my ears have gone queer like mother's."

"And maybe I'll not be back for a year," offered Diane calmly. "I can work south through the winter—"

Aunt Agatha fell tragically back in her chair and gasped.

"Didn't we take a whole year to motor over Europe?" demanded Diane impetuously. "And that was nothing like so fascinating as my gypsy house on wheels."

"If I could only have looked ahead!" breathed Aunt Agatha, shuddering. "If only I could have foreseen what notions you and Carl were fated to take in your heads, I'd have refused your grandfather's legacy. I would indeed. Here I no more than get Carl safely home from hunting Esquimaux or whatever it was up there by the North Pole—walravens, wasn't it, Diane?—well, walrus then!—than you decide to become a gypsy and sleep by a lake in springtime under a planting moon and stay outdoors all winter, collecting birds, when I fancied you were safely launched in society until you were married."

"But Aunt Agatha," flashed the girl, "I'm not at all anxious to marry."

Aunt Agatha burst into a calamitous shower of tears.

"Aunt Agatha," said Diane kindly, "why not remember that you're no longer burdened with the terrible responsibility of bringing Carl and me up? We're both mature, responsible beings."

Aunt Agatha dabbed defiantly at her eyes.

"Well," she said flatly, "I shan't worry, I just shan't. I'm past that. There was a time, but at my time of life I just can't afford it. You can do as you please. You can go shoot alligators if you want to, Diane, I shan't interpose another objection. But the trials that I've endured in my life through the Westfalls, nobody knows. I was a cheerful, happy person until I knew the Westfalls. And your father was notional too. I was a Gregg, Diane, until I married your uncle—he wasn't really your uncle, but a sort of cousin—and the Greggs, thank heavens! are mild and quiet and never wander about. Dear me, if a Gregg should take to sleeping by a lake in spring-time under a planting moon, I would be surprised, I would indeed! There was only one in our whole family who ever galloped about to any extent—Uncle Peter Gregg—and you really couldn't blame him. Bulls were perpetually running into him, and once he fell overboard and a whale chased him to shore. Isn't it funny? Strangest thing! But there, Diane, I wonder your poor dear grandfather doesn't turn straight over in his grave—I do indeed. Many and many a time your poor father tried him sorely—and Carl's mother too." Aunt Agatha sniffed meekly.

"Will you go alone?" she ventured, wiping her eyes.

"Bless your heart, Aunt Agatha, no!" laughed Diane radiantly. "I'm going to take old Johnny Jutes with me!"

Diane kissed her aunt lightly on the forehead.

"Well," said Aunt Agatha in melancholy resignation, "if you must turn gypsy,

my dear, and wander about the country, Johnny Jutes is the best one to go along. He's old and faithful and used to your whims and surely after thirty years of service, he won't break into tantrums."

Silver-sweet through the quiet house came the careless ripple of a flute, showering light and sensuous music. There was a dare-devil lilt and sway to the flippant strains and Aunt Agatha covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, Diane," she whispered, shuddering, "when he plays like that he drinks and drinks and drinks until morning."

"Poor Aunt Agatha!" said the girl pityingly. "What troublesome folk we Westfalls are! And I no less than Carl."

"No, no, my dear!" murmured Aunt Agatha. "It's only when Carl plays like that—that I grow afraid."

Aunt Agatha went to bed to listen tremblingly while the dare-devil dance of the flute tripped ghostlike through the corridors. And falling asleep with the laughing demon of wind and melody cascading wildly through the mad scene from Lucia, she dreamt that Carl had captured an Esquimau with his flute and weaving a suit of basket armor for him, had dispatched him by aeroplane to lead Diane's gypsy cart into the Everglades of Florida, the home-state of Norman Westfall until his ill-fated marriage.

CHAPTER V

THE PHANTOM THAT ROSE FROM THE BOTTLE

The demon of the flute laughed and fell silent. The house grew very quiet. A fresh log built its ragged shell of color within the library and Carl drank again and again, watching the play of firelight upon the amber liquor in his glass. It pleased him idly to build up a philosophy of whiskey, an impudent, fearless reverie of fact and fancy.

"So," he finished carelessly, "every bottle is a crystal temple to the great god Bacchus and who may know what phantom lurks within, ready to rise and grow from the fumes of its fragrant incense into a nebulous wraith of gigantic proportions. Many a bottle such as this has made history and destroyed it. A sparkling essence of tears and jest, of romance and passion and war and grotesquerie, of treachery and irony and blood and death, whose temper no man may know until he tests it through the alchemy of his brain and soul!"

To Starrett it gave a heavy courtesy; to Payson a mad buffoonery; to Wherry pathos; to Carl himself—ah!—there was the rub! To Carl its message was as capricious as the wind—a moon-mad chameleon changing its color with the fickle light. And in the bottle to-night lay a fierce, unreasoning resentment against Diane.

"Fool!" said Carl. "One mad, eloquent lie of love and she would have

softened. Women are all like that. Tell me," Carl stared whimsically into his glass as if it were a magic crystal of revelation, "why is it that when I am scrupulously honest no one understands? ... Why that mad stir of love-hunger to-night as Diane stood in the doorway? Why the swift black flash of hatred now? Are love and hatred then akin?"

The clock struck three. Carl's brain, flaming keen, master of the bottle save for its subtle inspiration of wounded pride and resentment, brooded morosely over Diane, over the defection of his parasitic companions, over the final leap into the abyss of parsimony and Diane's flash of contempt at the mention of his mother. Half of Diane's money was rightly his—his mother's portion. And he could love vehemently, cleanly, if he willed, with the delicate white fire which few men were fine enough to know... In the soft hollow of Diane's hand had lain the destiny of a man who had the will to go unerringly the way he chose... Love and hunger—they were the great trenchant appetites of the human race: one for its creation, the other for its perpetuation... To every man came first the call of passion; then the love-hunger for a perfect mate. The latter had come to him to-night as Diane stood in the doorway, a slender, vibrant flame of life keyed exquisitely for the finer, subtler things and hating everything else.

Still he drank, but the fires of hell were rising now in his eyes. There was treachery in the bottle... Diane, he chose to fancy, had refused him justice, salvation, respect to the memory of his mother! ... So be it! ... His to wrench from the mocking, gold-hungry world whatever he could and however he would... Only his mother had understood... And Diane had mocked her memory. Still there had been thrilling moments of tenderness for him in Diane's life... But Diane was like that—a flash of fire and then bewildering sweetness. There was the spot Starrett's glass had struck; there the ancient carved chair in which Diane had mocked his mother; there was red—blood-red in the dying log—and gold. Blood and gold—they were indissolubly linked one with the other and the demon of the bottle had danced wild dances with each of them. A mad trio! After all, there was only one beside his mother who had ever

understood him—Philip Poynter, his roommate at Yale. And Philip's lazy voice somehow floated from the fire to-night.

"Carl," he had said, "you've bigger individual problems to solve than any man I know. You could head a blood revolution in South America that would outrage the world; or devise a hellish philosophy of hedonism that by its very ingenuity would seduce a continent into barking after false gods. You've an inexplicable chemistry of ungovernable passions and wild whims and you may go through hell first but when the final test comes—you'll ring true. Mark that, old man, you'll ring true. I tell you I *know*! There's sanity and will and grit to balance the rest."

Well, Philip Poynter was a staunch optimist with oppressive ideals, a splendid, free-handed fellow with brains and will and infernal persistence.

Four o'clock and the log dying! The city outside was a dark, clinking world of milkmen and doubtful stragglers, Carl finished the whiskey in his glass and rose. His brain was very drunk—that he knew—for every life current in his body swept dizzily to his forehead, focusing there into whirling inferno, but his legs he could always trust. He stepped to the table and lurched heavily. Mocking, treacherous demon of the bottle! His legs had failed him. Fiercely he flung out his arm to regain his balance. It struck a candelabrum, a giant relic of ancient wood as tall as himself. It toppled and fell with its candled branches in the fire. Where the log broke a flame shot forth, lapping the dark wood with avid tongue. With a crackle the age-old wood began to burn.

Carl watched it with a slight smile. It pleased him to watch it burn. That would hurt Diane, for everything in this beautiful old Spanish room linked her subtly to her mother. Yes, it would hurt her cruelly. Beyond, at the other end of the table, stood a mate to the burning candlestick, doubtless a silent sentry at many a drinking bout of old when roistering knights gathered about the scarred slab of table-wood beneath his fingers. A pity though! Artistically the carven thing was splendid.

Cursing himself for a notional fool, Carl jerked the candlestick from the fire and beat out the flames. The heavy top snapped off in his hands. The falling wood disclosed a hollow receptacle below the branches ... a charred paper. Well, there was always some insane whim of Norman Westfall's coming to light somewhere and this doubtless was one of them.

The paper was very old and yellow, the handwriting unmistakably foreign. French, was it not? The firelight was too fitful to tell. Carl switched on the light in the cluster of old iron lanterns above the table and frowned heavily at the paper. No, it was the precise, formal English of a foreigner, with here and there a ludicrous error among the stilted phrases. And as Carl read, a gust of wild, incredulous laughter echoed suddenly through the quiet room. Again he read, cursing the dizzy fever of his head. Houdania! Houdania! Where was Houdania? Surely the name was familiar. With a superhuman effort of will he clenched his hands and jaws and sat motionless, seeking the difficult boon of concentration. Out of the maelstrom of his mind haltingly it came, and with it memory in panoramic flashes.

Once more he heard the clatter of cavalry galloping up a winding mountain road to a gabled city whose roofs and turrets glinted ruddily in the westering sun. There had been royalty abroad with a brilliant escort, handsome, dark-skinned men with a lingering trace of Arab about the eyes, who galloped rapidly by him up the winding road to the little kingdom in the mountains. Houdania!—yes that was it—of course. Houdania! A Lilliputian monarchy of ardent patriots. There had been a flaming sunset behind the turrets of a castle and he had climbed up—up—up to the gabled kingdom, seeking, away from the track of the tourist, relief from the exotic gayety of his rocketing over Europe. And high above the elfin kingdom on a wooded ravine where a silver rivulet leaped and sang along the mountain, a gray and lonely monastery had offered him a cell of retreat.

Houdania! Yes, he had found Houdania. Philip Poynter had told him of the monastery months before. Philip liked to seek and find the picturesque. Thus had he come into Andorra in the Pyrenees and Wisby in the Baltic. And he—Carl—had found Houdania. But what of it? Ah, yes, the burning candlestick—the paper—the paper! And again a gust of laughter drowned the fitful crackle of the fire. There was gold at his hand—great, tempting quantities of it!

"When the test comes, you'll ring true," came the crackle of Philip's voice from the fire. "Mark that, old man, you'll ring true. I tell you, I know." Well, Philip Poynter was his only friend. But Philip was off somewhere, gone out of his life this many a day in a characteristic burst of quixotism.

Carl laughed and shuddered, for a mad instant he held the tempting yellow paper above the fire—and drew it back, stared at the charred candlestick and laughed again—but there was nothing of laughter in his eyes. They were darkly ironic and triumphant. There was blood in the fire—and gold—and Diane had mocked his mother. With a groan Carl flung his arms out passionately upon the table, torn by a conflict of the strangely warring forces within him. And with his head drooping heavily forward upon his hands he lay there until the melancholy dawn grayed the room into shadowy distinctness, his angle of vision twisted and maimed by the demon of the bottle. The candlestick loomed strangely forth from the still grayness; the bottle took form; the yellowed paper glimmered on the table. Carl stirred and a spasm of mirthless laughter shook him.

"So," he said, "Philip Poynter loses—and I—I write to Houdania!"

So from the bottle rose a phantom of glittering gold and temptation to grow in time to a wraith of gigantic proportions. In the bottle to-night had lain tears and jest and love unending, romance and passion, treachery and irony—blood and the shadow of Death.

CHAPTER, VI

BARON TREGAR

Lilac and wistaria flowered royally. Carpenter, wheelwright and painter departed. The trim green wagon, picked out gayly in white, windowed and curtained and splendidly equipped for the fortunes of the road, creaked briskly away upon its pilgrimage, behind a pair of big-boned piebald horses from the Westfall stables, with Johnny at the reins. On the seat beside him Diane radiantly waved adieu to her aunt, who promptly collapsed in a chair on the porch and dabbed violently at her eyes.

"I shall never get over it," sniffed Aunt Agatha tragically. "Carl may say what he will, I never shall. But now that I've come up here to see her off, I've done my duty, I have indeed. And I do hope Carl hasn't any wild ideas for the summer—I couldn't stand it. Allan, as long as Miss Diane is camping within reasonable distance of the farm, you'd better take the run-about each night and find her and see if she's all right—and brush the snakes and bugs and things out of camp. If everything wild in the forest collected around the camp fire, like as not she wouldn't see them until they bit her."

The boy shifted a slim, bare leg and sniggered.

"Miss Westfall," he said, "Miss Diane she says she's a-goin' to a spot by the river and camp a week an'—an' if she finds anybody a-follerin' or spyin' on her from the farm, she'll skin him alive an'—an' them black eyes o' her'n snapped fire when she said it. An' Johnny, he's got weepens 'nough with him to fight

pirates."

Aunt Agatha groaned and rocking dolorously back and forth upon the porch reviewed the calamitous possibilities of the journey.

But the restless young nomad on the road ahead, sniffing the rare, sweet air of early summer, had already relegated the memory of her long-suffering aunt to the forgotten things of civilization. For the summer world, sweet with the scent of wild flowers, was very young, with young leaves, young grass and flowering, sun-warm hedges, and beyond the Sherrill place on the wooded hill, the sun flamed yellow through the hemlocks.

"Oh, Johnny Jutes! Oh, Johnny Jutes!" sang the girl happily, with the color of the wild rose in her sun-brown cheeks. "It's good—it's good to be alive!"

With a chuckle of enthusiasm Johnny cracked his whip and opined that it was.

Now even as the great green van rolled forth upon the country roads, bound for an idyllic spot by the river where Diane had planned to camp a week, two men appeared upon the wide, white-pillared Sherrill porch, smoking and idly admiring the bluish hills and the rolling meadowlands below bright with morning sunlight. To the east lay the silver glimmer of a tree-fringed lake; beyond, a church spire among the trees and a winding country road traveled by the solitary van of green and white.

"A singular conveyance, is it not, Poynter?" inquired the older man, his careful articulation blurred by a pronounced foreign accent. Staring intently at the sunlit road, he added: "Is it a common mode of travel—here in America?"

The younger man, a lean, sinewy chap with singularly fine eyes of blue above lean, tanned cheeks, frowned thoughtfully.

"By no means," said he pleasantly. "Indeed it's quite new to me. Seems to have blowy white things at the sides like window curtains, doesn't it?"

"A nomadic young woman, I am told," shrugged the older man carelessly. He stood watching the dusty trail of the nomad with narrowed, thoughtful eyes, unaware that his companion's eyes had wandered somewhat expectantly to the Westfall lake.

"Baron Tregar!" whispered Ann Sherrill in a remote corner of the veranda to a girl she had brought up to the farm with her late the night before. "Has a *real* air of distinction, hasn't he, Susanne? And such deep, dark, *compelling* eyes. Rather Arabic, I think, but mother says Magyar. Dick says he's immensely interested in the war possibilities of aeroplanes and fearfully patriotic. Touring the States, I believe. Dad picked him up in Washington. Philip's teaching him to fly. Philip was up once before, you know, in the spring and Dad urged him to come up again and bring the Baron along to learn aeroplaning. Philip *Poynter*, of course, the Baron's secretary!" in scandalized italics. "Didn't you know, *really?* ... *The Philip Poynter...* And I say it's absolutely *sinful* for a man to be so good-looking as long as the world's monogamous."

"Quarreled with his father or something, didn't he?" asked Susanne vaguely.

"Quarreled!" exclaimed Ann righteously. "Well, I should say he did. My dear, the young man's temper simply splintered into a million pieces and he hasn't found them yet. Flatly refused to take a *cent* of his father's money because he'd discovered it was made dishonestly. *Think* of it! And Dad says it's true. Old Poynter is a pirate, an unscrupulous, money-mad, villainous old pirate and he did something or other most unpleasant to Dad in Wall Street. And would you *believe* it, Susanne, Philip went fuming off huffily to some ridiculous little mountain kingdom in Europe that he was awfully keen about—Houdania—and rented himself out as a secretary to Baron Tregar. Just *imagine*! Dick says he organized an aviation department there and won some kind of a prize for an improved model and in the midst of it all, Susanne, Philip's

grandfather up and died, after quarreling for years and *years* with the whole family, and left Philip *all* his money! *I* think Philip's quarrel with his father pleased him. But the very queerest part is that Philip actually *likes* to work and dabble in foreign politics and he flatly refused to give up his job! Isn't it romantic? Philip was *always* keen for adventure. Dick says you never could put your finger on a spot on the map and say comfortably, 'Philip Poynter's here!' for most likely Philip Poynter was bolting furiously somewhere else!"

Unaware of Susanne's furtive interest in his career, Philip scanned the calm, unruffled waters of the Westfall lake and sighing turned back to his chief. There was a tempting drone of motors back among the hangars.

"We fly this morning?" he inquired smiling.

"Unfortunately not," regretted the Baron, and led the way indoors to a room which Mrs. Sherrill had hospitably insisted upon regarding as a private den of work and consultation for the Baron and his secretary.

"There is a mission of exceeding delicacy," began Baron Tregar slowly, "which I feel I must inflict upon you." His deep, penetrating eyes lingered intently upon Philip's face. "It concerns the singular conveyance of green and white and the lady within it."

Philip looked frankly astonished.

"I take it then," he suggested, "that you know the nomadic lady, Baron Tregar?"

"No," said the Baron.

Philip stared.

"Your Excellency is pleased to jest," he said politely.

"On the contrary," said the Baron, "I am at a loss for suitable words in which to express my singular request. I am assured of your interest, Poynter?"

"Of my interest, assuredly!" admitted Philip. "My compliance," he added fairly, "depends, of course, upon the nature of the mission."

"It is absurdly simple," said the Houdanian suavely. "Merely to discover whether or not the nomadic lady feels any exceptional interest—in Houdania. For the information to be acquired in a careless, disinterested manner without arousing undue interest, requires, I think, an American of brains and breeding, a compatriot of the nomad. It has occurred to me that you are equipped by a habit of courtesy and tact to—arrive accidentally in the path of the caravan—"

"I thank you!" said Philip dryly. "I prefer," he added stiffly, "to confine my diplomatic activities to more conventional channels."

"When I assure you," purred the Baron with his maddening precision of speech, "that this information is of peculiar value to me and without immediate significance to the lady herself, I am sure that you will not feel bound to withhold your—hum—your coöperation in so slight a personal inconvenience, singular as it may all seem to you, I am right?"

Philip reddened uncomfortably.

"I am to understand that I would undertake this peculiar mission equipped with no further information than you have offered?"

"Exactly so," said the Baron. "I must beg of you to undertake it without question."

"Pray believe," flashed Philip, "that I am not inclined to question. That fact," he added coldly, "is in itself a handicap."

"The lady's name," explained the Baron quietly, "is Westfall—Diane Westfall."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Philip and savagely bit his lip.

"Ah, then you know the lady!" said the Baron softly.

"I regret," said Philip formally, "that I have not had the honor of meeting Miss Westfall." But he saw vividly again a girl straight and slender as a silver birch, with firm, wind-bright skin and dark, mocking eyes. There were hemlocks and a dog—and Dick Sherrill had been talkative over billiards the night before.

"Miss Westfall," added Philip guilelessly, "is the owner of the Glade Farm below here in the valley."

"Ah, yes," nodded Tregar. "It is so I have heard." His glance lingered still upon Philip's face in subtle inquiry. Bending its Circean head, Temptation laughed lightly in Philip Poynter's eyes. The girl in the caravan was winding away by dusty roads—out of his life perhaps. And singular as the mission was, its aim was harmless.

"Our lady," said the Baron smoothly, "camps by night. From an aeroplane one may see much—a camp—a curl of smoke—a caravan. Later one may walk and, walking, one may lose his way—to find it again with perfect ease by means of a forest camp fire."

Somehow on the Baron's tongue the escapade became insidious duplicity. Philip flushed, acutely conscious of a significant stirring of his conscience.

"I may fly with Sherrill this afternoon," he said with marked reluctance.

"And at sunset?"

"I may walk," said Philip, shrugging.

"Permit me," said the Baron gratefully as he rose, "to thank you. The service is—ah—invaluable."

Uncomfortably Philip accepted his release and went lightly up the stairs.

"I am a fool," said Philip. "But surely Walt Whitman must have understood for he said it all in verse. 'I am to wait, I do not doubt, I am to meet you again,'" quoted Philip under his breath; "I am to see to it that I do not lose you!"

CHAPTER VII

THEMAR

The door which led into the Baron's bedroom from his own was slightly ajar. Philip, about to close it, fancied he heard the stealthy rustle of paper beyond and swung it noiselessly back, halting in silent interest upon the threshold.

Themar, the Baron's Houdanian valet, was intently transcribing upon his shirt-cuff, the contents of a paper which lay uppermost in the drawer of a small portable desk.

Catlike, Philip stole across the room. The man's hand was laboriously reproducing upon the linen an intricate message in cipher.

"Difficult, too, isn't it?" sympathized Philip smoothly at his elbow.

With a sharp cry, Themar wheeled, his small, shifting eyes black with hate. They wavered and fell beneath the level, icy stare of the American. Philip's fingers slipped viselike along the other's wrists and Philip's voice grew more acidly polite.

"My dear Themar," he regretted, falling unconsciously into the language of his chief, "I must spoil the symmetry of your wardrobe. The hieroglyphical cuff, if you please."

Themar's snarl was unintelligible. Smiling, Philip unbuttoned the stiff band of

linen and drew it slowly off.

"A pity!" said he with gentle, sarcastic apology in his eyes. "Such perfect work! And after all that infernal bother of stealing the key!"

Philip lightly dropped the cuff into the pocket of his coat.

"And the key, Themar," he reminded gently, "the key to the Baron's desk? ... Ah, so it's still here. Excellent! And now that the drawer is locked again—"

The hall door creaked. Simultaneously Themar and Philip wheeled. The Baron stood in the doorway.

Philip smiled and bowed.

"Excellency," said he, "Themar in an over-zealous desire to rearrange your private papers has acquired your private key and I have taken the liberty of confiscating it, knowing that you prize its possession. Permit me to return it now."

"Thank you, Poynter!" said the Baron and glanced keenly at Themar. "It is but now that I had missed it."

"Excellency," burst forth Themar desperately, "I found it this morning on the rug."

"But," purred the Baron, "why seek a keyhole?"

Themar's dark face was ashen.

Philip, with a wholesome distaste for scenes, slipped away.

"Excellency," burst forth Themar passionately as the door closed, "it is unfair
—"

The Baron raised his hand in a gesture of warning.

"Permit me, Themar," he said coldly as the sound of Philip's footsteps died away, "permit me to remind you that my secretary is quite unaware of our peculiar relations. He is laboring at present under the necessary delusion that your arrival here was entirely the result of my fastidious distaste for the personal services of anyone but a fellow countryman. Presumably I had cabled home for you. I prefer," he added, "that he continue to think so."

Themar's eyes flashed resentfully.

"Excellency," he said sullenly, "it is unfair that I am denied the knowledge of detail that I need. That is why I sought to read the cipher."

"And yet, Themar," said the Baron softly, "I fancy Ronador has told you—something—enough!" He shrugged, his impenetrable eyes narrowing slowly. "But that I need you," he said evenly, "but that your knowledge of English makes you an invaluable ally—and one not easily replaced—I would send you back to Houdania—disgraced! As it is, we are hedged about with peculiar difficulties and I must use—and watch you."

He glanced significantly at the desk drawer and thence to Themar's dark, unscrupulous face, resentful and defiant.

"Now as for the cryptogram which tempted you so sorely," went on the Baron smoothly. "Its chief mission, as I have repeatedly assured you, was to convert my journey of pleasure in America into one of immediate—hum—service. I have spoken to you of a certain paper—"

"There was more," said Themar sullenly.

"Merely," smiled the Baron with engaging candor, "that you are fully equipped with definite instructions which I am to see are fulfilled."

"There is a girl," said Themar bluntly.

The Baron stared.

"What?" he rumbled sharply.

"I—I learned of her and of the cipher in Houdania!" stammered Themar.

"You know something more of detail than you need to know," said the Baron dryly. "Moreover," he added icily, "you will confine your professional attentions to the other sex. You are sure about the paper?"

"Yes."

"Your trip to New York last night was—hum—uneventful?"

"Yes."

"You will go again to-night?"

"It is unnecessary. Granberry is at the Westfall farm."

"Ah!"

"But, Excellency," reminded Themar glibly, "there is still the girl—" Deep, compelling, Tregar's eyes burned steadily into menace.

"Must I repeat—"

"Excellency," stammered Themar blanching.

"You may go!" said the Baron curtly.

There had been no word of the scribbled cuff, Themar remembered. And

surely one may steal away one's own.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER SUNSET

The sun had set. Back from his flight over the hills with Sherrill, Philip had bathed and shaved, whistling thoughtfully to himself. Now as he descended the steep Sherrill lane to the valley, ravine and hollow were already dark with twilight. From the rustling trees arching the lane overhead came the occasional sleepy chirp and flutter of a bird. Off somewhere in the gathering dusk a lonely owl hooted eerily. Still there was storm in the warm, sweet air to-night and back yonder over the hills to the north, the sky brightened fitfully with lightning.

Slipping his hand carelessly into his coat pocket for a pipe, Philip laughed.

"My Lord!" said he lightly. "The hieroglyphical cuff! I should have given that to the Baron... Themar," added Philip, packing his pipe, "is an infernal boulder!"

Diane's camp lay barely two miles to the west. Homing at sunset Philip had veered and circled over it. Now as he turned westward toward the river, the nature of his errand chafed him sorely.

"Nor can I see," mused Philip, puffing uncomfortably at his pipe, "why in the devil he wants to know!"

A soft, warm nose suddenly insinuated itself into his hand with a frank bid for attention and Philip turned. A shaggy, soft-footed shadow was wagging along

at his heels, Dick's favorite setter.

"Hello, old top!" exclaimed Philip cheerfully. "When did you hit the trail?"

Old Top barked joyously but didn't appear to remember.

"Well," said Philip, lazily patting the dog's head, "you're welcome anyway. I'm a diplomat to-night," he added humorously, "bound upon a 'mission of exceeding delicacy' and only a companion of your extraordinary reticence and discretion would be welcome."

Man and dog turned aside into a crossroad. It was very dark now, the only spot of cheer save for the lightning behind the hills, the coal of Philip's pipe.

"Tell me, old man," begged Philip whimsically, "what would you do? May we not wander casually into camp and look at my beautiful gypsy lady without fussing unduly about this infernal mission? More and more do we dislike it. And in the morning we may respectfully rebel. Ah, an excellent point, Nero. To be sure our chief will be very smooth and insistent but we ourselves, you recall, have possibilities of extreme firmness. And the lady is Diane, though we only call her that, old top, among ourselves.

"Splendid decision!" exclaimed Philip presently with intense satisfaction. "Nero, you've been an umpire. We'll rebel. Nevertheless, we must assure ourselves that the camp of our lady is ready for storm."

It was. Following a forest path, Philip presently caught the flicker of a camp fire ahead. There was a huge tarpaulin over the wagon and a canopy above the horses. Storm-proof tents loomed dimly among the trees. A brisk little man whose apple cheeks and grizzled whiskers Philip instantly approved, trotted importantly about among the horses, humming a jerky melody. Johnny was fifty and looked a hundred, but those unwary ones who had felt the steely grip of his sinewy fingers were apt evermore to respect him.

Diane was piling wood upon the fire with the careless grace of a splendid young savage. The light of the camp fire danced ruddily upon her slim, brown arms and throat bared to the rising wind. A beautiful, restless gypsy of fire and wind, she looked, at one with the storm-haunted wood about her.

There came a patter of rain upon the forest leaves. The tents were flapping and the fire began to flare. There were curious wind crackles all about him, and Nero had begun to sniff and whine. Somewhere—off there among the trees—Philip fancied he caught the stealthy pad of a footfall and the crackle of underbrush. Every instinct of his body focusing wildly upon the thought of harm to Diane, he whirled swiftly about, colliding as he did so with something—vague, formless, heavy—that leaped, crouching, from the shadows and bore him to the ground. The lightning flared savagely upon steel. Philip felt a blinding thud upon his head, a sharp, stinging agony along his shoulder.

Somewhere in the forest—a great way off he thought—a dog was barking furiously.

CHAPTER IX

IN A STORM-HAUNTED WOOD

"The storm is coming!" exclaimed Diane with shining eyes. "Button the flaps by the horses, Johnny. We're in for it to-night. Hear the wind!"

Overhead the gale tore ragged gaps among the fire-shadowed trees, unshrouding a storm-black sky. Fearlessly—the old wild love of storm and wind singing powerfully in her heart—the girl rose from the fire and faced the tempest.

Rex pressed fearfully beside her, whining. Off there somewhere in the wind and darkness a dog had barked. It came now again, high above the noise of the wind, a furious, frightened barking.

"Johnny!" exclaimed Diane suddenly. "There must be something wrong over there. Better go see. No, not that way. More to the east." And Johnny, whose soul for thirty years had thirsted for adventure, briskly seized an ancient pistol and charged off through the forest.

But Aunt Agatha had talked long and tearfully to Johnny. Wherefore, reluctant to leave his charge alone in the rain and dark, he turned back.

"Go!" said Diane with a flash of impatience.

Johnny went. Looking back over his shoulder he saw the girl outlined vividly

against the fire, skirts and hair flying stormily about her in the wind. So might the primal woman stand ere the march of civilization had over-sexed her.

The wind was growing fiercer now, driving the rain about in angry gusts. Thunder cannonaded noisily overhead.

Veering suddenly in a new direction—for in the roar of the storm the bark of the dog seemed curiously to shift—Johnny collided violently with a dark figure running wildly through the forest. Both men fell. Finding his invisible assailant disposed viciously to contest detention, Johnny fell in with his mood and buried his long, lean fingers cruelly in the other's throat.

The fortunes of war turned speedily. Johnny's victim squirmed desperately to his feet and bounded away through the forest.

Now as they ran, stumbling and finding their way as best they might in the glitter of lightning, there came from the region of the camp the unmistakable crack of a pistol. Two shots in rapid succession followed—an interval of five seconds or so—and then another. The final trio was the shot signal of the old buffalo hunters which Diane had taught to Johnny.

"Where are you?" barked the signal.

Drawing his ancient pistol as he ran, Johnny, in vain, essayed the answer. The veteran missed fire. After all, reflected Johnny uncomfortably, one signal was merely to locate him. If another came—

The lightning, flaming in a vivid sheet, revealed a lonely road ahead and on the road by the farther hedge, a man desperately cranking a long, dark car. The lamps of the car were unlighted.

With a yell of startled anger, the man who bore the bleeding marks of Johnny's fingers redoubled his speed and darted crazily for the roadway. Before

he had reached it the man by the car had leaped swiftly to the wheel and rolled away.

From the forest came again the signal: "Where are you?"

Johnny groaned. Frantically he tried the rebel again. It readily spat its answer this time, an instantaneous duplicate of shots.

"I'm here. What do you want?"

In the lightning glare the man ahead made off wildly across the fields.

Running, Johnny cocked his ears for the familiar assurance of one shot.

"All right," it would mean; "I only wanted to know where you are," but it did not come.

Instead—two shots again in rapid succession—an interval—and then another.

"I am in serious trouble," barked the signal in the forest. "Come as fast as you can."

With a groan Johnny abandoned the chase and retraced his steps. Thus a perverse Fate ever snipped the thread of an embryo adventure.

A light flickered dully among the trees to the east. Johnny cupped his hands and yodeled. The light moved. A little later as he crashed hurriedly through the underbrush, Diane called to him. She was holding a lantern high above something on the ground, her face quite colorless.

"I'm glad you're here!" she said. "It's the aviator, Johnny. He's hurt—"

The aviator stirred.

"He's comin' 'round," said Johnny peering down into the white face in the aureole of lantern-light. "The rain in his face likely... Well, young fellow, what do you think of yourself, eh?"

"Not much," said Philip blankly and stared about him.

"Can you follow us to the camp fire yonder?" asked Diane compassionately.

Philip, though evidently very dizzy, thought likely he could, and he did. That his shoulder was wet and very painful, he was well aware, though somehow he had forgotten why. Moreover, his head throbbed queerly.

There came a tent and a bed and a blur of incidents.

Mr. Poynter dazedly resigned himself to a general atmosphere of unreality.

CHAPTER X

ON THE RIDGE ROAD

At the Westfall farm as the electric vanguard of the storm flashed brightly over the valley, the telephone had tinkled. In considerable distress of mind Aunt Agatha answered it.

"I—I'm sure I don't know when he will be home," she said helplessly after a while... "He went barely a minute ago and very foolish too, I said, with the storm coming... At dinner he spoke some of going to the camp—Miss Westfall's camp... I—I really don't know. ... I wish I did but I don't."

The lightning blazed at the window and left it black. Beyond in the lane, a car with glaring headlights was rolling rapidly toward the gateway. Aunt Agatha hung up with an aggrieved sniff.

Catching the reflection of the headlights she hurried to the window.

"Carl! Carl!" she called through the noise of wind and thunder.

The car came to a halt with a grinding shudder of brakes.

"Yes?" said Carl patiently. "What is it, Aunt Agatha?"

"Dick Sherrill phoned," said his aunt plaintively. "I thought you'd gone. He wanted you to come up and play bridge. Oh, Carl, I—I do wish you wouldn't motor about in a thunder shower. I once knew a man—such a nice, quiet fellow

too—and very domestic in his habits—but he would ramble about and the lightning tore his collar off and printed a picture of a tree on his spine. Think of that!"

Carl laughed. He was raincoated and hatless.

"An arboreal spine!" said he, rolling on. "Lord, Aunt Agatha, that was tough! Moral—don't be domestic!"

"Carl!" quavered his aunt tearfully.

Again, throbbing like a giant heart in the darkness, the car halted. Carl tossed his hair back from his forehead with a smothered groan, but said nothing. He was always kinder and less impatient to Aunt Agatha in a careless way than Diane.

"Will you take Diane an extra raincoat and rubbers?" appealed Aunt Agatha pathetically. "Like as not the pockets of the other are full of bugs and things."

"Aunt Agatha," grumbled Carl kindly, "why fuss so? Diane's equipped with nerve and grit and independence enough to look out for herself."

Aunt Agatha sniffed and closed the window.

"I shan't worry!" she said flatly. "I shan't do it. If Carl comes home with a tree on his spine, it's his own concern. Why *I* should have to endure all this, however, I can't for the life of me see. I've one consolation anyway. A good part of my life's over. Death will be a welcome relief after what *I've* gone through!"

Shrugging as the window closed Carl drove on rapidly down the driveway.

It pleased him to ride madly with the wind and storm. The gale, laden with dust and grit, bit and stung and tore rudely at his coat and hair. The great lamps

of the car flashed brilliantly ahead, revealing the wind-beaten grasses by the wayside. Somewhere back in his mind there was a troublesome stir of conscience. It had bothered him for days. It had driven him irresistibly to-night at dinner to speak of visiting his cousin's camp, though he bit his lip immediately afterward in a flash of indecision. The turbulent night had seemed of a sort to think things over. Moonlit fields and roads were enervating. Storm whipping a man's blood into fire and energy—biting his brain into relentless activity!—there was a thing for you.

Whiskey did not help. Last night it had treacherously magnified the voice of conscience into a gibing roar.

Money! Money! The ray of the lamps ahead, the fork of the lightning, the flickering gaslight there at the crossroads, they were all the color of gold and like gold—of a flame that burned. Yes, he must have money. No matter what the voice, he must have money.

At the crossroads he halted suddenly. To the south now lay his cousin's camp, to the north the storm.

Perversely Carl wheeled about and drove to the north. A conscience was a luxury for a rich man. Let the thing he had done, sired by the demon of the bottle and mothered by the hell-pit of his flaming passions, breed its own results.

It was a fitful nerve-straining task, waiting, and he had waited now for weeks. Waiting had bred the Voice in his conscience, waiting had bored insidious holes in his armor of flippant philosophy through which had crept remorse and bitter self-contempt; once it had brought a flaming resolve brutally to lay it all before his cousin and taunt her with a crouching ghost buried for years in a candlestick.

Then there were nights like to-night when the ghastly hell-pit was covered,

and when to tell her squarely what the future held, without taunt or apology, stirred him on to ardent resolution.

But alas! the last was but an intermittent witch-fire leading him through the marsh after the elusive ghosts of finer things, to flicker forlornly out at the end and abandon him in a pit of blackness and mockery.

Very well, then; he would tell Diane of the yellowed paper; he would tell her to-night. However he played the game there was gold at the end.

He laughed suddenly and shrugged and swept erratically into a lighter mood of impudence and daring. There was rain beating furiously in his face and his hair was wet. Well, the car pounding along beneath him had known many such nights of storm and wild adventure. It had pleased him frequently to mock and gibe at death, with the wheel in his hand and a song on his lips, and now wind and storm were tempting him to ride with the devil.

So, dashing wildly through the whirl of dirt and wind, heavy with the odor of burnt oil, he bent to the wheel, every nerve alert and leaping. As the great car jumped to its limit of speed, he fell to singing an elaborate sketch of opera in an insolent, dare-devil voice of splendid timbre, the exhaust, unmuffled, pounding forth an obligato.

The lightning flared. It glittered wickedly upon the unlighted lamps of a car rolling rapidly toward him. With a squirt of mud and a scatter of flying pebbles, Carl swung far to the side of the road and slammed on his brakes, skidding dangerously. The other car, heading wildly to the left, went crashing headlong into a ditch from which a man crawled, cursing viciously in a foreign tongue.

"You damned fool!" thundered Carl in a flash of temper. "Where are your lights?"

The man did not reply.

Carl, whose normal instincts were friendly, sprang solicitously from the car.

"I beg your pardon," said he carelessly. "Are you hurt?"

"No," said the other curtly.

"French," decided Carl, marking the European intonation. "Badly shaken up, poor devil!—and not sure of his English. That accounts for his peculiar silence. Monsieur," said he civilly in French. "I am not prepared to deliver a homily upon wild driving, but it's well to drive with lights when roads are dark and storm abroad."

"I have driven so few times," said the other coldly in excellent English, "and the storm and erratic manner of your approach were disquieting."

"*Touché!*" admitted Carl indifferently. "You have me there. Your choice of a practice night, however," he added dryly, "was unique, to say the least."

He crossed the road, frowned curiously down at the wrecked machine and struck a match.

"*Voilà!*" he exclaimed, staring aghast at the bent and splintered mass, "*c'est magnifique, Monsieur!*"

A sheet of flame shot suddenly from the match downward and wrapped the wreck in fire. Conscious now of the fumes of leaking gasoline, Carl leaped back.

"Monsieur," said he ruefully, and turned. The reflection of the burning oil revealed Monsieur some feet away, running rapidly. Angered by the man's unaccountable indifference, Carl leaped after him. He was much the better runner of the two and presently swung his prisoner about in a brutal grip and marched him savagely back to the blazing car. Again there was an indefinable

peculiarity about the manner of the man's surrender.

"It is conventional, Monsieur," said Carl evenly, "to betray interest and concern in the wreck of one's property. *Voilà!* I have effectively completed what you had begun. If I am not indifferent, surely one may with reason look for a glimmer of concern from you."

Shrugging, the man stared sullenly at the car, a hopeless torch now suffusing the lonely road with light. There was a certain suggestion of racial subtlety in the careful immobility of his face, but his dark, inscrutable eyes were blazing dangerously.

Carl's careless air of interest altered indefinitely. Inspecting his chafing prisoner now with narrowed, speculative eyes which glinted keenly, he fell presently to whistling softly, laughed and with tantalizing abruptness fell silent again. Immobile and subtle now as his silent companion, he stared curiously at the other's fastidiously pointed beard, at the dark eyes and tightly compressed lips, and impudently proffered his cigarettes. They were impatiently declined.

"Monsieur is pleased," said Carl easily, "to reveal many marked peculiarities of manner, owing to the unbalancing fact, I take it, that his mind is relentlessly pursuing one channel. Monsieur," went on Carl, lazily lighting his own cigarette and staring into his companion's face with a look of level-eyed interest, "Monsieur has been praying ardently for—opportunities, is it not so? 'I will humor this mad fool who motors about in the rain like an operatic comet!' says Monsieur inwardly, 'for I am, of course, a stranger to him. Then, without arousing undue interest, I may presently escape into the storm whence I came—er—driving atrociously.'"

The man stared.

"Monsieur," purred Carl audaciously, "is doubtless more interested in—let us say—camp fires for instance, than such a vulgar blaze as yonder car."

"One is powerless," returned the other haughtily, "to answer riddles."

Carl bowed with curiously graceful insolence.

"As if one could even hope to break such splendid nerve as that!" he murmured appreciatively. "It is an impassiveness that comes only with training. Monsieur," he added imperturbably, "I have had the pleasure—of seeing you before."

"It is possible!" shrugged the other politely.

"Under strikingly different conditions!" pursued Carl reminiscently. There was a disappointing lack of interest in the other's face.

"Even that is possible," assented the foreigner stiffly, "Environment is a shifting circumstance of many colors. The honor of your acquaintance, however, I fear is not mine."

Carl's eyes, dark and cold as agate, compelled attention.

"My name," said he deliberately, "is Granberry, Carl Westfall Granberry."

The brief interval of silence was electric.

"It is a pity," said the other formally, "that the name is unfamiliar. Monsieur Granberi, the storm increases. My ill-fated car, I take it, requires no further attention." He stopped short, staring with peculiar intentness at the road beyond. In the faint sputtering glow of the embers by the wayside his face looked white and strained.

A slight smile dangerously edged the American's lips. With a careless feint of glancing over his shoulder, he tightened every muscle and leaped ahead. The violent impact of his body bore his victim, cursing, to the ground.

"Ah!" said Carl wresting a revolver from the other's hand, "I thought so! My friend, when you try a trick like that again, guard your hands before you fall to staring. A fool might have turned—and been shot in the back for his pains, eh? Monsieur," he murmured softly, pinioning the other with his weight and smiling insolently, "we've a long ride ahead of us. Privacy, I think, is essential to the perfect adjustment of our future relations. There are one or two inexplicable features—"

The eyes of the other met his with a level glance of desperate hostility.

With an undisciplined flash of temper, Carl brutally clubbed his assailant into insensibility with the revolver butt and dragged him heavily to the tonneau of his car, throbbing unheeded in the darkness. Having assured himself of his guest's continued docility by the sinister adjustment of a handkerchief, an indifferent rag or so from the repair kit and a dirty rope, he covered the motionless figure carelessly with a robe and sprang to the wheel, whistling softly. With a throb, the great car leaped, humming, to the road.

At midnight the lights of Harlem lay ahead. The ride from the hills, three hours of storm and squirting gravel, had been made with the persistent whir and drone of a speeding engine. But once had it rested black and silent in a lonely road of dripping trees, while the driver hurried into a roadside tavern and telephoned.

Now, with a purring sigh as a bridge loomed ahead, the car slackened and stopped. Carl slowly lighted a cigarette. At the end of the bridge a straggler struck a match and flung it lightly in the river, the disc of his cigar a fire-point in the shadows.

The car rolled on again and halted.

A stocky young man behind the fire-point emerged from the darkness and climbed briskly into the tonneau.

"Hello, Hunch," said Carl.

"Lo!" said Hunch and stared intently at the robe.

"Take a look at him," invited Carl carelessly. "It's not often you have an opportunity of riding with one of his brand. He's in the *Almanach de Gotha*."

"Tell yuh say!" said Hunch largely, though the term had conveyed no impression whatever to his democratic mind.

Cautiously raising the robe Hunch Dorrigan stared with interest at the prisoner he was inconspicuously to assist into the empty town house of the Westfalls.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE CAMP OF THE GYPSY LADY

From a garish dream of startling unpleasantness, Philip Poynter stirred and opened his eyes.

"Well, now," he mused uncomfortably, "this is more like it! This is the sort of dream to have! I wonder I never had sufficient wit to carve out one like this before. Birds and trees and wind fussing pleasantly around a fellow's bed—and by George! those birds are making coffee!"

There was a cheerful sound of flapping canvas and vanishing glimpses of a woodland shot with sun-gold, of a camp fire and a pair of dogs romping boisterously. Moreover, though his bed was barely an inch from the ground to which it was staked over a couple of poles, it was exceedingly springy and comfortable. Not yet thoroughly awake, Philip put out an exploring hand.

"Flexible willow shoots!" said he drowsily, "and a rush mat! Oberon had nothing on me. Hello!" A dog romped joyfully through the flapping canvas and barked. Philip's dream boat docked with a painful thud of memory. Wincing painfully he sat up.

"Easy, old top!" he advised ruefully, as the dog bounded against him. "It would seem that we're an invalid with an infernal bump on the back of our head and a bandaged shoulder." He peered curiously through the tent flap and whistled softly. "By George, Nero," he added under his breath, "we're in the

camp of my beautiful gypsy lady!"

There was a bucket of water by the tent flap. Philip painfully made a meager toilet, glanced doubtfully at the coarse cotton garment which by one of the mystifying events of the previous night had replaced the silk shirt he had worn from Sherrill's, and emerged from the tent.

It was early morning. A fresh fire was crackling merrily about a pot of coffee. Beyond through the trees a river of swollen amber laughed in the morning sunlight under a cloudless sky. The ridge of a distant woodland was deeply golden, the rolling meadow lands of clover beyond the river bright with iridescent dew. But the storm had left its trail of broken rush and grasses and the heavy boughs of the woodland dripped forgotten rain.

A girl presently emerged from the trees by the river and swung lightly up the forest path, her scarlet sweater a vivid patch in the lesser life and color all about her.



Diane swung lightly up the forest path.

[Illustration: Diane swung lightly up the forest path.]

"Surely," she exclaimed, meeting Philip's glance with one of frank and very pleasant concern, "surely you must be very weak! Why not stay in bed and let Johnny bring your breakfast to you?"

"Lord, no!" protested Philip, reddening. "I feel ever so much better than I look."

"I'm glad of that," said Diane, smiling. "You lost a lot of blood and bumped your head dreadfully on a jagged rock. Would you mind," her wonderful black eyes met his in a glance of frank inquiry, "would you mind—explaining? There was so much excitement and storm last night that we haven't the slightest notion what happened."

"Neither have I!" exclaimed Philip ruefully.

The girl's eyes widened.

"How very singular!" she said.

"It is indeed!" admitted Philip.

"You must be an exceedingly hapless young man!" she commented with serious disapproval. "I imagine your life must be a monotonous round of disaster and excitement!"

"Fortuitously," owned Philip, "it's improving!"

Piqued by his irresistible good humor in adversity, Diane eyed him severely.

"Are you so in the habit of being mysteriously stabbed in the shoulder whenever it storms," she demanded with mild sarcasm, "that you can retain an

altogether pernicious good humor?"

Philip's eyes glinted oddly.

"I'm a mere novice," he admitted lightly. "If my shoulder didn't throb so infernally," he added thoughtfully, "I'd lose all faith in the escapade—it's so weird and mysterious. A crackle—a lunge—a knife in the dark—and behold! I am here, exceedingly grateful and hungry despite the melodrama."

To which Diane, raising beautifully arched and wondering eyebrows, did not reply. Philip, furtively marking the firm brown throat above the scarlet sweater, and the vivid gypsy color beneath the laughing dusk of Diane's eyes, devoutly thanked his lucky star that Fate had seen fit to curb the air of delicate hostility with which she had left him on the Westfall lake. Well, Emerson was right, decided Philip. There is an inevitable law of compensation. Even a knife in the dark has compensations.

"Johnny," said Diane presently, briskly disinterring some baked potatoes and a baked fish from a cairn of hot stones covered with grass, "is off examining last night's trail of melodrama. He's greatly excited. Let me pour you some coffee. I sincerely hope you're not too fastidious for tin cups?"

"A tin cup," said Philip with engaging candor, "has always been a secret ambition of mine. I once acquired one at somebody's spring hut—er—circumstances compelled me to relinquish it. It was really a very nice cup too and very new and shiny. Since then, until now, my life, alas! has been tin-cupless."

Diane carved the smoking fish in ominous silence.

"Do you know," she said at length, "I've felt once or twice that your anecdotes are too apt and—er—sparkling to be overburdened with truth. Your mechanic, for instance—"

Philip laughed and reddened. The mechanic, as a desperate means of prolonging conversation, had served his purpose somewhat disastrously.

"Hum!" said he lamely.

"I shan't forget that mechanic!" said Diane decidedly.

"This now," vowed Philip uncomfortably, "is a *real* fish!"

Diane laughed, a soft clear laugh that to Philip's prejudiced ears had more of music in it than the murmur of the river or the clear, sweet piping of the woodland birds.

"It is," she agreed readily. "Johnny caught him in the river and I cooked him."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Philip, inspecting the morsel on his wooden plate with altered interest, "you don't—you can't mean it!"

"Why not?" inquired Diane with lifted eyebrows.

Philip didn't know and said so, but he glanced furtively at the girl by the fire and marveled.

"Well," he said a little later with a sigh of utter content, "this is Arcadia, isn't it!"

"It's a beautiful spot!" nodded Diane happily, glancing at the scarlet tendrils of a wild grapevine flaming vividly in the sunlight among the trees. There was yellow star grass along the forest path, she said absently, and yonder by the stump of a dead tree a patch of star moss woven of myriad emerald shoots; the delicate splashes of purple here and there in the forest carpet were wild geranium.

"There are alders by the river," mused Diane with shining eyes, "and marsh

marigolds; over there by a swampy hollow are a million violets, white and purple; and the ridge is thick with mountain laurel. More coffee?"

"Yes," said Philip. "It's delicious. I wonder," he added humbly, "if you'd peel this potato for me. A one cylinder activity is not a conspicuous success."

"I should have remembered your arm," said Diane quickly. "Does it pain much?"

"A little," admitted Philip. "Do you know," he added guilelessly, "this is a spot for singularly vivid dreams. Last night, for instance, exceedingly gentle and skillful hands slit my shirt sleeve with a pair of scissors and bathed my shoulder with something that stung abominably, and somehow I fancied I was laid up in a hospital and didn't have to fuss in the least, for my earthly affairs were in the hands of a nurse who was very deft and businesslike and beautiful. I could seem to hear her giving orders in a cool, matter-of-fact way, and once I thought there was some slight objection to leaving her alone—and she stamped her foot. Odd, wasn't it?"

"Must have been the doctor," said Diane, rising and adding wood to the fire. "Johnny went into the village for him."

"Hum!" said Philip doubtfully.

"He had very nice hands," went on Diane calmly. "They were very skillful and gentle, as you say. Moreover, he was young and exceedingly good-looking."

"Hum!" said Philip caustically. "With all those beauty points, he must be a dub medically. What stung so?"

"Strong salt brine, piping hot," said the girl discouragingly. "It's a wildwood remedy for washing wounds."

"Didn't the dub carry any conventional antiseptics?"

"You are talking too much!" flashed Diane with sudden color. "The wound is slight, but you bled a lot; and the doctor made particular reference to rest and quiet."

"Good Lord!" said Philip in deep disgust. "There's your pretty physician for you! 'Rest and quiet' for a knife scratch. Like as not he'll want me to take a year off to convalesce!"

"He left you another powder to take to-night," remarked Diane severely. "Moreover, he said you must be very quiet to-day and he'd be in, in the morning, to see you."

Something jubilant laughed and sang in Philip's veins. A day in Arcadia lay temptingly at his feet.

"Great Scott," he protested feebly. "I can't. I really can't, you know—"

"You'll have to," said Diane with unsmiling composure. "The doctor said so."

"After all," mused Philip approvingly, "it's the young medical fellows who have the finest perceptions. I *do* need rest."

Off in the checkered shadows of the forest a crow cawed derisively.

"Did you like your shirt?" asked Diane with a distracting hint of raillery under her long, black lashes.

"It's substantial," admitted Philip gratefully, "and democratic."

"You've still another," she said smiling. "Johnny bought them in the village."

"Johnny," said Philip gratefully, "is a trump."

Diane filled a kettle from a pail of water by the tree and smiled.

"There's a hammock over there by the tent," she said pleasantly. "Johnny strung it up this morning. The trees are drying nicely and presently I'm going to wander about the forest with a field glass and a notebook and you can take a nap."

Philip demurred. Finding his assistance inexorably refused, however, he repaired to the hammock and watched the camp of his lady grow neat and trim again.

On the bright embers of the camp fire, the kettle hummed.

"There now," said Philip suddenly, mindful of the hot, stinging wound-wash, "that is the noise I heard last night just after you stamped your foot and *before* the doctor came."

"Nonsense!" said Diane briskly. "Your head's full of fanciful notions. A bump like that on the back of your head is bound to tamper some with your common sense." And humming lightly she scalded the coffeepot and tin cups and set them in the sun to dry. Philip's glance followed her, a winsome gypsy, brown and happy, to the green and white van, whence she presently appeared with a field glass and a notebook.

"Of course," she began, halting suddenly with heightened color, "it doesn't matter in the least—but it does facilitate conversation at times to know the name of one's guest—no matter how accidental and mysterious he may be."

"Philip!" he responded gravely but with laughing eyes. "It's really very easy to remember." Diane stamped her foot.

"I *do* think," she flashed indignantly, "that you are the most trying young man I've ever met."

"I'm trying of course—" explained Philip, "trying to tell you my name. I greatly regret," he went on deferentially, "that there are a number of exceptional circumstances which have resulted in the brief and simple—Philip. For one thing, a bump which muddles a man's common sense is very likely to muddle his memory. And so, for the life of me, I can't seem to conjure up a desirable form of address from you to me except Philip. And Philip," he added humbly, "isn't really such a bad sort of name after all."

There was the whir and flash of a bird's wing in the forest the color of Diane's cheek. An instant later the single vivid spot of crimson in Philip's line of vision was the back of his lady's sweater.

CHAPTER XII

A BULLET IN ARCADIA

"It's time you were in bed," said Diane. "Johnny's out staring at the moon and that's the final chore of the evening. Besides, it's nine o'clock."

"I shan't go to bed," Philip protested. "Johnny spread this tarpaulin by the fire expressly for me to recline here and think and smoke and b'jinks! I'm going to! After buying me two shirts yesterday and tobacco to-day—to say nothing of bringing home an unknown chicken for invalid stew, I can't with decency offend him."

"I can't see why he's taken such a tremendous shine to you!" complained Diane mockingly.

"Nor I!" agreed Philip, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"You've been filling his pockets with money!" accused Diane indignantly. "It's the only explanation of the demented way he trots around after you."

"Disposition, beauty, singular grace and common sense all pale in the face of the ulterior motive," Philip modestly told his pipe. "What a moon!" he added softly. "Great guns, what a moon!"

Beyond, through the dark of the trees, softly silvered by the moon above the ridge, glimmered the river, winding along by peaceful forest and meadows

edged with grass and mint. There was moon-bright dew upon the clover and high upon the ridge a tree showed dark and full against the moon in lonely silhouette. It was an enchanted wood of moonlit depth and noisy quiet, of shrilling crickets, the plaintive cries of tree frogs, the drowsy crackle of the camp fire, or the lap of water by the shore, with sometimes the lonely hoot of an owl.

"A while back," mused Diane innocently, "there was a shooting star above the ridge—"

"Yes?" said Philip puffing comfortably at his pipe.

"I meant to call your attention to it but 'Hey!' and 'Look!' were dreadfully abrupt."

"There is always—'Philip!'" insinuated that young man. Diane bit her lip and relapsed into silence.

"You didn't tell me," said Philip presently, "whether or not you found any more flowers this morning."

"Only heaps of wild blackberry," Diane replied briefly. "But the trees were quite as devoid of new birds as Johnny's detective trip of clues."

"Too bad!" sympathized Philip. "I'll go with you in the morning."

"The bump on your head," suggested Diane pointedly, "is growing malignant!"

"By no means!" said Philip lazily. "With the exception of certain memory erasures, it's steadily improving."

"Why," demanded Diane with an unexpected and somewhat resentful flash of reminiscence, "why did you tell me your motor was deaf and dumb and

insane when it wasn't?"

"I didn't," said Philip honestly. "If you'll recall our conversation, you'll find I worded that very adroitly."

Thoroughly vexed Diane frowned at the fire.

"Was it necessary to affect callow inexperience and such a happy-go-lucky, imbecile philosophy?" she demanded cuttingly.

"Hum!" admitted Philip humbly. "I'm a salamander."

"And you said you were waiting to be rescued!" she accused indignantly.

Philip sighed.

"Well, in a sense I was. I saw you coming through the trees—and there are times when one must talk." He met her level glance of reproach with one of frank apology. "If I see a man whose face I like, I speak to him. Surely Nature does not flash that subtle sense of magnetism for nothing. If I am to live fully, then must I infuse into my insular existence the electric spark of sympathetic friendship. Why impoverish my existence by a lost opportunity? If I had not alighted that day upon the lake and waited for you to come through the trees—" he fell suddenly quiet, knocking the ashes from his pipe upon the ground beside him.

"The moon is climbing," said Diane irrelevantly, "and Johnny is waiting to bandage your shoulder."

"Let him wait," returned Philip imperturbably. "And no matter what I do the moon will go on climbing." He lazily pointed the stem of his pipe at a firelit tree. "What glints so oddly there," he wondered, "when the fire leaps?"

"It's the bullet," replied Diane absently and bit her lip with a quick flush of

annoyance.

"What bullet?" said Philip with instant interest. "It's odd I hadn't noticed it before."

"Some one shot in the forest last night while Johnny was off chasing your assailant. Likely the second man he saw cranking the car. It struck the tree. Johnny and I made a compact not to speak of it and I forgot. My aunt is fussy."

"Where were you?" demanded Philip abruptly.

"By the tree. It—it grazed my hair—"

Philip's face grew suddenly as changeless as the white moonlight in the forest.

"Accidental knives and bullets in Arcadia!" said he at length. "It jars a bit."

"I do hope," said Diane with definite disapproval, "that you're not going to fuss. I didn't. I was frightened of course, for at first I thought it had been aimed straight at me—and I was quite alone—but startling things do happen now and then, and if you can't explain them, you might as well forget them. I hope I may count on your silence. If my aunt gets wind of it, she'll conjure up a trail of accidental shots to follow me from here to Florida and every time it storms, she'll like as not hear ghost-bullets. She's like that."

"Florida!" ejaculated Philip—and stared.

"To be sure!" said Diane. "Why not? Must I alter my plans for somebody's stray bullet?"

Philip frowned uneasily. The instinctive protest germinating irresistibly in his mind was too vague and formless for utterance.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "But I fancied you were merely camping around among the hills for the summer."

The girl rose and moved off toward the van looming ghostlike through the trees.

"Good night—*Philip!*" she called lightly, her voice instinct with delicate irony.

Philip stirred. His voice was very gentle.

"Thank you!" he said simply.

Diane hastily climbed the steps at the rear of the van and disappeared.

"I hate men," thought Diane with burning cheeks as she seated herself upon the cot by the window and loosened the shining mass of her straight black hair, "who ramble flipantly through a conversation and turn suddenly serious when one least expects it."

By the fire, burning lower as the moon climbed higher, Philip lay very quiet. Somehow the moonlit stillness of the forest had altered indefinitely. Its depth and shadows jarred. Fair as it was, it had harbored things sinister and evil. And who might say—there was peace of course in the moon-silver rug of pine among the trees, in the gossamer cobweb there among the bushes jeweled lightly in dew, in the faint, sweet chirp of a drowsy bird above his head—but the moon-ray which lingered in the heart of the wild geranium would presently cascade through the trees to light the horrible thing of lead which had menaced the life of his lady.

Well, one more pipe and he would go to bed. Johnny must be tired of waiting. Philip slipped his hand into his pocket and whistled.

"So," said he softly, "the hieroglyphic cuff is gone! It's the first I'd missed it."

"Like as not it dropped out of my pocket when I fell last night," he reflected a little later. "I'd better go to bed. I'm beginning to fuss."

CHAPTER XIII

A WOODLAND GUEST

There was gray beyond the flap of Philip's tent, a velvet stillness rife with the melody of twittering birds. Already the camp fire was crackling. Philip rose and dressed.

Beyond, through the ghostly trees where the river glimmered in the gray dawn with a pearly iridescence, a girl was fishing. There were deeper shadows in the hollows but the sky behind the wooded ridge to the east was softly opaline. As the river grew pink, mists rose and curled upward and presently the glaring searchlight of the sun streamed brilliantly across the river and the forest, flinging a banner of shadow tracery over the wakening world.

The girl by the river caught a fish, deftly strung it on a willow shoot beside some others and bathed her hands in the river. Turning she smiled and waved. Philip went to meet her.

"Let me take your fish," he offered.

"Your arm—" began Diane,

"Pshaw!" insisted Philip. "It's ever so much better. I can even use my hand."

To prove it, Philip presently armed himself with a fork and developed considerable helpful interest in a pan of fish. Whereupon a general atmosphere

of industry settled over the camp. Rex and Nero acrobatically locked forepaws and rolled over and over in a clownish excess of congeniality. Johnny trotted busily about feeding the horses. Diane made the coffee, arousing the frank and guileless interest of Mr. Poynter.

The fish began to sizzle violently. Considerably aggrieved by a variety of unexpected developments in the pan, Philip harpooned the smoking segments with indignant vim, burned his fingers, made reckless use of the wounded arm and regretfully resigned the task to Johnny who furtively bestowed certain hot sable portions of the rescued fish upon the dogs, thereby arousing a snarling commotion of intense surprise.

"That's a wonderful bed of mine," commented Philip at breakfast. "Tell me where in the world did you get your camp equipment?"

"I made the bed myself," said Diane happily, "of red willow shoots from the swamp, and I carved these forks and spoons out of wood Johnny gathered."

"I do wish I were clever!" grumbled Philip in acute discontent. "After breakfast I'm going to whittle out a wildwood pipe and make a birch canoe, and likely I'll weave a rush mat and a willow bed and carve some spoons and forks and a sundial."

"Will you be through by noon?" asked Diane politely.

Philip laughed.

"As a matter of fact," he said easily, "I'm going with you to lamp birds. I want to duck that fool doctor."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Diane with decision, "for I'm going to stay in camp and bake bread."

The bread was baking odorously and a variety of shavings flying ambitiously

from an embryo pipe by ten o'clock. At noon the doctor had not yet arrived. Philip dexterously served a savory fish chowder from a pot hanging within a tripod of saplings and refused to dwell upon the thought of his eventual departure.

A man appeared among the trees to the east, switching absently at the underbrush with a cane.

Philip sniffed.

"I thought so," he nodded. "That medical dub carries a cane on his professional rounds! Like as not he wears a flowing tie, a monocle and pink socks."

The man approached and raised his hat, smiling urbanely. It was Baron Tregar.

Philip leaped to his feet, reddening.

"Excellency!" he stammered.

"Pray be seated!" exclaimed the Baron with sympathy. "Such a disturbing experience as you have had affords one privileges."

"Permit me," said Philip uncomfortably to Diane, "to present my chief, Baron Tregar. Excellency, Miss Westfall, to whom I am eternally indebted." And Philip's eyes sparkled with laughter as he uttered her name.

There was an old world courtliness in the Baron's bow and murmured salutation.

"Ah," said he with gallant regret, "Fate, Miss Westfall, has never seen fit to temper misfortune so pleasantly for me. Poynter, you have been exceedingly fortunate."

Diane laughed softly. It was hers to triumph now.

"*Mr. Poynter*," she said with relish, flashing a sidelong glance at that discomfited young man, "Mr. Poynter has been good enough to make the chowder. It would gratify me exceedingly, Baron Tregar, to have you test it."

Heartily anathematizing his chief, who was gratefully expressing his interest in chowder, Mr. Poynter stared perversely at his cuff.

"I wonder," he reflected uneasily, "just what he wants and how in thunder he knew!"

The Baron, gracefully adapting himself to woodland exigencies, supplied the answer.

"Dr. Wingate," he boomed, "is at the Sherrill farm. Themar officiously fancied he could fly and had a most distressing fall yesterday from the smaller biplane." His deep, compelling eyes lingered upon Philip's face. "Dr. Wingate spoke some of an unlucky young man marooned in a forest with a knife wound in his shoulder—described him—and behold!—my missing secretary is found after considerable bewilderment and uneasiness on my part. Wingate will stop here later."

Philip civilly expressed regret that he had not thought to dispatch Johnny to the Sherrill farm with a message.

"It is nothing!" shrugged Tregar smoothly.

"One forgets under less mitigating causes." And, having begged the details of Philip's adventure, he listened with careful attention.

"It is exceedingly mysterious," he rumbled, after a frowning interval of thought. "But surely one must feel much gratitude to you, Miss Westfall. A night

in the storm without attention and we have complications."

Over his coffee, which he sipped clear with the appreciation of an epicure, the Baron, in his suave, inscrutable way, grew reminiscent. He talked well, selecting, discarding, weighing his words with the fastidious precision of a jeweler setting precious stones. Subtly the talk drifted to Houdania.

There was a mad king—Rodobald—upon the throne. Doubtless the Baron's hostess had heard? No? Ah! So must the baffling twist of a man's brain complicate the destiny of a kingdom. And Rodobald was hale at sixty-five and mad as the hare of March. There had been much talk of it. Singular, was it not?

Followed a sparkling anecdote or so of court life and shrugging reference to the jealous principality of Galituria that lay beyond in the valley. To Galiturians the madness of King Rodobald was an exquisite jest.

Philip grew restless.

"Confound him!" he mused resentfully. "One would think I had deliberately contrived to linger here merely to give him a graceful opportunity to accomplish his infernal errand himself. Thank Heaven this lets me out!" He glanced furtively at Diane. The girl's interest was wholesomely without constraint.

"Great guns!" decided Philip fretfully. "I doubt if she's ever heard of his toy kingdom before and yet he's probing her interest with every atom of skill he can command." Puzzled and annoyed he fell quiet.

"It is somewhat inaccessible—my country," Tregar was saying smoothly. "One climbs the shaggy mountain by a winding road. You have climbed it perhaps—touring?"

"Excellency, no!" regretted Diane. "I fear it is quite unknown to me."

"Ah!" exclaimed the patriotic Baron, "that is indeed unfortunate. For it is well

worth a visit." He turned to Philip. "You are pale and quiet, Poynter," he added kindly. "A day or so more perhaps here where it is quiet—"

Philip flushed hotly,

"Excellency!" he protested feebly.

The Baron bowed courteously to Diane.

"If I may crave still further hospitality and indulgence," he begged regretfully. "There is already much excitement at the Sherrill place owing to the officious act of my man, Themar, and his accident. Another invalid—my secretary—one flounders in a dragnet of unfortunate circumstances. And I am sensitive in the disturbance of my host's guests—"

Diane's eyes as they rested upon Philip were very kind.

"Excellency," she said warmly, "Mr. Poynter's tent lies there among the trees. I trust he will not hesitate to use it until he is strong again. Fortunately we are equipped for emergency."

The Baron bowed gratefully.

"You are a young woman of exceeding common sense!" he said with deep respect.

Philip was very grateful that the Baron had not misunderstood; a breath might shatter the idyllic crystal into atoms.

Later, when the Baron had departed, Philip flushed suddenly at the ugly suspicion rising wraithlike in his mind. He was accustomed to the Baron's subtleties.

"Mr. Poynter!" called Diane.

Mr. Poynter perversely went on whittling out the hollow of his wildwood pipe.

"Mr. Poynter!"

The bowl, already sufficient for a Titan's smoke, grew a trifle larger and somewhat irregular. Carving had conceivably injured Mr. Poynter's hearing, for he kept on whistling.

"Philip!" said Diane and stamped her foot.

"Yes?" replied Philip respectfully, and instantly discarded the Titan's pipe to listen.

"Why are you so quiet?" flashed Diane.

"Well, for one thing," explained Philip cheerfully, "I'm mighty busy and for another, I'm thinking."

"Do you withdraw into a sound-proof shell when you think?"

"Mr. Poynter does!" regretted Philip. "I do not."

"I do hope," said the girl demurely, "that you'll be able to hear when the doctor gets here. He's coming through the trees."

CHAPTER XIV

BY THE BACKWATER POOL

The sun had set with a primrose glory of reflection upon the river and the ridge. Over there in the west now there was a pale after-glow of marigold. It streamed across the dark, still waters of the backwater pool by the river and faintly edged the drowsy petals of white and yellow lilies. Already distant outline and perspective were hazy, there was purple in the forest, and birds were winging swiftly to the woods.

By the pool with a great mass of dripping lilies at his side to carry back to camp, Philip stared frowningly at the tangled float of foliage at his feet. Somehow that ugly flash of suspicion had persisted. Why had the Baron wished him to stay in the camp of Diane? ... What was the portent of his peculiar interest anyway?

Philip sighed.

"Do you know, Nero," he confided suddenly, patting the dog's shaggy head, "my life is developing certain elements of intrigue and mystery exceedingly offensive to my spread-eagle tastes. There's a knife and a bullet now, Johnny's two men and the auto, and a cuff and a most mysterious link between our lady and the Baron. I'll be hanged if I like any of it. And why in thunder did Themar crib an aeroplane and bump his fool head?" He fell suddenly thoughtful.

"As for you, old top," he added presently, "you ought to go home. Dick will

be fussing."

Nero wagged ambiguously. Philip nodded.

"Right, old man," he admitted with sudden gravity. "I can always depend upon you to set me right. It's nothing like so essential for you to go as it is for me. You did right to mention it. I ought to dig out—all the more because the Baron wants me to stay—but I've been thinking a bit this afternoon and unusual problems demand unusual solutions. You'll grant that?" Nero politely routed an excursive bug from his path and lay down to listen.

"Mr. Poynter!" called a voice from the darkling trees behind him.

Mr. Poynter smiled and fell deliberately to filling the bowl of his wildwood pipe. Gnarled and twisted and marvelously eccentric was this wildwood pipe and therefore an object of undoubted interest. The bowl had somehow eluded Philip's desperate effort to keep it of reasonable dimensions and required a Gargantuan supply of tobacco.

"Mr. Poynter!"

"My Lord!" murmured Philip, staring ruefully into the pipe-bowl, "the infernal thing is bottomless! Exit another can of tobacco. I'll have to ask Johnny to buy me a barrel." And Philip flung the empty can into the pool whence a frog leaped with a frightened croak.

"Philip!"

"Mademoiselle!" said Philip pleasantly.

Darkly lovely, Diane's eyes met his with a glance of indignant reproach. Somehow her lips were like a scarlet wound in the gypsy brown skin and her cheeks were hot with color.

"A wildwood elf of scarlet and brown!" thought Philip and hospitably flicked away a twig or so with his handkerchief that she might sit down.

"There's water plantain over there in the bog," he said lazily, "and swamp honeysuckle. And see," he turned out his pockets, "swamp apples. Queer, aren't they? Johnny says they're good to eat. The honeysuckle was full of them."

Diane bit daintily into the peculiar juicy pulp.

"A man of your pernicious good humor," she said greatly provoked, "is a menace to civilization. You sap all the wholesome fire of one's most cherished resentment."

"I know," admitted Philip humbly. "I'll be hanged yet."

"I can't see what in the world you find so absorbing over here," she commented with marked disapproval. "All the while I was getting supper I watched you. And you merely smoked and flipped pebbles in the pool and kept supper waiting."

"You're wrong there," said Philip. "I've been thinking, too."

"I'd like to know just why you've been thinking so deeply!"

"Honest Injun?"

"Honest Injun!"

"Well," said Philip slowly, "I've been reviewing the possible mishaps incident to a caravan trip to Florida."

"Mishaps!" Diane studied him in frank displeasure. "Are you a fussy pessimist?"

"By no means. Merely—prudent." Philip's eyes narrowed thoughtfully and he fell silent.

The iris shadows beyond the river deepened. A firefly or so flickered brightly above the fields of clover. In the soft clear twilight, fragrant with the smell of clover and water lily and rimmed now by the rising moon, Philip found his resolution of the afternoon difficult to utter. The pool at his feet was a motionless mirror of summer stars. Surely there could be nothing but peace in this tranquil world of tree and grass and murmuring river. And yet—

"Do take that ridiculous pipe out of your mouth and say something!" exclaimed Diane restlessly. "You look as if you were smoking a pumpkin! Besides, the supper's all packed up in hot stones and grass to keep it hot. Why moon so and shoot pebbles at the frogs?"

"Well," said Philip abruptly, "do you mind if I say that your trip seems a most imprudent venture?"

"By no means!" replied Diane with maddening composure. "But it's only fair to warn you that my aunt's already said all there is to say on the subject. The horses may drop dead," she reviewed swiftly on her slim brown fingers, "Johnny may fall heir to an apoplectic fit and fall on a horse thereby inducing him to run away into a swamp and sink in quicksand. I may be kidnapped and held for ransom in the wilds of Connecticut and the van may burn up some night when I'm asleep in it. Then I may eat poison berries in a fit of absent-mindedness, I may fall into a river while I'm fishing, forget how to swim, and drown, Johnny may gather amanitas and kill us both, and something or other may bite me. There are one or two other little things like forest fires, floods and brigands—"

"Help!" murmured Philip.

"Can you add anything to that?" demanded Diane politely.

Philip laughed. Diane, delicately sarcastic, was irresistible.

"There is the bullet—" he reminded gravely.

"*Please!*" begged Diane faintly.

Philip flushed with a sense of guilt.

"Well," he owned, "I have bothered you a lot about it, that's a fact! But it sticks so in my mind. There's something else—"

"Yes?" said Diane discouragingly.

"Didn't you tell me yesterday that you'd had a feeling some one had been spying on your camp?"

"Yes," said Diane in serious disapproval. "I did. I get seizures of confidential lunacy once in a while. Are you going to fuss about that?"

"No," said Philip gently. "But the knife and the bullet and that have made me wonder—a lot. After all," he regretted sincerely, "my notions are very vague and formless, but I feel so strongly about them that—urging my friendship for Carl as my sole excuse for unasked advice to his cousin—"

"Yes?"

Philip laid aside his pipe with a sigh. The crisp music of his lady's voice was not encouraging.

"I do hope you'll forgive me," he said quietly, "but I'm going to urge you to abandon your trip to Florida!"

"Mr. Poynter!" flashed Diane indignantly. "The bump on your head has had a relapse. Better let Johnny go for the doctor again."

"I know I'm infernally presumptuous," acknowledged Philip flushing, "but I'm terribly in earnest."

Diane's eyes, wide, black, rebuking, scanned his troubled face askance.

"I ought to be exceedingly angry," she said slowly, "and if it wasn't for the bump, like as not I would be—but I'm not."

"I'm truly grateful," said Philip with a sigh of relief. And added to himself, "Philip, old top, you're in for it."

"Why," exclaimed Diane, "I've never been so happy in my life as I have been here by this beautiful river!"

"Nor I!" said Philip truthfully.

Diane did not hear.

"Every wild thing calls," she went on, impetuously. "It always has. Fish—bird—wild flower—the smell of clover—the hum of bees—I can't pretend to tell you what they all mean to me. Even as a youngster I frightened my aunt half to death by running away to sleep in the forest. I'm sorry I'll ever have to go back to civilization!"

"And yet," insisted Philip inexorably, "to me it seems that you should go back—to-morrow!"

"I do seem to feel a stir of temper!" said Diane reflectively. "Maybe I'd better go back and look at supper. You can come after you're through pelting that frog."

"There's still another reason," said Philip humbly, "which I can't tell you. Indeed, I ought not mention it. I can only beg you to take it on trust and believe

that it's another forcible argument against your trip. Somehow, everything in my mind weaves into a gigantic warning. So disturbing is the notion," added Philip unquietly, "that—"

"Yes?" queried Diane politely.

"That after much thought, I have decided to stay here in camp until you abandon your nomadic scheme and break camp for home. There'll come a time, I'm sure, when you'll think as I do to get rid of me."

Diane rose with suspicious mildness.

"I'm hungry," she said, "and Johnny's yodeling."

"Well," said Philip provokingly, "I don't believe I want any supper after all. The atmosphere's too chilly."

CHAPTER XV

JOKAI OF VIENNA

It was insolent music, a taunt in every note. Carl laid aside his flute and inspected his prisoner with impudent interest.

"You *are* the most difficult person to entertain!" he accused softly. "Here Hunch has strained a sinuous spine performing our beautiful native dances, the tango and the hesitation, and I've fluted up all the wind in the room and still you glower."

"Monsieur," broke forth the prisoner, goaded beyond endurance by the stifling heat and the stench of Hunch's pipe, "is it not enough to imprison me here without reason, that you must taunt and gibe—" he choked indignantly and stared desperately at the boarded windows.

"Let your voice out, do!" encouraged Carl. "We dispensed with the caretaker days ago, fearing you'd feel restricted."

The other's face was livid.

"Monsieur!" he cried imperiously, his eyes flashing. "Take care!"

"I know," said Carl soothingly, "that you have deep, dark, sinister possibilities within you—dear, yes! You tried something of the sort on the Ridge Road. That's why your august head's so badly bruised. But why aggravate your

blood pressure now when it's so infernally hot and you've work ahead. Hunch," he added carelessly to the admiring henchman who had once dealt away successive slices of his inheritance, "go get a pitcher of ice water and rustle up another siphon of seltzer and some whiskey. Likely His Nibs and I will play chess again to-night."

Hunch rose from a chair by the window where he had flattened his single good eye against a knot hole, and slouched heavily to the door.

The face of the prisoner slowly whitened. Every muscle of his body quivered suddenly in horrible revulsion. Nights of enforced drunkenness had left his nerves strained to the breaking point.

"Monsieur," he panted, greatly agitated, "the whiskey—the thought of it again to-night—is maddening."

Carl merely raised ironical eyebrows.

"You are not a man," choked the other, shaking. "You are a nameless demon! Such hellish originality in the conception of evil, such singular indignities as you have seen fit to inflict, they are the freaks of a madman!"

"Thank you," said Carl politely. "One likes to have one's little ingenuities appreciated."

"I—I am ill—and the room is stifling."

"If I do not mind it," said Carl in aggrieved surprise, "why should you?"

"You are a thing of steel and infernal fire. I am but human."

"There is a way to stop it all," reminded Carl, lazily relighting his cigar. "Why not give me a logical reason for your presence in America?"

"I have done so. Have I not said again and again that I am Sigmund Jokai, of Vienna, touring in America?"

"You have said so," agreed Carl imperturbably, "but you lie. There was an empty chamber in your revolver, you were perilously close to my cousin's camp. Why? Is it not better to tell me than foolishly to waste such splendid nerve and grit as you possess?"

The prisoner moistened his bloodless lips and shrugged.

"Monsieur," he accused coldly, "you tinge commonplace incidents with melodrama."

"Days ago—er—Jokai of Vienna," went on Carl thoughtfully, "I dispatched a formal communication to your country. Why has it been ignored? Why did my first inkling of its effect come in the sight of your face in suspicious territory? And why, Monsieur," purred Carl softly, "did you seek to kill me by a trick?"

"Monsieur, you delayed me. I am hot of temper—"

"And kill whoever angers you? My dear Jokai, that's absurd. As for your singular indifference to the burning car—that's easy. You'd stolen it. But why?"

He smiled slightly and picked up his flute. With infinite softness a waltz danced lightly through the quiet room. To such a fanciful, eerie piping might the ghost of a child have danced. Then without pause or warning it swung dramatically into a stirring melody of power and dignity.

The wretched man by the table buried his face in his hands and groaned.

"Ah!" said Carl softly. "So Monsieur has heard that tune before? That in itself is illuminating."

With a leer Hunch entered and deposited a tray upon the table. Carl poured

himself some whiskey and pushed the decanter toward his guest with a significant glance. Jokai of Vienna poured and drank with a shudder of nausea.

"We've a new chessboard," said Carl. "It's most ingenious. Hunch spent a large part of his valuable morning shopping for it. The board and chessmen are metal and I myself have added one or two unique improvements. Help yourself to some more whiskey—do."

"Monsieur," faltered Jokai desperately, "I—I can not."

"Hunch," said Carl softly. "His Nibs won't drink."

Instantly from the wired metal points of Jokai's chair a stinging electric current swept fiendishly through his body. Last night it had goaded him unspeakably. To-night, with every tortured nerve leaping, it was unbearable. Shaking, he poured again and drank—great drops of sweat starting out upon his forehead. Where the rope bound his ankles the flesh was aching dully.

"Mercy!" he choked. "I—I can not bear it."

"There is a way to stop it!" reminded Carl curtly. "The ivory chessmen for me, Hunch. And whenever he refuses to drink—start the current."

With the metal chessboard before him, Carl idly arranged his ivory men. Jokai touched a metal pawn and shuddered violently. The metal board was wired. Thenceforth every move in the game he must play with the metal men would complete the circuit and send the biting needles through his frame. It was delicately gauged, a nerve-racking discomfort without definite pain, a thing to snap the dreadful tension of a man's endurance at the end.

"Ah! Monsieur!" cried Jokai wildly. "It is inconceivable—"

"Play!" said Carl briefly. White and grim his guest obeyed.

In terrible silence they played the game through to the end.

"Let me pour you some more whiskey," insisted Carl with infernal courtesy. "Let us understand each other. Whenever I drink, I expect you to do the same. As for you, Hunch, you'll kindly stay sober!"

Jokai gulped the nauseating torture to the end. He was faint and sick. By the end of the third game, every move had become convulsive. The insidious bite of the current was getting horribly on his nerves. Still with desperate will he played on. Drunk and dizzy—his veins hot and pounding, he stared in fascinated horror at the face of his merciless opponent. Through the film of smoke it loomed vividly dark, impudent, ironic, the mobile mouth edged satirically with a slight smile.

"Are you man or devil?" he whispered.

Carl laughed. His hand, for all his drinking, was calm and steady, his handsome eyes clear and cold and resolute.

"Hunch," he said curtly, "if you touch that bottle again, I'll break it over your head. You're drunk now."

To Jokai his voice trailed off into curious nothingness. Somewhere he knew in a room stifling hot and hazy with the fumes of vile tobacco there was a voice, musical, detached and very far away.

"Monsieur," it was saying, "there are still the questions."

With shaking hand Jokai touched a metal king and screamed. The heat and the hell-board hard upon his days and nights of enforced drinking were too much. With a strangled sob, Jokai of Vienna pitched forward upon the board unconscious.

Carl swept the metal men away with a shrug.

"Poor devil!" he said pityingly. "All this hell sooner than answer a question or two. By to-morrow night, with another dose of the same medicine, he'll feel differently. Likely I'll run up to Connecticut to-night, Hunch, to see my aunt. I'll be back by noon to-morrow. Tear off the window boards and give him some more air. You can move him to another room in the morning."

Hunch obeyed, and presently as the street door slammed behind his chief, Hunch's single eye roved expectantly to the forgotten whiskey on the table. Jokai lay in a motionless stupor by the window. It would be morning before the hapless drinker would be quite himself again. With brutal, powerful arms, Hunch bore his charge to an adjoining room and consigned him disrespectfully to a bed. Then with a fresh bottle of whiskey in his hand, he returned to the open window, leered pleasantly at the dizzy glare of city lights beyond and henceforth devoted himself to getting very drunk. Having gratified this bibulous ambition to the uttermost, he fell asleep. The morning sunlight flaming at last on his coarse, bloated face awoke him to resentful consciousness. Glowering at the bright, warm light with his single eye, Hunch rolled away into the shadow and went to sleep again.

Below on the porch, with an outraged caretaker's letter in her hand bag, Aunt Agatha turned her latchkey resolutely in the lock.

"I just will not have it!" reflected Aunt Agatha defiantly. "I certainly will not. And I'd have been here yesterday if Mary hadn't insisted upon my spending the night with her. Well do I remember how Carl installed himself here last year with a Japanese servant and invited that good-looking Wherry boy to come and scratch the furniture. I don't suppose Carl invited him for that purpose," added Aunt Agatha fairly, "but he did it, anyway. I can't for the life of me see why it is that young Mr. Wherry is perpetually making scratches where his feet rest. And I'm sure he left his footprint on the piano and thundered through every roll on the player, for they're all out of place, and the Williston caretaker heard him,

though like as not it was Carl for that matter. He's a Westfall, and he'd do it if he felt like it, dear knows! Though I must say Carl detests bangy music."

Still rambling, Aunt Agatha, having fussed considerably over the extraction of the key, halted in the hallway, appalled by the utter loneliness of the darkened rooms. Beyond in the library a clock boomed loudly through the quiet. Somewhere upstairs a dull, choking rasp broke the soundless gloom. Aunt Agatha began to flutter nervously up the stairway.

"It's Carl of course!" she murmured in a panic. "I just know it is. I've never known him to even gurgle—much less snore in his sleep. Like as not his windows are still boarded up and he's suffocating. Only a Westfall would think of such a thing."

Puffing, Aunt Agatha halted at her nephew's door. That and the one adjoining were locked. There was a den beyond. Making her way to a door of which Hunch was ignorant. Aunt Agatha opened it and gasped. Fully clothed, a man whose feet and hands were securely bound, lay muttering upon the bed, his jargon incomprehensibly foreign.

"God deliver us from all Westfalls!" wept Aunt Agatha. "Carl's kidnapped an immigrant!"

With unwavering determination in her round, aggrieved eyes, she swept majestically to the bed and shook the sleeper severely.

"My good man," she demanded, "what do you mean by lying here on a lace spread with your feet tied and your head scarred?"

Jokai of Vienna stirred and moaned. Aunt Agatha fumbled for her smelling salts and administered a most heroic draft. Sputtering, Jokai awoke from his restless stupor and stared.

From the room adjoining came again the dull, choking rasp of Hunch's heavy slumber. Fluttering hurriedly to the doorway, Aunt Agatha stared in horror at the littered room and Hunch, the latter no reassuring sight at his best, and thence with fascinated gaze at Jokai of Vienna. With wild imploring eyes Jokai glanced at his hands and feet. Miraculously Aunt Agatha understood. After an interval of petrified indecision, during which she trembled violently and made inarticulate noises in her throat, she fluttered excitedly from the room and returned with a pair of scissors. Urged to noiseless activity by Jokai's fear of the sleeper in the farther room, she cut the ropes which bound him and led him stealthily to the hall below.

"You poor thing!" whispered Aunt Agatha in hysterical sympathy. "You're as pale as a ghost. I don't wonder—"

But Jokai of Vienna was already bolting wildly through the street door and down the steps. Aunt Agatha burst into aggrieved tears.

"I don't in the least know what it's all about," she sniffed, greatly frightened, "but what with the immigrant bolting out of the house in his shirt sleeves without so much as a word of thanks—such a nice distinguished fellow as he was, too, for all he smelt of liquor!—and Carl nowhere in sight—and a fat young man, with a hairy chest exposed, sleeping on a whiskey bottle and snoring like a prisoner file, it does seem most mysterious—that's a fact! And my knees have folded up and I can't budge. Mother's knees used to fold up this way, too. God bless my soul!" wept the unfortunate lady. "I do wish I were dead."

With a desperate effort Aunt Agatha unfolded her knees sufficiently to bear her weight and turning, screamed wildly. Hunch Dorrigan was stealing catlike down the stairs, his bloated vicious face leering threateningly at her over the railing.

"You old she-wolf!" roared that elegant young man. "Where's His Nibs?"

Aunt Agatha moistened her dry lips and, gurgling fearfully, fainted. When at length she became conscious again. Hunch, glowering fiercely, was returning from a futile chase. With a resentful flash of brutality he towered suddenly above her and began to curse. Aunt Agatha, bristling, sat up.

"Don't you dare speak to me like that after breathing vulgar liquor fumes all over my niece's house and tying up that nice foreign gentleman," she quavered weakly. "Don't you dare! I live in this house, young man, and Carl will see to it that I'm protected. He always has. He's very good to me."

Hunch glowered sullenly at her, fearful, in the face of her relationship to Carl, of committing still another unforgivable offense.

"I once knew a stout young man with a glass eye," she gulped with increasing courage, "and he was hanged by the neck until he was dead—quite dead—and then they cut his body down and his relatives took it away in a cart and on the way home it came to life—"

Aunt Agatha halted abruptly, vaguely conscious that this somewhat felicitous ending to the tragedy, as an object lesson to Hunch, left much to be desired.

"Leave the house!" she commanded with shrill magnificence, for all her hair and dress were awry, and her round face flushed. "Leave the house."

Hunch shrugged and obeyed. It was nearly noon and there was no single east-side acquaintance—no, not even Link Murphy, the terrible—whom he feared as he feared Carl Granberry.

Weeping, Aunt Agatha watched him go.

CHAPTER XVI

THE YOUNG MAN OF THE SEA

Diane was to learn that the infernal persistence of the Old Man of the Sea of Arabian origin could find its match in youth. A week slipped by. Philip wove an unsatisfactory mat of sedge upon a loom of cord and stakes, whittled himself a knife and fork and spoon which he initialed gorgeously with the dye of a boiled alder, invented a camp rake of forked branches, made a broom of twigs, and sunk a candle in the floor of his tent which he covered with a bottomless milk bottle. All in all, he told Nero, he was evolving rapidly into an excellent woodsman, despite the peculiar appearance of the sedge mat.

When Diane was honestly indignant, Philip was quiet and industrious, and accomplished a great deal with his knife and bits of wood. When, finding his cheerful good humor irresistible, she was forced to fly the flag of truce, he was profoundly grateful.

"When do you think you'll go?" demanded Diane pointedly one morning as she deftly swung her line into the river. "Unless you contrive to get stabbed again," she added doubtfully, "I really don't see what's keeping you."

"When I may help you break camp and escort you back to your aunt," replied Philip pleasantly, "I'll pack up my two shirts and my wildwood pipe and depart, exceedingly grateful for my stay in Arcadia."

Diane bit her lip and frowned.

"Suppose," she flashed, with angry scarlet in her cheeks, "suppose I break camp and leave you behind!"

"I'll go with you," shrugged Philip. "Don't you remember? I told you so before. And I'll sit on the rear steps of the van all the way to Florida and play a tin whistle."

Appalled by the thought of the spectacular vagaries which this Young Man of the Sea might develop if she took to the road, Diane said nothing.

"No matter how I view you," she indignantly exclaimed a little later, "you're a problem."

"Settle the problem," advised Philip. "It's simple enough."

"He'll go presently," she told herself resentfully. "He'll have to."

"How it amuses these fish to watch me murder worms!" exclaimed Philip in deep disgust. "Look at the audience over there! I attract 'em and you get 'em! Miss Westfall, are you a slave driver?"

"What do you mean?" asked Diane cautiously.

Philip's most innocent beginnings frequently led into argumentative morasses for his opponent.

"Does Johnny have complete freedom in your camp?"

"Certainly!" exclaimed Diane warmly. "Johnny is old and faithful. He may do as he pleases."

Philip changed an angemic worm of considerable transparency for one of more interest to his river audience and smiled.

"Johnny," said he cheerfully, "has been good enough to invite me to stay in camp with him indefinitely. I'm his guest, in fact, until you go home. I imagine that as Johnny's guest I ought to enjoy immunity from sarcastic shafts, but I may be mistaken. I've washed and drained most of these worms. Will you lend me an inch or so of that stout invertebrate climbing out of the can by you?"

Thoroughly out of patience, Diane reeled in her line and returned to camp, whence she presently heard Philip blithely whistling a fisherman's hornpipe and urging Nero to retrieve certain sticks he had thrown into the river. A little later he caught a sunfish and swung into camp with such a smile of irresistible pride and good humor on his sun-browned face, that Diane laughed in spite of herself.

"How ridiculous it is!" she mused uncomfortably. "Here I may not depart for fear a happy-go-lucky young man will play a tin whistle on the steps of the van, and I will not go home. What in the world am I to do with him? Are you an orphan?" she asked with guileful curiosity.

"No," said Philip.

"I'm sorry," said Diane maliciously. "For then I could take out papers of adoption—"

"I'll stay without them," promised Philip. And Diane added wood to the fire with cheeks like the scarlet sunset.

"I'm going to send for my aunt," she announced a few days later.

"Yes?" said Philip.

"Unconventionality of any sort shocks her dreadfully. Like as not she'll faint dead away at the sight of you domiciled in my camp as if you own it. She'll see that you go."

"Better not," advised Philip.

"Why?"

"I'll produce credentials proving I'm a reputable victim of circumstances. I'll suggest that in complete concurrence with her I deem it unsafe for a young and attractive girl to tour about the country—and that I do not feel that I can conscientiously depart. Between the two of us you'll likely have a most uncomfortable hour or so."

Aunt Agatha was impressionable. It needed but a spark of concurrence to arouse her dreadfully. Diane dismissed the project.

"I think," she said hopefully, "that you'll most likely go to-night."

"In any circumstances," said Philip easily, "I fear that would be impossible. Johnny's behind with the laundry and I haven't a collarable shirt." Whereupon he whistled for Nero and set off amiably through the woods to gather an inaccessible flower he knew his lady would prize.

By nine that night Diane was asleep in the van. Philip, with whom she had indignantly crossed swords a little earlier, lay thoughtfully by the fire watching the snowy curtains of the van windows billowing lazily in the warm night wind. He felt restless and perturbed and presently sought his tent, where he lit the bottled candle to look for the predecessor of his insatiable wildwood pipe, but halted suddenly with a peculiar whistle.

The silk shirt he had worn from Sherrill's lay conspicuously upon the bed, washed and ironed and beautifully mended up the slashed sleeve and along the shoulder. As a laundress of parts, Johnny was a jewel, but he could not mend!

Now oddly enough as Mr. Poynter stared at the shirt upon the bed, his appearance was that of a young man decidedly out of sorts. Presently with an ominous glint of temper in his fine eyes, he noiselessly rearranged his tent,

viciously donned the offending shirt, whistled for Nero and leaving the camp of his lady as unexpectedly as he had entered it, set out for Sherrill's.

Even the most equable of tempers, it would seem, may now and then prove crotchety.

And who may say? Mr. Poynter was a young man of infinite resource. And there were other ways.

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH THE BARON PAYS

"Excellency," said Philip politely, "I have returned."

"Ah!" said the Baron cordially, marveling somewhat at the forbidding glint in the young man's eyes. He was to learn presently its portent.

Within doors, a few men chatted in the billiard room. A girl was singing. The Baron, however, was the only occupant of the comfortable porch-room with the green-shaded lamp, to which Philip had come, passing Themar, who had left a tray of ice and *crème de menthe* upon the table.

With his customary deliberation the Baron selected a glass, filled it with shaved ice, which he as carefully covered with green *crème de menthe*, and pushed the delectable result across the table to his secretary.

Philip accepted with a formal expression of thanks.

"I am delighted," rumbled the Baron, sipping his iced mint with keen appreciation, "to see that you are fully recovered."

"And Themar?" inquired Philip coldly.

"He was not injured so badly as I feared," admitted Tregar slowly. "His accident," commented Philip quietly, "was to say the least coincidental—and convenient."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Just why," begged Philip icily, "did you wish me to intrude further upon the hospitality of Miss Westfall?"

"There was an errand," reminded the Baron blandly. "Having discharged it myself, Poynter, I might—er—trust to you to report its consequences. There are possibilities of confidences over a camp fire—"

"You expected me to—spy upon Miss Westfall?"

"Even so.

"Pray believe," said Philip stiffly, "that any confidence of Miss Westfall's would have been to me—as your own."

"I am to understand then," commented His Excellency suavely, "that you made absolutely no effort—"

"You are to understand just that," said Philip quietly. "Moreover," he manfully met his chief's level glance with one of inexorable decision, "I sincerely regret that hereafter I shall be unable to discharge my duties as your secretary."

The Baron stirred.

"I may be honored by your reasons, Poynter?" he inquired quietly.

"The duties of a spy," flashed Philip, "are peculiarly offensive to me. So is Themar."

"Themar!"

"Excellency," said Philip curtly, "to-night as I entered, the lamplight fell full

upon the face and throat of your valet."

"Yes?"

"Themar's throat, Excellency, bears peculiar scars."

"My dear Poynter! Themar's fall injured him severely about the face and hands."

"I have not forgotten," insisted Philip grimly, "that Miss Westfall's servant sunk his terrible fingers into the throat of the man whose knife scar I bear. Whether or not his knife was meant for me, I can not say. Nor have I sufficient proof openly to accuse him, but of this much I am convinced. Themar's presence near the camp of Miss Westfall is, in the face of your peculiar and secretive errand, ominously significant."

The Baron sighed. There was frank hostility in Philip's eyes.

"Miss Westfall," added Philip hotly, "is the unsuspecting victim of a peculiar network of mystery of which I feel you hold the key. Her camp is constantly spied upon. Upon the night of the storm there were two men lurking mysteriously in the forest near her camp fire. The knife of one I was unfortunate enough to receive. The other," Philip's eyes glinted oddly, "the other, Excellency," he finished slowly, "tried, I firmly believe—to kill Miss Westfall."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the Baron, greatly shocked.

"If I might know the nature of your peculiar interest in Miss Westfall," urged Philip bluntly, "I would have greater faith in your apparent surprise."

The Baron reddened.

"That is quite impossible," he regretted formally. "Pray believe that you have magnified its importance into exceedingly ludicrous proportions. I fear I am

obliged to dispense with your faith in my integrity on the conditions you mention. Your resolution to leave me—that is final?"

"Entirely so."

"I am sorry," said the Baron simply. And, meeting his chief's eyes, Philip felt somewhat ashamed of one or two of his highly colored suspicions and reddened uncomfortably.

"It is at least—comforting," observed the Baron quietly, "to feel that whatever I may have said in confidence to you will be honorably forgotten."

"Excellency," said Philip with spirit, "though I may not speak to Miss Westfall of your interest or my suspicions, for reasons which need no naming among gentlemen, it is but fair to warn you that henceforth I shall regard myself as personally responsible for her safety."

"Gallantly spoken!" declared the older man, and watched his secretary, as he bowed and withdrew, with more regret than he had seen fit to express. Then, lying back in his chair he listened with unsmiling attention as Philip entered the billiard room with a laughing shot of abuse for Dick Sherrill which aroused an immediate uproar of welcome.

Watching the Baron's narrowed eyes, one might have wondered greatly. For Baron Tregar looked very tired and grim. At length, having smoked his cigar quite to the end, he went up to his room and summoned Themar.

"Ah, Themar!" said he softly, and laughed with peculiar relish.

Themar shifted restlessly.

"Excellency," he began, uncomfortably aware of unpleasant mockery in his chief's keen eyes.

The Baron matched the tips of his powerful fingers and studied them intently.

"Themar," said he acidly, "within a fortnight I have lost a car whose burned remains were found several miles from here, and a secretary whose friendship and invaluable service I prize more highly than your life. I feel that you can to some extent explain both of these disasters."

"Excellency knows," reminded Themar glibly, "that the car was stolen from the Sherrill garage."

"I have merely supposed so," corrected the Baron coldly. And rising he inspected the curious scars upon his valet's throat with interest. "Odd!" he purred, "that an aeroplane may simulate the marks of tearing fingers." Swept by a sudden gust of terrible anger, he gripped Themar's shoulders and shook him until the valet's face was dark with fear.

"Why," hissed the Baron, "did you lie? Why did you go to the Westfall camp and attack Poynter? Why did you swear these scars came from a disastrous flight in a stolen aeroplane? Why have you been spying upon Miss Westfall when I expressly forbade it?"

"Excellency," choked Themar, horrified by the Baron's unprecedented display of passion, "there was a blunder—I dared not tell."

"Who blundered?" thundered his chief.

"I. Granberry, I thought, was to go to his cousin's camp," panted Themar quaking. "I heard Sherrill telephone—later he told some men—"

"You took the car—" prompted the Baron icily.

"I—I did not know it was Poynter until he fell," urged Themar trembling. "Granberry and he are similar in build."

"Who attempted to kill Miss Westfall?" blazed the Baron, shaking his valet into chattering subjection.

"Excellency, I know not!" protested Themar swallowing painfully. "There was still another man—he dashed ahead and stole the car."

After all, reflected the Baron wryly, in this damnable muddle he must still use Themar. To antagonize him now would be foolhardy. Wherefore, with a civil expression of regret at his loss of temper and certain curt instructions, he dismissed Themar, sullen and chastened, and betook himself to an open window, where he sat smoking thoughtfully until the house grew quiet and one by one the lights in the valley faded out. In the web which had engulfed one by one, himself, Themar, Granberry, Miss Westfall and Poynter, a murderous stranger was floundering. Who and what he was, it behooved His Excellency to discover.

"It would seem," reflected the Baron with grim humor as he thought of his car and his secretary, "that I am paying heavily for my part in a task not greatly to my liking."

In the adjoining room behind locked doors, Themar worked feverishly upon a cipher inscribed upon a soiled linen cuff.

CHAPTER XVIII

NOMADS

"Johnny!" said Diane in crisp, distinct tones, "Mr. Poynter has slept long enough. You'd better call him."

Now it is a regrettable fact that ordinarily this attack would have provoked a reply of mild impudence from Mr. Poynter's tent, but this morning a surprising silence lay behind the flapping canvas. Diane began to hum. When presently investigation proved that Mr. Poynter's tent was in exemplary order—that Mr. Poynter and his mended shirt were missing—she went on humming—but to Johnny's amazement, burned her fingers on the coffeepot; sharply reproved Johnny for staring, and then curtly suggested that he prepare to break camp that morning, as it was high time they were on the road.

"As for Mr. Philip Poynter," reflected Diane with delicate disdain, as she bent over the fire and rolled some baked potatoes away with a stick, "what can one expect? Men are exceedingly peculiar and inconsistent and impudent. I haven't the ghost of a doubt that he found that ridiculous shirt and went off in a huff. And I'm very glad he did—very glad indeed. I meant he should, though I didn't suppose with his unconscionable nerve it would bother him in the least. If a man's sufficiently erratic to blow a tin whistle all the way to Florida—as Philip certainly is—and maroon himself on somebody else's lake for fear he'd miss an acquaintance, he'd very likely fly into a rage when one least expected it and go tramping off in the night. I do dislike people who fall into huffs about nothing."

Diane burned her fingers again, felt that the fire was unnecessarily hot upon her face, and indignantly resigning the preparation of breakfast to Johnny, went fishing.

"He should have gone long ago," mused Diane, flinging her line with considerable force into the river. "It's a great mercy as it is that Aunt Agatha didn't appear and weep all over the camp about him. I'm sorry I mended the shirt. Not but that I was fortunate to find something that would make him go, but a shirt's such a childish thing to fuss about. And, anyway, I preferred him to leave in a friendly, conventional sort of way!"

There are times, alas, when even fish are perverse! Thoroughly out of patience, Diane presently unjointed her rod, emptied the can of worms upon the bank, and returned to camp, where she found Johnny industriously piling up a heap of litter.

"What are you going to do with these?" demanded Diane, indicating an eccentric woodland broom and a rake of forked twigs and twine. "Throw them out?"

Johnny nodded.

"Well, I guess you're not!" sniffed Diane indignantly. "They're mighty convenient. That rake is really clever."

Johnny's round eyes showed his astonishment. He had heard his perverse young mistress malign these inventions of Philip's most cruelly.

Then what a woodland commotion arose after breakfast! What a cautious stamping out of fire and razing of tents! What a startled flutter of birds above and bugs below! What an excited barking on the part of Rex, who after loafing industriously for a week or so, felt called upon to sprint about and assist his mistress with a dirt-brown nose! What a trampling of horses and a creaking of

wheels as the great green wagon wound slowly through the shadowy forest road and took to the open highway with Rex at His mistress's feet haughtily inspecting the wayside.

And what a wayside, to be sure! Past fields of young rye from which a lazy silver smoke seemed to rise and follow the wind-billowing grain; past fields of dark red clover rife with the whir and clatter of mowing machines as the farmers felled the velvety stalks for clover hay; past snug white farmhouses where perfumed peonies drooped sleepily over brick walks; on over a rustic bridge, skirting now a tiny village whose church spire loomed above the trees; now following a road which lay rough and deeply rutted, among golden fields of buttercups fringed with bunch grass.

Farmers waved and called; housewives looked and disapproved; children stared and jealous canines pettishly barked at the haughty Rex; but Johnny only chuckled and cracked his whip. Day by day the green and white caravan rumbled serenely on, camping by night in field and forest.

A country world of peace and sunshine—of droning bees and the nameless fragrance of summer fields it was! And the struggling nomads of the dusty road! Diane felt a kindred thrill of interest in each one of them. Now a Syrian peddler woman, squat and swarthy, bending heavily beneath her pack amid a flurry of dust from the sun-baked roads her feet had wearily padded for days; now a sleepy negro on a load of hay, an organ grinder with a chattering monkey or a clumsy bear, another sleepy negro with another load of hay, and a picturesque minstrel with an elaborate musical contrivance drawn by a horse. Now a capering Italian with a bagpipe, who danced grotesquely to his own piping, and piped the pennies out of rural pockets as if they had been so many copper rats from Hamelin!

Peddlers and tramps and agents, country drummers and country circuses, medicine men who shouted the versatile merits of corn salve by the light of flaring torches, eccentric orators of eccentric theology, tent-shows of "Uncle

Tom's Cabin," with real bloodhounds and unreal painted ice, gypsies who were always expected to steal some one's children and never did, peddlers with creaking, clinking wagons, hucksters and motorcyclists, motorists and dusty hikers—one by one in the days to come Diane was to meet them all and learn that the nomads of the summer road were a happy-go-lucky guild of peculiar and coöperative good humor.

But the girl herself was a truer nomad than many to whom with warm friendliness she nodded and spoke.

Late one afternoon Diane espied a woodland brook. Shot with gold and shadow, it laughed along, under a waving canopy of green, freckled with cool, clean pebbles and hiding roguishly now and then beneath a trailing branch. A brook was a luxury. It was mirror and spring and lullaby in one.

By six the tents of the nomad were pitched by the forest brook and the nomad herself was smoothing back her ruffled hair over a crystalline mirror.

A drowsy negro on a load of hay drove by on the road beyond.

Diane studied him with critical interest.

"Johnny," she said, "just why are there so many drowsy negroes about driving loads of hay? Or is that the same one? And if it is, where under Heaven has he been driving that hay for the last three days?"

Johnny didn't know. Wherefore he pursed his lips and shook his head.

The hay wagon turned on into the forest on the farther side of the road and halted. The drowsy negro leisurely alighted and shuffled through the trees until he stood before Diane with a square of birch bark in his hand. Greatly astonished—for this negro was apparently too lazy to talk when he deemed it unnecessary—Diane took the birch bark and inspected it in mystification. A

most amazing message was duly inscribed thereon.

"Erastus has acquired a sinewy chicken from somebody's barn yard," it read. "Why not bring your own plate, knife, fork, spoon and a good saw over to my hay-camp and dine with me?"

"Philip."

Diane stared with rising color at the load of hay. From its ragged, fragrant bed, a tall, lean young man with a burned skin, was rising and lazily urging a nondescript yellow dog to do the same. The dog conceivably demurred, for Philip removed him, yelping, by the simple process of seizing him by the loose skin at the back of his neck and dropping him overboard. Having brushed his clothes, the young man came, with smiling composure, through the forest, the yellow dog wagging at his heels.

"I've read so much about breaking the news gently," apologized Philip, smiling, "that I thought I'd better try a bit of it myself. Hence the sylvan note. Ras, if you go to sleep by that tree, I'll like as not let you sleep there until you die. Go back to camp and build a fire and hollow out the feathered biped."

Ras slouched obediently off toward the hay-camp.

"You've hay in your ears!" exclaimed Diane, biting her lips.

"I'm a nomad!" announced Philip calmly. "So's Erastus—so's Dick Whittington here. I'm likely to have hay in my ears for months to come. Dick Whittington," explained Philip, patting the dog, "is a mustard-colored orphan I picked up a couple of days ago. He'd made a vow to gyrate steadily in a whirlwind of dust after a hermit flea who lived on the end of his tail, until somebody adopted him and—er—cut off the grasping hermit. I fell for him, but, like Ras, a sleep bug seems to have bitten him."

"Most likely he unwinds in his sleep," suggested Diane politely. And added, acidly, "Where are you going?"

"Florida!" said Philip amiably.

The girl stared at him with dark, accusing eyes.

"The trip is really no safer now," reminded Philip steadily, "than it was when I left camp."

"In a huff!" flashed Diane disparagingly.

"In a huff," admitted Philip and dismissed the dangerous topic with a philosophic shrug.

"I won't have you trailing after me on a hay-wagon!" exclaimed Diane in honest indignation.

"Hum! Just how," begged Philip, "does one go about effecting a national ordinance to keep hay-carts off the highway?"

As Philip betokened an immediate desire to name over certain rights with which he was vested as a citizen of the United States, Diane was more than willing to change the subject. Persistence was the keynote of Mr. Poynter's existence.

"Johnny," begged Philip, "get Miss Diane some chicken implements, will you, old man? And lend me some salt. You see," he added easily to Diane, "Ras and I are personally responsible for an individual and very concentrated grub equipment. It saves a deal of fussing. I carry mine in my pocket and Ras carries his in his hat, but he wears a roomier tile than I do and never climbs out of it even when he sleeps. Thank you, Johnny. I'll send Ras over with your supper. But if it seems to be getting late, look him up. He may fall asleep."

After repeated indignant refusals which Mr. Poynter characteristically splintered, Diane, intensely curious, went with Mr. Poynter to the hay-camp for supper.

Now although the somnolent Ras had been shuffling drowsily about a fresh fire with no apparent aim, he presently contrived to produce a roasted chicken fresh cucumbers, some caviare and rolls, coffee and cheese and a small freezer of ice cream, all of which he appeared to take at intervals from under the seat of the hay-cart.

"Ice cream and caviare!" exclaimed the girl aghast. "That's treason."

"I've my own notions of camping," admitted Philip, "and really our way is exceedingly simple and comfortable. Ras loads up the seat pantry at the nearest village and then we cast off all unnecessary ballast every morning. Of course we couldn't very well camp twice in the same place—we decorate so heavily—but that's a negligible factor. Oh, yes," added Philip smiling, "we've blazed our trail with buns and cheese for miles back. Ras thinks whole processions of birds and dogs and tramps and chickens are already following us. If it's true, we'll most likely eat some of'em."

"Where," demanded Diane hopelessly, "did you get this ridiculous outfit?"

"Well," explained Philip comfortably, "Ras was drowsing by Sherrill's on a load of hay and I bought the cart and the hay and the horses and Ras at a bargain and set out. Ras is a free lance without an encumbrance on earth and I can't imagine a more comfortable manner of getting about than stretched out full length on a load of hay. You can always sleep when you feel like it. And every morning we peel the bed—that is, we dispense with a layer of mattress and *presto!* I have a fresh bed until the hay's gone. We bought a new load this morning."

Swept by an irresistible spasm of laughter, Diane stared wildly about the

hay-camp.

"And Ras?" she begged faintly.

"Well," said Philip slowly, "Ras is peculiarly gifted. He can sleep anywhere. Sometimes he sleeps stretched out on the padded seat of the wagon, and sometimes he sleeps under it—the wagon I mean; not in the pantry. And then of course he sleeps all day while he's driving and once or twice I've found him in a tree. I don't like him to do that," he added with gravity, "for he's so full of hay I'm afraid the birds will begin to make nests in his ears and pockets."

"Mistah Poynteh," reflected Ras, scratching his head through his hat, "is a lunatic. He gits notions. I cain't nohow understan' him but s'long as he don' get ruction I'se gwine drive dat hay-cart to de Norf Pole if he say de word. I hain't never had a real chanst to make my fortune afore."

"And what," begged Diane presently, "do you do when it rains?"

Mr. Poynter agreed that that had been a problem.

"But with our accustomed ingenuity," he added modestly, "we have solved it. Back there in a village we induced a blacksmith with brains and brawn to fit a tall iron frame around the wagon and if the sun's too hot, or it showers, we shed some more hay and drape a tarpaulin or so over the frame. It's an excellent arrangement. We can have side curtains or not just as we choose. In certain wet circumstances, of course, we'll most likely take to barns and inns and wood-houses and corncribs and pick up the trail in the morning. You can't imagine," he added, "how ready pedestrians are to tell us which way the green moving van went."

Whereupon the nomad of the hay-camp and his ruffled guest crossed swords again over a pot of coffee, with inglorious defeat for Diane, who departed for her own camp in a blaze of indignation.

"I'll ignore him!" she decided in the morning as the green van took to the road again. "It's the only way. And after a while he'll most likely get tired and disgruntled and go home. He's subject to huffs anyway. It's utterly useless to talk to him. He thrives on opposition."

Looking furtively back, she watched Mr. Poynter break camp. It was very simple. Ras, yawning prodigiously, heaved a variety of unnecessary provisions overboard from the seat pantry, abandoned the ice-cream freezer to a desolate fate by the ashes of the camp fire and peeled the hay-bed. Philip slipped a small tin plate, a collapsible tin cup, a wooden knife, fork and spoon into his pocket. Ras put his in his hat, which immediately took on a somewhat bloated appearance. Having climbed languidly to the reins, the ridiculous negro appeared to fall asleep immediately. Mr. Poynter, looking decidedly trim and smiling, summoned Dick Whittington, climbed aboard and, whistling, disappeared from view with uncommon grace and good humor. The hay-wagon rumbled off.

Diane bit her lips convulsively and looked at Johnny. Simultaneously they broke into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"Very well," decided the girl indignantly a little later, "if I can't do anything else, I can lose him!"

But even this was easier of utterance than accomplishment. Diane was soon to learn that if the distance between them grew too great, Mr. Poynter promptly unloaded all but a scant layer of hay, took the reins himself, and thundered with expedition up the trail in quest of her, with Dick Whittington barking furiously. It was much too spectacular a performance for a daily diet.

Diane presently ordered her going and coming as if the persistent hay-gypsy on the road behind her did not exist, but every night she caught the cheerful glimmer of his camp fire through the trees, and frowned.

CHAPTER XIX

A NOMADIC MINSTREL

Striking west into New York State, Diane had come into Orange County, whence she wound slowly down into northern Jersey, through the Poconos. For days now the dusty wanderers had followed the silver flash of the Delaware, coming at length from a rugged, cooler country of mountain and lake into a sunny valley cleft by the singing river. It was a goodly land of peaceful villages tucked away mid age-old trees, of garrulous, kindly folks and covered bridges, of long, lazy canals with grassy banks banding each shore of the rippling river, of tow-paths padded by the feet of bargemen and bell-hung mules and lock-tenders.

At sunset one night Diane paid her toll at a Lilliputian house built like an architectural barnacle on to the end of a covered bridge, and with a rumble of boards wound slowly through the dusty, twilight tunnel into Pennsylvania. A little later a drowsy negro passed through with a load of hay, a barking dog and a mysterious voice, with a lazy drawl, which directed the payment of the toll from among the hay. Still later a musical nomad driving an angular horse from the seat of a ramshackle cart, accoutered, among other orchestral devices, with clashing cymbals, a drum and a handle which upon being turned a trifle by the curious tollgate keeper aroused a fearful musical commotion in the cart.

From her camp on a wooded spot by the river, Diane presently watched the hay-camp anchor with maddening ease for the night. Ras built a fire, unhitched

the horses, produced a variety of things from the seat of the pantry and took his table equipment from his hat. Philip smoked, removed an occasional wisp of hay from his hair and shied friendly pebbles at Richard Whittington.

Diane was busy making coffee when the third nomad appeared with his music machine, and, halting near her, alighted and fell stiffly to turning the eventful crank.

Instantly two terrible drumsticks descended and with globular extremities thumped, by no visible agency, upon the drum. The cymbals clashed—and a long music record began to unfold in segments like a papier-mache snake.

"Well," exclaimed Diane fervently, "I do wish he'd stop! For all we've seen him so often he's never bothered us like this before."

The unfortunate and frequently flagellated "Glowworm," however, continued to glow fearfully, impelled to eruptive scintillation by the crank, and the vocal lady "walked with Billy," and presently the minstrel came through the trees with his hat in his hand, his dark eyes very humble and deferential.

Now as Diane nodded pleasantly and smiled and held forth a coin, the wandering minstrel suddenly swayed, clapped his hand to his forehead with a choking groan and pitched forward senseless upon the ground at her feet. Diane jumped.

"Johnny!" she exclaimed in keen alarm, "we've another invalid. Turn him over!" But it was not Johnny who performed this service for the unfortunate minstrel. It was Mr. Poynter.

"Hum!" said Philip dryly. "That's most likely retribution. A man can't unwind all that hullabaloo without feeling the strain. Water, Johnny, and if you have some smelling salts handy, bring 'em along."

After one or two vigorous attentions on the part of Mr. Poynter, the nomad of the music machine opened his eyes and stared blankly about him. That he was not yet quite himself, however, was readily apparent, for meeting Mr. Poynter's unsmiling glance, he grew very white and faint and begged for water.

Philip supplied it without a word. After an interval of unsympathetic silence, during which the minstrel's eyes roved uncertainly about the camp and returned each time to Philip's face in a fascinated stare, he feebly strove to rise but fell back groaning.

"If—if I might stay here for but the night," he begged pathetically, his accent slightly foreign.

"That's impossible!" said Philip curtly. "I'll help you to your rumpus machine and back there in the village you will find an inn. My man will go with you."

"Philip!" exclaimed Diane with spirit. "The man is ill."

"I'm not denying it," averred Philip stubbornly. "Nor is there any denying the existence of the inn."

"How can you be so heartless!"

"One may also be prudent."

"He'll stay here of course if he wishes. The inn is a mile back."

"Diane!"

"Is he the first?" flashed Diane impetuously.

Philip reddened but his eyes were sombre. The knife and the bullet had engendered a certain cynicism.

"As you will!" said he. And consigning to Johnny the care of the invalid, who watched him depart with furtive relief, Philip strode off through the woods. Hospitality, reflected Philip unquietly, was all right in its place, but Diane was an extremist. After supper, however—for Philip was inherently kind hearted and sympathetic—he dispatched Ras to unhitch the minstrel's snorting steed and remove the eccentric music machine from the highway. Johnny had already accomplished both.

Smoking, Philip stared at the firelit hollow where his lady's fire-tinted tents glimmered spectrally through the trees. He was relieved to see that the camp's unbidden guest lay comfortably upon his own blankets by the fire.

Somehow the minstrel's face, clean-shaven, strikingly brown of skin and unmistakably foreign beneath the thatch of dark hair sparsely veined in grey, lingered hauntingly in his memory.

"Where in thunder have I seen him before?" wondered Philip restlessly. "There's something about his eyes and forehead—on the road probably, for of course I've passed him a number of times. Still—Lord!" added Philip with a burst of impatience, "what a salamander I am, to be sure! Whittington, old top, ever since I've known our gypsy lady, I've done nothing but fuss."

But, nevertheless, when Diane's camp finally settled into quiet for the night, there was a watchful sentry in the forest who did not retire to his bed of hay until Johnny was astir at daybreak. And Philip was to find his bearings in a staggering flash of memory and know no peace for many a day to come.

CHAPTER XX

THE ROMANCE OF MINSTRELSY

"I am glad to see that you are better," said Diane pleasantly.

The minstrel, who had bathed his hands and face in the river until they were darkly ruddy, bowed with singular grace and ease. That he was grave and courtly of manner and strikingly handsome to boot, Diane had already noticed with a flash of wonder.

"I owe you much," said he simply. "My life perhaps—"

"I am sure," protested Diane, "that you greatly overrate my small service."

"Day by day," exclaimed the minstrel sombrely, "I travel the summer roads in quest of health."

Not a little interested, Diane raised frankly sympathetic eyes to his in diffident question.

"The music?" said the minstrel with his slow, grave smile. "Is there not more romance and adventure in the life of a wandering minstrel than in that of an idle seeker after health? In the open one finds happiness, health, color and life!"

Diane felt a sudden tie of sympathy link her subtly to this mysterious nomad of the summer road. Simply and naturally she spoke of her own love of the wild

things that filled the sylvan world with life and color.

"You look much then at the wild flowers!" he exclaimed delightedly. "There was a leaf back there on a mountain, the edge of white, a white blossom in the heart like a patch of snow—"

"Snow-on-the-mountain!" exclaimed Diane. "I've looked for it for days."

"It shall be my ambition to bring you some," said the minstrel gallantly. "I shall not forget."

Diane glanced furtively at the picturesque attire which her nomadic guest wore with a certain dashing grace, and marveled afresh. It was of ragged corduroy with a brightly colored handkerchief about the throat which foiled his vivid skin artistically. Indeed there was more of sophistication in the careful blending of colors than even the normal seeker after health might deem expedient for his purpose.

"It is to few—to none indeed save you that I have confided the secret of my minstrelsy," he said deferentially a little later. "Illness, love of adventure, a longing to brush elbows with the world, a hunger for the woodland—in the eyes of unromantic men these things are weaknesses. You and I know differently, but nevertheless it is best that I seem but a poor vagrant grinding forth a hapless tune for the coppers by the wayside."

The minstrel gazed idly at the hay-camp.

"One does not quite understand," he suggested raising handsome eyebrows in subtle disapproval; "the negro, the hay—the curious camp?"

Diane recalled Philip's unfeeling attitude of the night before.

"A happy-go-lucky young man with a taste for hay," she said. "I know little

of him."

"One treasures one's confidence from the unsympathetic," ventured the minstrel. "Now the young man of the hay, I take it, is intensely practical and let us say—unromantic. Lest he laugh and scoff—" he shrugged and glanced furtively at the girl's face. It was brightly flushed and very lovely. The velvet dusk of Diane's eyes was sparkling with the zest of woodland adventure. To repose a confidence in one so spirited and beautiful was fascinating sport—and safe.

Now the minstrel found as the morning waned that he was not so strong as he had fancied. Wherefore he lay humbly by the fire and talked of his fortunes by the roadside. Bits of philosophy, of sparkling jest, of vivid description, to these Diane listened with parted lips and eyes alive with wholesome interest as her guest contrived to veil himself in a silken web of romance and mystery.

It was sunset before the girl felt uncomfortably that he ought to go. A little later, on her way to the van, she found a volume of Herodotus in the original Greek which with a becoming air of guilt the minstrel owned that he had dropped.

"Ah, Herodotus!" he murmured, smiling. "After all, was he not the wandering, romantic father of all of us who are nomads!"

"I wonder," said a lazy voice among the trees, "I wonder now if old Herodotus ever heard of a hay-camp."

Removing a wisp of hay from his shoe with a certain matter-of-fact grace characteristic of him, Mr. Poynter, who had been invisible all day, arrived in the camp of the enemy. Diane saw with a fretful flash of wonder that he was immaculate as usual. She saw too that the minstrel was annoyed and that he dropped the volume of Herodotus into his pocket with a flush and a frown.

"I trust," said Philip politely, "that you are better?"

Save for a slight dizziness, the minstrel said, he was.

"And yet," urged Philip feelingly, "I'm sure you'll not take to the road to-night, feeling wobbly. The inn back there in the village is immensely attractive. And a bed is the place for a sick man."

"He will remain where he is," flashed Diane perversely, "until he feels quite able to go on."

"Will you?" asked Philip pointedly.

The minstrel rose weakly and glanced at Diane with profound gratitude.

"After all," he said hurriedly, "he is doubtless right. Ill or not I must go on."

"An excellent notion!" approved Philip cordially. "I'll go with you."

Now whether or not the hurry and excitement of rising in these somewhat frictional circumstances brought on a recurrence of the nomad's singular disease, Diane did not know, but certainly he staggered and fell back, faint and moaning by the fire, thereby arousing an immediate commotion.

Philip grimly took his pulse and met Diane's sympathetic glance with one of honest indignation.

"Diane," he said in a low voice, "he is tricking you into sympathy merely for the comfort of your camp. Twice now his fainting has been attended by an absolutely normal pulse. Let Ras and Johnny carry him back to his rumpus machine and I'll drive him to the inn."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed the girl with flaming color. "Why are you so suspicious?"

Philip sighed.

CHAPTER XXI

AT THE GRAY OF DAWN

It was very quiet in the wood by the river. A late moon swung its golden censer above the water by invisible chains, marking checkered aisles of light in the silent wood, burnishing elfin rosaries of dew, touching with cool, white fingers of benediction the leaf-cowled heads of stately trees. Like lines of solemn monks they stood listening raptly to the deep, full chant of the moving river. The sylvan mass of the night was a thing of infinite peace and mystery, of silence and solemnity.

Into the hush of the moonlit night came presently a jarring note, the infernal racket of a motorcycle. Philip, a lone sentry by the camp of his lady, stirred and frowned. The clatter ceased. Once again the lap of the restless river and the rustle of trees were the only sounds in the silent wood. Philip glanced at the muffled figure of the minstrel asleep on the ground by the dead embers of the camp fire, and leaning carelessly upon his elbow, fell again into the train of thought disturbed by the clatter.

"Herodotus!" said Philip. "Hum!" And roused to instant alertness by the crackle of a twig in the forest, he glanced sharply roadwards where the trees thinned.

There was something moving stealthily along in the shadows. With narrowed eyes the sentry noiselessly flattened himself upon the ground and fell to watching.

A stealthy crackle—and silence. A moving shadow—a halt!

A patch of moonlight lay ahead. For an interval which to Philip seemed unending, there was no sound or movement, then a figure glided swiftly through the patch of moonlight and approached the camp. It was a man in the garb of a motorcyclist.

Noiselessly Philip shifted his position. The cyclist crept to the shelter of a tree and halted.

The moon now hung above the wood. Its light, showering softly through the trees as the night wind swayed the branches, fell presently upon the camp and the face of the cyclist.

It was Themar.

Now as Philip watched, Themar crouched suddenly and fell to staring at the muffled figure by the camp fire. For an interval he crouched motionless; then with infinite caution he moved to the right. A branch swept his cap back from his forehead and Philip saw now that his face was white and staring.

And in that instant as he glanced at the horrified face of the Houdanian, Philip knew. The stained skin, the smooth-shaven chin and lip of the minstrel—if Themar had found them puzzling, the revealment had come to him, as it had come to Philip, in a flash of bewilderment.

With a bound, the startled American was on his feet, stealing rapidly toward the man by the tree. To the spying, the mystery, the infernal trickery and masquerading which dogged his lady's trail, Themar held the key, wherefore—

Cursing, Philip forged ahead. The carpet of dry twigs beneath him had betrayed his approach and Themar was running wildly through the forest.

On and on they went, stumbling and flying through the moonlit wood to the towpath. But Philip was much the better runner and soon caught the fleeing cyclist by the collar with a grip of steel.

"Poynter!" panted Themar, staring.

"At your service!" Mr. Poynter assured him and politely begged instant and accurate knowledge of a number of things, of a knife and a bullet, of Themar's spying, of a cuff, of the man by the fire who read Herodotus, of a motorcyclist seeking for days to overtake a nomad.

"I—I dare not tell," faltered Themar, moistening his lips. "I—I am bound by an oath—"

"To spy and steal and murder!"

Themar stared sullenly at the river, gray now with the coming dawn. His dark face was drawn and haggard.

And again Mr. Poynter shot a volley of questions and awaited the answers with dangerous quiet.

Shaking, Themar refused again to answer. With even more quietness and courtesy Philip obligingly gave him a final opportunity and finding Themar white and inexorable, smiled.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Poynter warmly, "I'll take it out of your hide." Which he proceeded to do with that consummate thoroughness which characterized his every action, husbanding the strength of his long, lean arms until a knife appeared in Themar's hand. Then in deadly silence Mr. Poynter reduced his treacherous assailant to a battered hulk upon the towpath.

A mule bell tinkled in the quiet.

Upstream on the path between canal and river two mules appeared with a man slouching heavily behind them. The towline led to a grimy scow which loomed out of the misty stillness like a heavier drift of the dawn itself.

"Hello!" Philip hailed the mule driver.

"What's wantin'?" asked the man and halted.

Philip indicated Themar with his foot.

"Here is a gentleman," he explained, "whom I discovered lurking about my camp a while ago. He showed me his knife and I've mussed him up a bit."

The mule-driver bent over Themar and sharply scanned the dark, foreign face.

"One o' them damned black-and-tans, eh?" he growled. "They're too ready with their knives. What ye goin' to do with him?"

"I'm wondering," shrugged Philip, smoothing his rumpled hair back from his forehead with the palm of his hand, "if you'll permit me to pay his passage to a hospital, the farther away, the better."

The mule-driver glanced searchingly at Mr. Poynter's face. Apparently satisfied, he cupped his mouth with his hands and called "Ho, Jem!"

"Jem" jerked sharply at the tiller and presently the scow scraped the shore. The mule-driver consigned the care of his mules to Philip and scrambled down the grassy bank to the edge of the water.

"Where ye want him took?" demanded Jem, scratching a bristling shock of hair which glimmered through the dawn like a thicket of spikes.

"Well," said Mr. Poynter indifferently, "where are you going?"

Jem named a town many miles away. The mule-driver looked hard again at Philip.

"Gawd, young feller," he admired, "you're a cool un all right!"

"Take him there," said Philip with the utmost composure. "Deliver him somewhere a reasonable distance off for repairs and I'll pay you fifty dollars."

"See here," broke in Jem, somewhat staggered by the careless manner in which Mr. Poynter handled fortunes, "hain't no foul play about this here, eh? Asher says he's mussed up considerable."

"Asher's right," admitted Mr. Poynter modestly. "I did the best I could, of course. Come up and look him over. He's decorated mournfully with fist marks, but nothing worse. There's his knife."

After a somewhat cautious inspection, Themar was hoisted aboard the scow and harnessed discreetly with ropes. Jem shared his companion's distrust of black-and-tans. With a tinkle of mule-bells the cortege faded away into the gray of dawn.

Later, Mr. Poynter discovered an abandoned motorcycle by the roadside, which with some little malice he had crated at the nearest town and dispatched to Baron Tregar.

Thereafter, after a warning talk with Johnny, Philip slept by day and watched by night.

CHAPTER XXII

SYLVAN SUITORS

Southward wound the green and white van; southward the hay-camp with infrequent scurries to inn and barn for shelter; southward, his health still improving, went the musical nomad, unwinding his musical hullabaloo for the torture of musical crowds.

Now the world was a-riot with the life and color of midsummer. Sleepy cows browsed about in fields dotted with orange daisies, horses switched their tails against the cloudless sky on distant hillsides, sheep freckled the sunny pastures, and here and there beneath an apple tree heavy with fruit, lumbered a mother-sow with her litter of pigs. Sun-bleached dust clouded the highway and the swaying fields of corn were slim and tall.

The shuttle of Fate clicked and clicked as she wove and crossed and tangled the threads of these wandering, sun-brown nomads. How frequently the path of the music machine crossed the path of the van, no one knew so well perhaps as Philip, but Philip at times was tantalizing and mysterious and only evidenced his knowledge in peculiar and singularly aggravating ways.

For the friendship between Diane and the handsome minstrel was steadily growing. By what subtle hints, by what ingenuous bursts of confidence, by what bewildering flashes of inherent magnetism he contrived to cement it, who may say? But surely his romantic resources like his irresistible charm of speech and manner, were varied. A rare flower, an original and highly commendable bit of

woodland verse, some luxury of fruit or camping device, in a hundred delicate ways he contrived to make the girl his debtor, talking much in his grave and courtly way of the gratitude he owed her. Adroitly then this romantic minstrel spun his shining, varicolored web, linking them together as sympathetic nomads of the summer road; adroitly too he banned Philip, who by reason of a growing and mysterious habit of sleeping by day had gained for himself a blighting reputation of callous indifference to the charm of the beautiful rolling country all around them.

"I'm exceedingly sorry," read a scroll of birch bark which Ras drowsily delivered to Diane one sunset, "but I'll have to ask you to invite me to supper. Ras bought an unhappy can of something or other behind in the village and it exploded.

"Philip."

"If I refuse," Diane wrote on the back, "you'll come anyway. You always do. Why write? Will you contribute enough hay for a cushion? Johnny's making a new one for Rex."

It was one of the vexing problems of Diane's nomadic life, just how to treat Mr. Philip Poynter. It was increasingly difficult to ignore or quarrel with him—for his memory was too alarmingly porous to cherish a grudge or resentment. When a man has had a bump upon his only head, held Mr. Poynter, things are apt to slip away from him. Wherefore one may pardon him if after repeated commands to go home, and certain frost-bitten truths about officious young men, he somehow forgot and reappeared in the camp of the enemy in radiant good humor.

Philip presently arrived with a generous layer of hay under his arm and a flour bag of tomatoes.

"Hello," he called warmly. "Isn't the sunset bully! It even woke old Ras up

and he's blinking and grumbling like fury." Mr. Poynter fell to chatting pleasantly, meanwhile removing from his clothing certain wisps of hay.

"You're always getting into hay or getting out of it!" accused Diane.

Philip admitted with regret that this might be so and Diane stared hopelessly at his immaculate linen. Heaven alone knew by what ingenuity Mr. Poynter, handicapped by the peculiar limitations of a hay-camp, contrived to manage his wardrobe. What mysterious toilet paraphernalia lay beneath the hay, what occasional laundry chores Ras did by brook and river, what purchases Mr. Poynter made in every village, and finally what an endless trail of shirts and cuffs and collars lay behind him, doomed, like the cheese and buns, as he feelingly put it, to one-night stands, only Ras and Philip knew; but certainly the hay-nomad combined the minimum of effort with the maximum of efficiency to the marvel of all who beheld him. Ras's problem was infinitely simpler. He never changed. There was much of the original load of hay, Philip said, dispersed about his ears and pockets and fringing the back of his neck.

"Where did you get tomatoes?" inquired Diane at supper.

"Well," said Philip, "I hate to tell you. I strongly suspect Ras of spearing 'em with a harpoon he made. Made it in his sleep, too. It's pretty long and he can spear whatever he wants from the wagon seat. Lord help the rabbits!" He lazily sprinkled salt upon a large tomato and bit into it with relish. "But why should I worry?" he commented smiling. "They're mighty good. Johnny, old top, see if you can rustle up a loaf of bread to lend me for breakfast, will you? I'm willing to trade three cucumbers for it. And tell Ras when you take his supper over that there's a herring under the seat for Dick Whittington's supper. Tell me," he added humorously to Diane, "just how do you contrive to remember bread and salt?"

"I don't," said Diane, smiling. "Johnny does. Did the storm get you last night, Philip?"

"It did indeed. It's the third load of hay we've had this week. We're perpetually furling up the tarpaulin or unfurling it or skinning the mattress or watching the clouds. I'm a wreck."

"Where have you been all day?"

"Haying!" said Philip promptly.

"Sleeping!" corrected Diane with a critical sniff.

Mr. Poynter fancied they were synonyms.

"Do you know," he added pointedly, "I imagine I'd find ever so much more romance and adventure about it if I only had some interesting ailment and a music-mill. I did think I had a bully cough, but it was only a wisp of hay in my throat."

Philip's powers of intuition were most fearful. Diane colored.

"Just what do you mean?" she inquired cautiously.

"Nothing at all," replied Philip with a charming smile. "I never do. Why mean anything when words come so easy without? It has occurred to me," he added innocently, "that it takes an uncommonly thick-skinned and unromantic dub to tour about covered with hay. Fancy sleeping through this wild and beautiful country when I might be grinding up lost chords to annoy the populace."

Diane had heard something of this sort before from quite another source. Acutely uncomfortable, she changed the subject. There was something uncanny in Philip's perfect comprehension of the minstrel's tactics.

A little later Mr. Poynter produced a green bug mounted eccentrically upon a bit of birch bark.

"I found a bug," he said guilelessly. "He was a very nice little bug. I thought you'd like him."

Diane frowned. For every flower the minstrel brought, Philip contrived a ridiculous parallel.

"How many times," she begged hopelessly, "must I tell you that I am not collecting ridiculous bugs?"

Philip raised expressive eyebrows.

"Dear me!" said he in hurt surprise. "You do surprise me. Why, he's the greenest bug I ever saw and he matches the van. He's a nomad with the wild romance of the woodland bounding through him. I did think I'd score heavily with him."

Diane discreetly ignored the inference. Whistling happily, Mr. Poynter poured the coffee and leaned back against a tree trunk. Watching him one might have read in his fine eyes a keener appreciation of nomadic life—and nomads—than he ever expressed.

There was idyllic peace and quiet in this grove of ancient oaks shot with the ruddy color of the sunset. Off in the heavier aisles of golden gloom already there were slightly bluish shadows of the coming twilight. Hungry robins piped excitedly, woodpeckers bored for worms and flaming orioles flashed by on golden wings. Black against the sky the crows were sailing swiftly toward the woodland.

With the twilight and a young moon Philip produced his wildwood pipe and fell to smoking with a sigh of comfort.

"Philip!" said Diane suddenly.

"Mademoiselle!" said Philip, suspiciously grave and courtly of manner. The girl glanced at him sharply.

"It annoys me exceedingly," she went on finally, finding his laughing glance much too bland and friendly to harbor guile, "to have you trailing after me in a hay-wagon."

"I'll buy me a rumpus machine," said Philip.

"It would bother me to have you trailing after me so persistently in any guise!" flashed the girl indignantly.

"It must perforce continue to bother you!" regretted Philip. "Besides," he added absently, "I'm really the Duke of Connecticut in disguise, touring about for my health, and the therapeutic value of hay is enormous."

Now why Diane's cheeks should blaze so hotly at this aristocratic claim of Mr. Poynter's, who may say? But certainly she glanced with swift suspicion at her tranquil guest, who met her eyes with supreme good humor, laughed and fell to whistling softly to himself. Despite a certain significant silence in the camp of his lady, Mr. Poynter smoked most comfortably, puffing forth ingenious smoke-rings which he lazily sought to string upon his pipestem and busily engaging himself in a variety of other conspicuously peaceful occupations. All in all, there was something so tranquil and soothing in the very sight of him that Diane unbent in spite of herself.

"If you'd only join a peace tribunal as delegate-at-large," she said, "you'd eliminate war. I meant to freeze you into going home. I do wish I could stay indignant!"

"Don't," begged Philip humbly. "I'm so much happier when you're not."

"There *is* another way of managing me," he said hopefully a little later. "I

meant to mention it before—"

"What is it?" implored Diane.

"Marry me!"

"Philip!" exclaimed the girl with delicate disdain, "the moon is on your head—"

"Yes," admitted Philip, "it is. It does get me. No denying it. Doesn't it ever get you?"

"No," said Diane. "Besides, I never bumped my brain—"

"That could be remedied," hinted Philip, "if you think it would alter matters—"

Diane was quite sure it would not and later Philip departed for the hay-camp in the best of spirits. In the morning Diane found a conspicuous placard hung upon a tree. The placard bore a bombastic ode, most clever in its trenchant satire, entitled—"To a Wild Mosquito—by One who Knows!"

Since an ill-fated occasion when Mr. Poynter had found a neatly indited ode to a wild geranium written in a flowing foreign hand, his literary output had been prodigious. Dirges, odes, sonnets and elegies frequently appeared in spectacular places about the camp and as Mr. Poynter's highly sympathetic nature led him to eulogize the lowlier and less poetic life of the woodland, the result was frequently of striking originality.

Convinced that Mr. Poynter's eyes were upon her from the hay-camp, Diane read the ode with absolute gravity and consigned it to the fire.

The minstrel's attitude toward the hay-nomad might be one of subtle undermining and shrugging ridicule, but surely with his imperturbable gift of

satire, Mr. Poynter held the cards!

Still another morning Diane found a book at the edge of her camp.

"I am dropping this accidentally as I leave," read the fly leaf in Philip's scrawl. "I don't want you to suspect my classic tastes, but what can I do if you find the book!"

It was a volume of Herodotus in the original Greek!

CHAPTER XXIII

LETTERS

Buckwheat was cut, harvest brooded hazily over the land and the fields were bright with goldenrod when Diane turned sharply across Virginia to Kentucky.

"It is already autumn," she wrote to Ann Sherrill. "The summer has flown by like a bright-winged bird. For days now the forests have been splashed with red and gold. The orchards are heavy with harvest apples, the tassels of the corn are dark and rusty, and the dooryards of the country houses riot gorgeously in scarlet sage and marigold, asters and gladiolas. The twilight falls more swiftly now and the nights are cooler but before the frost sweeps across the land I shall be in Georgia.

"For all it is autumn elsewhere, here in this wonderful blue grass land, it is spring again, a second spring. The autumn sunlight over the woods and pastures is deeply, richly yellow. There are meadow larks and off somewhere the tinkle of a cow bell. Oh, Ann, how good it is to be alive!

"Ages ago, in that remote and barbarous past when I lived with a roof above my head, there were times when every pulse of my body cried and begged for life—for gypsy life and gypsy wind and the song of the roaring river! Now, somehow, I feel that I have lived indeed—so fully that a wonderful flood tide of peace and happiness flows strongly in my veins. I am brown and happy. Each day I cook and tramp and fish and swim and sleep—how I sleep with the

leaves rustling a lullaby of infinite peace above me! Would you believe that I lived for two days and nights in a mountain cave? I did indeed, but Johnny was greatly troubled. Aunt Agatha stuffed his head with commands.

"The South thrills and calls. After all, though I was born in the Adirondacks, I am Southern, every inch of me. The Westfalls have been Florida folk since the beginning of time.

"There is an interesting nomad in a picturesque suit of corduroy who crosses my path from time to time with an eccentric music-machine. Sometimes I see him gravely organ-grinding for a crowd of youngsters, sometimes—with an innate courtliness characteristic of him—for a white-haired couple by a garden gate. He is wandering about in search of health. Oddly, his way lies, too, through Kentucky and Tennessee, to Florida. He—and Ann, dear, this confidence of his I must beg you to respect, as I know you will—is a Hungarian nobleman, picturesquely disguised because of some political quarrel with his country. He writes excellent verse in French and Latin, is a clever linguist, and has a marvelous fund of knowledge about birds and flowers. Altogether he is a cultured, courtly, handsome man whom I have found vastly entertaining. Romantic, isn't it?

"A letter to Eadsville, Kentucky, will reach me if you write as soon as this reaches you.

"Ever yours,

"Diane."

Let him who is more versed in the science of a nomad's mind than I, say why there was no mention of the hay-camp!

Ann's answer came in course of time to Eadsville. As Ann talked in sprightly italics, so was her letter made striking and emphatic by numberless underlinings.

"How very romantic!" ran a part of it. "I am mad about your nobleman! Isn't it wonderful to have such unique and thrilling adventures? I suppose you hung things up on the walls of the cave and built a delightfully smoky fire and that the Hungarian—bless his heart!—trimmed his corduroy suit with an ancestral stiletto, and paid his courtly respects to the beautiful gypsy hermit and fell desperately in love with her, as well he might. I would myself!

"Diane, I simply must see him! I'm dying for a new sensation. Ever since Baron Tregar's car was stolen from the farm garage and his handsome secretary mysteriously disappeared (by the way, it's Philip Poynter—Carl knows him—do you?) and then reappeared with a most unsatisfactory explanation which didn't in the least explain where he had been—only to up and disappear again as strangely as before, and the very next morning—life has been terribly monotonous. And mother had a rustic seizure and made us stay at the farm all summer. Imagine! Dick's aeroplane the tops off all the trees!

"Do beg your Hungarian to join us at Palm Beach in January. It would be most interesting and novel and I'll swear on the ancestral stiletto to preserve his incognito! You remember you solemnly promised to come to me in January, no matter where you were! My enthusiasm grows as I write—it always does. I'm planning a *fête de nuit*—masked of course. Do please induce the romantic musician to attend. I must have him. I'm sure he'll enjoy a few days of conventional respectability and so will you. I'll lend you as many gowns as you need, you dear, delightful gypsy!"

To which Diane's answer was eminently satisfactory.

"Last night as Johnny was getting supper," she wrote, "our minstrel appeared with a great bunch of silver-rod and I begged him to stay to supper. He was greatly gratified and when later I confessed my indiscreet revelation to you—and your invitation—he accepted it instantly. He will be honored to be your guest, he said, provided of course he may depend upon us to preserve his

incognito. That is very important. Do you know it is astonishing how I find myself keyed up to the most amazing pitch of interest in him—he's so mysterious and romantic and magnetic.

"Your constant craving for new and original sensations brings back a lot of memories. Will you never get over it?

"I shall probably leave the van with Johnny at Jacksonville and go down by rail. There are certain spectacular complications incident to an arrival at Palm Beach in the van which would be very distasteful, to say the least. Besides, I'd be later than we planned."

For most likely, reflected Diane, nibbling intently at the end of her pen, most likely Palm Beach had never seen a hay-camp and much Mr. Poynter would care!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LONELY CAMPER

The west was yellow. High on the mountain where a mad little waterfall sprayed the bushes of laurel and rhododendron with quicksilver, the afterglow of the sunset on the tumbling water made a streak of saffron. The wings of a homing eagle were golden-black against the sky. Over there above the cornfields to the west there was a cliff and a black and bushy ravine over which soared a buzzard or two. Presently when the moon rose its splendid alchemy would turn the black to glowing silver.

A Kentucky brook chuckled boisterously by the hay-camp, tumbling headlong over mossy logs and stones and a tangled lacery of drenched ferns.

Philip laid aside a bow and arrow upon which he had been busily working since supper and summoned Dick Whittington. Beyond, through oak and poplar, glowed the camp fire of his lady.

"Likely we'll tramp about a bit, Richard, if you're willing," said he. "Somehow, we're infernally restless to-night and just why our lady has seen fit to pile that abominable silver-rod in such a place of honor by her tent, we can't for the life of us see. It's nothing like so pretty as the goldenrod. By and by, Whittington," Philip felt for his pipe and filled it, "we'll have our wildwood bow and arrows done and we fancy somehow that our gypsy's wonderful black eyes are going to shine a hit over that. Why? Lord, Dick, you do ask foolish questions! Our beautiful lady's an archer and a capital one too, says Johnny—"

even if she does like beastly silver-rod."

Somewhat out of sorts the Duke of Connecticut set off abruptly through the trees with the dog at his heels.

Having climbed over log and boulder to a road which cleft the mountain, he kept on to the north, descending again presently to the level of the camp, smoking abstractedly and whistling now and then for Richard Whittington, who was prone to ramble. Philip was debating whether or not he had better turn back, for the moon was already edging the black ravine with fire, when a camp fire and the silhouette of a lonely camper loomed to the west among the trees. Philip puffed forth a prodigious cloud of smoke and seated himself on a tree stump.

"My! My!" said he easily. "Must be our invalid and his rumpus machine. Whittington, we're just in the mood to-night, you and I, to wander over there and tell him that he's not getting half so much over on us as he thinks he is. I've a mind to send you forward with my card."

Philip's eyes narrowed and he laughed softly. Tearing a sheet of paper from a notebook he took from his pocket, he scribbled upon it the following astonishing message:

"The Duke of Connecticut desires an audience. Do not kick the courier!"

Accustomed by now to carry birch-bark messages to Diane, Richard Whittington wagged in perfect understanding and trotted off obediently toward the fire with Philip close at his heels.

Conceivably astonished, the camper presently picked up the paper which Mr. Whittington dropped at his feet, and read it. As Philip stepped lazily from the trees he turned.

It was Baron Tregar. Both men stared.

"The Duke of Connecticut!" at length rumbled the Baron with perfect gravity. "I am overwhelmed."

Philip, much the more astonished of the two, laughed and bowed.

"Excellency," said he formally, "I am indeed astonished."

"Pray be seated!" invited the Baron, his eyes more friendly than those of his guest. "I, too, have taken to the highway, Poynter, on yonder motorcycle and I have lost my way." He sniffed in disgust. "I am dining," he added dryly, "if one may dignify the damnable proceeding by that name, on potatoes which I do not in the least know how to bake without reducing them to cinders. I bought them a while back at a desolate, God-forsaken farmhouse. Heaven deliver me from camping!"

With which pious ejaculation the Baron inspected his smudged and blistered fingers and read again the entertaining message from the Duke of Connecticut.

"Why take to the highway," begged Philip guilelessly, "when the task is so unpleasant?"

"Ah!" rumbled the Baron, more sombre now, "there is a man with a music-machine—"

"There is!" said Philip fervently.

The Baron looked hard at His Highness, the Duke of Connecticut. The latter produced his cigarette case and opening it politely for the service of his chief, smiled with good humor.

"There is," said he coolly, "a man with a music-machine, a mysterious malady, a stained skin and a volume of Herodotus! Excellency knows the—er

—romantic ensemble?"

Excellency not only knew him, but for days now, taking up the trail at a certain canal, he had traveled hard over roads strangely littered with hay and food and linen collars—to find that romantic ensemble. He added with grim humor that he fancied the Duke of Connecticut knew him too. The Duke dryly admitted that this might be so. His memory, though conveniently porous at times, was for the most part excellent.

"What is he doing?" asked the Baron with an ominous glint of his fine eyes.

"Excellency," said Philip, staring hard at the end of his cigarette, "by every subtle device at his command, he is making graceful love to Miss Westfall, who is sufficiently wholesome and happy and absorbed in her gypsy life not to know it—yet!"

The Barents explosive "Ah!" was a compound of wrath and outraged astonishment. Philip felt his attitude toward his chief undergoing a subtle revolution.

"His discretion," added Philip warmly, "has departed to that forgotten limbo which has claimed his beard."

The Baron was staring very hard at the camp fire.

"So," said he at last,—“it is for this that I have been—” he searched for an expressive Americanism, and shrugging, invented one, “thunder-cracking along the highway in search of the man Themar saw by the fire of Miss Westfall. ‘It is incredible—it can not be!’ said I, as I blistered about, searching here, searching there, losing my way and thunder-cracking about in dead of night—all to pick up the trail of a green and white van and a music-machine! ‘It is unbelievable—it is a monstrous mistake on the part of Themar!’ But, Poynter, this love making, in the circumstances, passes all belief!” The Baron added that twice within the

week he had passed the hay-camp but that by some unlucky fatality he had always contrived to miss the music-machine.

"Days back," rumbled the Baron thoughtfully, "I assigned to Themar the task of discovering the identity of the man who—er—acquired a certain roadster of mine and who, I felt fairly certain, would not lose track of Miss Westfall but Themar, Poynter, came to grief—"

"Yes?" said Philip coolly. "You interest me exceedingly."

"He made his way back to me after many weeks of illness," said the Baron slowly, "with a curious tale of a terrible thrashing, of a barge and mules, of rough men who kicked him about and consigned him to a city jail under the malicious charge of a mule-driver who swore that he loved not black-and-tans—"

"Lord!" said Philip politely; "that was tough, wasn't it?"

"Just what, Poynter," begged the Baron, "is a black-and-tan?"

Mr. Poynter fancied he had heard the term before. It might have reference to the color of a man's skin and hair.

An uncomfortable silence fell over the Baron's camp. The Baron himself was the first to break it.

"Poynter," said he bluntly, "the circumstances of our separation at Sherrill's have engendered, with reason, a slight constraint. There was a night when you grievously misjudged me—"

"I am willing," admitted Philip politely, "to hear why I should alter my views."

"*Mon Dieu*, Poynter!" boomed the Baron in exasperation, "you are maddening. When you are politest, I fume and strike fire—here within!"

"Mental arson!" shrugged the Duke of Connecticut, relighting his cigarette with a blazing twig. "For that singular crime. Excellency, my deepest apologies."

The Baron stared, frowned, and laughed. One may know very little of one's secretary, after all.

"You are a curious young man!" said he.

The Duke of Connecticut admitted that this might be so. Hay, therapeutically, had effected an astonishing revolution in a nature disposed congenitally to peace and trustfulness. Local applications of hay had made him exceedingly suspicious and hostile. So much so indeed that for days now he had slept by day, to the total wreck of his aesthetic reputation, and watched by night, convinced that Miss Westfall's camp was prone to strange and dangerous visitors. Excellency no doubt remembered the knife and the bullet.

The Baron sighed.

"Poynter," he said simply, "to a man of my nature and diplomatic position, a habit of candor is difficult. I wonder, however, if you would accept my word of honor as a gentleman that I know as little of this treacherous bullet as you; that for all I am bound to secrecy, my sincerest desire is to protect Miss Westfall from the peculiar consequences of this damnable muddle, to clear up the mystery of the bullet, and for more selfish reasons to protect her from the romantic folly of the man with the music-machine!"

Philip, his frank, fine face alive with honest relief, held out his hand.

"Excellency," said he warmly, "one may learn more of his chief over a camp fire, it seems, than in months of service. Our paths lie parallel." There was a subtle compact in the handshake.

"What," questioned the Baron presently, "think you, are my fine gentleman's plans, Poynter?"

Philip reddened.

"Excellency," he admitted, "I have definite information of his plans which I did not seek."

"And the source?"

"Miss Westfall's servant."

"Ah!"

"There are certain atmospheric conditions," regretted Philip, "intensely bad for hay-camps, wherefore I found myself obliged to seek an occasional understudy who would not only blaze the trail for me but do faithful sentry duty in my absence. And Johnny, Excellency, whom I pledged to this secret service, uncomfortably insists upon reporting to me much unnecessary detail. He has developed a most unreasoning dislike for music-machines and musical gypsies."

"There appears to be a general prejudice against them," admitted the Baron grimly.

"A while back, then," resumed Philip, "Johnny chanced upon the information that in January Miss Westfall will be a guest of Ann Sherrill's at Palm Beach. So will our minstrel—still incognito—"

"Excellent!" rumbled the Baron with relish. "Excellent. If all this be true," he added, muddling an Americanism, "we have then, of the horse another color!"

"Later," said Philip, "when Miss Westfall returns to her house on wheels, I imagine he too will take to the road again—and resume his charming erotics."

"That," said the Baron with decision, "is most undesirable."

"I agree with you!" said Philip feelingly.

"I too have promised to be a guest at Miss Sherrill's *fête de nuit*!" purred the Baron suavely. "And you, Poynter?"

"Unfortunately Miss Sherrill knows absolutely nothing of my whereabouts."

"Sherrill days ago entrusted me with a cordial invitation for you. He was unaware of our disagreement and expected you to accompany me. As my official secretary, Poynter, for, let us say the month of January, it is possible for me to command your attendance at Palm Beach."

"Excellency," said Philip slowly, "singular as it may seem in my present free lance state, I am greatly desirous of hearing such a command."

"Poynter," boomed the Baron formally, "in January I shall be overweighted with diplomatic duties at Palm Beach. I regret exceedingly that I am forced to command your attendance. This frivolling about must cease." He shook suddenly with silent laughter. "Doubtless," said he, meeting Philip's amused glance with level significance, "doubtless, Poynter, we can—"

"Yes," said Philip with much satisfaction, "I think we can."

They fell to chatting in lower voices as the fire died down.

"Meanwhile," shrugged the disgusted Baron a little later, "I shall abandon that accursed music-machine to its fate, and rest. God knows I am but an indifferent nomad and need it sorely. Night and day have I thunder-cracked the highways, losing my way and my temper until I loathe camps and motor machines and dust and wind and baked potatoes. I sincerely hope, Poynter, that you can find me the road to an inn and a bed, a bath and some iced mint—"

to-night."

Philip could and did. Presently standing by his abominated motorcycle on a lonely moonlit road, the Baron adjusted his leather cap and stroked his beard.

"Do you know, Poynter," said he slowly, "this is a most mysterious motorcycle. It was crated to me from an unknown village in Pennsylvania by the hand of God knows whom!"

"Excellency," said Philip politely as he cordially shook hands with his chief, "The world, I find, is full of mystery."

CHAPTER XXV

A DECEMBER SNOW STORM

As the dusty wanderers wound slowly down into southern Georgia on a mild bright day, a December snow storm broke with flake and flurry over the Westfall farm. Whirling, crooning, pirouetting, the mad white ghost swept down from the hills and hurled itself with a rattle of shutters and stiffened boughs against the frozen valley. By nightfall the wind was wailing eerily through the chimneys; but the checkerboard panes of light one glimpsed through the trees of the Westfall lane were bright and cheery.

In the comfortable sitting room of the farmhouse, Carl rose and drew the shades, added a log to the great, open fireplace and glanced humorously at his companion who was industriously playing Canfield.

"Well, Dick," said he, "on with your overcoat. Now that supper's done, we've a tramp ahead of us."

Wherry rebelled.

"Oh, Lord, Carl!" he exclaimed. "Hear the wind!" He rose and drew aside the shade. "The lane's thick with snow. Heavens, man, it's no night for a tramp. Allan's coming in with the mail and he looks like a snow man."

"You promised," reminded Carl inexorably. "How long since you've had a drink, Dick?"

"Nine weeks!" said Wherry, his boyish face kindling suddenly with pride.

"And your eyes and skin are clear and you're lean and hard as a race horse. But what a fight! What a fight!" Carl slipped his arm suddenly about the other's broad shoulders. "Come on, Dick," he urged gently. "It's discipline and endurance to-night. I want you to fight this icy wind and grit your teeth against it. Every battle won makes a force furrow in your will."

He met Wherry's eyes and smiled with a flash of the irresistible magnetism which somehow awoke unconscious response in those who beheld it. It flamed now in Wherry's clear young eyes, a look of dumb fidelity such as one sees now and then in the eyes of a faithful animal. Such a look had flashed at times in the bloated face of Hunch Dorrigan, in the eyes of young Allan Carmody here at the farm, and—in early manhood when Carl had lazily set a college by the ears—in the eyes of Philip Poynter. It was the nameless force which the faculty had dreaded, for it sent men flocking at the heels of one whose daring whims were as incomprehensible as they were unexpected and original.

Young Allan brought the mail in and Carl smilingly tossed a letter to Wherry, who colored and slipped it in his pocket with an air of studied indifference.

Carl slit the two directed to himself and rapidly scanned their contents. One was from Ann Sherrill jogging his memory about a promise to come to Palm Beach in January, the other from Aunt Agatha, whose trip to her cousin's in Indiana Carl had encouraged with a great flood of relief, for it had made possible this nine weeks with Wherry at the Glade Farm.

Two steps at a time, Wherry bounded up to his room. When he returned he was in better spirits than he had been for months.

"Come on, Carl," he exclaimed boyishly. "I'll walk down any gale to-night. And Allan says we're in for a blizzard."

Breasting the biting gale, the two men swung out through the snowy lane to the roadway.

Carl watched his companion in silence. It was a test—this wind—to see how much of a man had been made from the flabby, drunken wreck he had dragged to the Glade Farm weeks ago with a masterful command. It had been a bitter fight, with days of heavy sullenness on Wherry's part and swift apology when the mood was gone, days of hard riding and walking, of icy plunges after a racking grind of exercise for which Carl himself with his splendid strength inexorably set the pace, days of fierce rebellion when he had calmly thrashed his suffering young guest into submission and locked him in his room, days of horrible choking remorse and pleading when Carl had grimly turned away from the pitiful wreck Starrett had made of his clever young secretary.

Once Starrett had motored up officiously to bully Wherry into coming back to him. Carl smiled. Starrett had stumbled back to his waiting motor with a broken rib and a bruised and swollen face. Starrett was a coward—he would not come again.

Carl glanced again at Wherry. It was a man who walked beside him to-night. The battle was over. Chin up, shoulders squared against the bitter wind, he walked with the free, full stride of health and new endurance, tossing the snow from his dark, heavy hair with a laugh. There was clear red in his face and his eyes were shining.

Five miles in the teeth of a sleety blizzard and every muscle ached with the fight.

"Dick," said Carl suddenly, "I'm proud of you."

Wherry swung sturdily on his heel.

"But you won for me, Carl," he said quietly. "I'll not forget that."

In silence they tramped back through the heavy drifts to the farmhouse and left their snowy coats in the great warm kitchen where the Carmodys—old Allan and young Allan, young, shy, pretty Mary and old Mary, the sole winter servants of the Glade—were mulling cider over a red-hot stove.

By the fire in the sitting room Dick faced his host with hot color in his face.

"Carl," he said with an effort, "my letter to-night—it's from a girl up home in Vermont. I—I've never spoken of her before—I wasn't fit—"

"Yes?" said Carl.

"She's a little bit of a girl with wonderful eyes," said Wherry, his eyes gentle. "We used to play a lot by the brook, Carl, until I went away to college and forgot. I—I wrote her the whole wretched mess," he choked. "She says come back."

"Yes," said Carl sombrely, "there are fine, big splendid women like that. I'm glad you know one. God knows what the world of men would do without them. You'll go back to her?"

Wherry gulped courageously.

"If—if you think I'm fit," he said, his face white. "If you feel you can trust me, I'll go in the morning."

"I know I can trust you," said Carl with his swift, ready smile. "I know, old man, that you'll not forget."

"No," said Dick, "I can't forget."

"Tell me," Carl bent and turned the log. "What will you do now, Dick? I know your head was turned a bit by the salary Starrett gave you, but you'll not

go back to that sort of work for a while anyway, will you?"

"No," said Dick. "If I knew something of scientific farming," he added after a while, "I think I'd stay home. Dad's a doctor, a kindly, old-fashioned chap. I—I'd like to have you know him, Carl—he's a bully sort. He's living up there in Vermont on a farm that's never been developed to its full possibilities. It's the best farm in the valley, but, you see, he hasn't the time and he's growing old—"

"Why not take a course at an agricultural college?"

Wherry colored.

"I haven't the money, Carl," he acknowledged honestly. "Most of Dad's savings went to see me through college. I've a little—"

"Would a thousand a year see you through, with what you've got?" asked Carl quietly.

But Wherry did not answer. He had walked away to the window, shaking. Presently he turned back to the table, but his face was white and his eyes dark with agony. Dropping into a chair he buried his face in his hands, unnerved at the end of his fight by Carl's offer.

Wisely the man by the fire let him fight it out by himself and for an interval there was no sound in the quiet room save the crackle of the log and the great choking breaths of the boy by the table, whose head had fallen forward on his outstretched arms.

Carl threw his cigar into the fire and rose.

"Brace up, Dick!" he said at length. "We've been touching the high spots up here and you were strung to a tension that had to break." He crossed to Wherry and laid his hand heavily on the boy's heaving shoulder. "Now, Dick, I

want you to listen to me. I'm going to see you through an agricultural college and you're not going to tell me I can't afford it. I know it already. But I've four thousand a year and that's so far off from what I need to live in my way—that a thousand or so one way or the other wouldn't make any more difference than a snowflake in hell. I owe you something anyway—God knows!—for supplying the model that sent you to perdition. If you hadn't paid me the ingenuous compliment of unremitting imitation, you'd have been a sight better off. . . And you're going to marry the white little girl with the beautiful eyes and the wonderful, sweet forgiving decency of heart, and bring up a crowd of God-fearing youngsters, make over the old doctor's farm for him—and likely his life—and begin afresh. That's all I ask. Now to bed with you."

Wherry wrung Carl's hand, and after a passionate, incoherent storm of gratitude stumbled blindly from the room.

The old house grew very quiet. Presently to the crackle of the fire and the wild noise of the wind outside was added the soft and melancholy lilt of a flute. There was no mockery or impudence in the strain to-night. It was curiously of a piece with the creaking loneliness of the ancient farmhouse and so soft at times that the clash of the frozen branches against the house engulfed it utterly.

Sombre, swayed by a surge of deep depression, the flutist lay back in his chair by the fire, piping moodily upon the friend he always carried in his pocket. To-morrow Dick would be off to the girl in Vermont—

The clock struck twelve. The rural world was wrapped in slumber. Above-stairs Dick was sleeping the sound, dreamless sleep of healthy weariness, and most likely dreaming of the girl by the brook. A cleansed body and a cleansed mind, thank God! So had he slept for nights while the inexorable master of his days, with no companion but his flute, drank and drank until dawn, climbing up to bed at cockcrow—sometimes drunk and morose, sometimes a grim and conscious master of the bottle.

Carl had been drinking wildly, heavily for months. That in flagellating Wherry's body day by day he spared not himself, was characteristic of the man and of his will. That he preached and dragged a man from the depths of hell by day and deliberately descended into infernal abysses by night, was but another revelation of the wild, inconsistent humors which tore his soul. Youth and indomitable physique gave him as yet clear eyes and muscles of iron, for all he abused them, but the humors of his soul from day to day grew blacker.

Kronberg, a new servant Carl had brought with him to the Glade for personal attendance, presently brought in his nightly tray of whiskey.

Carl glanced at the bottle and frowned.

"Take it away!" he said curtly.

Kronberg obeyed.

A little later, white and very tired, Carl went up to bed.

Dick went in the morning. At the door, after chatting nervously to cover the surge of emotion in his heart, he held out his hand. Neither spoke.

"Carl," choked Wherry at last, meeting the other's eyes with a glance of wild imploring, "so help me God, I'll run straight. You know that?"

"Yes," said Carl truthfully, "I know it."

An interval of desperate silence, then: "I—I can't thank you, old man, I—I'd like to but—"

"No," said Carl. "I wish you wouldn't."

And Wherry, wildly wringing his hand for the last time, was off to the sleigh waiting in the lane, a lean, quivering lad with blazing eyes of gratitude and a

great choke in his throat as he waved at Carl, who smiled back at him with lazy reassurance through the smoke of a cigarette.

Carl's day was restless and very lonely. By midnight he was drinking heavily, having accepted the tray this time and dismissed Kronberg for the night. Though the snow had abated some the night before, and ceased in the morning, it was again whirling outside in the lane with the wild abandon of a Bacchante. The wind too was rising and filling the house with ghostly creaks.

It was one of those curious nights when John Barleycorn chose to be kind—when mind and body stayed alert and keen. Carl lazily poured some whiskey in the fire and watched the flame burn blue. He could not rid his mind of the doctor's farm and the girl in Vermont.

Again the wind shook the farmhouse and danced and howled to its crazy castanetting. There was a creak in the hallway beyond. Last night, too, when he had been talking to Wherry, there had been such a creak and for the moment, he recalled vividly, there had been no wind. Then, disturbed by Dick's utter collapse, he had carelessly dismissed it. Now with his brain dangerously edged by the whiskey and his mind brooding intently over a series of mysterious and sinister adventures which had enlivened his summer, he rose and stealing catlike to the door, flung it suddenly back.

Kronberg, his dark, thin-lipped face ashen, fell headlong into the room with a revolver in his hand.

With the tigerish agility which had served him many a time before Carl leaped for the revolver and smiling with satanic interest leveled it at the man at his feet.

"So," said he softly, "you, too, are a link in the chain. Get up!"

Sullenly Kronberg obeyed.

"If you are a good shot," commented Carl coolly, "the bullet you sent from this doorway would have gone through my head. That was your intention?"

Kronberg made no pretense of reply.

"You've been here nine weeks," sympathized Carl, "and were cautious enough to wait until Wherry departed. What a pity you were so delayed! Caution, my dear Kronberg, if I may fall into epigram, is frequently and paradoxically the mother of disaster. As for instance your own case. I imagine you're a blunderer anyway," he added impudently; "your fingers are too thick. If you hadn't been so anxious to learn when Wherry was likely to go," guessed Carl suddenly, "you wouldn't have listened and creaked at the keyhole last night. And more than likely you'd have gotten that creak over on me to-night."

Kronberg's shifting glance roved desperately to the doorway.

"Try it," invited Carl pleasantly. "Do. And I'll help you over the threshold with a little lead. Do you know the way to the attic door in the west wing?"

Kronberg, gulping with fear, said he did not. He was shaking violently.

"Get the little lamp on the mantel there," commanded Carl curtly, "and light it. Bring it here. Now you will kindly precede me to the door I spoke of. I'll direct you. If you bolt or cry out, I'll send a bullet through your head. So that you may not be tempted to waste your blood and brains, if you have any, and my patience, pray recall that the Carmodys are snugly asleep by now in the east wing and the house is large. They couldn't hear you."

It was the older portion of the house and one which by reason of its draughts was rarely used in winter, to which Carl drove his shaking prisoner. In summer it was cool and pleasant. In winter, however, it was cut off from heat and habitation by lock and key.

At Carl's curt direction Kronberg turned the key in the door and passed through the icy file of rooms beyond to the second floor, thence to a dusty attic where the sweep of the wind and snow seemed very close, and on to an ancient cluster of storerooms. Years back when the old farmhouse had been an inn, shivering servants had made these chill and dusty rooms more habitable. Now with the deserted wing below and the wind-feet of the Bacchante on the roof above, they were inexpressibly lonely and dreary.

Kronberg bit his lip and shuddered. His fear of the grim young guard behind him had been subtly aggravated by the desolation of his destined jail.

Halting in the doorway of an inner room, Carl held the light high and nodded with approval.

Its dim rays fell upon dust and cobwebs, trunks and the nondescript relics of years of hoarding. There were no windows; only a skylight above clouded by the whirl of the storm.

Carl seated himself upon a trunk, placed the lamp beside him and directed his guest to a point opposite. Kronberg, with dark, fascinated eyes glued upon the glittering steel in his jailer's hand, obeyed.

"Kronberg," said Carl coldly, "there's a lot I want to know. Moreover, I'm going to know it. Nor shall I trust to drunken jailers as I did a while back with a certain compatriot of yours. Late last spring when you sought employment at my cousin's town-house, you were already, I presume, a link in the chain. If my memory serves me correctly, you were dismissed after ten days of service, through no fault of your own. The house was closed for the summer. You came to me again this fall with a letter of recommendation from Mrs. Westfall. Knowing my aunt," reflected Carl dryly, "that is really very humorous. What were you doing in the meantime?"

Carl shifted the lamp that its pale fan of light might fall full upon the other's

face.

"Let me tell you—do!" said he. "For I'm sure I know. During the summer, my dear Kronberg, I was the victim of a series of peculiar and persistent attacks. To a growing habit of unremitting vigilance and suspicion, I may thank my life. As for the peaceful monotony of the last nine weeks, doubtless I may attribute that to the constant companionship of Wherry, the fact that you were much too unpopular with the Carmodys as a foreigner to find an opportunity of poisoning my food, and that I've fallen into the discreet and careful habit of always drinking from a fresh bottle, properly sealed. There was a chance even there, but you were not clever enough to take it. You're overcautious and a coward. But how busy you must have been before that," he purred solicitously, "bolting about in various disguises after me. How very patient! Dear, dear, if Nature had only given you brains enough to match your lack of scruples—"

The insolent purr of his musical voice whipped color into Kronberg's cheeks. Abruptly he shifted his position and glared stonily.

"Venice," murmured Carl impudently, "Venice called them *bravi*; here in America we brutally call them gun-men, but honestly, Kronberg, in all respect and confidence, you really haven't brains and originality enough for a clever professional murderer. Amateurish killing is a sickly sort of sport. And the danger of it! Take for instance that night when you fancied you were a motor bandit and waylaid me on the way to the farm. I was very drunk and driving madly and I nearly got you. A pretty to-do that would have been! To be killed by an amateur and you a paid professional! My! My! Kronberg, I blush for you. I really do!"

He rose smiling, though his eyes were dangerously brilliant.

"Just when," said he lazily, "did you steal the paper I found in the candlestick? It's gone—"

He had struck fire from the stone man at last. A hopeless, hunted look flamed up in Kronberg's eyes and died away.

"Ah!" guessed Carl keenly, "so you're in some muddle there, too, eh?" Kronberg stared sullenly at the dusty floor.

"A silence strike?" inquired Carl. "Well we'll see how you feel about that in the morning. As for the skylight, Kronberg, if you feel like skating down an icy roof to hell, try it."

Whistling softly, Carl backed to the door and disappeared. An instant later came the click of a key in the lock. He had taken the lamp with him.

Groping desperately about, Kronberg searched for some covering to protect him from the icy cold. His search was unsuccessful. When the skylight grayed at dawn, he was pacing the floor, white and shaking with the chill.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN ACCOUNTING

The key clicked in the lock. Kronberg, huddled in a corner, stirred and cunningly hid the flimsy coverings of chintz he had unearthed from an ancient trunk. For three days he had not spoken, three days of bitter, biting cold, three days of creaking, lonely quiet, of mournful wind and shifting lights above the glass overhead, of infernal visitations from one he had grown to fear more than death itself. With heavy chills racking his numb body, with flashes of fever and clamping pains in his head, his endurance was now nearing an end.

Bearing a tray of food, Carl entered and closed the door.

"I'm still waiting, Kronberg," he reminded coolly, "for the answers to those questions."

For answer Kronberg merely pushed aside the tray of food with a shudder. There was a dreadful nausea to-day in the pit of his stomach.

"So?" said Carl. "Well," he regretted, "there are always the finger stretchers. They're crude, Kronberg, and homemade, but in time they'll do the work."

Kronberg's face grew colorless as death itself as his mind leaped to the torture of the day before. A clamp for every finger tip, a metal bar between—the hell-conceived device invented by his jailer forced the fingers wide apart and held them there as in vise until a stiffness bound the aching cords, then a

pain which crept snakelike to the elbow—and the shoulder. Then when the tortured nerves fell wildly to telegraphing spasmodic jerkings of distress from head to toe, the shrugging devil with the flute would talk vividly of roaring wood fires and the comforts awaiting the penitent below. Yesterday Kronberg had fainted. To-day—

Carl presently took the singular metal contrivance from his pocket, deftly clamped the fingers of his victim and sat down to wait, rummaging for his flute.

The tension snapped.

Choking, Kronberg fell forward at his jailer's feet, his eyes imploring.

"Mercy," he whispered. "I—I can not bear it."

"Then you will answer what I ask?"

"Yes."

Carl unsnapped the infernal finger-stretcher and dropped it in his pocket.

"Come," said he not unkindly and led his weak and staggering prisoner to a room in the west wing where a log fire was blazing brightly in the fireplace.

With a moan Kronberg broke desperately away from his grasp and flung himself violently upon his knees by the fire, stretching his arms out pitifully to the blaze and chattering and moaning like a thing demented. Carl walked away to the window.

Presently the man by the fire crept humbly to a chair, a broken creature in the clutch of fever, eyes and skin unnaturally bright.

"Here," said Carl, pouring him some brandy from a decanter on the table. "Sit quietly for a while and close your eyes. Are you better now?" he asked a

little later.

"Yes," said Kronberg faintly.

"What is your real name?"

"Themar."

"When you took service with my aunt in the spring, you were looking for a certain paper?"

"Yes."

"Did you find it during your ten days in the town-house?"

"No."

"How did you discover its whereabouts?"

"One night I watched you replace it in a secret drawer in your room. Before I could obtain it, the house was closed for the summer and I was dismissed. I had succeeded, however, in getting an impression of the desk lock."

"You went back later?"

"Yes. It was a summer day—very hot. The front door was ajar. I opened it wider. Your aunt sat upon the floor of the hall crying—"

"Yes?"

"I spoke of passing and seeing the door ajar. She recognized me as one of the servants and begged me to call a taxi. I assisted her to the taxi and went back, having only pretended to lock the door."

"And having disposed of her," supplied Carl, "you flew up the stairs, applied the key made from the impression—and stole the paper?"

"Yes."

"Beautiful!" said Carl softly. "How cleverly you tricked me!"

Themar shrugged.

"It was very simple."

Carl smiled.

"Where is the paper now?" he inquired.

Themar's face darkened.

"When later I looked in the pocket of my coat," he admitted, "the paper had disappeared utterly. Nor have I found it since. It is a very great mystery—"

"Ah!" said Carl. "So," he mused, "as long as the paper was in my possession, my life was safe, for you must watch me to find it. Therefore I was not poisoned or stabbed or shot at during your original ten days of service. Later, even though you could not lay your own hands upon the paper, things began to happen. Knowing what I did, I had lived too long as it was."

"Yes."

"Suppose you begin at the beginning—and tell me just what you know."

It was a halting, nervous tale poorly told. Carl, with his fastidious respect for a careful array of facts, found it trying. By a word here or a sentence there, he twisted the mass of imperfect information into conformity and pieced it out with knowledge of his own.

"So," said he coldly, "you thought to stab me the night of the storm and stabbed Poynter. Fool! Why," he added curtly, "did you later spy upon my cousin's camp when Tregar had expressly forbidden it?"

It was an unexpected question. Themar flushed uncomfortably. Carl had a way of reading between the lines that was exceedingly disconcerting. His information, he said at length after an interval of marked hesitancy, had been too meager. He had listened at the door once when the Baron had spoken of Miss Westfall to his secretary. A housemaid had frightened him away and he had bolted upstairs—to attend to something else while they were both safely occupied. Rather than work blindly as he needs must if he knew no more, he had sought to add to his information by spying on her camp.

It was unconvincing.

"So," said Carl keenly, "Baron Tregar does not trust you!"

Themar's lip curled.

"The Baron knew of your ten days in my cousin's house?"

Again the marked hesitancy—the flush.

"Yes," said Themar.

"You're lying," said Carl curtly. "If you wish to go back—"

Themar moistened his dry lips and shuddered.

"No," he whispered, "he did not know."

"Why?"

Themar fell to trembling. This at least he must keep locked from the grim, ironic man by the window.

"You're playing double with Tregar and with me," said Carl hotly. "I thought so. Very well!" Smiling infernally, he drew from his pocket the finger-stretchers.

"Excellency!" panted Themar.

"Why did you serve in my cousin's house without the knowledge of the Baron?"

"If—if the secret was harmful to Houdania," blurted Themar desperately, spurred to confession by the clank of the metal in Carl's hand, "I—I could sell the paper to Galituria!"

The nature of the admission was totally unexpected. Carl whistled softly.

"Ah!" said he, raising expressive eyebrows.

"My mother," said Themar sullenly, "was of Galituria. There is hatred there for Houdania—a century's feud—"

"And you in the employ of the rival province hunting this to earth! What a mess—what a mess!"

Followed a battery of merciless questions punctuated by the diabolic clank of metal.

Themar had been deputed solely to report to Baron Tregar—

"And murder me!" supplemented Carl curtly.

"Yes," said Themar. "Under oath I was to obey Ronador's commands without question. But he did not even trust me with the cipher message of

instruction. That was mailed to the Baron's Washington address written in an ink that only turned dark with the heat of a fire. I too was sent to Washington. Ronador knew nothing of the Baron's trip to Connecticut."

By spying before he had sailed, Themar added, at a question from Carl, he had learned of the cipher.

"You read the paper of course when you stole it from my desk?"

"There was a noise," said Themar dully, his face bitter; "I ran for the street. Later the paper was gone."

"What were Tregar's intentions about the paper?"

Themar chewed nervously at his lips.

"His Excellency spoke to me of a paper. He said that I must discover its whereabouts, if possible, but that none but he must steal it. Anything written which you would seem to have hidden would be of interest to him. He bound me by a terrible oath not to touch or read it."

"And you?"

"After a time I swore that I had seen you burn it—"

"Clumsy! Still if he believed it, it left me, in the event of Miss Westfall's complete ignorance of all this hubbub, the sole remaining obstacle."

But Themar had not heard. He was shaking again in the clutch of a heavy chill. Presently, his sentences having trailed off once or twice into peculiar incoherency, he fell to talking wildly of a hut in the Sherrill woods in which he had lived for days in the early autumn, of a cuff in a box buried in the ground beneath the planking. For weeks, he said, he had vainly tried to solve its cipher, stealing away from the farm by night to pore over it by the light of a candle. It

was fearfully intricate—

"But you—you that know all," he gasped painfully, "you will get it and read and tell me—"

Moaning he fell back in his chair.

Carl rang for Mrs. Carmody. It was young Mary, however, who answered, her round blue eyes lingering in mystification upon the fire Carl had built in the deserted wing.

"Mary," said Carl carelessly, "you'd better phone for a doctor and a nurse. Kronberg has returned and I fear he's in for a spell of pneumonia."

Later in the Sherrill hut, Carl ripped a board from the floor and found in the dirt beneath, a box containing a soiled cuff covered with an intricate cipher.

"Odd!" said he with a curious smile as he dropped the cuff into his pocket; "it's very odd about that paper."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SONG OF THE PINE-WOOD SPARROW

With the dawn a laggard breeze came winging drowsily in from the southern sea, the first thing astir in the spectral world of palm and villa. Warm and deliciously fragrant, it swept the stiff wet Bermuda grass upon the lawn of the Sherrill villa at Palm Beach, rustled the crimson hedge of hibiscus, caught the subtle perfume of jasmine and oleander and swept on to a purple-flowered vine on the white walls of the villa, a fuller, richer thing for the ghost-scent of countless flowers.

Into this gray-white world of glimmering coquina and dew-wet palm rode presently the slim, brisk figure of a girl astride a fretful horse. A royal palm dripped cool gray rain upon her as she galloped past to the shell-road looming out of the velvet stillness ahead like a dim, white ghost-trail.

The gray ocean murmured, the still gray lagoon was asleep! Here and there a haunting, elusive splash of delicate rose upon the silver promised the later color of a wakening world. It was a finer, quieter world, thought Diane, than the later day world of white hot sunlight.

With pulses atune to the morning's freshness, the girl galloped rapidly along the shell-road, the clattering thud of her horse's hoofs startling in the quiet. As yet only a sleepy bird or two had begun to twitter. There was a growing noise

of wind in the grass and palms.

A century back it seemed to this girl in whom the restless gypsy tide was subtly fretting, she had left Johnny and the van at Jacksonville to come into this sensuous, tropical world of color, fashionable life and lazy days.

Coloring delicately, the metallic gray bosom of the lake presently foretold the sunrise with a primrose glow. When at length the glaring white light of the sun struck sparks from the dew upon the pine and palmetto, Diane was riding rapidly south in quest of the Florida flat-woods. There was a veritable paradise of birds in the pine barren, Dick Sherrill had said, robins and bluebirds, flickers and woodpeckers with blazing cockades, shrikes and chewinks.

It was an endless monotony of pine trees, vividly green and far apart, into which Diane presently rode. A buzzard floated with uptilted wings above the sparse woodland to the west. A gorgeous butterfly, silver-spangled, winged its way over the saw palmetto and sedge between the trees to an inviting glade beyond, cleft by a shallow stream. Swamp, jungle, pine and palmetto were vocal with the melody of many birds.

Diane reined in her horse with a thrill. This was Florida, at last, not the unreal, exotic brilliance of Palm Beach. Here was her father's beloved Flowerland which she had loved as a child. Here were pines and tall grass, sun-silvered, bending in the warm wind, and the song of a pine-wood sparrow!

From the scrub ahead came his quiet song, infinitely sweet, infinitely plaintive like the faint, soft echo of a fairy's dream. A long note and a shower of silver-sweet echoes, so it ran, the invisible singer seeming to sing for himself alone. So might elfin bells have pealed from a thicket, inexpressibly low and tender.

Diane sat motionless, the free, wild grace of her seeming a part of the primeval quiet. For somehow, by some twist of singer's magic, this Florida bird was singing of Connecticut wind and river, of dogwood on a ridge, of water

lies in the purple of a summer twilight, of a spot named forever in her mind—Arcadia.

Now as the girl listened, a beautiful brown sprite of the rustling pine wood about her, a great flood of color crept suddenly from the brown full throat to the line of her hair, and the scarlet that lingered in her cheeks was wilder than the red of winter holly.

Surely—surely there was no reason under Heaven why the little bird should sing about a hay-camp!

But sing of it he did with a swelling throat and a melodic quiver of nerve and sinew, and a curious dialogue followed.

"A hay-camp is a very foolish thing, to be sure!" sang the bird with a dulcet shower of plaintive notes.

"To be sure," said the voice of the girl's conscience, "to be sure it is. But how very like him!"

"But—but there was the bullet—"

"I have often thought of it," owned the Voice.

"A gallant gentleman must see that his lady comes to no harm. 'Tis the way of gallant gentlemen—"

"Hum!"

"And he never once spoke of his discomfort on the long hot road, though a hay-camp is subject to most singular mishaps."

"I—I have often marveled."

"He is brave and sturdy and of charming humor—"

"A superlative grain of humor perhaps, and he's very lazy—"

"And fine and frank and honorable. One may not forget Arcadia and the rake of twigs."

"One may not forget, that is very true. But he seeks to make himself out such a very great fool—"

"He cloaks each generous instinct with a laughing drollery. Why did you hum when you cooked his supper and called to him through the trees?"

"I—I do not know."

"Twas the world-old instinct of primitive woman!"

"No! No! No! It was only because I was living the life I love the best. I was very happy."

"Why were you happier after the storm?"

"I—I do not know."

"You have scolded with flashing eyes about the hay-camp—"

"But—I—I did not mind. I tried to mind and could not—"

"That is a very singular thing."

"Yes."

"Why have you not told him of the tall sentinel you have furtively watched of moonlit nights among the trees, a sentinel who slept by day upon a ridiculous

bed of hay that he might smoke and watch over the camp of his lady until peep o' day?"

"I—do not know."

"You are sighing even now for the van and a camp fire—for the hay-camp through the trees—"

"No!" with a very definite flash of perversity.

"Where is this persistent young nomad of the hay-camp anyway?"

"I—I have wondered myself."

But with a quiver of impatience the horse had pawed the ground and the tiny bird flew off to a distant clump of palmetto.

Diane rode hurriedly off into the flat-woods.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE NOMAD OF THE FIRE-WHEEL

It had been an unforgettable day, this day in the pine woods. Diane had forded shallow streams and followed bright-winged birds, lunched by a silver lake set coolly in the darkling shade of cypress and found a curious nest in the stump of a tree. Now with a mass of creeping blackberry and violets strapped to her saddle she was riding slowly back through the pine woods.

Though the sun, which awhile back had filled the hollow of palmetto fronds with a ruddy pool of light, had long since dropped behind the horizon, the girl somehow picked the homeward trail with the unerring instinct of a wild thing. That one may be hopelessly lost in the deceptive flatwoods she dismissed with a laugh. The wood is kind to wild things.

It was quite dark when through the trees ahead she caught the curious glimmer of a cart wheel of flame upon the ground, hub and spokes glowing vividly in the center of a clearing. Curiously the girl rode toward it, unaware that the picturesque fire-wheel ahead was the typical camp fire of the southern Indian, or that the strange wild figure squatting gravely by the fire in lonely silhouette against the white of a canvas-covered wagon beyond in the trees, was a vagrant Seminole from the proud old turbaned tribe who still dwell in the inaccessible morasses of the Everglades.

The realization came in a disturbed flash of interest and curiosity. Though the Florida Indian harmed no one, he still considered himself proudly hostile to the

white man. Wherefore Diane wisely wheeled her horse about to retreat.

It was too late. Already the young Seminole was upon his feet, keen of vision and hearing for all he seemed but a tense, still statue in the wildwood.

Accepting the situation with good grace, Diane rode fearlessly toward his fire and reined in her horse. But the ready word of greeting froze upon her lips. For the nomad of the fire-wheel was a girl, tall and slender, barbarically arrayed in the holiday garb of a Seminole chief. The firelight danced upon the beaten band of silver about her brilliant turban and the beads upon her sash, upon red-beaded deerskin leggings delicately thonged from the supple waist to the small and moccasined foot, upon a tunic elaborately banded in red and a belt of buckskin from which hung a hunting knife, a revolver and an ammunition pouch.

But Diane's fascinated gaze lingered longest upon the Indian girl's face. Her smooth, vivid skin was nearer the hue of the sun-dark Caucasian than of the red man, and lovelier than either, with grave, vigilant eyes of dusk, a straight, small nose and firm, proud mouth vividly scarlet like the wild flame in her cheeks.

Aloof, impassive, the Indian girl stared back.

"I wish well to the beautiful daughter of white men!" she said at length with native dignity. The contralto of her voice was full and rich and very musical, her English, deliberate and clear-cut.

Immensely relieved—for the keen glance of those dark Indian eyes had suddenly softened—Diane leaped impetuously from her horse; across the fire white girl and Indian maid clasped hands.





White girl and Indian maid then clasped hands.

[Illustration: White girl and Indian maid then clasped hands.]

"Do forgive me!" she exclaimed warmly. "But I saw your fire and turned this

way before I really knew what I was doing." Just as Diane won the confidence of every wild thing in the forest, so now with her winsome grace and unaffected warmth, she won the Indian girl.

Some subtle, nameless sympathy of the forest leaped like a spark from eye to eye—then with a slow, grave smile in which there was much less reserve, the Seminole motioned her guest to a seat by the fire.

Nothing loath, Diane promptly tethered her horse and squatted Indian fashion by the cartwheel fire, immensely thrilled and diverted by her picturesque adventure.

"My name," she offered presently with her ready smile, "is Diane."

"Di-ane," said the Indian girl majestically. And added naïvely, "She was the Roman goddess of light—and of hunting, is it not so?"

Diane looked very blank.

"Where in the world—" she stammered, staring, and colored.

The Indian girl smiled.

"From so high," she said shyly, "I have been taught by Mic-co. Like the white student of books, I know many curious things that he has taught me."

"And your name?" asked Diane, heroically mastering her mystified confusion. "May I—may I not know that too?"

"Shock-kil-law," came the ready reply.

"That readily becomes Keela!" exclaimed Diane smiling.

The girl nodded.

"So Mic-co has said. And so indeed he calls me."

"Tell me, Keela, what does it mean?"

"Red-winged blackbird," said Keela.

It was eminently fitting, thought Diane, and glanced at Keela's hair and cheeks.

There was a wild duck roasting in the hub of coals—from the burning spokes came the smell of cedar. The Indian girl majestically broke a segment of koon-ti bread and proffered it to her companion. With faultless courtesy Diane accepted and presently partook with healthy relish of a supper of duck and sweet potatoes.

The silence of the Indian girl was utterly without constraint.

"I wonder," begged Diane impetuously, "if you'll tell me who Mic-co is? I'm greatly interested. He taught you about Rome?"

Nodding, the Indian girl said in her quaint, deliberate English that Mic-co was her white foster father. The Seminoles called him Es-ta-chat-tee-mic-co—chief of the White Race. Most of them called him simply Mic-co. He was a great and good medicine man of much wisdom who dwelt upon a fertile chain of swamp islands in the Everglades. The Indians loved him.

Still puzzled, Diane diffidently ventured a question or two, marveling afresh at the girl's beauty and singular costume.

"I am of no race," said Keela sombrely. "My father was a white man; my mother not all Indian; my grandfather—a Minorcan. Six moons I live with my white foster father. And I live then as I wish—like the daughter of white men. Six moons I dwell with the clan of my mother. Such is my life since the old chief

made the compact with Mic-co. Come!" she added and led the way to the Indian wagon.

"When the night-winds call," she said wistfully, "I grow restless—for I am happiest in the lodge of Mic-co. Then the old chief bids me travel to the world of white men and sell." There was gentle pathos in her mellow voice.

Pieces of ancient pottery, quaint bleached bits of skeleton, beads and shells and trinkets of gold unearthed from the Florida sand mounds, moccasins and baskets, koonti starch and plumes, such were the picturesque wares which Keela peddled when the stir of her mingled blood drove her forth from the camp of her forbears.

Diane bought generously, harnessed her saddle with clanking relics and regretfully mounted her horse.

"Let me come again to-morrow!" she begged.

"Uncah!" granted the girl in Seminole and her great black eyes were very friendly.

Looking back as she rode through the flat-woods, Diane marveled afresh. It was a far cry indeed from the camp of a Seminole to the legends of Rome.

But the primeval flavor of the night presently dissolved in the glare of acetylenes from a long gray car standing motionless by the roadside ahead. The climbing moon shone full upon the face of a bareheaded motorist idly smoking a cigarette and waiting.

Diane reined in her horse with a jerk and a clank of relics.

"Philip Poynter!" she exclaimed.

The driver laughed.

"I wonder," said he, "if you know what a shock you've thrown into your aunt by staying out in the flat-woods until dark. She once knew a man who lost himself. Incidentally they are mighty deceptive to wander about in. The trees are so far apart that one never seems to get into them. And then, having meanwhile effectively got in without knowing it, one never seems to get out."

"Where," demanded Diane indignantly, "did you come from anyway?"

"If you hadn't been so ambitious," Philip assured her with mild resentment, "you'd have seen me at breakfast. I arrived at Sherrill's last night. As it is, I've been sitting here an hour or so watching you swap wildwood yarns with the aborigine yonder. And Ann Sherrill sent me after you in Dick's speediest car. Ho, uncle!"

An aged negro appeared from certain shadows to which Philip had lazily consigned him.

"Uncle," said Philip easily, "will ride your horse back to Sherrill's for you. I picked him up on the road. You'll motor back with me?"

Diane certainly would not.

"Then," regretted Philip, "I'm reduced to the painful and spectacular expedient of just grazing the heels of your fiery steed with Dick's racer all the way back to Sherrill's and matching up his hoof-beats on the shell-road with a devil's tattoo on the horn."

Greatly vexed, Diane resigned her horse to the waiting negro, who rode off into the moonlight with a noisy clank. Mr. Poynter's face was radiant.

"And after running the chance of a night in the pine barrens," he mused admiringly, "you amble out of the danger zone in the most matter-of-fact

manner with your saddle clanking like a bone-yard. I don't wonder your aunt fusses. What made the racket?"

"Bones and shells and things."

"Well, for such absolute irresponsibility as you've developed since you've been out of the chastening jurisdiction of the hay-camp, I'd respectfully suggest that you marry the very first bare-headed motorist, smoking a cigarette, whom you happened to see as you rode out of the pine-woods."

"Philip," said Diane disdainfully, "the moon—"

"Is on my head again," admitted Philip. "I know. It always gets me. We'd better motor around a bit and clear my brain out. I'd hate awfully to have the Sherrills think I'm in love."

Almost anything one could say, reflected Diane uncomfortably, inspired Philip's brain to fresh fertility.

The camp of Keela, domiciled indefinitely in the flat-woods to sell to winter tourists, proved a welcome outlet for the fretting gypsy tide in Diane's veins. She found the Indian girl's magnetism irresistible.

Proud, unerringly truthful, fastidious in speech and personal habit, truly majestic and generous, such was the shy woodland companion with whom Diane chose willfully to spend her idle hours, finding the girl's unconstrained intervals of silence, her flashes of Indian keenness, her inborn reticence and naïve parade of the wealth of knowledge Mic-co had taught her, a most bewildering book in which there was daily something new to read.

There was a keen, quick brain behind the dark and lovely eyes, a faultless knowledge of the courtesies of finer folk. Mic-co had wrought generously and well. Only the girl's inordinate shyness and the stern traditions of her tribe,

Diane fancied, kept her chained to her life in the Glades.

Keela, strangely apart from Indian and white man, and granted unconventional license by her tribe, hungered most for the ways of the white father of whom she frequently spoke.

Diane learned smoke signals and the blazing and blinding of a trail, an inexhaustible and tragic fund of tribal history which had been handed down from mouth to mouth for generations, legends and songs, wailing dirges and native dances and snatches of the chaste and oathless speech of the Florida Indian.

"Diane, *dear!*" exclaimed Ann Sherrill one lazy morning, "what in the *world* is that exceedingly mournful tune you're humming?"

"That," said Diane, "is the 'Song of the Great Horned Owl,' my clever little Indian friend taught me. Isn't it plaintive?"

"It is!" said Ann with deep conviction. "*Entirely* too much so. I feel creepy. And Nathalie says you did some picturesque dance for her and your aunt—"

"The 'Dance of the Wild Turkey,'" explained Diane, much amused at the recollection. "Aunt Agatha insisted that it was some iniquitous and cunningly disguised Seminole species of turkey trot. She was horribly shocked and grew white as a ghost at my daring—"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Ann Sherrill. "She ought to have *all* the shock out of her by now after bringing up you and Carl! *I'm* going to ride out to the flat-woods with you, for I'm simply *dying* for a new sensation. Dick's as stupid as an owl. He does nothing but hang around the Beach Club. And Philip Poynter's tennis mad. He looks hurt if you ask him to do anything else except perhaps to trail fatuously after you. It's the flat-woods for mine."

Ann returned from her visit to the Indian camp scintillant with italics and enthusiasm.

"My dear," she said, "I'm *wild* about her—*quite* wild! ... I'm going again and *again*! ... If I knew *half* as much and were *half* as lovely— Why, do you know, Diane, she set me right about some ridiculous quotation, and I never try to get them straight, for *half* the time I find my own way so *much* more expressive... There's Philip Poynter with a tennis racquet again! Diane, I'm losing patience with him."

From her madcap craving for new sensation, Ann was destined to evolve an inspiration which with customary energy and Diane's interested connivance she swept through to fruition, unaware that Fate marched, leering, at her heels.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BLACK PALMER

Curious things may happen when masked men hold revel under a moonlit sky.

Thus in a tropical garden of palm and fountain, of dark, shifting shadows and a thousand softly luminous Chinese lanterns swaying in a breeze of spice, a Bedouin talked to an ancient Greek.

"He is here?" asked the Bedouin with an accent slightly foreign.

"Yes," said the Greek. "He is here and immensely relieved, I take it, to be rid of the jurisdiction of the hay-camp."

"I fancied he would not dare—"

"A man in love," commented the Greek dryly, "dares much for the sake of his lady. One may conceivably lack discretion without forfeiting his claim to courage."

"The disguise of his stained and shaven face," hinted the Bedouin grimly, "has made him over-confident. Having tested it with apparent success upon you—"

"Even so. But he has forgotten that few men have such striking eyes."

"If he has taken the pains to assure himself of my whereabouts," rumbled the

Bedouin, "as he surely has, I am of course still blistering in extreme southern Florida, hunting tarpon. I have a permanent Washington address which I have taken pains to notify of my interest in tarpon and to which he writes. These incognito days," added the Bedouin with a slight smile, "my cipher communications cross an ocean and return immediately by trusted hands to America, though I, of course, know nothing of it. Those from my charming minstrel to me—make similar tours."

"And I?"

"You—my secretary—having spent a few days with the Sherrills on your way to join me after months of frivolling with a hay-camp, have been forced by telegram to depart before the *fête de nuit* to which Miss Sherrill begged our attendance. Rest assured he knows that too. Therefore, to unmask unobtrusively and slip away to his room, and in the absence of other guests to linger for a week of incognito quiet—*voilà!* he is quite safe though imprudent!"

Greek and Bedouin fell silent, watching the laughing pageant in the garden.

Venetian lamps glowed like yellow witch-lights in the branches; fountains tossed moon-bright sprays of quicksilver aloft and tinkled with the splash; the waters of a sunken pool, jeweled in stars, glimmered darkly green through files of cypress. All in all, an entrancing moon-mad world of mystery and dusk-moths, heavy with the scent of jasmine and orange. And the moon played brightly on curious folk, on spangles and jewels and masked and laughing eyes.

A gray mendicant monk with sombre, thin-lipped face beneath a grayish mask slipped furtively by with a curious air of listening intently to the careless chatter about him; a fat and plaintive Queen Elizabeth followed, talking to a stout courtier who was over-trusting the seams of his satin breeches.

"I doubt if you'll believe me," puffed Queen Elizabeth dolorously, "but every day since that time she deliberately went out and lost herself all day in the flat-

woods and stopped to look at that ridiculous cart with the wheel of flame when I was sure a buzzard had bitten her—No! No! I don't know, Jethro; I'm sure I don't. How should I know why it was burning? But it was. She said plainly that it was a cart wheel of fire and if it was a wheel it must certainly have been on something and what on earth would a wheel be on but a cart? Certainly one wouldn't buy a bale of cart wheels to make fires in the flat-woods. Well, it's the strangest thing, Jethro, but nearly every day since, she's visited the flat-woods and wandered about with that terrible Indian girl who isn't an Indian girl. Seems that she's a most extraordinary girl with a foster-father and she sells sand mounds—no, that's not it—the things they find in them besides the sand—and she has a queer, wild sort of culture and her father was white. Like as not Diane will come home some night scalped and she has such magnificent hair, Jethro. To her knees it is and so black! And what must she and Ann do to-night but—there, I promised Diane faithfully to keep it a secret, for they've been working for days and days and she is distractingly lovely. With the Sherrill topazes too. And now that she's sold all the sand mounds, or whatever it is, do you know, Jethro, she's going to drive Diane north to Jacksonville in the Indian wagon. They start to-morrow morning. I think it's because they're both so mad about trees and things—I can't for the life of me make it out. Jethro, Diane will drive me mad—she will indeed. Well, all I can say, Jethro, is that if you don't know what I'm talking about you must be very stupid to-night. No! No! do I ever know, Jethro? He may be here and he may not. He may be off in Egypt shooting scarabs by now. He was at the farm when he wrote to me in Indiana. Well, *collecting* scarabs, then, Jethro. Why do you fuss so about little things? Isn't it funny—strangest thing!"

Queen Elizabeth passed on with her aged dandy.

A dark figure by the cypress pool laughed and shrugged. He was a singular figure, this man by the pool, with a hint of the Orient in his garb. His robe was of black, with startling and unexpected flashes of scarlet lining when he walked. Black chains clanked drearily about his waist and wrists. There was a cunningly

concealed light in his filmy turban which gave it the singular appearance of a dark cloud lighted by an inner fire. As he wandered about with clanking chains, he played strange music upon a polished thing of hollow bones. Sometimes the music laughed and wooed when eyes were kind; sometimes when eyes were over-daring it was subtly impudent and eloquent. Sometimes it was so unspeakably weird and melancholy that along with the clanking chains and the strangely luminous turban, many a careless stroller turned and stared. So did a slender, turbaned Seminole chief with a minstrel at his heels.

It was upon this picturesque young Seminole that the eyes of the Greek by the hibiscus lingered longest, but the eyes of the Bedouin scanned every line of the minstrel's ragged corduroy with grim amusement.

"A romantic garb, by Allah!" said the Bedouin dryly.

"It has served its purpose," reminded the Greek sombrely. And laughed with relish.

For the Seminole chief had fled perversely through the lantern-lit trees, her soft, mocking laughter proclaiming her sex and her mood.

"And still he follows!" boomed the Bedouin. "With or without the music-machine, he is consistently fatuous."

The man with the luminous turban spoke suddenly to a girl in trailing satin with a muff of flowers in her hand. Shoulders and throat gleamed superbly above the line of golden satin; there were flashing topazes in her hair and about her throat; and the slender, arched foot in the satin slipper was small and finely moulded.

"Tell me," he begged insistently, "who you are! You've grace and poise enough for a dozen women. And who taught you how to walk? Few women know how."

The girl, with a delicate air of hauteur, flung back her head imperiously and turned away.

"And you've wonderful eyes—black and wistful and tragic and beautiful!" persisted the man impudently. "Wonderful, sparkling lady of gold and black, tell me who you are!"

"Who," said the girl gravely in a clear, rich contralto, "who are you?"

The man laughed but his eyes lingered on the firm, proud scarlet lips and the small even teeth.

"Call me the 'Black Palmer,'" said he. "There's a tremendous significance in my rig to be sure, but it's only for one man."

"What," asked the girl seriously, "is a palmer?"

Mystified the Black Palmer stared.

"You honestly mean that you don't know?"

"I speak ever the truth," said the proud scarlet lips below the golden mask. "When I ask, I mean that I do not know."

"And this in a world of sophistication!" murmured the man blankly, but the girl was moving off with graceful majesty through the trees, the jewels in her hair alive in the lantern-lit dusk. The Black Palmer sprang after her.

"Tell me, I beg of you," he exclaimed earnestly, "you who are so grave and beautiful and apart from this world of mine, like a fresh keen wind in a scorching desert, in Heaven's name tell me who you are!"

But the girl's dark, fine eyes flashed quick rebuke.

Nothing daunted the Black Palmer impudently stripped the golden mask from her face. The soft yellow light of the Venetian lamp in the tree above her fell full upon the lovely oval of a face so peculiar in its striking beauty of line and vivid coloring that he fell back staring.

"Lord, what a face!" exclaimed the Greek, too taken aback to resent the Palmer's insolence.

And the Bedouin rumbled: "Exquisite! But she is not of your land. Italian, Spanish, or some bizarre mingling of strange races, but none of your colder lands!"

Now as the Black Palmer stared at the dark, accusing eyes of the girl, a singular thing occurred. His cloak of impudence fell suddenly from his shoulders and returning the golden mask, he bowed and begged her pardon with unmistakable deference.

"Let a humbled Palmer," he said quietly, "pay his sincerest homage to the most beautiful woman he has even seen." And as the girl moved proudly away, the strain of fantastic music which followed her was subtly deferential.

CHAPTER XXX

THE UNMASKING

At midnight a mellow chime rang somewhere by the cypress pool. Laughing and jesting, calling to one another, the masked crowd moved off to the vine-hung villa ahead, gleaming moon-white through the shrubbery.

Somewhat reluctantly the minstrel followed. It had been his intention to unmask in some secluded corner whence, presently, he might slip away to his room, but finding himself jostled and pushed on by a Greek and a Bedouin who, to do them justice, seemed quite unaware of their importunities, he surrendered to the press about him and presently found himself in an unpleasantly conspicuous spot in the great room which the Sherrills occasionally used as a ballroom.

All about him girls and men were unmasking amid a shower of laughing raillery. That the Seminole chief with her tunic and beaded sash and her brilliant turban was very near him, was a pleasant and altogether accidental mitigation of his mishap. That a Greek and a Bedouin were just behind him—a fact not in the least accidental—and that a gray monk was slipping about among the guests whispering to receptive ears, did not interest him in the least. A string orchestra played softly in an alcove. The leader's eyes, oddly enough, were upon the ancient Greek.

Now suddenly a curious hush swept over the room. Uncomfortably aware that he was a spectacular object of interest by reason of his mask and that

every unmasked eye was full upon him, the minstrel, following the lines of least resistance, removed the bit of cambric from his eyes. After all, in the sea of faces before him, there were none familiar.

As the mask dropped—the ancient Greek thoughtfully adjusted his tunic.

Instantly without pause or warning the soft strain of the orchestra swept dramatically into a powerful melody of measured cadences. It was the tune Carl had played upon his flute to Jokai of Vienna months before. The minstrel, mask in hand, stared at the orchestra, blanched and bit his lip.

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Queen Elizabeth to Jethro, "it's the immigrant, Jethro, and there he was on the lace spread with his feet tied and gurgling. I'll never forget his eyes."

"Jokai of Vienna!" said the Black Palmer, whistling. "By Jove, they've trapped him nicely."

For an uncomfortable instant, the silence continued, then came the saving stir of laughter and chatting.

The Bedouin with an unrelenting air of dignity and command, removed his mask and bowed low; to Diane in whose startled eyes below the Seminole turban flashed sympathy and acute regret.

"Miss Westfall," said he gravely, "permit me to present to you, Prince Ronador of Houdania."

White and stern, his fine eyes flashing imperially, Ronador bowed.

"Rest assured, Miss Westfall," he said, "that I know you have not betrayed my confidence. Baron Tregar is an ardent patriot who by virtue of his office must needs object to democratic masquerading."

The Baron stroked his beard.

"For inspiring the musical ceremony due your rank, Prince," he said dryly, "I crave indulgence."

Smiling, the ancient Greek at the Baron's elbow unmasked, to show the cheerful face of Mr. Poynter.

"Prince," said Mr. Poynter, "I sincerely trust I have made no error in transcribing the Regent's Hymn for our excellent musicians. Having heard it so many times in your presence in Houdania, I could not well forget. At your service," with a glance at his Grecian attire, "Herodotus, father of nomads!"

But Ann Sherrill in the gorgeous raiment of a Semiramis was already at hand, sparkling italics upon her royal guest, and Philip moved aside.

"I am *overwhelmed*!" whispered Ann a little later. "I am *indeed*! I was not in the *least* aware that our mysterious incognito was a prince, were you, Diane?"

"Yes," said Diane. Her color was very high and she deliberately avoided the imploring eyes of Mr. Poynter.

"What in the *world* is it all about?" begged Ann helplessly. "And *who* was the grayish monk who flitted about so mysteriously telling us that the minstrel was a *prince*! It spread like wildfire. As for you, Philip Poynter, it's exactly like you! To depart night before last and suddenly reappear is *quite* of a piece with your mysterious habit of fading periodically out of civilization. Baron Tregar, how *exceedingly* delightful of you to come this way and surprise me when I fancied you were so keen about those horrid tarpon that you wouldn't leave them for all I *wrote* and *wrote*."

There was a sprightly nervousness in Ann's manner. She was uncomfortably

aware of a subtle undercurrent.

"And I've another unexpected guest," she added to Diane. "Carl's here. Wandering in from Heaven knows where, as he always does. He's making his peace with your aunt—"

Herodotus, who had been trying for some time to get into friendly communication with his lady, suddenly murmured "Frost in Florida!" with audible regret and moved off good-humoredly to look for Carl.

He found that young man listening attentively to his aunt's reproaches.

"And that costume, Carl," fluttered Queen Elizabeth in aggrieved disapproval. "Why, dear me, it's enough to make a body shudder, it's so sort of sinister—it is indeed! And I do hope you don't set your hair on fire with that extraordinary light in your turban. Is it a candle or an electric bulb?"

"A forty horse power glowworm!" Carl assured her gravely, and the portly Jethro sniggered to the danger of his seams.

Philip's hand came down heavily upon the Palmer's broad shoulder and Carl wheeled. In that instant as he grasped Philip's hand in a silence more eloquent than words, every finer instinct of his queerly balanced nature flashed in his face. The two hands tightened and fell apart.

"Come, smoke!" invited Carl, smiling. "I'm glad you're here. I haven't been ragged and abused for so long there's a lonely furrow in my soul."

But Dick Sherrill, looking very warm and disgruntled in a costume he informed them bitterly was meant for Claude Duval, came up as they were turning away and insisted upon presenting Carl to the guest of the evening.

"Ann sent me," he added. "And you've got to come. And I want to say right

now that Ann makes me tired. She's as notional as a lunatic. *She* planned this rig and now she doesn't like it. And if I don't look like a highwayman you can wager your last sou I feel like one, and that's sufficient. The whole trouble is that Ann's been so busy with hair-dressers and manicurists and *corsetières* and dressmakers and the Lord knows what not over that stunning Indian girl, who'll likely run off with the family topazes, that she's had no time for her brother, and rubs it in now by laughing at the shape of my legs. What's the matter with my legs, Carl?"

"Too ornamental," said Carl. "Curvilinear grace is all very well but—"

"Shut up!" said Sherrill viciously. "Have you ever met this king-pin I'm exploiting?"

"I've seen him," said Car. "Once when he was riding up the mountain road to Houdania with a brilliant escort and one—er—other time. Think I told you I'd spent a month or so in a Houdanian monastery several years ago, didn't I, Dick?"

"Yes," said Dick. "That's why I asked. Poynter, who in blue blazes are you looking for?"

Philip flushed.

"Dry up!" he advised. "You're grouchy."

Sherrill was still heatedly denying the charge when they halted near the Baron.

"You wear a singular costume," suggested Ronador stiffly, when the formalities of presentation were at an end. He glanced at the luminous turban and thence to the chains. Carl, though he had primarily intended the singular rig for the eyes of Tregar, had subtly invited the remark. His eyes were darkly

ironic.

"Prince," he said guilelessly, "it is a silent parable."

"Yes?"

"I am 'The Ghost of a Man's Past!'" explained the Palmer lightly—and clanked his chains. The level glances of the two met with the keenness of invisible swords.

"The heavy, sinister black," suggested the Palmer, "the flashes of forbidden scarlet—the hours of a man's past are scarlet, are they not?—the cloud above the head, with a treacherous heart of fire, the clanking chains of bondage—they are all here. And the skeleton in the closet—Sire—behold!" He laughed and flung back his mantle, revealing a perfect skeleton cunningly etched in glaring white upon a close-fitting garment of black.

Did the Baron's eyes flash suddenly with a queer dry humor? Philip could not be sure.

With a clank of symbolic chains Carl bowed and withdrew, and coming suddenly upon his cousin, halted and stared. Long afterward Diane was to remember that she had caught a similar look in the eyes of Ronador.

"Well?" she begged, slightly uncomfortable.

Carl smiled. Once more his fine eyes were impassive. With ready grace he admired the delicately-thonged tunic and the beaded sash, the bright turban with the beaten band of silver and the darkly lovely face beneath it.

"It's a duplicate of the rig my little Indian friend wears," she explained, smiling. "Hasn't Ann told you? She's quite wild about it."

"Ann's very busy soothing Dick," laughed Carl and to the malicious

satisfaction of that worthy Greek who had been trailing along in his wake, presented Herodotus. Diane nodded, smiled politely—and sought delicately to ignore the ancient Greek. It was a hopeless task. Mr. Poynter insisted upon considering himself included in every word she uttered.

"Isn't mother a *dear*!" exclaimed Ann Sherrill joining them. "After ragging me *desperately* for days about Keela, until I threatened to kill myself, and giving me an *exceedingly* horrid little book on the advisability of curbing one's most *interesting* impulses, she's taken her under her wing to-night and they're excellent friends. Philip, dear, go unruffle Dick. He's *horribly* fussed up about something or other. Carl, I want you to meet Keela. It's the most *interesting* thing I've dared in ages and Dad's been very decent about it. Dad always *did* understand me. He has a sense of humor."

Diane and Carl followed, laughing, at her heels. Ann presently found her mother and Keela and unaware of the astonished interest in Carl's eyes, presented him.

"The Black Palmer!" said Keela naïvely.

"Lady of Gold and Black!" said Carl and bowed profoundly.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RECKONING

The reckoning of Ronador and the Baron came by the cypress pool.

"It is useless to rave and storm," said Tregar quietly. "I hold the cards."

"Was it necessary to humiliate me in the presence of Miss Westfall?" demanded Ronador bitterly. With all his sullenness there was in his tone a marked respect for the older man.

"It was necessary to end this romantic masquerade!" insisted Tregar. "Why are you here?"

"I—I came in a flash of panic. It seemed to me that after all I—I could not trust to other hands when the dead thing stirred." Ronador's face was white and haggard. In that instant his forty-four years lay heavily upon his shoulders.

"Have I ever misplaced your trust?" reminded Tregar sombrely. "Have I not even kept your secret from your father?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me," asked the Baron bluntly, "why you must come to America and hysterically complicate this damnable mess by—a bullet!"

Greatly agitated, Ronador fell to pacing to and fro. Heavy cypress shadows

upon the water moved like pointing fingers.

"Is there nothing I may keep from you?" broke from him a little bitterly.

"Why," insisted the older man, "have you seen fit to conduct yourself with the irrationality of a madman by trundling a music-machine about the country and making love to a girl you tried in a moment of fright and frenzy—to kill?"

"I—I lost my head," said the Prince with an effort. "It—it seemed at first that she must die. The other, I thought to myself, I will leave to Themar and the Baron. This I must do for myself. They will spare her and years hence the thing may stir again. I—I can not bear to think of it even now, Tregar. I have paid heavily for my moment of madness. For nights after, I did not sleep. Even now the memory is unspeakable torture!" And Ronador admitted with stiff, white lips that some nameless God of Malice had made capital of his bullet, stirring his heart into admiration for the fearless girl who had stood so gallantly by the fire in a storm-haunted wood. In the heart of the forest a happier solution had come to him and eliminated the sinister thought of murder.

The Baron coldly heard the passionate avowal through to the end.

"And the Princess Phaedra?" he begged formally. "What of her? What of the marriage that is to dissolve the bitter feud of a century between Houdania and Galituria, this marriage to which already you are informally bound?"

"It is nothing to me. I shall marry Miss Westfall."

"So!" The Baron matched his heavy fingertips. "So! And this is another infernal complication of the freedom of marital choice we grant our princes!"

"Ten years ago," flamed Ronador passionately, "you and my father picked a wife for me! Is not that enough? Now that she is dead, I shall marry whom I choose. Has it not occurred to you that after all it is the sanest way out of this

horrible muddle?"

"It is one way out," admitted Tregar, "and by that way lies war with Galituria." He fell silent, plucking at his beard. "I fancy," he said at last, "that you will not go back to the music-machine."

"It was—and is—my only means of following her."

"Do so again," said the Baron dryly, "and the American yellow papers shall blazon your identity to the world. 'Son of a prince regent—nephew of a king—trundles a music-machine about to win a beautiful gypsy!' And Galituria and the Princess Phaedra will read with interest." Then he blazed suddenly with one of his infrequent outbursts of passion, "Is it not enough to have Galituria laughing at a mad king whose claim to the throne by our laws may not be invalidated by his madness? A king so mad that the affairs of a nation must be administered by a prince regent—your father? Must you add to all this the disgrace of breaking faith with Galituria and plunging your country into war? Your father is an old man. With but his life and the life of an aging madman between you and the throne, it behooves you to walk with a full recognition of your future responsibilities. Your father knows you are here in America?"

"No. There was an Arctic expedition. He thinks I have gone hunting with that. At first I thought I could come to America and return with no one the wiser."

"Having murdered Miss Westfall!" completed the Baron quietly.

Ronador's face was ashen.

"Excellency," he choked suddenly, "my little son—"

"Yes," said Tregar with sudden kindness, "I know. Your great love and ambition for the boy drove you to madness." He paused. "You are fully decided

to break faith with Phaedra, knowing what may come of it?"

"Yes. Even if my great love for Miss Westfall did not drive me on——"

"To indiscretion!" supplied the Baron dryly.

"As you will. Even then, to me it is now the one way out. With Granberry dead, with the treacherous paper in my possession——"

"It has been burned."

Ronador did not hear.

"With Miss Westfall my wife," he finished, "even if the dead thing stirs again, it can make no difference."

"Then," said the Baron formally, "I am through with it all, quite through. The task was never of my choosing, as you know. When the dead hand reached forth from the grave to taunt you, Ronador, I was willing at first to stoop to unutterable things to save you—and Houdania—from dishonor, but more and more there has been distaste in my heart for the blackness of the thing. Days back I warned you by letter that I would not see Miss Westfall coldly sacrificed for a muddle of which she knew absolutely nothing. There are things a man may not do even for his country—one is murdering women. Now, though I pledged myself through loyalty to my country, my king, my regent and yourself to spying and murder and petty thievery, with a consequent chain of discomfort and misunderstandings for myself, I am through and mightily glad of it!"

"And what have you accomplished?" flamed Ronador passionately. "Granberry, for all your ciphered pledges, lives and mocks me as he did tonight, as he did months back. I could kill him for the indignities he has heaped upon me, if for nothing else. And he knows more than you think. What did he mean to-night?"

"Circumstances," said Tregar coldly, "have made you unduly sensitive and suspicious. Granberry's costume was planned maliciously as an impersonal affront to me. He knew of my plans through a telegram of mine to Themar and made his own accordingly. It was not your past to which he referred. Surely it is not difficult to catch his meaning?"

"Blunders and blunders and quixotic scruples," raved Ronador, "and now this crowning indignity to-night! What has Themar been doing? ... What have you done? ... Why is Granberry still alive? Hereafter, Tregar, Themar will report to me. I personally will see that the thing is cleared up and silenced forever. I may trust at least to your silence?"

"My word as a gentleman is sufficient?"

"It is."

"Consider me pledged to silence as I have been for a quarter of a century."

"Where is Themar?"

"He is here at my command to-night after an illness of weeks. He has been Granberry's prisoner. His illness alone won his release for him through some inconsistent whim of sympathy on the part of Granberry. He wears the garb of a gray monk."

"Send him here."

The Baron bowed and withdrew. At the path he turned.

"Ronador," he said quietly, "for the sake of the lifetime friendship I have borne your father, for the sake of the position of honor and trust I hold in your father's court, for the sake of my great love for Houdania, let me say that when you find you are sinking deeper and deeper into a pitfall of errors and

unhappiness and treachery, I shall be ready and willing to aid and advise you as best I may. I think I know you better than you know yourself. You have an inheritance of wild passion, a nature that swayed by irresistible and fiery impulse, will for the moment dare anything and regret it with terrible suffering ever after. One such lesson you have had in early manhood. I hope you may not rush on blindly to another. Until you come to me, however," he added with dignity, "I shall not meddle again."

"I shall not come!" said Ronador imperiously. But the Baron was gone.

Later, by the cypress pool, the gray monk and the minstrel talked long and earnestly of one who knew overmuch of the affairs of both.

"There is but one thing more," faltered Themar at the end. "I may speak with freedom?"

"Yes," said Ronador impatiently, "what is it?"

"Miss Westfall—I spied upon her camp in Connecticut—"

"Yes?"

"It is well to know all. For days she lived with Poynter in the forest—"

Ronador's eyes blazed.

"Go, go!" he cried, his face quite colorless, "for the love of God go before I kill you! I—I can not bear any more to-night."

Who had scored! For Ronador, at least, in the guileful hands of a traitor who by reason of a strong maternal sympathy desired the alliance of Ronador and Princess Phaedra, there was doubt and bitter suffering. And he might not return to the music-machine.

Themar's thin lips smiled but he wisely retreated.

CHAPTER XXXII

FOREST FRIENDS

Northward to Jacksonville had journeyed the camp of the Indian girl, bearing away Diane, to Aunt Agatha's unspeakable agitation. Now, joining forces, these two forest friends, linked in an idle moment by the nameless freemasonry of the woodland, were winding happily south along the seacoast. Nights their camps lay side by side.

Keela, with shy and delightful gravity, slipped wide-eyed into the niceties of civilization, coiled her heavy hair in the fashion of Diane and copied her dress naïvely. Diane felt a thrill of satisfaction at this singular finding of a friend whose veins knew the restless stir of nomadic blood, a friend who was fleeter of foot, keener of vision and hearing and better versed in the ways of the woodland than Diane herself. And Diane had known no peer in the world of white men.

There were gray dawns when a pair of silent riders went galloping through the stillness upon the Westfall horses, riding easily without saddles; there were twilights when they swam in sheltered pools like wild brown nymphs; there were quiet hours by the camp fire when the inborn reticence of the Indian girl vanished in the frank sincerity of Diane's friendship. Of Mr. Poynter and the hay-camp there was no sign.

"Doubtless," considered Diane disdainfully, "he has come at last to his senses. And I'm very glad he has, very glad indeed. It's time he did. I think I made my displeasure sufficiently clear at the exceedingly tricky way he and the

Baron conducted themselves at Palm Beach. And the Baron was no better than Philip. Indeed, I think he was very much worse. If Philip hadn't wandered about in the garb of Herodotus and murmured that impertinence about 'frost in Florida' it wouldn't have been so bad. It's a very unfortunate thing, however, that he never seems to remember one's displeasure or the cause of it."

But for one who rejoiced in Mr. Poynter's belated inheritance of common sense, Diane's comment a few days later was very singular.

"I wonder," she reflected uncomfortably, "if Philip understands smoke signals. He may be lost."

But Philip was not lost. He was merely discreet.

A lonely beach fringed in sand hills lay before the camp. Beyond rolled the ocean, itself a melancholy solitude droning under an azure sky. There were beach birds running in flocks down the sand as the white-ridged foam receded; overhead an Indian file of pelicans winged briskly out to sea.

On the broad, hard beach to the north presently appeared a music-machine. Piebald horse, broad, eccentric wagon, cymbals and drum—there was no mistaking the outfit, nor the minstrel himself with his broad-brimmed sombrero tipped protectively over his nose.

Now despite the fact that the Baron had hinted that Ronador's masquerade was at an end, the music-machine steadily approached and halted. The minstrel alighted and fell stiffly to turning the crank, whereupon with a fearful roll of the drum and a clash of cymbals, the papier-mache snake began to unfold and "An Old Girl of Mine" emerged from the cataclysm of sound and frightened the fish hawks over the shallow water. A great blue heron, knee-deep in water, croaked with annoyance, flapped his wings and departed.

When the dreadful commotion in the wagon at last subsided, the minstrel

came through the trees and sweeping off his sombrero, bowed and smiled.

"Merciful Heavens!" exclaimed the girl, staring.

It was Mr. Poynter.

"I'm sorry," regretted Mr. Poynter. "I'm really sorry I feel so well—but I've got a music-machine." And seating himself most comfortably by the fire, with a frankly admiring glance at his corduroy trousers, silken shirt and broad sombrero, he anxiously inquired what Diane thought of his costume. Indeed, he admitted, that thought had been uppermost in his mind for days, for he'd copied it very faithfully.

"It's ridiculous!" said Diane, "and you know it."

There, said Mr. Poynter, he must disagree. He didn't know it.

"Well," said Diane flatly, "to my thinking, this is considerably worse than blowing a tin whistle on the steps of the van!"

Mr. Poynter could not be sure. He said in his delightfully naïve way, however, that a music-machine was a thing to arouse romance and sympathy with conspicuous success, that more and more the moon was getting him, and that he did hope Diane would remember that he was the disguised Duke of Connecticut. Moreover, his most tantalizing shortcoming up-to-date had seemed to be a total inability to arouse said romance and sympathy, especially sympathy, for, whether or not Diane would believe it, even here in this land of flowers he had encountered frost! Wherefore, having personal knowledge of the success incidental to unwinding a hullabaloo in proper costume, he had purchased one from a—er—distinguished gentleman who for singular and very private reasons had no further use for it. And though the negotiations, for reasons unnamable, had had to be conducted with infinite discretion through an unknown third person, he had eventually found himself the possessor of the

hullabaloo, to his great delight. He had hullabalooed his way along the coast in the wake of a nomadic friend, but deeming it wise to await the dispersal of frost strangely engendered by a Regent's Hymn, had discreetly kept his distance and proved his benevolence, in the manner of his distinguished predecessor, by playing to all the nice old ladies in the dooryards... And one of them had given him a piece of pie and a bottle of excellent coffee and fretted a bit about the way he was wasting his life. Mr. Poynter added that in the fashion of certain young darkies who infest the Southern roads, he would willingly stand on his head for a baked potato in lieu of a nickel, being very hungry.

"You probably mean by that, that you're going to stay to supper!" said Diane.

Mr. Poynter meant just that.

"Where," demanded Diane, "is the hay-camp?"

"Well," said Philip, "Ras is a hay-bride-groom. He dreamt he was married and it made such a profound impression upon him that he went and married somebody. He slept through his wooing and he slept through his wedding and I gave him the hay and the cart and Dick Whittington. I don't think he entirely appreciated Dick either, for he blinked some. All of which primarily engendered the music-machine inspiration. It's really a very comfortable way of traveling about and the wagon was fastidiously fitted up by my distinguished predecessor. The seat's padded and plenty broad enough to sleep on."

Mr. Poynter presently departed to the music-machine for a peace offering in the shape of a bow and some arrows upon which, he said, he'd been working for days. When he returned, laden with luxurious contributions to the evening meal, the camp had still another guest. Keela was sitting by the fire. Philip eyed with furtive approval the modish shirtwaist, turned back at the full brown throat, and the heavily coiled hair.

"The Seminole rig," explained Diane, "was an excellent drawing card for Palm Beach tourists but it was a bit conspicuous for the road. Greet him in Seminole, Keela."

"Som-mus-ka-lar-nee-sha-maw-lin!" said Keela with gravity.

Philip looked appalled.

"She says 'Good wishes to the white man!'" explained Diane, smiling.

"My Lord," said Philip, "I wouldn't have believed it. Keela, I thought you were joint by joint unwinding a yard or so of displeasure at my appearance. No-chit-pay-lon-es-chay!" he added irresponsibly, naming a word he had picked up in Palm Beach from an Indian guide.

The effect was electric. Keela stared. Diane look horrified.

"Philip!" she said. "It means 'Lie down and go to sleep!'"

"To the Happy Hunting Ground with that bonehead Indian!" said Philip with fervor. "Lord, what a civil retort!" and he stammered forth an instant apology.

Immeasurably delighted, Keela laughed.

"You are very funny," she said in English. "I shall like you."

"That's really very comfortable!" said Philip gratefully. "I don't deserve it." He held forth the bow and arrows. "See if you can shoot fast and far enough to have six arrows in the air at once," he said, smiling, "and I'll believe I'm forgiven."

With lightning-like grace Keela shot the arrows into the air and smiled.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Philip admiringly. "Seven!"

With deft fingers she strung the bow again and shot, her cheeks as vivid as a wild flower, her poise and skill faultless.

"Eight!" said Philip incredulously. "Help!"

"Keela is easily the best shot I ever knew," exclaimed Diane warmly. "Try it, Philip."

"Not much!" said Philip feelingly. "I can shoot like a normal being with one pair of arms, but I can't string space with arrows like that. You forest nymphs," he added with mild resentment, "with woodland eyes and ears and skill put me to shame. You and I, Diane, quarreled once, I think, about the number of Pleiades—"

"They're an excellent test of eyesight," nodded Diane. "And you said there were only six!"

"There is no seventh Pleiad!" said Philip with stubborn decision.

"Eight!" said Keela shyly. And they both stared. Shooting a final arrow, she sent it so far that Philip indignantly refused to look for it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BY THE WINDING CREEK

At dawn one morning a long black car shot out from Jacksonville and took to the open road. It glided swiftly past arid stretches of pine barrens streaked with stagnant water, past bogs aglow with iris, through quaint little cities smiling under the shelter of primeval oaks and on, stopping only long enough for the driver to ask a question of a negro on a load of wood—or a mammy singing plaintively in the flower-bright dooryard of a house.

Sometimes losing, sometimes finding, the trail of a green and white van, the long black car shot on, through roads of pleasant windings flanked by forest and river, beyond which lay the line of green-fringed sand hills which parallel the rolling Atlantic. Past placid lakes skimmed by purple martins, past orange groves heavy with fruit, past fences overrun with Cherokee roses, and on, but the driver, abroad with the sunrise glow, seemed somehow to see little or none of it. Sometimes he stared sombrely at a ghostly palmetto, tall and dark against the sky. Once with a grinding shudder of brakes he halted on the border of a cypress swamp and stared frowningly at the dark, dank trees knee-deep in stagnant water above which the buzzards flew, as if the loathsome spot matched his mood. As indeed it did.

For the words of Themar had done cruel work. Torn by black suspicion, Ronador saw no peace in this tranquil Florida world of sun and flower, of warm south wind and bright-winged bird. He saw only the buzzards, birds of evil

omen. Swayed by fiery gusts of passion, of remorse, of sullenness and jealousy, he rode on, a prey to sinister resolution. To confront Diane with his knowledge of those days by the river, this resolution alternated as frequently with another—to put his fate to the test and passionately avow his utter trust in one immeasurably above the rank and file of women. He had racked Themar with insistent questions, he had quarreled again and again with the Baron since that night by the pool, until now he had at his finger-ends, the ways and days of Philip Poynter since the day the Baron had dispatched his young secretary upon the ill-fated errand to Diane. And as there were finer moments when his faith in the girl was unmarred by suspicion, so there were wild, unscrupulous hours of jealousy when he could have killed Philip and taunted her with insults.

Driving steadily, he came in course of time to a narrow, grass-banked creek. The nomads on the winding road beside it were many and beautiful. Here were yellow butterflies, sandpipers and kingfishers, and now and then an eagle cleaved the dazzling blue overhead with magnificent wing-strokes. Sand hills reflected the white sunlight. Beyond glistened a stretch of open sea with a flock of beautiful gannets of black and white whipping its surface. But Ronador did not thrill to the peaceful picture. He glanced instead at the buzzard which seemed curiously to hang above the long black car.

Now presently as he eyed the road ahead for a glimpse of the van, Ronador saw the familiar lines of a music-machine and drove by it with a glance of interest. Instantly the blood rushed violently to his face. For, as the horse and music-machine had been familiar, so was the driver, who swept a broad sombrero from his head and revealed the face of Philip Poynter.

With a curse Ronador abruptly brought the car to a standstill. The very irony of this masquerade fired him with terrible anger.

"You!" he choked. "You!"

Philip nodded.

"I guess you're right," he said.

The blazing dark eyes and the calm, unruffled blue ones met in a glance of implacable antagonism. Not in the least impressed Philip replaced his sombrero and spoke to his horse. Fish crows flew overhead with croaks of harsh derision.

Another buzzard! With a terrible jerk, Ronador drove on, his face scarlet.

So Poynter still dared to follow! By a trick he had bought the music-machine, by a trick he had given the Regent's Hymn to the curious ears at Sherrill's. Very well, there were tricks and tricks! And if one man may trick, so, surely, may another.

Passion had always hushed the voice of the imperial conscience, though indeed it awoke and cried in a terrible voice when passion was dead. So now with stiff white lips fixed in unalterable resolution, Ronador drove viciously on, turning over and over in his fevered brain the ways and days of Philip Poynter... So at last he came to the camp he sought.

It was pitched upon the upland bank of the winding creek and as the car shot rapidly toward it, a great blue heron flapped indignantly and soared away to the marsh beyond the trees. Ronador jumped queerly and colored with a sense of guilt.

There was yellow oxalis here carpeting the ground among the low, dark cedars, yellow butterflies flitted about among the trees where Johnny was washing the van, and the inevitable buzzard floated with upturned wings above the camp. Ronador had grown to hate the ubiquitous bird of the South. Superstition flamed hotly up in his heart now at the sight of it.

Diane was sewing. He had caught the flutter of her gown beneath a cedar as

he stopped the car. There was no one visible in the camp of the Indian girl. Ronador sprang from his car and waved to the girl, smiling, she came to meet him.

Now as Ronador smiled down into the clear, unfaltering eyes of the girl before him, he knew suddenly that he trusted her utterly, that the mad suspicion, sired by the words of Themar and mothered by jealousy, was but a dank mist that melted away in the sunlight of her presence. Only jealousy remained and a smouldering, unscrupulous hate for the persistent young organ-grinder behind him.

Chatting pleasantly they returned to camp.

Imperceptibly their talk of the fortunes of the road took on a more intimate tinge of reminiscence and presently, with searching eyes fixed upon the vivid, lovely face of the wind-brown gypsy beneath the cedar, Ronador asked the girl to marry him.

Very gently Diane released her hands from his grasp, her cheeks scarlet.

"Indeed, indeed," she faltered, "I could not with fairness answer you now, for I do not in the least know what I think. You will not misunderstand me, I am sure, if I tell you that not once in the long, pleasant days we journeyed the same roads, did I ever dream of the nature of your pleasant friendship." Her frank, dark eyes, alive with a beautiful sincerity, met his honestly. "There was always tradition—" she reminded.

Ronador's reply was sincere and gallant. Diane was lovelier than any princess, he said, and in Houdania, tradition had been replaced years back by a law which granted freedom.

"Though to be sure," he added bitterly, "each generation seeks to break it. Tregar tried, urging me persistently for diplomatic reasons to take a wife of his

choosing. And when I—I fled to America to escape his infernal scheming and spying—he followed. Even here in America I have been haunted by spies—"

His glance wavered.

"And then," he went on earnestly, "I saw you and I knew that Princess Phaedra was forever impossible. There was a night of terrible wind and storm when I planned to beg shelter in your camp and make your acquaintance... You are annoyed?"

"No," said Diane honestly. "Why fuss now?"

"Tregar must have suspected. I met his—his spy in the forest and we quarreled wildly. He tried to kill me but the bullet went wild."

Again his glance wavered but the lying words came smoothly. "My servant, Themar, leaped and stabbed him in the shoulder—"

"No! No!" cried Diane. "Not that—not that!" Her eyes, dark with horror in the colorless oval of her face, met Ronador's with mute appeal. "It—it can not be," she added quietly. "The man was Philip Poynter."

Ronador caught her hands again with fierce resolve. His eyes were blazing with excitement and anger at the utter faith in her voice.

"Why do you think I adopted the stained face—the disguise of a wandering minstrel?" he demanded impetuously. "It was to free myself from his infernal spying—to afford myself the opportunity of gaining your friendship without his knowledge! Why did he follow—always follow? Because at the command of his chief, he must needs obstruct my plan of winning you. There was always Princess Phaedra! Why did he watch by night in the forest. To spy! Can you not see it?"

"Surely, surely," said Diane, "you must be wrong!"

But Ronador could not be wrong. Themar, his servant, whom he had dispatched to seek employment with the Baron when the fortunes of the road had made further attendance upon himself inconvenient, had learned of the hay-camp and of Poynter's pledge to make his victim's advances ridiculous in the eyes of Diane.

"And when Themar followed—to warn me—Poynter beat him brutally," he went on fiercely, "beat him and sent him in a dirty barge to a distant city. All the while when I fancied my disguise impenetrable, he was laughing in his sleeve, for he is as clever as he is unscrupulous. He was even meeting his chief in a Kentucky woods to report. Tregar admitted it. Why did he make me ridiculous at the Sherrill fête? Purely because your eyes, Miss Westfall, were among those who watched the indignity! Why is he driving about now in the music-machine to mock me? Because having forced me from the road, he must needs see to it that I do not return. When I do, he must be near at hand to report to the Baron."

It was an artful network. Somehow, by virtue of the sinister skeleton of facts underlying the velvet of his logic, it rang true. Diane, as colorless as a flower, sat utterly silent, slender brown fingers tightened against the palms of her hands.

Philip false! Philip a spy! Philip—almost a murderer! It could not be!

Yet how insistently he had striven to force her to return to civilization. Away from Ronador? It might be. How insistently the Baron had urged him to linger in her camp! *To spy*? A great wave of faintness swept over her. And there was Arcadia and the hay-camp and the mildly impudent indignities—they all slipped accurately into place.

"I—I do not know!" she faltered at last in answer to his impetuous pleading. "If you will not see me again until I may think it all out—"

But there was danger in waiting. A hot appeal flashed in Ronador's eyes and eloquently again he fell to pleading.

But Diane had caught the clatter of the music-machine up the road where Philip was good-humoredly unwinding the hullabaloo for a crowd of gleeful young darkies, and suddenly she turned very white and stern.

"No! No!" she said. "It must be as I said."

And presently, with faith in his poisoned arrows Ronador went, pledged to await her summons.

Diane sat very still beneath the cedars, with the noise of the music-machine wild torture to her ears.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE MOON ABOVE THE MARSH

The moon silvered the marsh and the creek. Off to the east rippled a silent, moon-white stretch of sea, infinitely lonely, murmuring in the star-cool night.

Restless and wakeful Diane watched the stream glide endlessly on, each reed and pebble silvered. Rex lay on the bank beside her, whither he had followed faithfully a very long while ago, snapping at the insects which rose from the grass. So colorless and fixed was the face of his mistress that it seemed a beautiful graven thing devoid of life.

Now presently as Diane stared at the moon-lit pebbles glinting at her feet, a shadow among the cedars, having advanced and retreated uncertainly a score of times before, suddenly detached itself from the wavering stencil of tree and bush upon the moonlit ground and resolved itself into the figure of a tall, determined sentinel who approached and seated himself beside her.

"What's wrong?" begged Philip gently. "I've been watching you for hours, Diane, and you've scarcely moved an inch."

"Nothing," said Diane. But her voice was so lifeless, her lack of interest in Philip's sudden appearance so pointed, that he glanced keenly at her colorless face and frowned.

"There is something, I'm sure," he insisted kindly. "You look it." Finding that

she did not trouble to reply, he produced his wildwood pipe and fell to smoking.

"Likely I'll stay here," said Philip quietly, "until you tell me. Surely you know, Diane, that in anything in God's world that concerns you, I stand ready to help you if you need me."

It was manfully spoken but Diane's lips faintly curled. Philip's fine frank face colored hotly and he looked away.

In silence they sat there, Philip smoking restlessly and wondering, Diane staring at the creek, with Ronador's impassioned voice ringing wildly in her ears.

In the east the sky turned faintly primrose, the creek glowed faintly pink. The great moon glided lower by the marsh with the branch of a dead tree black against its brilliant shield. Marsh and oak were faintly gray. The metallic ocean had already caught the deepening glow of life. Where the stream stole swampwards, a mist curled slowly up from the water like beckoning ghosts draped in nebulous rags.

Suddenly in the silence Diane fell to trembling.

"Philip!" she cried desperately.

"Yes?" said Philip gently.

"Why are you following me with the music-machine?"

"I could tell you," said Philip honestly, "and I'd like to, but you'd tell me again that the moon is on my head."

The girl smiled faintly.

"Tell me," she begged impetuously, "what was that other reason why I must not journey to Florida in the van? You spoke of it by the lily pool in Connecticut. You remember?"

"Yes," said Philip uncomfortably. "Yes, I do remember."

"What was it?" insisted Diane, her eyes imploring. "Surely, Philip, you can tell me now! I—I did not ask you then—"

"No," said Philip wistfully. "I—I think you trusted me then, for all our friendship was a thing of weeks."

"What was it?" asked Diane, grown very white.

"I am sorry," said Philip simply. "I may not tell you that, Diane. I am pledged."

"To whom?"

"It is better," said Philip, "if I do not tell."

Diane sharply caught her breath and stared at the sinister wraiths rising in floating files from the swamp stream.

"Philip—was it—was it Themar's knife?"

"Yes," said Philip.

"And the man to whom you are pledged is—Baron Tregar!"

"Yes," said Philip again.

"Why were you in the forest that night of storm and wind?"

Philip glanced keenly at the girl by the creek. Her profile was stern and very beautiful, but the finely moulded lips had quivered.

"What is it, Diane?" he begged gently. "Why is it that you must ask me all these things that I may not honorably answer?"

"I—I do not see why you may not answer."

"An honorable man respects his promise scrupulously!" said Philip with a sigh. "You would not have me break mine?"

"Why," cried Diane, "did you fight with Themar in the forest? Why have you night after night watched my camp? Oh, Philip, surely, surely, you can tell me!"

Philip sighed. With his infernal habit of mystery and pledges, the Baron had made this very hard for him.

"None of these things," he said quietly, "I may tell you or anyone."

Diane leaned forward and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Philip," she whispered with dark, tragic eyes fixed upon his face, "who—who shot the bullet that night? Do you know?"

"Yes," said Philip, "I—I am very sorry. I think I know—"

"You will not tell me?"

"No."

Diane drew back with a shudder.

"I know the answers to all my questions!" she said in a low voice, and there was a great horror in her eyes. "Oh, Philip, Philip, go! If—if you could have

told me something different—"

"Is it useless to ask you to trust me, Diane?"

"Go!" said Diane, trembling.

By the swamp the gray ghosts fell to dancing with locked, transparent hands.

Blood-red the sun glimmered through the pines and struck fire from a gray, cold world.

Philip bent and caught her hands, quietly masterful.

"What you may think, Diane," he said unsteadily, "I do not know. But part of the answer to every question is my love for you. No—you must listen! We have crossed swords and held a merry war, but through it all ran the strong thread of friendship. We must not break it now. Do you know what I thought that day on the lake when I saw you coming through the trees? I said, I have found her! God willing, here is the perfect mate with whom I must go through life, hand in hand, if I am to live fully and die at the last having drained the cup of life to the bottom. If, knowing this, you can not trust me and will tell me so—"

But Ronador's eloquent voice rang again in the girl's ears. Her glance met Philip's inexorably. And there was something in her eyes that hurt him cruelly. For an instant his face flamed scarlet, then it grew white and hard and very grim.

"Go!" said Diane and buried her face in her hands.

With no final word of extenuation Philip went.

Diane stumbled hurriedly through the trees to Keela's camp and touched the Indian girl frantically upon the shoulder.

"Keela," she cried desperately, "wake! wake! It's sunrise. Let us go somewhere—anywhere—and leave this treacherous world of civilization behind us. I—I am tired of it all."

Keela stared.

"Very well," she said sedately a little later. "You and I, Diane, we will journey to my home in the Glades. There—as it was a century back—so it is now."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE WIND OF THE OKEECHOBEE

Southward along the beautiful Kissimmee river, where the fabled young grandee of Spain kissed the plaintive Seminole maid, rumbled the great green van and the camp of Keela. Southward, unremittingly protective, followed the silent music-machine. For though the dear folly and humor were things of the past, like Arcadia, a true knight may surely see that his willful lady comes to no harm though he must worship from afar. And at length they came to the final fringe of civilization edging the Everglades where, despite repeated protests, Johnny must stay behind with the cumbrous van.

And now the Southern woods were gloriously a-riot with blossoms; with dogwood and magnolia, with wild tropical blossoms of orange and scarlet; and the moon hung wild and beautiful above the Everglades.

"Little Spring Moon!" said Keela softly in Seminole.

Diane thought suddenly of a late moon above a marsh.

"He—he can not follow me into those terrible wilds ahead," she thought with sudden bitterness. "I shall be free at last from his dreadful spying."

At sunrise one morning they bade Johnny adieu and struck off boldly with the Indian wagon into the melancholy world of the Everglades.

"It is better," said Keela gravely, "if you wear the Seminole clothes you wore at Sherrill's. They are in the wagon. My people love not the white man."

"But—" stammered Diane.

"They will think," explained Keela shyly, "that you are a beautiful daughter of the sun from the wilderness of O-kee-fee-ne-kee. You are brown and beautiful. Such, they tell, was my grandmother. It is a legend of my mother's people, but I do not think," added Keela majestically, "that the wild and beautiful tribe of mystery who were sons and daughters of the Sun, are half so beautiful as you!"

To the dull baying of the alligators in the saw grass, and the melancholy croak of the great blue herons, Keela's wagon penetrated the weird and terrible wilds of the Everglades, winding by the gloomy border of swamps where the deadly moccasin dwelt beneath the darkling shadow of cypress, on by ponds thick with lilies and tall ghostly grasses, over tangled underbrush, past water-dark jungles of dead trees where the savage cascade of brush and vine and fallen branches had woven a weird, wild lacery among the trees, through mud and saw grass, past fertile islands and lagoons of rush and flag—a trackless water-prairie of uninhabitable wilds which to Keela's keen and beautiful eyes held the mysteriously blazed home-trail of the Seminole.

As Keela knew the trail, so surely from the rank, tropical vegetation of the great Southern marshland she knew the art of wresting food. Bitter wild oranges, pawpaws, oily palmetto cabbage, wild cassava, starred gorgeously now with orange colored blossoms, and guavas; these, with the wild turkeys and mallard ducks, turtles and squirrels and the dark little Florida quail with which the wild abounded, gave them varied choice.

Cheerfully fording miles of mud and water, his discomforts not a few, came Philip, greatly disturbed by the incomprehensible whims of his lady. By day he followed close upon the trail of the canvas wagon, patterning his conquest of

the aquatic wilderness about him after that of Keela, hunting the wild duck and the turkey and discarding the bitter orange with aggrieved disgust. And if Keela occasionally found a brace of ducks by the camp fire or a bass in a nest of green palmetto, she wisely said nothing, sensing the barrier between these two and wondering greatly.

By night when the great morass lay in white and sinister tangle under the wild spring moon, when the dark and dreadful swamps were rife with horrible croaks and snaps, the whirring of the wings of waterfowl or the noise of a disturbed puff adder, Philip stretched himself upon the seat of the music-machine and slept through the twilight and the early evening. When the camp ahead, glimmering brightly through the live oaks, was silent, Philip awoke and watched and smoked, a solitary sentinel in the terrible melancholy of the moonlit waste of ooze and dead leaf and sinister crawling life.

So they came in time to the plains of Okeechobee and thence to the wild, dark waters of the great inland sea—a wild, bleak sea, mirroring cloud and the night-lamp of the Everglades. The wind wafting across on night-tipped wings rippled the great water shield and brought its message to the silent figure on the shore.

"So," sighed the wind of the Okeechobee, "he still follows!"

"Yes," said Diane, shuddering at the howl of a cat owl, "he has dared even that!"

"Brave and resolute to plunge into the wilds with a music-machine! Would he, think you, dare all this for the sake of—spying?"

"I—I do not know. I have wondered greatly. Still he has dared much for it before."

"He asked you to remember—his love—"

"I—I dare not think of it. For every admission he made that night by the marsh tallied with the terrible tale of Ronador. I had thought he followed and watched by night for another reason."

"What reason?"

"I—do not know. A finer, holier reason—"

The wind fluttered and fell, and rose again with a plaintive sigh.

"You know, but you will not tell!"

"It—it may be so. He is false—he is false!" cried the voice of the girl's sore heart; "a false sentry and a false protector. I can not bear it. Philip! Philip! It was Themar's knife—and the bullet was his—and all that seemed fine and noble was black and false!"

"You will not trust him as he begged!"

"I can not. For he will not tell me the reason for all these things!"

"You will wed Prince Ronador?"

"Yes. It is the one way out."

"Why?"

"He is a gallant lover and the victim of much that is vile and unfair."

"Yes—he has said so."

"He has suffered much through me."

"Yes."

"And he is honorable and devoted."

"It may be."

"He told me all, though he found it difficult."

"He was not bound by a pledge."

"No."

"Well, there is wisdom, the wisdom of the world, in your choice. Flashing jewels, robes of state, maids of honor—"

"These things," spurned Diane with beautiful insolence, "I may buy with gold."

"Ah!" crooned the wind, "but the vassalage of this elfin nation that plays at empire, the romance and adventure of an imperial court! And when the mad King dies and the Prince Regent, then Ronador will be king—"

"I have thought of it all. I can not go back to the old shallow life with Aunt Agatha. No! No! And I am very lonely. If in the days to come wind and moon and the call of the wilderness stir my gypsy blood to rebellion—if I am ever to forget—"

"What must you forget?"

"It was foolish to speak so. I do not know. Then when the call of the wildwood comes I must have crowded days and fevered gayety to hush it. And surely this will come to me in the court of Ronador."

The wild moon drifted behind a cloud, the sea darkened, something huge and shadowy lumbered down to the water and splashed heavily away, the cat

owl hooted. A mist drooped trailing fingers over the water as the wind died away.

A profoundly dreary setting for a dream of empire!

CHAPTER XXXVI

UNDER THE LIVE OAKS

"See!" said Keela shyly. "It is the camp of my people."

It lay ahead, a fire-blot in the darkling swamp, a primitive mirage of primitive folk, of palmetto wigwams and log-wheel fires among the live oaks of a lonely island.

Keela's wagon presently forded a shallow creek and crossed an island plain. Thence it came by a winding road to the village, where, with the halting of the wagon, the travelers became the hub of a vast and friendly wheel of excitement.

Hospitable hands were already leading Keela's horses away when Mr. Poynter rode sedately into camp and, descending to terra firma in the light of the nearest camp fire, guilefully proceeded to assure himself of a welcome and immediate attention by spectacular means; he simply unwound the hullabaloo.

Cymbals clashed, the drum cannonaded fearfully and to the sprightly measures of "The Glowworm," the Indians who had collected about Keela's wagon to stare at Diane, decamped in a body to the side of Mr. Poynter, who smiled and proceeded in pantomime to make friends with all about him.

This, by virtue of the entertaining music-machine, was not difficult. Having exhausted the repertoire of the hullabaloo, he initiated the turbaned warriors into the mystery of unwinding tunes, thereby cementing the friendship forever.

The general din and excitement grew fearful. Presently the Thunder-Man was warmly assigned a wigwam, made of palmetto and the skins of wild animals above a split-log floor, to which he retired at the heels of Sho-caw, a copper-colored young warrior who had learned a little English from the traders.

Already rumor was rife among the staring tribe that Diane had strayed from the legendary clan of beautiful Indians in the O-kee-fee-ne-kee wilderness. The assignment of her wigwam, therefore, had been made with marked respect.

Here, as the Indian camp settled into quiet and the fires died lower, as the wild night sounds of the Glades awoke in the marsh outside, Diane lay still and wakeful and a little frightened. Wilderness and Seminole were still primeval. The world seemed very far away. The thought of the music-machine brought with it somehow a feeling of security.

With the broad white daylight, courage returned. From her wigwam Diane watched the silent village, wrapped in fog, wake to the busy life of the Glades. Sombre-eyed little Indian lads carried water and gathered wood, fires brightened, there was a pleasant smell of pine in the morning air. Later, by Keela's fire, she furtively watched Philip ride forth with a band of hunters.

So at last in the heart of the wildwood, among primitive folk whose customs had not varied for a century, Diane drank deep of the wild, free, open life her gypsy heart had craved. There were times when a great peace dwarfed the memory of the moon above the marsh; there were times when the thought of Ronador and Philip sent her riding wildly across the plains with Keela; there were still other times when a nameless disquiet welled up within her, some furtive distrust of the gypsy wildness of her blood. But in the main the days were quiet and peaceful.

"It is a wild world of varied color and activity," she wrote to Ann. "The trailing air plants in the trees beside my wigwam weave a dense, tropical jungle

of shadow shot with sunlight. Keela's wigwam lies but a stone's throw beyond. It is lined with beaded trinkets, curious carven things of cypress, pots of dye made of berries and barks, and pottery which she has patterned after the relics in the sand mounds. There is an old chief with all the terrible pathos of a vanishing race in his eyes. I find in his wistful dignity an element of tragedy. He is very kind to Keela and talks much of her in his quaint broken English.

"Moons back, he declares, when E-shock-e-tom-isee, the great Creator, made the world of men by scattering seeds in a river valley, of those who grew from the sand, some went to the river and washed too pale and weak—the white man; some, enough—the strong red man; some washed not at all—the shiftless black man. But Keela came from none of these.

"Ann, the squaws are *hideous*! Their clothes, an indescribable *potpourri* of savage superstition and stray inklings (such as a disfiguring bang of hair across the forehead, a Psyche knot and a full skirt) from the white man's world of fashion—years back. The pounds and pounds of bead necklaces they wear give the savage touch. I don't wonder Keela's delicate soul rebelled and drove her to the barbaric costume of a chief. It is infinitely more picturesque and beautiful.

"There are thrilling camp fire tales of Osceola, the brilliant, handsome young Seminole chief who blazoned his name over the pages of Florida history, but here among Osceola's kinsmen, pages are unnecessary. The sagas of the tribe are handed down from mouth to mouth to stir the youth to deeds of daring. Keela, like Osceola, had a white father and a Seminole mother. Ann, I sometimes wonder what opportunity might have done for Osceola. As great as Napoleon, some one said. What might opportunity do for this strange, exotic flower of Osceola's people? She has brains and beauty and instinctive grace enough to startle a continent. I am greatly tempted. Ann, I beg of you, don't breathe any of this to Aunt Agatha. Some day I may carry Keela away to the cities of the North for an experiment quite my own. Her delicate beauty—her

gravity—her shy, sweet dignity, hold me powerfully. It would make life well worth the living—the regeneration of a life like hers.

"No, I am not mad. If I am, it is a delicious madness indeed, this craving to do something for some one else. I need the discipline of thinking for another.

"I don't know when you will get this. Once in a while an Indian rides forth to civilization, and this letter will perforce await such a messenger. I wrote to Aunt Agatha from the little hamlet where Johnny is waiting with the van. I know she is fussing.

"You wrote me something in one of your letters, that Dick and Carl were planning to camp and hunt wild turkeys in the Glades. Let me know what luck they had and all the news.

"Ever yours,

"Diane."

Now, if Diane proved readily adaptable to the wild life about her, no less did Philip. At night he smoked comfortably by his camp fire, unwound the hullabaloo upon request or lent it to Sho-caw. He rode hard and fearlessly with the warriors, hunted bear and alligator, acquired uncommon facility in the making of sof-ka, the tribal stew, and helped in the tanning of pelts and the building of cypress canoes.

Presently the unmistakable whir of a sewing machine which Sho-caw had bought from a trader, floated one morning from Philip's wigwam. Keela reported literally that Mr. Poynter had said he was building himself a much-needed tunic, though he had experienced considerable difficulty in the excavation of the sleeves.

CHAPTER XXXVII

IN THE GLADES

"What the devil is the matter with you, Carl?" demanded Dick Sherrill irritably. "If I'd known you were going to moon under a tree and whistle through that infernal flute half the time, I'd never have suggested camping. Are you coming along to-night or not?"

"No. I've murdered enough wild turkeys now."

Sherrill plunged off swampwards with the guides.

Left to himself Carl laid aside his flute and sat very quiet, staring at the cloud-haunted moon which hung above the Glades. He had been drinking and gaming heavily for weeks. Now floundering deeper and deeper into the mire of debt and dissipation, forced to a fevered alertness by distrust of all about him, he found the weird gloom of the Everglades of a piece with the blackness of his mood. For days he had taken wild chances that horrified Sherrill inexpressibly; drinking clear whiskey in the burning white tropical sunlight, tramping off into trackless wilds without a guide, conducting himself, as Sherrill aggrievedly put it, with the general irrationality of a drunken madman.

"The climate or a moccasin will get you yet!" exclaimed Sherrill heatedly. "And it will serve you right. Or you'll get lost. And to lose your way in this infernal swamp is sure death. They used to enter runaway niggers who came here, on the undertaker's list. I swear I won't tell your aunt if you do disappear.

That's a job for a deaf mute. And only yesterday I saw you corner a moccasin and tantalize him until the chances were a hundred to one that he'd get you, and then you blazed your gun down his throat and walked away laughing. Faugh!"

With the perversity of reckless madmen, however, Carl went his foolhardy way unharmed. But his nights were fevered and sleepless and haunted by a face which never left him, and the locked hieroglyphics on Themar's cuff danced dizzily before his eyes.

Carl presently lighted a lantern, seated himself at the camp table and fell moodily to poring over the tormenting hieroglyphics which had haunted him for days.

The night was cloudy. Only at infrequent intervals the moon soared turbulently out from the somber cloud-hills and glinted brightly through the live oaks overhead.

Carl had been drinking heavily since the morning, with vicious recourse to the flute when his mood was darkest. Now he felt strung to a curious electric tension, with pulse and head throbbing powerfully like a racing engine. Still there was satanic keenness in his mind to-night, a capacity for concentration that surprised him. Somewhere in his head, taut like an overstrung ligament or the string of a great violin, something sinister droned and hummed and subtly threatened. For the hundredth time he made a systematic list of recurrent symbols, noting again the puzzling similarity of the twisted signs, but no sign appeared frequently enough to do vowel work.

To-night somehow the cipher mocked and gibed and goaded him to frenzy. The mad angles pointing up and down and right and left—it was impossible to sort them. They danced and blurred and crept irresistibly into the wrong list.

And in error came solution. Carl glanced intently at the jumbled list and fell feverishly to working from a different viewpoint. From the cryptic snarl came

presently the single English word in the cipher—his name. The keen suspicion of his hot brain had, at last, been right. For every letter in the alphabet, four symbols had been used interchangeably but whether they pointed up or down or right or left, their significance was the same. There were no word divisions.

When at last Ronador's frantic message to the Baron lay before him, Carl was grateful for the quiet monastery days in Houdania with Father Joda. They had given him an inkling of the language.

Some of the message, to be sure, was missing—for Themar had been interrupted—and some of it unintelligible. But clear and cold before his fevered eyes lay the words which marked him irrevocably for the knife of a hired assassin. There was no suggestion of sealing his lips with gold, as in a drunken moment he had suggested in his letter. The seal of death was safer than the seal of gold. Seeing the sinister command there before him, even though the knowledge was not new, Carl felt a nameless fury rise in his reeling brain. He must live—live—live! he told himself fiercely. With the vivid, lovely face of Keela tormenting him to sensual conquest, he must live no matter what the price! How safeguard his life from the men who were hunting him?

What if Diane were to—*die*? Carl shuddered. Then the sirocco of fear and hate centering about her, would blow itself out forever and his own life would be safe, for the secret would be worthless. These men—Tregar, Ronador, Themar—scrupled for vastly different reasons to take the life of a woman.

Money! Money! He must have money! And if Diane were to *die*, the great estate of Norman Westfall would revert to him of course; there was no other heir. Why had he not thought of that before? In that instant he knew that barely a year ago the treacherous thought would have been for him impossible, that slowly, insistently he had been sliding deeper and deeper into the dark abyss of degradation where all things are possible.

There had been intrigue and dishonor of a sort in the letter to Houdania, but

not this—Oh, God! not this horrible, beckoning Circe with infamous eyes and scarlet robes luring him to the uttermost pit of the black Inferno.

But Diane had flashed and mocked him as a child when he was sensitive and lonely. She had always mocked the memory of his mother. Brown and lovely his cousin's face rose before him in a willful moment of tenderness—and then from the shadows came again the flash of topaz and Venetian lamps and the lovely face of Keela.

Something in Carl's haunted brain snapped. With a groan of horror and suffering, he pitched forward upon the ground, breathing Philip Poynter's name like an invocation against the things of evil crowding horribly about him.

It was Dick Sherrill who at last found him.

"Nick!" he called in horror to one of the guides. "For God's sake bring some brandy! No! he's had too much of that already. Water! Water—can't somebody hurry!"

"Leave him to me, Mr. Sherrill!" said Nick with quiet authority. And bending over the motionless figure under the oak, he gently loosened the flannel shirt from the throat, laid a wet cloth upon the forehead and fell to rubbing the rigid limbs.

Presently, with a long, shuddering sigh, Carl opened his eyes, stared at the scared circle of faces about him and instantly tried to rise.

"Don't, don't, Carl," exploded Dick Sherrill solicitously. "Lie still, man! I was afraid something would get you."

Carl fell back indifferently.

Presently with a slight smile he sat up again.

"I'm all right now, Dick," he insisted. "It's nothing at all. I've had something like it once before. Don't mention it to my aunt. She'd likely fuss."

Dick readily promised.

"Nevertheless," he insisted, "we're going to break camp in the morning. This infernal bog's got on my nerves. There are more creepy, oozy things in that cypress swamp over there than a man can afford to meet in the dark. To the devil with your wild turkeys, Nick! Quail and duck are good enough for me."

The camp wagons drove back to Palm Beach in the morning. Carl was very quiet and evaded Sherrill's anxious eyes. He seemed to be brooding morosely over some inner problem which frequently furrowed his forehead and made him very restless.

"Cheer up!" exclaimed Dick reassuringly. "You'll feel better when you get a shower and some other clothes. As for me, I'm going to hunt field mice and ground doves from now on. Lord, Carl, I'll never forget that beastly swamp. Did I tell you that last night, after all our discomfort, I got nothing but a smelly buzzard? Ugh!" Dick's hunting interest was steadily on the wane. He finally came down to birds and humble bees, though when they started he had talked magnificently of alligators and bears.

Carl laughed and relapsed into brooding silence.

A little later on the Sherrill porch he found himself listening with tired patience to Aunt Agatha's opinion of camping in the Everglades.

"What with your Esquimaux," she puffed tearfully, "and the immigrant who wasn't an immigrant—and I must say this once, Carl, for all I promised to ask no further questions, that you never attempted to explain that performance to my satisfaction—the young man with the eye, you know, and the immigrant with his feet on the lace spread—to say nothing at all of Diane's losing herself in the

flat-woods over a cart wheel of flame, I wonder I'm not crazy, I do indeed! And riding off to Jacksonville with the Indian girl, for all I've lain awake night after night seeing her scalp lying by the roadside! It was bad enough to have you in those horrible Glades, but Diane—"

"Aunt Agatha," said Carl patiently, "what in thunder are you driving at anyway?"

"Why," said Aunt Agatha in aggrieved distress, "Diane's gone and left Johnny at some funny little hamlet and she's gone into the Everglades to a Seminole village with the Indian girl. There's a letter in my room. You can read for yourself."

Aunt Agatha burst into tears. Carl patiently essayed a comforting word of advice and followed Dick indoors to seek relief in less calamitous showers. Before he did so, however, he read his cousin's letter.

For that night and the night following Carl did not sleep. On the morning of the third day, after a careless inquiry he went to West Palm Beach and interviewed some traders who were reported to be on the eve of an expedition into the Everglades with a wagonload of scarlet calico and beads to trade for Indian products.

The fourth day he was missing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN PHILIP'S WIGWAM

For hours now, Carl had lain hidden in the waist-high grass, staring at the Seminole camp. The sun had set in a wild red glory in the west, staining dank pool and swamp with the color of blood. The twilight came and with it the eerie hoot of the great owls whirring by in the darkness. Unseen things crept silently by. Once a great winged wraith of ghostly white flapped by with a croak, a snowy heron, winging like a shape of Wrath Incarnate, above the crouching man in the grass. The wheel fires of the Seminoles flared among the live oaks, silhouetting dusky figures and palmetto wigwams.

By the swamp the night darkened. Carl had thrown himself upon the grass now, his white, haggard face buried upon his arm. Back there scarcely a mile to the east lay the camp of the traders. In the morning they would ride into the Indian camp saddled with bright beads and colored calicoes. In the morning—Carl shuddered and lay very quiet, fighting again the ghastly torment that had racked and driven him into the melancholy solitude of the Everglades. Now the firelit palmetto roof of the wigwam he knew to be Diane's seemed somehow, to his distorted fancy, redder than the others—the color of blood. There, too, was the wigwam of Keela, bringing taunting desire.

A crowd of Seminoles rode into camp and, dismounting, led their horses away. Carl watched them gather about the steaming sof-ka kettles on the fires, handing the spoon from mouth to mouth. One, a tall, broad young warrior in tunic and trousers and a broad sombrero—disappeared in a wigwam on the

fringe of camp.

A great wave of dizziness and burning nausea swept over Carl. Again he was conscious of the taut, over-strung ligament droning, droning in his head. The camp ahead became a meaningless blur of sinister scarlet fire, of bloodred wigwams and dusky figures that seemed to dance and lure and mock. The wild wind that bent the grasses, the horrible persistent hoot of the owl in the cypress tree, the night noises of the black swamp to the west, all mocked and urged and whispered of things unspeakable.

The camp fell quiet. A black moonless sky brooded above the dying camp fires. Not until this wild world of swamp and Indian seemed asleep did the man in the grass stir.

Silently then he crept forward upon hands and knees until he had passed the first of the Indian wigwams. Here he dropped for a silent interval of caution into shadow and lay there scarcely breathing. On toward the door of Diane's shelter he crept and once more lay inert and quiet.

Thunder rumbled disquietingly off to the east, The wind was rising over the Glades with a violent rustle of grass and leaves. Now that his arm was nerved at last to its terrible task, it behooved him to hurry, ere the rain and thunder stirred the camp.

Noiselessly he crawled forward again. As he did so a ragged dart of lightning glinted evilly in his eyes. With a leap something bounded from the shadows behind him and bore him to the ground.

In the thick pall of darkness, he fought with infernal desperation. The rain came fiercely in great gusts of tearing wind. There was the strength of a madman to-night in Carl's powerful arms. Relentlessly he bore his assailant to the ground and raised his knife. The lightning flared brilliantly again. With a great, choking cry of unutterable horror, Carl fell back and flung his knife away.

"Oh, God!" he cried, shaking. "Philip!" He flung himself face downward on the ground in an agony of abasement.

With a roar of wind and rain the hurricane beat gustily upon the wigwams. Neither man seemed aware of it. Philip, his face white, had risen. Now he stood, tall, rigid, towering above the man upon the ground, who lay motionless save for the shuddering gusts of self-revulsion which swept his tortured body.

It was Philip at last who spoke. Bending he touched the other's shoulder.

"Come," he said. "Diane must not know."

"No," said Carl dully. "No—she must not know. I—I am not myself, Philip, as God is my witness—" He choked, unable to voice the horror in his heart. A man may not raise the knife of death to his one friend and speak of it with comfort.

Rising, Carl stumbled blindly in the wake of the tall figure striding on ahead. They halted at last at a wigwam on the fringe of the camp. Philip lighted a lantern, his white face fixed and expressionless as stone.

"You were going to kill her!" he said abruptly.

"Yes," said Carl. He shuddered.

In the silence the storm battered fiercely at the wigwam.

Philip wheeled furiously.

"What is it?" he demanded. "In God's name what threatens her, that even here in these God-forsaken wilds she is not safe?" He towered grim above the crouching man on the floor of the wigwam. "For months I have guarded her day and night," he went on fiercely, "from some damnable mystery and treachery

that has almost muddled my life beyond repair. What is it? Why were you creeping to her wigwam to-night with a knife in your hand?"

Carl flinched beneath the blazing anger and contempt in his eyes. The droning in his head grew suddenly to a roar. The nausea flamed again over his body. For a dizzy interval he confused the noise of the storm with the drone in his head. Philip seized the lantern and bending, stared closely into his white face and haunted eyes.

"You're ill!" he said gently.

"Yes," said Carl. "I—I think so." He met Philip's glance of sympathy with one of wild imploring. It was the man's desperate effort to keep this one friend from sweeping hostilely out of his life on the wings of the dark, impious tempest he had roused himself. To his disordered brain nothing else mattered. Philip had trusted him always—and his knife had menaced Philip. In Philip's hand lay then, though he could not know it, the future of the man at his feet. In the silence Carl fell pitifully to shaking.

"Steady, Carl!" exclaimed Philip kindly and setting the lantern down, slipped a strong, reassuring arm about the other's shoulders.

In that second Philip proved his caliber. With big inherent generosity he saw beyond the bloated mask of brutal passion and resolve. Miraculously he understood and said so. This white, haggard face, marked cruelly with dissipation and suffering, was the face of a man at the end of the way. In his darkest hour he needed—not an inexorable censor—but a friend. With heroic effort Philip put aside the evil memory of the past hour, though his sore heart rebelled.

"Carl," he said gently, "you've got to pull up. You've come to the wall at last. You know what lies on the other side?"

Carl shuddered.

"Yes," he whispered. "Madness—or—or suicide. One of the two must come in time."

"Madness or suicide!" repeated Philip slowly and there was a great pity in his eyes.

Carl caught the look and his face grew whiter beneath its tan. Chin and jaw muscles went suddenly taut.

"Philip," he choked, unnerved by the other's gentleness, "you don't—you can't mean—you believe in me—*yet*?"

"Yes," said Philip steadily. "God help me, I do."

Carl flung himself upon the floor, torn by great dry sobs of agony. Shaking, Philip turned away. Presently Carl grew quieter and fell to pouring forth an incoherent recital about a candlestick. From the meaningless raving of the white, drawn lips came at last a single sentence of lucid revelation. Philip leaped and shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Carl, think! think!" he cried fiercely. "For God's sake, think! You—don't know what you are saying!"

But Carl repeated the statement again and again, and Philip's eyes grew sombre. With quick, keen questions he reduced the chaotic yarn to order.

The wild tale at an end, Carl fell back, limp and very tired.

"In God's name," thundered practical Philip, "why didn't you look in the other candlestick?"

Carl stared. Then suddenly without a word of warning, he pitched forward

senseless upon the floor.

Philip loosened his clothing, rubbed his icy hands and limbs and bathed his forehead, but the interval was long and trying before the stark figure on the floor shuddered slightly and struggled weakly to a sitting posture.

"I'm all right now," said Carl dully. "And I've got to go on. I—I can't meet Diane." He drew something from his pocket and jabbed it in his arm.

Philip looked on with disapproval.

"No," said Carl, meeting his glance. "No, not so very often, Philip. Just lately, since Sherrill and I camped in the Glades. There's something—something very tight here in my head whenever I grow excited. When it snaps I'm done for a while, but this helps."

Philip's fine, frank mouth was very grim.

"Carl," he said quietly, "off there to the south is the eccentric swamp home of a singular man, a philosopher and a doctor. He's Keela's foster father. I've met and smoked with him. I want you to go to him and rest. The Indians do that. He's what you need. And tell him you're down and out. You'll go—for me?"

"Anywhere," said Carl.

"Tell him about the dope and every other hell-conceived abuse with which you've tormented your body. Tell him about the infernal tightness in your head."

"Yes," said Carl.

"But this thing of the candlestick," added Philip bitterly, "tell to no man. You're strong enough to start now?"

"Yes."

Philip left the wigwam. When at length he returned, there was a dark, slight figure at his heels, turbaned and tunicked, a guide whom he trusted utterly.

A burning wave swept suddenly over Carl's body and left him very cold. Philip could not know, of course.

"Keela will guide you," said Philip. "She could follow the trail with her eyes closed. The horses are saddled at the edge of camp. You'll be there by daylight."

He smiled and held out his hand and his eyes were encouraging. The hands of the two men tightened. Carl stumbled blindly away at the heels of the Indian girl. Philip watched them go—watched Keela lead the way with the lithe, soft tread of a wild animal, and mount—watched Carl swing heavily into the saddle and follow. Silhouetted darkly against the watery moon, the silent riders filed off into the swamp-world to the south. For an instant Philip experienced a sudden flash of misgiving but Philip was just and honorable in all things and having disciplined himself to faith in his friend, maintained it.

Then his eyes wandered slowly to the wigwam of Diane. Thinking of the story of the candle-stick, with his mouth twisted into a queer, wry smile, Philip fumbled for his pipe.

"*Requiescat in pace*," said Philip, "the hopes of Philip Poynter!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

UNDER THE WILD MARCH MOON

Southward under the watery moon and the wild, dark clouds rode the Indian girl, following a trail blazed only for Indian eyes. The aquatic world about them had grown steadily wilder, more remote from the haunts of men. Fording miry creeks, silver-streaked with moon-light, trampling through dense, dark, tangled brakes and on, under the wild March moon, followed Carl, a prey to the memory of the Indian girl as he had seen her that night at Sherrill's.

Keela's face, vividly dark and lovely, had mocked his restless slumbers this many a day. Keela's eyes, black like a starless night or the cloud-black waters of Okeechobee had lured and lured to sensual conquest.

But a great shame was adding its torment to the terrible pain in his head and the fevered singing of his pulses. In the torture of his self-abasement, the overstrung ligament in his head fell ominously to droning again. Everything seemed remote and unreal. He hated the awful silence about him—the crash of his horse's feet through the matted brush and the twist of palmetto, resolved itself into dancing ciphers.

Ahead Keela stopped. Motionless, like a beautiful sculptured thing, she sat listening as Carl rode up beside her.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I fancied some one followed," said Keela soberly. "It may not be." She rode forward, glancing keenly at the trail behind her.

Thus they rode onward until the east grew pale and gray. A bleak dawn was breaking in melancholy mists over the Everglades. The lonely expanse of swamp and metallic water, of grass-flats and tangled wilds, loomed indistinctly out of the half light in sinister skeleton.

Keela glanced with furtive compassion at the haggard face of the rider behind her. Since midnight he had ridden in utter silence, growing whiter it seemed as the night waned.

"Another hour!" said Keela in her soft, clear voice. "Be of courage. When the sun rises there behind the cypress, we shall be at our journey's end."

"I—I am all right," stammered Carl courageously, but he bit his lips until they bled, and swayed so violently in the saddle that Keela slid to the ground in alarm.

"Put your arms about my shoulders—so!" she commanded imperiously. "You will fall! Philip surely could not know how ill you are. Can you get down?"

With an effort Carl dismounted and fell forward on his knees.

"You must sleep for a while," said Keela. "I will build a fire. We can breakfast here and rest as long as you like." She took a blanket from his saddle and spread it on the ground.

Carl crept on hands and knees to the Indian blanket and lay very still. A drowsiness numbed his senses. When he awoke after a brief interval of restless slumber, it was not yet daylight, though the sky in the east was softly streaked with color. The moon hung low.

A fire crackled in the center of a clearing. The horses were tethered to a

tree. Keela was off somewhere with bow and arrow to hunt their breakfast.

Now suddenly as he lay there, tired and apathetic, Carl was conscious of a face leering from among the trees close at hand, a dark, thin-lipped foreign face with eyes black with hate and malicious triumph. There was a horse hitched to a tree in the thicket beyond. In that instant Carl knew that the Houdanian had furtively followed the camp of the traders into the wilds of the Everglades, spurred on by the fierce command of Ronador. But he did not move. A terrible apathy made him indifferent to the knife of the assassin. He had had his day of masterful torment back there in the attic of the farm, he told himself. Now he must pay. The knife would quiet this unbearable agony in his head.

Themar met his eyes, smiled evilly and raised his knife. But the weapon fell suddenly from his hand. With an ominous hum an arrow whizzed fiercely through the trees and anchored in the flesh above his heart.

Themar stumbled and fell forward on his face. Like the stricken moose who seeks to press his wound against the earth, he drove the arrow home to his heart. He sobbed, and choked and lay very still, a scarlet wound dying his flannel shirt.

Carl's horrified eyes turned slowly to the west.

Keela was coming through the trees, proud eyes fierce with terrible anger; halting beside the dead man, she spurned him with moccasined foot.

The tense, droning string in Carl's head whirled again—and snapped. He lay in a heavy stupor, dozing fitfully until the moon climbed high again above the Glades.

CHAPTER XL

THE VICTORY

When consciousness and a restful sense of returning strength came at last Keela was bending anxiously over him.

"You have been quiet so long," she said gravely, "that I grew afraid. Drink." She held forth a cup of woven leaves, and the glance of her great black eyes was very soft and gentle.

Carl flushed and taking the cup with shaking hand, drank. There was a flash of gratitude in his eyes.

"Themar?" he whispered. "Where is he?" He looked toward the trees beyond.

"In the swamp!" said Keela, her face stern and beautiful. "It is better so."

"You—you dragged him there?"

"I am very strong," said Keela simply. "The vultures will get him. It is the Indian way with one who murders."

Their eyes met, a great wave of crimson suddenly dyed Keela's throat and face and swept in lovely tide to the brilliant turban. A constrained silence fell between them, broken only by the whirl of a great heron flapping by on snowy wings. And there was something in Keela's eyes that sent the blood coursing

furiously through Carl's fevered veins.

The Indian girl busied herself with the wild duck roasting in the hub of coals. Carl ate a little and lay down again. He saw now that Themar's horse was tethered beside Keela's—that the dead man's saddlebags lay by the fire. Furtive recourse to the drug in his pocket presently flushed his veins with artificial calm. He fell asleep to find his dreams haunted again by the lovely face of Keela, kinder and gentler now than that proud, imperious face above the line of flashing topaz.

He awoke with a start.

The Indian girl lay asleep on a blanket by the fire. The world of moon-haunted jungle and water was very quiet. Firelight faintly haloed Keela's face and brought mad memories of the soft light of the Venetian lamp at the Sherrill fete. He noted the pure, delicate regularity of feature, the delicate, vivid skin—it was paler than Diane's—and flaming through his brain went the dangerous reflection that conquest lay now perhaps in the very hollow of his hand.

Desire had driven him on to things unspeakable. It had clouded his brain, fired his blood to ugly resolve, blinded every finer instinct with its turbulent call, until the siren who beckons men onward through the marshland of passion had flung the gift at his feet in the haunted wilds.

Staring at the tranquil, delicate face of the sleeper by the camp fire, a great horror of the scarlet hours behind him awoke suddenly in Carl's heart. There had been a girl who cried. And he had laughed and shrugged and voiced an ironical philosophy of sex for her consolation. There was no philosophy of sex, only a hideous injustice which Man, the Hunter, willfully ignored. There were faces in the fire—faces like that of Keela, that had lured to sensual conquest and faded.

Trembling violently, Carl stared long and steadily at the Indian girl. There

had been a time, before he sank to the bottom of the pit, when her face had awakened in him an eager deference. The moon darkened. A white wall of mist settled thickly over the Glades. Then came other thoughts. Philip trusted him. He must not forget. And the immortal spark of control lay somewhere within him. Unbridled passion of mind and body had made him very ill. Very well, then, it behooved him to exorcise the demon while this tormenting clarity of vision whirled the dread kaleidoscope of his careless life before him in honest colors.

Unleashed by drug and drink and ceaseless brooding, nerve centers had rebelled, an infernal blood pressure born of mental agony had inspired the droning, his will had slipped its moorings. That his body was not ill, he now knew for the first time. Fever, nausea, pain and droning, they had all leaped at the infernal manipulation of his disordered mind with sickening intensity. Now with a terrible effort he summoned each tattered remnant of the splendid mental strength he had indifferently abused, disciplined his fleeing faculty of concentration and sat very quiet.

Philip trusted him. He must not forget! Keela's face had made its delicate appeal to his finer side until that appeal had been hushed by the call of his blood. And there were times when Diane had been kind. He must not forget. Like the stirring of a faint shadow, he felt the first dawning sense of self-mastery he had known for days.

The horrible Circe with infamous eyes and scarlet robes no longer lured ... the terrible sirocco of unbridled passion which had dominated his body almost to destruction was burning itself out ... the droning in his head was very faint. He must not forget Philip, truest and best of friends.

Carl lay down again beside the fire with a great sigh. He was very tired—very sleepy.

He slept soundly until morning.

When he awoke it was broad daylight. There was a curious sense of utter rest in his veins and meeting Keela's solicitous glance, he said, a little diffidently, that he was better and that he thought they might go on. After a breakfast of quail and wild cassava they rode on, Keela on Themar's horse. Her own obediently followed.

An hour later they came to an aquatic jungle haunted by noisome reptiles. Here fallen trees and a matted underbrush of poisonous vines lay submerged in dank black water. Cypress gloomed in forbidding shadow above the stagnant water; the swamp itself was rife with horrible quacks and croaks and off somewhere the distant bellow of an alligator.

So dense and dark this terrible haunt of snake and bird and brilliant lizard that Carl shuddered, but Keela, dismounting, tethered her horses to the nearest tree and struck off boldly across a narrow trail of dry land above the level of the water. Carl followed. Presently the matted jungle thinned and they came to a rude foot-bridge made of twisted roots. It led to the first of a series of fertile islands which threaded the terrible swamp with a riot of color. Here royal poinciana flared gorgeously beside the orange-colored blossoms of wild cassava, and hordes of birds flamed by on brilliant wings.

Through rude avenues of palm and pine and cypress, through groves of wild orange and banana fringed with mulberry and persimmon trees, over rustic bridges which led from island to island, they came at last to a larger hummock and the wild, vine-covered log lodge of Mic-co, the Indians' white friend.

It was thatched like the Seminole wigwams in palmetto and set in a cluster of giant trees. Trailing moss and ferns and vines hung from the boughs, weaving a dense, cool shade about the dwelling. The exuberant air plants brought memories of Lanier's immortal poem:

"Glooms of the live oaks, beautiful-braided and woven
With intricate shades of the vines that myriad-cloven
Clamber the forks of the multiform boughs,—"

There were brilliant vistas of bloom beyond the shadow. The odor of orange hung heavily in the still, warm air. A pair of snowy herons flapped tamely about among the pines.

Utter peace and quiet, alive with the chirp of many birds, brilliant sunshine and deep, dark shadow! But Carl stared most at the figure that came to greet them, a tall, broad man of dark complexion and wonderful, kindly eyes of piercing darkness. His hair and beard were snow-white and reached nearly to his waist, his attire buckskin, laced at the seams. But his slender, sensitive hands caught and held attention.

"Mic-co," said Keela gravely, "he is very tired in his head. Philip would have him rest."

Mic-co held out his hand with a quiet smile. Whatever his searching eyes had found in the haggard face of his young guest was reflected in his greeting.

"You are very welcome," he said simply.

"No," said Carl steadily, "I may not take your hand, sir, until you know me for what I am. There are none worse. I have been through the mire of hell itself. I have dishonorably betrayed a kinsman in the hope of gold. I had thought to kill. Only a freak of fate has stayed my hand. And there is more that I may not tell—"





"No, I may not take your hand."

[Illustration: "No, I may not take your hand."]

"So?" said Mic-co quietly.

Flushing, Carl took the outstretched hand.

"I—I thank you," he said, and looked away.

CHAPTER XLI

IN MIC-CO'S LODGE

The rooms of Mic-co's lodge opened, in the fashion of the old Pompeian villas, upon a central court roofed only by the Southern sky. This court, floored with split logs, covered with bearskin rugs and furnished in handmade chairs of twisted palmetto and a rude table, years back Mic-co and his Indian aides had built above a clear, lazy stream. Now the stream crept beneath the logs to a quiet open pool in the center where lilies and grasses grew, and thence by its own channel under the logs again and out. Storm coverings of buckskin were rolled above the outer windows and above the doorways which opened into the court.

Here, when the moon rose over the lonely lodge and glinted peacefully in the tiled pool, Mic-co listened to the tale of his young guest. It was a record of bodily abuse, of passion and temptation, which few men may live to tell, but Mic-co neither condoned nor condemned. He smoked and listened.

"Let us make a compact," he said with his quiet smile. "I may question without reserve. You may withhold what you will. That is fair?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever endured hardship of any kind?"

"I have hunted in the Arctics," said Carl. "There was a time when food failed.

We lived for weeks on reindeer moss and rock tripe. I have been in wild territory with naturalists and hunters. Probably I have known more adventurous hardship than most men."

Mic-co nodded.

"I fancied so," he said. "What is your favorite painting?" he asked unexpectedly.

The answer came without an instant's hesitation.

"Paul Potter's 'Bull.'"

"A thing of inherent virility and vigor, intensely masculine!" said Mic-co with a smile, adding after an interval of thought, "but there is a danger in over-sexing ____"

"I have sometimes thought so. The over-masculine man is too brutal."

"And the over-feminine woman?"

"Kindly, sentimental, helpless and weak. I have lived with such an aunt since I was fifteen. No, I beg of you, do not misunderstand me! I blame nothing upon her. Like many good women whose minds are blocked off in conventional squares, she is very loyal and sympathetic—and very trying. The essence of her temperament is ineffectuality. My cousin and I were a wild, unmanageable pair who rode roughshod over protest. That Aunt Agatha was not in fault may be proved by my cousin. She is a fine, true, splendid woman."

An ineffectual aunt in the critical years of adolescence! Mic-co did not suggest that his cousin's sex had been her salvation.

So nights by the pool Mic-co plumbed the depths of his young guest with the fine, tired eyes.

"Tell me," he said gently another night; "this inordinate sensitiveness of which you speak. To what do you attribute it?"

Carl colored.

"My mother," he said, "was courageous and unconventional. She recognized the fact that marriage and monogamy are not the ethical answers of the future—that though ideal unions sometimes result, it is not because of marriage, but in spite of it—that motherhood is the inalienable right of every woman with the divine spark in her heart, no matter what the disappointing lack of desirable marriage chances in her life may be. Therefore, when the years failed to produce her perfect and desirable human complement, she sought a eugenic mate and bore me, refusing to saddle herself to a meaningless, man-made partnership with infinite possibilities of domestic hell in it, merely as a sop to the world-Cerberus of convention. Marriage could have added nothing to her lofty conceptions of motherhood—but I—I have been keenly resentful and sensitive—for her. I think it has been the feeling that no one understood. Then, after she died, there was no one—only Philip. I saw him rarely."

"And your cousin?"

"She had been taught—to misunderstand. There was always that barrier. And she is very high spirited. Though we were much together as youngsters she could not forget."

A singular maternal history, a beautiful, high-spirited, intolerant cousin who had been taught to despise his mother's morality! What warring forces indeed had gone to the making of this man before him.

"You have been lonely?"

"Yes," said Carl. "My mother died when I needed her most. Later when I

was very lonely—or hurt—I drank."

"And brooded!" finished Mic-co quietly.

"Yes," said Carl. "Always." He spoke a little bitterly of the wild inheritance of passions and arrogant intolerance with which Nature had saddled him.

"All of which," reminded Mic-co soberly, "you inflamed by intemperate drinking. Is it an inherited appetite?"

"It is not an appetite at all," said Carl.

"You like it?"

"If you mean that to abandon it is to suffer—no. I enjoyed it—yes."

The wind that blew through the open windows and doors of the lodge stirred the moonlit water lilies in the pool. To Carl they were pale and unreal like the wraith of the days behind him. Like a reflected censer in the heart of the bloom shone the evening star. The peace of it all lay in Mic-co's fine, dark, tranquil face as he talked, subtly moulding another's mind in the pattern of his own. He did not preach. Mic-co smoked and talked philosophy.

Carl had known but little respect for the opinions of others. He was to learn it now. He was to find his headstrong will matched by one stronger for all it was gentler; his impudent philosophy punctured by a wisdom as great as it was compassionate; his own magnetic power to influence as he willed, a negligible factor in the presence of a man whose magnetism was greater.

Mic-co had said quietly by the pool one night that he had been a doctor—that he loved the peace and quiet of his island home—that years back the Seminoles had saved his life. He had since devoted his own life to their service. They were a pitiful, hunted remnant of a great race who were kindred to the Aztec.

He seemed to think his explanation quite enough. Wherefore Carl as quietly accepted what he offered. There was much that he himself was pledged to withhold. Thus their friendship grew into something fine and deep that was stronger medicine for Carl than any preaching.

"My mother and I were *friends*!" said Carl one night. "When I was a lad of ten or so, as a concession to convention she married the man whose name I bear, a kindly chap who understood. He died. After that we were very close, my mother and I. We rode much together and talked. I think she feared for me. There was peace in my life then—like this. That is why I speak of it. I needed a friend, some one like her with brains and grit and balance that I could respect—some one who would understand. There are but few—"

"She spoke of your own father?"

"No. I do not even know his name. We were pledged not to speak of it. I fancied as I grew older that she was sorry—"

The subject was obviously painful.

"And you've never been honestly contented since?" put in Mic-co quickly.

"Once." Carl spoke of Wherry. "They were weeks of genuine hardship, those weeks at the farm, but it's singular how frequently my mind goes back to them."

"Ah!" said Mic-co with glowing eyes, "there is no salvation like work for the happiness of another. That I know."

So the quiet days filed by until Mic-co turned at last from the healing of the mind to the healing of the body.

"Let us test your endurance in the Seminole way," he said one morning by

the island camp fire where his Indian servants cooked the food for the lodge. Beyond lay the palmetto wigwams of the Indian servants who worked in the island fields of corn and rice and sugar cane, made wild cassava into flour, hunted with Mic-co and rode betimes with the island exports into civilization by the roundabout road to the south which skirted the swamp. Off to the west, in the curious chain of islands, lay the palmetto shelter of the horses.

Mic-co placed a live coal upon the wrist of his young guest and quietly watched. There was no flinching. The coal burned itself out upon the motionless wrist of a Spartan.

Thereafter they rode hard and hunted, day by day. Carl worked in the fields with Mic-co and the Indians, tramped at sunset over miles of island path fringed with groves of bitter orange, disciplining his body to a new endurance. A heavy sweat at the end in a closed tent of buckskin which opened upon the shore of a sheltered inland lake, hardened his aching muscles to iron.

Upon the great stone heating in the fire within the sweat-lodge an Indian lad poured water. It rose in sweltering clouds of steam about the naked body of Mic-co's guest, who at length plunged from the tent into the chill waters of the lake and swam vigorously across to towels and shelter.

Carl learned to pole a cypress canoe dexterously through miles of swamp tangled with grass and lilies, through shallows and deep pools darkened by hanging branches. He learned to tan hides and to carry a deer upon his shoulders. Nightly he plunged from the sweat-lodge into the lake and later slept the sleep of utter weariness under a deerskin cover.

So Mic-co disciplined the splendid body and brain of his guest to the strength and endurance of an Indian; but the quiet hours by the pool brought with them the subtler healing.

Carl grew browner and sturdier day by day. His eyes were quieter. There

was less of arrogance too in the sensitive mouth and less of careless assertiveness in his manner.

So matters stood when Philip rode in by the southern trail with Sho-caw.

Now Philip had wisely waited for the inevitable readjustment, trusting entirely to Mic-co, but with the memory of Carl's haggard face and haunted eyes, he was unprepared for the lean, tanned, wholly vigorous young man who sprang to meet him.

"Well!" said Philip. "Well!"

He was shaken a little and cleared his throat, at a loss for words.

"You—you infernal dub!" said Carl. It was all he could trust himself to say.

It was a singular greeting, Mic-co thought, and very eloquent.

CHAPTER XLII

THE RAIN UPON THE WIGWAM

To the heart of the gypsy there is a kindred voice in the cheerful crackle of a camp fire—in the wind that rustles tree and grass—in the song of a bird or the hum of bees—in the lap of a lake or the brilliant trail of a shooting star.

A winter forest of tracking snow is rife with messages of furry folk who prowl by night. Moon-checkered trees fling wavering banners of gypsy hieroglyphics upon the ground. Sun and moon and cloud and the fiery color-pot of the firmament write their symbols upon the horizon for gypsy eyes to read.

What wonder then that the milky clouds which piled fantastically above the Indian camp fashioned hazily at times into curious boats sailing away to another land? What wonder if the dawn was streaked with imperial purple? What wonder if Diane built faces and fancies in the ember-glow of the Seminole fire-wheel? What wonder if like the pine-wood sparrow and the wind of Okeechobee the voice of the woodland always questioned? Conscience, soul-argument—what you will—there were voices in the wild which stirred the girl's heart to introspection.

So it was with the rain which, at the dark of the moon, pattered gently on the palmetto roof of her wigwam.

"And now," said the rain with a soft gust of flying drops, "now there is Sho-caw!"

"Yes," said Diane with a sigh, "there is Sho-caw. I am very sorry."

"But," warned the rain, "one must not forget. At Keela's teaching you have fallen into the soft, musical tongue of these Indian folk with marvelous ease. And you wear the Seminole dress of a chief—"

"Yes. After all, that was imprudent—"

"You can ride and shoot an arrow swift and far. Your eyes are keen and your tread lithe and soft like a fawn—"

"It is all the wild lore of the woodland I learned as a child."

"But Sho-caw does not know! To him the gypsy heart of you, the sun-brown skin and scarlet cheeks, the night-black hair beneath the turban, are but the lure and charm of an errant daughter of the O-kee-fee-ne-kee wilderness. What wonder that he can not see you as you are, a dark-eyed child of the race of white men!"

"I do not wonder."

"He has been grave and very deferential, gathered wood for you and carried water. Yesterday there was a freshly killed deer at the door of the wigwam. It is the first shy overture of the wooing Seminole."

"I know. Keela has told me. It has all frightened me a little. I—I think I had better go away again."

"There was a time, in the days of Arcadia, when Philip would have laughed, and a second deer would have lain at the door of your wig-wam—"

"Philip is changed."

"He is quieter—"

"Yes."

"A little sterner—"

"Yes."

"Like one perhaps who has abandoned a dream!"

"I—do—not—know."

"Why does he ride away for days with Sho-caw?"

"I have wondered."

The wind, wafting from the rain which splashed in the pool of Mic-co's court, might have told, but the wind, with the business of rain upon its mind, was reticent.

"And Ronador?"

"I have not forgotten."

"He is waiting."

"Yes. Day by day I have put off the thought of the inevitable reckoning. It is another reason why presently I must hurry away."

"A singular trio of suitors!" sighed the rain. "A prince—an Indian warrior—and a spy!"

"Not that!" cried the girl's heart. "No, no—not that!"

"You breathed it but a minute ago!"

"I know—"

"And of the three, Sho-caw, bright copper though he is, is perhaps braver—"

"No!"

"Taller—"

"He is not so tall as Philip."

"To be sure Philip is brown and handsome and sturdy and very strong, but Ronador—ah!—there imperial distinction and poise are blended with as true a native grace as Sho-caw's—"

"Humor and resource are better things."

"Sho-caw's grace is not so heavy as Ronador's—and not so sprightly as Philip's—"

"It may be."

"One may tell much by the color and expression of a man's eye. Sho-caw's eyes are keen, alert and grave; Ronador's dark, compelling and very eloquent. What though there is a constant sense of suppression and smouldering fire and not quite so much directness as one might wish—"

"Philip's eyes are calm and steady and very frank," said the girl, "and he is false."

"Yes," said the rain with a noise like a shower of tears, "yes, he is very false."

The wind sighed. The steady drip of the rain, filtering through the vines

twisted heavily about the oak trunks, was indescribably mournful. Suddenly the nameless terror that had crept into the girl's veins that first night in the Seminole camp came again.

"When the Mulberry Moon is at its full," she said shuddering, "I will go back to the van with Keela. I do not know what it is here that frightens me so. And I will marry Ronador. Every wild thing in the forest loves and mates. And I—I am very lonely."

But by the time the Mulberry Moon of the Seminoles blanketed the great marsh in misty silver Diane was restlessly on her way back to the world of white men.

Philip followed. Leaner, browner, a little too stern, perhaps, about the mouth and eyes, a gypsy of greater energy and resource than when he had struck recklessly into the Glades with the music-machine he had since exchanged for an Indian wagon, Philip camped and smoked and hunted with the skill and gravity of an Indian.

So the wagons filed back again into the little hamlet where Johnny waited, daily astonishing the natives by a series of lies profoundly adventurous and thrilling. Rex's furious bark of welcome at the sight of his young mistress was no whit less hysterical than Johnny's instant groan of relief, or the incoherent manner in which he detailed an unforgettable interview with Aunt Agatha, who had appeared one night from heaven knows where and pledged him with tears and sniffs innumerable to telegraph her when from the melancholy fastnesses of the Everglades, Diane or her scalp emerged.

"She wouldn't go North," finished Johnny graphically, his apple cheeks very red and his eyes very bright, "she certainly would not—she'd like to see herself—she would indeed!—and this no place for me to wait. Them very words, Miss Diane. And she went and opened your grandfather's old house in St. Augustine—the old Westfall homestead—and she's there now waitin'. Likely,

Miss Diane, I'd better telegraph now—this very minute—before she takes it in her head to come again!"

Johnny's dread of another Aunt Agathean visitation was wholly candid and sincere. He departed on a trot to telegraph, hailing Philip warmly by the way.

Here upon the following morning Diane and Keela parted—for the Indian girl was pledged to return to the lodge of Mic-co.

"Six moons, now," she explained with shining eyes, "I stay at the lodge of Mic-co, my foster father. When the Falling Leaf Moon of November comes, I shall still be there, living the ways of white men." She held out her hand. "Aw-lip-ka-shaw!" she said shyly, her black eyes very soft and sorrowful. "It is a prettier parting than the white man's. By and by, Diane, you will write to the lodge of Mic-co? The Indian lads ride in each moon to the village for Mic-co's books and papers." Her great eyes searched Diane's face a little wistfully. "Sometime," she added shyly, "when you wish, I will come again. You will not ride away soon to the far cities of the North?"

"No!" said Diane. "No indeed! Not for ever so long. I'm tired. Likely I'll hunt a quiet spot where there's a lake and trees and lilies, and camp and rest. You won't forget me, Keela?"

Keela had a wordless gift of eloquence. Her eyes promised.

Diane smiled and tightened her hold of the slim, brown Indian hand.

"Aw-lip-ka-shaw, Keela!" she said. "Some day I'm coming back and take you home with me."

The Indian girl drove reluctantly away; presently her canvas wagon was but a dim gray silhouette upon the horizon.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE RIVAL CAMPERS

Northward by lazy canal and shadowy hummock, northward by a river freckled with sand bars, Diane came in time to a quiet lake where purple martins winged ceaselessly over a tangled float of lilies—where now and then an otter swam and dipped with a noiseless ripple of water—where ground doves fluttered fearlessly about the camp as Johnny pitched the tents at noonday.

But for all the whirl and flash of brilliant birdlife above the placid water—for all the screams of the fish hawks and the noise of crows and grackle in the cypress—for all the presence of another camper among the trees to the west, the days were quiet and undisturbed. And at night when the birds were winging to the woods now black against the yellow west, and the lonely lake began to purple, the fires of the rival camps were the single spots of color in the heavy darkness along the shore.

Diane wrote of it, with disastrous results, to Aunt Agatha.

At sunset, one day, a carriage produced an aggrieved rustle of silk, a voice and a hand bag. Each fluttered a little as the driver accepted his fare and rolled away. The hand bag, in accordance with a sensational and ill-conditioned habit which had roused more than one unpopular commotion in crowded department stores and thoroughfares, leaped unexpectedly from a gloved and fluttering hand.

Aunt Agatha possessed herself of the bag with a sniff and rustled heedlessly into the nearest camp.

It was, of course, Mr. Poynter's.

Utterly confounded by the unexpected sight of a tall young man who was cooking a fish over the fire, Aunt Agatha gurgled fearfully and backed precipitately into the nearest tree, whence the ill-natured hand bag forcibly opened a grinning mouth, leaped into space and disgorged a flying shower of nickels and dimes, smelling salts and hairpins and a variety of fussy contrivances of sentimental value.

"God bless my soul!" bleated Aunt Agatha with round, affrighted eyes, "there's a dime in the fish! And I do beg your pardon, young man, but will you be so good as to poke the smelling salts out of the fire before they explode."

There was little likelihood of the final catastrophe, but Mr. Poynter obeyed. Laughing a little as he collected the scattered cargo, he good-humoredly suggested that he was not nearly so dangerous as Aunt Agatha's petrified gaze suggested, and that possibly she might remember him—his name was Poynter—and that Miss Westfall's camp lay a little farther to the east.

Aunt Agatha departed, greatly impressed by his gallantry and common sense. Arriving in the camp of her niece, she roused an alarming commotion by halting unobserved among the trees, staring hard at her niece's back-hair, dropping her hand bag, and bursting into tears that brought the startled campers to her side in a twinkling.

"Great Scott, Johnny!" exclaimed Diane, aghast. "It's Aunt Agatha!"

Aunt Agatha dangerously motioned them away with the hand bag Johnny had returned.

"I'll be all right in a minute!" she sniffed tearfully. "Mamma was that way, too—mamma was. Tears would burst right out of her, especially when she grew so stout. I can't help it! When I think of all I've gone through with you off in the Green-glades or the Never-glades or whatever they are—and worrying all the time about your scalp and alligators—and you sitting there so peaceful, Diane, with your hair still on—I've got to cry—I just have and I will. And Carl's mysteriously disappeared—Heaven knows where! I've not seen him for weeks. Nor did he condescend to write me—as I must say you did—and very good of you too!" Whether Aunt Agatha was crying because her mother was stout and eruptively lachrymose, or because Diane's hair was still where it belonged, or because Carl was missing, Diane could not be sure.

Aunt Agatha puffed presently to a seat by the fire, with hair and hat awry, and dropped her hand bag.

"Johnny," she said severely, "don't stare so. I'm sorry of course that I made you drop the kettle when I came, I am indeed, but I'm here and there's the kettle—and that's all there is to it."

"Of course it is!" exclaimed Diane, kissing her heartily. "And I'm mighty glad to see you, Aunt Agatha, tears and all!"

There was some little difficulty in persuading Aunt Agatha of the truth of this, but she presently removed her hat, narrowly escaped dropping it into the fire, and consigned it, along with the athletic hand bag, to Johnny.

Now Diane with a furtive glance at Philip's camp, had been hostilely considering the discouraging effect of Aunt Agatha's presence upon the rival camper. That Aunt Agatha would presently discern degenerative traces of criminality in his face by reason of his reprehensible proximity to her niece's camp, Diane did not doubt. That the aggrieved lady would call upon him within a day or so and air her rigid notions of propriety and convention, was well within the range of probability. Wherefore—

Aunt Agatha broke plaintively in upon her thoughts.

"If you would only listen, Diane!" she complained. "I've spoken three times of your grandfather's old estate and dear knows you ought to remember it—"

"I beg your pardon, Aunt!" stammered the girl sincerely.

"Certainly," said Aunt Agatha with dignity, "I deserve some attention. What with the dark, gloomy rooms of the house and the cobwebs and cranky spiders—and the people of St. Augustine believing it to be haunted—so that I could scarcely keep a servant—and green mould in the cellar—and a croquet set—and waiting down South when I distinctly promised to go back with the Sherrills in March—I take it very hard of you, Diane, to be so absent-minded. Ugh! How dark the lake has grown and the wind and the noise of the water. There's hardly a star. Diane, I do wonder how you stand it. The shore looks like bands of mourning crepe. And in the midst of it all, Diane, there in St. Augustine, the Baron aeroplaned the top off the Carroll's orchard—"

"Aunt Agatha!" begged the girl helplessly. "What in the world is it all about?"

Aunt Agatha flushed guiltily.

"Why is it," she demanded, "that no one ever seems to understand what I'm saying? Dear knows I haven't a harelip or even a lisp. Why, Baron Tregar, my dear. He's been staying in St. Augustine, too. It almost seemed as if he had deliberately followed me there—though of course that couldn't be. And the Prince too. And the Baron bought an aeroplane to amuse himself and annoy the Carrolls—"

Aunt Agatha flushed again, cleared her throat and looked away. Why Ronador was in St. Augustine she knew well enough. He had waited near her, successfully, for news of Diane. And though the Baron had been very quiet, he

had kept his eye upon the Prince. Aunt Agatha had for once been the startled hub of intrigue.

"And what with the driver mumbling to himself this afternoon because I lost my umbrella and made him go back, and the horse having ribs," she complained, shying from a topic which contained dangerous possibilities of revealing a certain indiscretion, "I do wonder I'm here at all. And the young man was very decent about the dime in his fish—though I'm sure he burned his fingers digging for the smelling salts—for they'd already begun to sizzle—but dear me! Diane, you can't imagine how I jarred my spine and my switch—I did think for a minute it would tumble off—and he was so quick and pleasant to collect the nickels and hairpins. Such a pleasant, comfortable sort of chap. I remember now he was at the Sherrill's and very good-looking, too, I must say, and very lonely too, I'll wager, camping about for his health. He didn't say anything about his health, but one can see by his eyes that he's troubled about it."

"Aunt Agatha!" begged Diane helplessly in a flash of foreboding, "what in creation are you trying to say?"

"Why, Mr. Poynter, of course!" exclaimed Aunt Agatha. "The hand bag shot into his camp and spilled nickels, and I bumped into a tree and jarred my switch. And a very fine fellow he is, to be sure!"

Diane stared.

It was like Aunt Agatha to blunder into the wrong camp. And surely it was like Philip to win her favor by chance.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE TALE OF A CANDLESTICK

The friendship of Aunt Agatha and Mr. Poynter miraculously grew. Aunt Agatha, upon the following morning, took to wandering vaguely about the wooded shore and into Philip's camp, impelled by gracious concern for his health, which she insisted upon regarding as impaired, and by effusive gratitude for such trifling civilities as he had readily proffered the day before. From there she wandered vaguely back to her niece's camp fire in a chronic state of worry about Carl. Discontented, unfailing in her melancholy reminiscences of cannibalistic snakes and herons. Aunt Agatha plainly had no immediate intentions of any sort. She had no intention of lingering in camp, she said, accoutered solely with a hand bag! And she had no intention—no indeed!—of departing until Diane went back with her to the deserted Westfall house in St. Augustine, with the green mould and the cobwebs and cranky spiders and the croquet set in the cellar. Arcadia, if Diane had not crushed the memory out of her heart, had had a parallel.

Greatly disturbed by her aunt's melancholy state of uncertainty, Diane one morning watched her set forth to gather lilies in the region of Philip's camp.

The woodland about was very quiet. Diane lay back against the tree trunk and closed her eyes, listening to the welcome gypsy voices of wind and water, to the noisy clapper rails in the island grass at the end of the lake and to the drone of a motor on the road to the north. Dimly conscious that Johnny was briskly scrubbing the rude table among the trees, she fell asleep.

When she awoke, with a nervous start, Johnny was down at the edge of the lake scouring pans with sand and whistling blithely. Off there to the west, with Aunt Agatha fussing at his heels, Philip was good-naturedly gathering the lilies at the water's edge. And some one was approaching camp from the northern road.

Diane glanced carelessly to the north and sprang to her feet with wild scarlet in her cheeks.

Ronador was coming through the forest.

His color was a little high, his eyes, beneath the peak of his motoring cap profoundly apologetic, but he was easier in manner than Diane.

"I'm offending, I know," he said steadily, "and I crave forgiveness, but muster an indifferent gift of patience as best I may, I can not wait. It is weeks, you recall—"

Diane flushed brightly.

"Yes," she said. "I know. I have been in the Everglades."

"Your aunt told me." Ronador searched her face suddenly with peculiar intentness. He might have added, with perfect truth, that to Aunt Agatha, who had indiscreetly afforded him a glimpse of her niece's letter, might be attributed the halting of the long, black car on the road to the north. "You have no single word of welcome, then!" he reproached abruptly and impatiently brushed his hair back from his forehead with a hand that shook a little.

From the north came the clatter of a motorcycle.

Diane held out her hand.

"Let us make a mutual compact!" she exclaimed frankly. "I have overstrained your patience—you have startled me. Let us both forgive. In a sense we have neither of us kept strictly to the letter of our agreement."

Ronador bent with deference over the girl's outstretched hand and brushed it lightly with his lips, unconscious that her face had grown very white and troubled. Nor in his impetuous relief was he aware that other eyes had witnessed the eloquent tableau and that Aunt Agatha had arrived in camp with an escort who quietly deposited an armful of dripping lilies upon the camp table and oddly enough made no effort to retire.

When at length, conscious of the electric constraint of the atmosphere, Ronador wheeled uncomfortably and met Philip's level glance, he stared and reddened, hot insolent anger in the flash of his eyes and the curl of his lips.

"Dear me!" faltered Aunt Agatha, guiltily conscious of the letter, "I am surprised, I am indeed! Who ever would have thought of seeing you here, Prince, among the trees and—and the ground doves and—and all the lilies!" The unfortunate lady, convinced by now that Ronador's apparent resentment concerned, in some inexplicable way, her escort, herself and the lilies, glanced beseechingly about her. "And what with the lilies," she burst forth desperately in apology for the inopportune arrival of herself and her escort, "what with the lilies, Prince, and the water so wet—though, dear me! it was not to be wondered at, of course—growing wild in the water that way—and only one gown and the hand bag—though to be sure I can't wear the hand bag, and wouldn't if I could—Mr. Poynter, with his usual courtesy was good enough to carry the lilies into camp when I asked him."

"Mr. Poynter was undoubtedly very good, Aunt Agatha," said Diane quietly, "but the lilies scarcely require any further attention."

Still Mr. Poynter did not stir.

"I regret exceedingly," he said formally to Diane, "that I am unable to avail myself of your cordial permission to retire. Unfortunately, I have urgent business with Prince Ronador. Indeed, I have waited for just such an opportunity as this."

He was by far the calmest of the four. Ronador's violent temper was rapidly routing his studied composure. Diane's lovely face was flushed and indignant. Aunt Agatha, making a desperate pretense of sorting the lilies, was plainly in a flutter and willing to be tearfully repentent over their intrusion. Not so Philip. There was satisfaction in his steady glance.

"There is scarcely any business which I may have with—er—Tregar's secretary," said Ronador with deliberate insolence, "which may not be more suitably discharged by Tregar himself."

There was a biting suggestion of rank in his answer at which Philip smiled.

"My spread-eagle tastes," he admitted, "have always protected my eyes from the bedazzlement frequently incident to the sight of royalty. Nor do I wish to flaunt unduly my excellent fortune in being born an American and a democrat, but for once. Prince, we must overlook your trifling disadvantage of caste and meet on a common footing. Permit me to offer my humble secretarial apology that the business is wholly mine—and one other's—and not my chief's."

Here Aunt Agatha created a singular diversion by dropping the lilies and gurgling with amazement.

"God bless my soul!" she screamed hysterically, conscious that her indiscretion was rapidly weaving a web around her which might not find favor in her niece's eyes, "it's Baron Tregar! I know his beard."

Now as it was manifestly impossible for the Baron and his beard to be secreted among the lilies which Aunt Agatha was wildly gathering up, Philip

looked off in the wood to the north.

There was a motorcyclist approaching who had conceivably felt sufficient interest in the long black car to follow it.

The Baron arrived, gallantly swept off his cap and bowed, and suddenly conscious of an indefinable hostility in the attitudes of the silent quartet, stared from one to the other with some pardonable astonishment.

"Tregar!" shouted the Prince hotly, "you will account to me for this officious espionage."

The Baron stroked his beard.

"One may pay his respects to Miss Westfall?" he begged with gentle sarcasm. "It is a sufficiently popular epidemic, I should say, to claim even me. Besides," he added dryly, "in reality I have come in answer to a letter of Poynter's. It has interested me exceedingly to find you on the road ahead of me."

"Baron Tregar," said Diane warmly, "you are very welcome, I assure you. Mr. Poynter has been pleased to inject certain elements of melodrama into his chance intrusion. Otherwise you would not find us staring at each other in this exceedingly ridiculous manner!"

"Hum!" said the Baron blandly and glanced with interest at the undisturbed countenance of Mr. Poynter.

"A mere matter of justice and belated frankness to Miss Westfall!" said Philip quietly. "I must respectfully beg Prince Ronador to disclose to her the original motive of his singular and highly romantic courtship. I bear an urgent message of similar import from one who has had the distinction of playing—imperial chess!"

They were curious words but not so curious in substance as in effect. With a cry of startled anger, Ronador leaped back, his eyes flashing terrible menace at Philip. There was only one pair of eyes, however, quick and keen enough, for all their loveliness, to follow his swift movement or the glitter of steel in his hand.

With a cry of fear and horror, Diane leaped like a wild thing and struck his hand aside. A revolver fell at her feet. Aunt Agatha screamed and covered her eyes with her hands.

In the tense quiet came the tranquil lap of the lake, the call of a distant bird, the lazy murmur of many leaves in a morning wind. Philip stood very quietly by the table. He looked at Diane; he seemed to have forgotten the others, Tregar thought.

With terrible anger in her flashing eyes, Diane flung the revolver into the placid lake, and facing Ronador, her sweet, stern mouth contemptuous, she met his imploring gaze with one of scathing rebuke.

"Excellency," she said to Ronador, "whatever else Mr. Poynter may have in mind, there is surely now an explanation which it behooves you to make as a gentleman who is not a coward!"

Ronador moistened his white lips and looked away.

Trembling violently she turned to Philip.

"Philip!" she cried. "What is it?" As her eyes met his, her hand went to her heart and the color swept in brilliant tide from the slim brown throat to the questioning eyes. "Oh, Philip! Philip!" She choked and fell again to trembling. It was a cry of remorse and heart-broken apology for the memory of a moon above the marsh.

For somehow in that instant, by a freak of instinct, the rain and the wind of

Okeechobee and the bird in the pines came into their own. Their subtle messages dovetailed with the hurt look in Philip's eyes—with the conviction of the girl's sore heart, unconquerable for all she had desperately fought it—with the revelation of treachery which lay now at the bottom of the lake.

Philip was very white.

"But," he said gently, "you could not know."

"I could have waited and trusted," cried the girl. "I could have remembered Arcadia!"

Was Ronador forgotten? Tregar thought so. These two mutely avowing with blazing eyes their utter trust and loyalty had for the moment forgotten everything but each other.

Ronador stalked viciously away to the lake, restlessly turned on his heel with a curse and came slowly back. There was despair in his eyes. Tregar thought of the black moments of impulse and the tearing conscience and pitied him profoundly.

"Excellency," reminded Diane, "there is an explanation—"

But Ronador's pallid lips were set in lines of fierce denial.

"Philip!" appealed the girl.

"Well," said Philip looking away, "it's a tale of a candlestick."

"A candlestick!"

"And a hidden paper."

"Yes?"

Ronador seemed about to speak, thought better of it and closed his lips in a tense white line of sullenness.

Philip glanced keenly at him, and his own mouth grew a little sterner.

"Excellency," he said to Ronador, "that you may not feel impelled again to violence in the suppression of this curious fragment of family history, let me warn you that the story has been entrusted in full to Father Joda, who knew and loved your cousin. Any spectacular irrationality that you may hereafter develop in connection with Miss Westfall, will lead to its disclosure. He is pledged to that in writing."

The color died out of Ronador's face. The fire, roused by the specter he had fought this many a day, burned itself quite to ashes and left him cold and sullen. He had played and lost. And he was an older and quieter man for the losing. Whatever else lay at the bottom of his contradictory maze of dark moods and passions, he had courage and the curse of conscience. There were black memories struggling now within him.

Tregar moved quietly to Ronador's side, an act of ready loyalty not without dignity in the eyes of Philip.

"Your letter hinted something of all this," he said. "Let us be quite fair, Poynter. Ronador feared only for his little son."

"Why must we talk in riddles?" cried Diane with a flash of impatience. "Why does Ronador fear for his son? Where is the candlestick? And the paper? Who found it?"

"Carl found it," said Philip. "It was written nearly a quarter of a century ago, by one—Theodomir of Houdania."

Diane glanced in utter mystification at Ronador's ashen face—there was a

great fear in his eyes—and thence to Baron Tregar.

"Excellency," she appealed, "it is all very hard to understand. Who is Theodomir? And why must his life touch mine after all these years?"

The Baron cleared his throat.

"Let me try to make it simpler," he said gravely. "Theodomir, Miss Westfall, was a lovable, willful, over-democratic young crown prince of Houdania who, many years ago, refused the responsibilities of a royal position whose pomp and pretensions he despised—quoting Buddha—and fled to America where in the course of time he married, divorced his wife and later died—incognito. He was Ronador's cousin, and his flight shifted the regency of the kingdom to Ronador's father."

"Yes," said the girl steadily, "that is very clear."

"Theodomir married—and divorced—your mother," said Philip gently.

Diane grew very white.

"And even yet," she said bravely, "I—can not see why we must all be so worked up. There is more?"

"Yes. Later, after her divorce from Theodomir, your mother married Norman Westfall—"

"My father," corrected Diane swiftly.

Philip looked away.

"Her second marriage," he said at last, "was childless."

"Philip!" Diane's face flamed. "And I?"

"You," said Baron Tregar, "are the child of Theodomir."

In the strained silence a bird sent a sweet, clear call ringing lightly over the water.

"That—that can not be!" faltered Diane. "It—it is too preposterous."

"I wish to Heaven it were!" said Philip quietly. "Whether or not it was Theodomir's wish that his daughter be reared, in the eyes of the world, as the daughter of Norman Westfall, to protect her from any consequences incident to his possible discovery and enforced return to Houdania, it is impossible to say. Hating royalty as he did, he may have sought thus to shield his daughter from its taint. Why he weakened and consigned the secret to paper—how or when he hid it in an ancient candlestick in the home of Norman Westfall, remains shrouded in utter mystery. It is but one of the many points that need light."

Again the Baron cleared his throat.

"And," said he, "since unwisely, Miss Westfall, for eugenic reasons, we grant a certain freedom of marital choice to our princes—since wisely or not as you will, the Salic Law does not, by an ancient precedent, obtain with us, and a woman may come in the line of succession, the danger to Ronador's little son, is, I think, apparent."

"Surely, surely!" exclaimed Diane hopelessly, "there is some mistake. There is so much that is utterly without light or coherence. So much—"

For the first time Ronador spoke.

"What," said he sullenly to Philip, "would you have us do?"

"I would have you eliminate the secrecy, the infernal intrigue, the scheming to smother a fire that burned wilder for your efforts," said Philip civilly. "I would

have you face this thing squarely and investigate it link by link. I would have you abandon the damnable man-hunt that has sent one man to his death in a Florida swamp and goaded another to a reckless frenzy in which all things were possible. Themar is dead. That Granberry is alive is attributable solely to the fact that he was cleverer and keener than any of those who hounded him. But he has paid heavily for the secret he tried in a drunken moment to sell to Houdania."

"I do not understand Carl's part in it," said Diane. "Nor can I see—"

But whatever it was that Diane could not see was not destined for immediate revelation. At the mention of Carl's name by her niece, Aunt Agatha came unexpectedly into the limelight with a gurgle and fainted dead away. Her white affrighted face had been turned upon Ronador in fearful fascination since Diane had struck his arm. Whether or not she had comprehended any of the talk that followed is a matter of doubt.

When at last, after an interval of flurry and excitement in the camp, Aunt Agatha gasped, sat up again and stared wildly at the sympathetic line of faces about her, Ronador was gone. When or where he had gone, no one knew. Only Diane caught the whirl of his motor on the road to the north.

"It is better so," said Tregar compassionately. "Though his love began in treachery, Miss Westfall, and drove him through the mire, it was, I think, genuine. A man may not see his hopes take wing with comfort. And Ronador's life has not been of the happiest."

"Excellency," said Philip who had been wandering restlessly about among the trees, "I know that you are but an indifferent gypsy, and strongly averse to baked potatoes, but such as it is, let me extend to you the hospitality of my camp. Doubtless Miss Westfall will dispatch Johnny for your motorcycle."

The Baron accepted.

"There is one thing more, Miss Westfall," he added as they were leaving. "Frankness is such a refreshing experience for me, that I must drink of the fount again. Days back, a headstrong young secretary of mine of considerable nerve and independence and—er—intermittent disrespect for his chief—having come to grief through a knife of Themar's intended for another—refused, with a habit of infernal politeness he has which I find most maddening, refused, mademoiselle, to execute a certain little commission of mine because he quixotically fancied it savored of spying!"

"Tregar!" said Philip with an indignant flush. And added with an uncomfortable conviction of disrespect, "Er—Excellency!"

"I said—intermittent disrespect," reminded Tregar. "Moreover," he continued, stroking his beard and selecting his words with the precision of the careful linguist that he was, "this secretary of mine, after an interview of most disconcerting candor, took to the road and a hay-cart in a dudgeon, constituting himself, in a characteristic outburst of suspicion, quixotism, chivalry and protection, a sentinel to whom lack of sleep, the discomforts of a hay-camp—and—er—spying black-and-tans were nothing. I have reason for suspecting that he may have been misrepresented and misjudged—"

"Excellency," said Philip shortly, "my camp lies yonder. And Mrs. Westfall will doubtless rejoice when her niece's camp is quiet."

Diane met the Baron's glance with a bright flush.

"Excellency," she said, "I thank you."

The two men disappeared among the trees.

CHAPTER XLV

THE GYPSY BLOOD

It was a curious puzzle which, through the quiet of the afternoon that followed, Diane sought desperately to assemble from the chaos of highly-colored segments which the morning had supplied. There were intervals when she rejected the result, with its maddening gaps and imperfections, with a laugh of utter derision—it was so preposterous! There were quieter intervals when she pieced the impossible segments all together again and stared aghast at the result. No matter how incredulous her attitude, however, when the scattered angles slipped into unity, riveted together by a painful concentration, the result, with its consequent light upon the wooing of Ronador, though more and more startling, was in the main convincing.

Days back in Arcadia Diane remembered the Baron had suavely spoken of his kingdom, and Philip had told her much. There was a mad king without issue upon the throne. There were two brothers of the mad king, each of whom had a son. Theodomir, then, had been the son of the elder, Ronador of the younger. Theodomir had fled at the death of his father, unwilling to take up the regency under a mad king. So Ronador's father had come to the regency of the kingdom and Ronador himself and his little son had stood in the direct line of succession until the ghost arose from the candlestick and mocked them all. And she—Diane—was the child of Theodomir.

Diane was still dazedly sorting the pieces of the puzzle when the sun set in a red glory beyond the lake, matching the flame of Philip's fire by which he and

the Baron sat in earnest discussion.

The west was faintly yellow, the forest dark, when from the tent to which she had retired at noon, quite distraught and incoherent. Aunt Agatha begged plaintively for a cup of tea.

"Diane," she said, when the girl herself appeared with it, "I—I can't forget his face. I—I never shall. Twice now I've tried to get up, but I thought of his eyes and the revolver, and my knees folded up. It—it was just so this morning. What with the ringing in my ears—and the dizziness—and his face so dark with anger—and digging my heels in the ground to keep my knees from folding up under me—I—I thought I should go quite mad, quite mad, my dear. He—he meant to kill Mr. Poynter?"

"Yes," said Diane with a shudder. "Yes. I—think so."

"I'm sorry I told him where you were," fluttered Aunt Agatha, taking a conscience-stricken and somewhat tearful gulp of very hot tea. "I—I am indeed, but I couldn't in the least know that he went about killing people, could I, Diane?"

"No," said Diane patiently. "No, of course not. Don't bother about it. Aunt Agatha. Why not wait until your tea is a little cooler?"

"I'll have to," said Aunt Agatha with an aggrieved sniff. "For I do believe I'm filled with steam now. Why are you so white and quiet, Diane? Is it the revolver?"

"Aunt Agatha," exclaimed the girl impetuously, "why have you always been so reticent about my mother?"

The effect of the girl's words was sufficient proof that the frightened lady had absorbed but little of Philip's revelation. Tired and nervous, hazily aware that the

scene of the morning had been portentous, and now confounding it in a panic with something that by a deathbed pledge had lain inexorably buried in her heart for years, Aunt Agatha screamed and dropped her teacup. It rolled away in a trail of steam to the flap of the tent. Covering her face with her hands, Aunt Agatha burst hysterically into a shower of tears.

Diane started.

"Aunt Agatha," she exclaimed, "what is it? For heaven's sake, don't sob and tremble so."

"I—I might have known it!" sobbed Aunt Agatha, wringing her plump hands in genuine distress. "I might have guessed they would tell you that, though how in the world they found it out is beyond me. If I'd only listened instead of worrying about my knees and the revolver, and staring so. And you in the Everglades—where your father went to hunt alligators. Oh, Diane, Diane, not a single night could I sleep—and it's not to be wondered at that I was scared. And the dance you did for Nathalie Fowler and me—and the costume that night at Sherrill's. I was fairly sick! I knew it would come out—though how could I foresee that the Baron and Mr. Poynter and the Prince would know? I—I told your grandfather so years ago, but he pledged me on his deathbed—and your father was wild and clever like Carl and singular in his notions. I'll never forget your grandfather's face when you ran away into the forest to sleep as a child. He was white and sick and muttered something about atavism. It—it was the Indian blood—"

Diane caught her aunt's trembling arm in a grip that hurt cruelly.

"Aunt Agatha," she said, catching her breath sharply, "you must not talk so wildly. Say it plainer!"

But Aunt Agatha tranquil was incoherent.

Aunt Agatha frightened and hysterical was utterly beyond control.

"And very beautiful too," she sobbed. "And Norman, poor fellow, was quite mad about her—for all she was an Indian girl—though her father was white and a Spaniard, I will say that for her. Not even so dark as you are, Diane, and shy and lovely enough to turn any man's head—much less your father's—though your grandfather stormed and threatened to kill them both and only for Grant he would have. And when an Indian from the Everglades told Norman that—that she really hadn't been married before but just a—mother like Carl's mother, my dear—"

But Diane was gone, stumbling headlong from the tent. Aunt Agatha was to remember her white agonized face for many a day.

CHAPTER XLVI

IN THE FOREST

With the darkening of the night a wind sprang up over the bleak, black expanse of lake and swept with a sigh through the forest on the shore. It was a wind from the east which drove a film of cloud across the stars and bore a hint of rain in its freshness. The rain itself pattering presently through the forest fell upon the huddled figure of a girl who lay face downward upon the ground among the trees.

She lay inert, her head pillowed upon her arm, face to face with the unspeakable shadow that had haunted Carl. Not married. Aunt Agatha had said, but just a mother! Now the pitiful fragments of a hallowed shrine lay mockingly at her feet. How scornfully she had flashed at Carl!

Diane quivered and lay very still, torn by the bitter irony of it.

And the Indian mother! Carl had known and Ronador. She had caught a startled look in the eyes of each at the Sherrill *fête*. Every wild instinct, if she had but heeded the warning, had pointed the way; the childhood escapade in the forest, the tomboy pranks of riding and running and swimming that had horrified Aunt Agatha to the point of tears, and later the persistent call of the open country.

What wonder if the soft, musical tongue of the Seminole had come lightly to her lips? What wonder if Indian instincts had driven her forth to the wild? What

wonder if the nameless stir of atavism beneath a Seminole wigwam had frightened her into flight. Indian instincts, Indian grace, Indian stoicism and courage, Indian keenness and hearing—all of these had come to her from the Indian mother with the blood of white men in her veins.

But the stain of illegitimacy—

That brought the girl's proud head down again with a strangled sob of grief. Shaking pitifully, she fell forward unconscious upon the ground.

Some one was calling. There was rain and a lantern.

Diane stirred.

"Diane! Diane!" called the voice of Philip.

At the memory of Philip and Arcadia, Diane choked and lay very still.

"Diane!" The lantern shone now in her face and Philip was kneeling beside her, his face whiter than her own.

"Great God!" said Philip and stared into her haunted eyes with infinite compassion.

But Philip, as he frequently said, was preeminently a "practician," wherefore he gently covered the girl with his coat, busied himself with the lantern and, for various reasons, sought to create a general atmosphere of commonplace reality.

"Your aunt sent me," he said at length. "She's awfully upset."

"She told you?"

"Yes."

"Of—of the Indian mother?"

"I knew," said Philip. "Carl told me. I withheld it this morning purposely. Why fuss about it, Diane? Lord Almighty!" added this exceedingly practical and democratic young man, "I shouldn't worry myself if my grandfather was a salamander! ... And, besides, your true Indian is an awfully good sport. He's proud and fearless and inherently truthful—"

"I know," said Diane. "It isn't that I mind—so much. It—it's the other."

"Of course!" said Philip gently, "but, somehow, I can't believe it's true, Diane. There's logic against it. Why, Great Scott!" he added cheerfully, for all there was a lump in his throat at the wistful tragedy in the girl's eyes, "there's Theodomir's own statement in the candlestick—have you forgotten?"

"It spoke of—of marriage?"

"It said that Theodomir had gone into the Glades hunting and had come upon the Indian village. There he met and married your mother and later divorced her."

"If I could only be sure!" faltered Diane.

"You can," said Philip, "for I am going back to the Glades to-morrow to hunt this thing to earth. The old chief will know."

"But the trail, Philip?"

"There are ways of finding it," said Philip reassuringly.

He was so cool and matter-of-fact, so entirely cheerful and resourceful, that Diane found his comfortable air of confidence contagious. Only for a time, however. A little later she glanced mutely into his face, met his eyes, flushed scarlet and fell to shaking again.

"Philip!" she whispered.

"Yes?" There was a wonderful gentleness in Philip's voice.

"I—I can't go back to camp yet, for all it's raining."

"Well," said Philip comfortably, "rain be hanged. We'll wait a bit."

Diane gave a sigh of relief and lay very quiet.

Philip wisely said nothing. He shifted the lantern so his own face might be in the shadow and for some reason of his own, fell to speaking of Carl. He told of Mic-co, of the quiet hours of healing by the pool, of another night of storm and stress when Carl had gone forth into the wilds with the Indian girl.

For the first time now he felt that he had pierced the girl's shell of tragic introspection and caught her interest. Though the rain came faster and the lantern flickered, Philip went on with his quiet story.

He spoke of the forces that had fired Carl to drunken resentment, the defection of his comrades, his conviction of injustice in the apportionment of the Westfall estate, the climax of his sensitive rebellion against Diane's attitude toward his mother, the morose and morbid loneliness which had driven him relentlessly to ruin.

"What did he hope to gain by writing to Houdania?" asked the girl a little bitterly.

"Money!" said Philip firmly. "He fancied he could frighten them and put a heavy price upon his silence. Later when his letter to Houdania was ignored he altered his plans. If he could prove that you were the daughter of Theodomir and not of Norman Westfall—then the great estate of his uncle would revert to him. Before he could act further, things began to happen. And then," added

Philip thoughtfully, "comes another dark patch in the mystery. Carl's story must have crossed wires with something else—something that frightened them and made his death imperative. The hysterical desperation of these men was out of all proportion to the cause. Baron Tregar, baffling as he is at times, is not the man to lend himself to deliberate assassination merely to keep the succession of Ronador's son free from incumbrances. Later still, Carl planned to sell the secret to the rival province of Galituria, but the net closed in so rapidly and he fell to drinking so heavily, that brain and body revolted and the first shadow of insanity whispered another way—"

"To murder me!" flashed the girl. For the first time there was warmth and color in her face.

Philip was glad. He had struck fire from her stony calm at last.

"Yes," he said, and catching her chilled hands, compelled the glance of her wistful eyes. "Diane," he said deliberately, "let us withhold our censure. Carl has a curious and tragic psychology and he has paid in full. Thanks to a habit of wonderful alertness and ingenuity, he has made his enemies respect and fear him. But the tangle aroused the blackest instincts of his soul."

But the girl was very bitter. The old impatience and intolerance flashed suddenly in her face.

Philip fell silent for an instant. Then he shot his final barb with deliberate intention—not so much to reproach—though there was utter honesty and loyalty to Carl in what he said—but more to touch the girl's tragedy with something sharp enough to pierce her morbidness.

"Carl blames no one but himself," he said gently. "But—but if you had been a little kinder, Diane—"

"Philip!" He had hurt and knew it.

"Yes, I know!" said Philip quickly, "but you're not going to misunderstand, I'm sure. Let me say it with all gentleness and without reproach. If you could have forgotten his mother's history and made him feel that he was not quite alone—that there was some one to whom his careless whims made a difference! But you were a little scornful and indifferent. I wonder if you'll believe that he can tell you each separate moment in his life when you were kind to him."

"I too was alone and lonely!" defended the girl. "And the call of the forest had made me most unhappy."

"Yes. But Carl was not mocking any sensitive spot in your life—"

"No—I was cruel—cruel!"

"I remember in college," said Philip, "he talked so much of his beautiful cousin, and the rest of us were wild to see her. We used to rag him a lot, but you held aloof and we told him we didn't believe he had a cousin. We discovered after a while that he was sensitive because you didn't come when he asked you, and we quit ragging him about it. You didn't even come when he took his degree."

"No. I—Oh, Philip! I am sorry."

"Your aunt," went on Philip, "was not mentally adapted to inspire his respect. He merely laughed and petted her into tearful subjection. You were the only one, Diane, who was his equal in body and brain, and you failed him at a period when your influence would have been tremendous. I can't forget," added Philip soberly, "that much of this I knew in college and carelessly enough I ignored it all later. I let him drift when I might have done much to help him."

Philip's instinct was right and kindly.

He had provided a counter wound to dwarf, at saving intervals, the sting of Aunt Agatha's frightened revelation. Thereafter, the memory of Philip's loyal rebuke was to trouble her sorely, temper a little the old intolerance and arouse her keen remorse. The consciousness that Philip disapproved was quite enough.

With a sudden gesture of solicitude, Diane touched the sleeve of his shirt. It was very wet.

"Philip!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. "We must go back."

"Lord," said Philip lazily, "that's nothing at all. I'm a hydro-aviator."

She glanced wistfully up into his face.

"You're right about Carl," she said. "I'm very sorry."

Philip felt suddenly that it behooved him to remember a certain resolution.

Later, as he hurried through the rainy wood to his own camp, where the Baron sat huddled in the Indian wagon in a state of deep disgust about the rain, he halted where the trees were thick and lighted his pipe.

"There's the Baron's aeroplane at St. Augustine," he said. "We can go there in the morning. And the old chief will know. His memory's good for half a century." Philip flung away his match. "But I can't for the life of me see which is the lesser of the two evils. If her mother wasn't married, it was bad enough, of course. But with Theodomir a crown prince—it's worse if she was!"

And a little later with a sigh—

"A princess! God bless my soul, with my spread-eagle tastes I shouldn't know in the least what to do with her!"

Huddled in the Indian wagon, the Baron and his secretary talked until

daybreak.

CHAPTER XLVII

"THE MARSHES OF GLYNN"

For the rides over the sun-hot plains, the poling of cypress canoes, the days of hunting and the tanning of hides, there was now a third of fearless strength and endurance. Keela had come with the Mulberry Moon to the home of her foster father, a presence of delicate gravity and shyness which pervaded the lodge like the breath of some vivid wild flower.

"Red-winged Blackbird," said Carl, one morning, laying aside the flute which had been showering tranquil melody through the quiet beneath the moss-hung oaks, "why are you so quiet?"

"I am ever quiet," said Red-winged Blackbird with dignity. "Mic-co says it is better so."

"Why?"

"Mic-co only understands, and even to him I may not always talk." She went sedately on with the modeling of clay, her slender hands swift, graceful, unflinching. Mic-co's lodge abounded in evidences of their deftness.

"You have more grace," said Carl suddenly, "than any woman I have ever known."

"Diane!" said Keela with charming and impartial acquiescence.

"Yes, Diane has it, too," assented Carl, and fell thoughtful, watching Mic-co's snowy herons flap tamely about the lodge.

"Play!" said Keela shyly.

Carl drew the flute from his pocket again and obeyed.

"Like a brook of silver!" said the Indian girl with an abashed revelation of the wild sylvan poetry with which her thoughts were rife.

"The one friend," said Carl, "to whom I have told all things. The one friend, Red-winged Blackbird, who always understood!"

"I," said Keela with majesty, "I too am your friend and I understand."

Carl reddened a little.

"What do you understand, little Indian lady?" he asked quietly.

He was totally unprepared for the keenness of her unsmiling analysis.

"That you have been very tired in the head," she nodded, her delicate, vivid face quite grave. "So tired that you might not see as you should, so tired that the medicine of white men could not reach it, but only the words of Mic-co, who knows all things. So tired that a moon was not a moon of lovely brightness. It was a thing of evil fire to scorch. Uncah? Mic-co would say warped vision. I must talk in simpler ways for all I study."

They fell quiet.

"Read me again that live oak poem of Lanier's," said Carl. "After a while Mic-co will be back to spirit you away to his Room of Books."

She read, as she frequently read to Carl and Mic-co in the long quiet

afternoons, with an accent musical and soft, of the immortal marshes of Glynn.

"Glooms of the live oaks, beautiful-braided and woven
With intricate shades of the vines that myriad-cloven
Clamber the forks of the multiform boughs,—"

What vivid memories it awoke of the morning the swamp had revealed to
him the island home of Mic-co!

"Ay, now, when my soul all day hath drunken the soul of the oak,
And my heart is at ease from men, and the wearisome sound of the stroke
Of the scythe of time and the trowel of trade is low,
And belief overmasters doubt, and I know that I know,
And my spirit is grown to a lordly great compass within,
That the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn
Will work me no fear like the fear they have wrought me of yore
When length was fatigue, and when breadth was but bitterness sore,
And when terror and shrinking and dreary unnameable pain
Drew over me out of the merciless miles of the plain."

Lanier, dying of heartbreak! How well he had understood!

"Oh, what is abroad in the marsh and the terminal sea?
Somehow my soul seems suddenly free
From the weighing of Fate and the sad discussion of sin,
By the length and the breadth and the sweep of the marshes of Glynn."

And Keela too had guessed.

"In the rose-and-silver evening glow,
Farewell—"

Keela broke off and laid aside the book.

"I may not read more," she said, bending to the pottery with wild color in her face. "I—I am very tired, Carl. You go in the morning?"

"Yes."

"You are strong—and sure?"

"Yes. Quite. I've promised Mic-co not to lose my grip again."

"And sometime you will come here again?"

"Often!"

A little later she went quietly away to the Room of Books with Mic-co.

When the evening star flashed silver in the lilled pool, Carl sat alone. Mic-co had been summoned away by an Indian servant. A soft light gleamed in the corner of the court in a shower of vines. Its light was a little like the soft rays of the Venetian lamp that had shone in the Sherrill garden, but Carl ruthlessly put the memory aside. It had grown once into a devouring flame of evil portent. It must not do so again.

His thoughts were so far away that a soft footfall behind him and the rustle of satin seemed part of that other night until turning restlessly, he caught the sheen of satin, brightly gold in the lantern-glow. The dark, vivid skin, the hair and eyes that were somehow more Spanish than Indian—the golden mask—Carl's face went wildly scarlet.

"Keela!" he cried, springing toward her, "Keela!"

There was much of his old intolerance, much of his impudent immunity to the world's opinion in the curious flash of adjustment which leveled barriers of caste and convention and bridged, for him, in the fashion of a willful uncle, the gulf of race and breeding.

The golden mask dropped.

"Is it not a pretty farewell?" she faltered, with a wistful glance at the shimmering gown. "Diane gave it all. As you saw me first, so—now!"

Some lines of Lanier's poem of the morning were ringing wildly in Carl's ears.

"The blades of the marsh grass stir;
Passeth a hurrying sound of wings that westward whir,
Passeth, and all is still; and the currents cease to run;
And the sea and the marsh are one."

"Why do you look at me so?" asked Keela.

"I have been a fool," said Carl steadily, "a very great fool—and blind."

Keela's lovely, sensitive mouth quivered.

"Is it—" she raised glistening, glorified eyes to his troubled face, "is it," she whispered naïvely, "that you care like the lovers in Mic-co's books?"

"Yes. And you, Keela?"

"I—I have always cared," she said shyly, "since that night at Sherrill's. I—I feared you knew."

Trembling violently the girl dropped to her knees with a soft crash of satin and buried her face in her hands. She was crying wildly.

Carl gently raised her to her feet again and squarely met her eyes.

"Red-winged Blackbird," he said quietly, "there is much that I must tell you before I may honorably face this love of yours and mine—"

Keela's black eyes blazed in sudden loyalty.

"There is nothing I do not know," she flung back proudly. "Philip told me. And for every wild error you made, he gave a reason. He loves and trusts you utterly. May I not do that too?"

"He told you!"

"Some that night in the storm when he and I were saddling the horses to ride to Mic-co's. Some later. He pledged me to kindness and understanding."

For every break in the thread there had always been Philip's strong and kindly hand to mend it. A little shaken by the memory of the night in Philip's wigwam, Carl walked restlessly about the court.

"But there is more," he said, coloring. "There was passion and dishonor in my heart, Keela, until, one night, I fought and won—"

"Is it not enough for me that you won?" asked Keela gently and broke off, wild color staining her cheeks and forehead.

Mic-co stood in the doorway.

"Mic-co," she said bravely, "I—I would have you tell him that he is strong and brave and clean enough to love. He—he does not know it."

She fled with a sob.

"Have you forgotten?" asked Mic-co slowly.

"I care nothing for race!" cried Carl with a flash of his fine eyes. "Must I pattern my life by the set tenets of race bigotry. I have known too many women with white faces and scarlet souls."

"If I know you at all," said Mic-co with a quiet smile, "there will be no pattern, save of your own making."

"I come of a family who rebel at patterns," said Carl. "My mother—my uncle—my cousin. Let me tell you all," and he told of the night in the Sherrill garden; of the brutal desire that had later come with the brooding and the wild disorders of his brain, to drive him deeper and deeper into the black abyss until he fought and won by the camp fire; of his consequent panic-stricken rebound of horror and remorse when he had put it all aside, fighting the call with reason, seeking desperately to crush it out of his life, until the sight of Keela in the satin gown had sent him back with a shock to that finer, cleaner, quieter call that had come in the Sherrill garden. Then the disordered interval between had fled to the limbo of forgotten things.

Mic-co heard his story to the end without comment. He was silent so long that Carl grew uncomfortable.

"Since Keela was a little, wistful, black-eyed child," said Mic-co at last, "I have been her teacher. We have worked very hard together. Peace came to me through her." He broke off frowning and spoke of the alarming mine of inherited instincts from the white father which his teaching had awakened. Keela had been restless and unhappy, fastidiously aloof with the Seminoles, shy and reticent with white men. He must not make another mistake, he said, for Keela was very dear to him.

"The white father?" asked Carl curiously.

"An artist."

"She has a marvelous gift in modeling," said Carl. "I know a famous young sculptor whose work is nothing like so virile. Might not something utterly new and barbaric come of it with proper direction? If she could interpret this wild life of the Glades from an Indian viewpoint—"

"I have frequently thought of it," agreed Mic-co. "You would help her, Carl?"

"Yes."

"It would give a definite and unselfish direction to your own life, would it not, like those weeks at the farm with Wherry?"

"Yes. You trust me, Mic-co?"

"Utterly."

Carl held out his hand.

"One by one," said Mic-co, "fate is slipping into the groove of your life people who are destined to care greatly—"

"You mean—"

"It shall be Keela's to decide."

"Mic-co, I—cannot thank you. You and Philip—"

But he could not go on.

A little later he went to bed and lay restless until morning. He was up again at sunrise, tramping over the island paths with Mic-co.

The quiet of the early morning was rife with the chirp of countless birds, with the crackle of the camp fire where the turbaned Indians in Mic-co's service were preparing the morning meal. There was young corn on the fertile island to the east. Over the chain of islands lay the promise of early summer.

There was a curious drone overhead as they neared the lake.

"Look!" exclaimed Carl. "A singular sight, Mic-co, for these island wilds of yours."

An aeroplane was whirring noisily above the quiet lake, startling the bluebills floating about on the surface.

"A singular sight!" nodded Mic-co, "and a prophetic one. Symbolic of the spirit of progress which hangs now above the Glades, is it not? The world is destined to reap much one day from the exuberant fertility of this marshland of the South."

The aeroplane glided gracefully to the bosom of the lake, alighted like a great bird and came to shore with its own power.

The aviator swept off his cap and smiled.

It was Philip.

CHAPTER XLVIII

ON THE LAKE SHORE

With the departure of Philip and the Baron for St. Augustine, a fever of energy had settled over Diane. Riding, rowing, swimming, tramping miles of Florida road, taking upon herself much of Johnny's camp labor, she ruthlessly tired herself out by day that she might soundly sleep by night. Youth and health and Spartan courage were a wholesome trio.

Aunt Agatha watched, sniffed and frequently groaned.

How much the kindly ruse of Philip had helped, Diane herself could not suspect, but her remorseful thoughts were frequently busy with memories of the old childhood days with Carl. He had been an excellent horseman, a sturdy swimmer, an unerring shot, compelling respect in those old, wild vacation days on the Florida plantation. If the cruelty had crept into her manner at an age when she could not know, it had been a reflex of the attitude of the stern old planter whose son and daughter had been so conspicuously erratic.

Gently enough, too, the girl sought to make Aunt Agatha comprehend the curious facts that had come to light that morning beneath the trees. Quite in vain. That good lady refused flatly to absorb it, grew ludicrously plaintive and aggrieved and flew off at tearful tangents into complicated segments of family history from which it was possible to extricate only the most ridiculous of facts, chief among them the reiterated assurance that her own father had been, in the bosom of his family, of a delightfully sportive nature, but nothing like the

Westfalls—dear no!—that he had a genteel figure, my dear, for all he had developed a somewhat corpulent tendency in later years; that the corn-beef which mother procured was highly superior to those portions of salted quadruped which Johnny obtained in the village—and facts of similar irrelevancy.

Diane had heard of the corn-beef and father's corpulency before, but she was now somewhat gentler and less impatient and checked the old careless flashes of annoyance. And, having supplemented the hand bag by a shopping trip to the nearest village, Aunt Agatha, to the girl's dismay, announced one day:

"It's my duty to stay, Diane, and stay I will. Mother would have stayed, I'm sure, and mother's judgment was usually correct, though she would wear smoked glasses."

Rowing in one morning with a string of fish, Diane was a little fluttered at the sight of a tall, broad-shouldered young man upon the shore, who waved his hat and quietly waited for her boat to come in. His dark skin was clear and ruddy and very brown, his mouth resolute, the careless grace and impudence of his old manner replaced by something steadier, quieter and possibly a shade less assured.

The meeting was by no means easy for either, and with remorseful memories leaping wildly in the heart of each, they smiled and called cheerfully to one another until the girl's boat glided in under the ready assistance of a masculine hand that shook a little.

"Let me moor it for you!" said Carl and busied himself with the rope for longer than the careless task would seem to warrant. When at length he straightened up again and briskly brushed the sand from his coat sleeve to cover his emotion, he forced himself to meet his cousin's troubled glance directly.

Instantly the careless byplay ceased. The desperate imploring in the eyes of

each keyed the situation to electric tensy. Curiously enough, both were thinking of Philip. Curiously enough, in this hour of reckoning Philip was an invisible arbiter urging them to generous understanding.

Diane was the first to speak. And, in the fashion of Diane since childhood, she bravely plunged into the heart of the thing with glistening eyes.

"Carl," she said, "I am very sorry."

It was heartfelt apology for the old offense.

Carl's face went wildly scarlet. The girl's gentleness, prepared as he was for the inevitable flash of fire, had caught him unawares. Springing forward, he caught her hands roughly in his own.

"Don't!" he said roughly. "For God's sake, Diane, don't! It's awfully decent of you—but—but I can't stand it! Have you forgotten—" he choked. "Surely," he said, "Philip told you all. He promised—"

"Yes," said Diane, "and—and that's why—" She was very close to tears now, but with the old imperiousness, with the Spartan pride of the Westfall training behind her, she flung back her head with a quick dry sob, her eyes imploring.

"Let's both forget," she said. "Oh, Carl, I was cruel, cruel! I—I can not see now what made me so. Philip is right. He is always just and honorable. He blames himself and me. You'll forgive me?"

"I forgive!" faltered Carl.

"There were forces driving you," said Diane steadily, "but I—was deliberate. Let's pledge to a new beginning. Let me be your friend as Philip is."

Their hands tightened in a clasp whose warmth was prophetic.

Mic-co's words rang again in Carl's ears.

"Fate is slipping into the groove of your life people who are destined to care greatly!"

Diane was another!

Deeply moved, Carl glanced away over the sunlit water, rippling and sparkling with myriad shafts of light.

"Let's sit here on the bank a minute," he said. "There's something I must tell you. It's all right," he added with a smile, interpreting her glance aright, "I made my peace with Aunt Agatha before you came in. She burst into tears at the sight of me and retired to her tent. I can't make out just why, but I think she said it was either because I'm so tanned and a little thinner, or because none of her family were ever addicted to disappearing, or because she has an uncle who's a bishop. I came from Philip."

"Philip!"

"Yes. He came to Mic-co's the morning I was leaving. Later we met again at a village on the outskirts of the Glades. He waited for me. There was a telegram there from the Baron. Philip said he knew you'd forgive him if he sent his message on by me—his father is very ill."

"Poor Philip!" exclaimed the girl. In the fullness of her swift compassion she forgot why Philip had gone back to the Indian village. It flooded back directly and her wistful eyes implored.

"It was a jealous lie," said Carl gently. "The old chief knew. The Indian who told it hated your father."

Diane sat so white and still that Carl touched her diffidently upon the arm.

"Don't look so!" he pleaded. "There was some difficulty at first, for Philip's Seminole is nearly as fragmentary as the old chief's English, but they called in Sho-caw and after a host of blunders and misunderstandings, Philip ran the thing to earth at last. Theodomir married and divorced your mother in the Indian village just as the paper in the candlestick said."

Still the girl did not speak or move and Carl saw with compassion that the veins of her throat were throbbing wildly. He fell quietly to talking of Keela, caught her interest and watched with a sense of relief the rich color flood back to his cousin's lips and cheeks.

It was plain the tale of the golden mask had startled her a little, for she laid her hand impetuously upon his arm, and her eyes searched his face with troubled intentness.

"It will all be very singular and daring," she faltered after a while. "I had thought of something like it myself—to help her, I mean. You are so—*different*, Carl! I know of no man who might dare so much and win." Then with unconscious tribute to one whose opinion she valued above all others, she added: "Philip trusts you utterly. He has said so. And Philip knows!"

Carl glanced furtively at her face and cleared his throat.

"Diane," he asked gravely, "I wonder how much that incredible tale of the old candlestick pleased you?"

"I don't know," said Diane honestly. "I wish I did. I've wondered and wondered. No matter how hard I think, it doesn't somehow come right. It's like shattering a cherished crystal into fragments to think that every tie of blood and country I valued is meaningless—that every memory is a mockery—that grandfather and you and Aunt Agatha—" she paused and sighed. "When I try to realize," she finished, "I feel very lonely and afraid."

"And Philip?" hinted Carl.

"I don't think he is pleased."

"You're right," said Carl with decision. "It upset him a lot. But that night by the old chief's camp fire, Philip discovered—"

"Yes?"

"That some imperfection in the stilted wording of the hidden paper had led us all astray. Philip said he could not be sure—there was so much fuss and trouble and misunderstanding—but the old chief had nursed Theodomir through some dreadful illness and knew it all. They were staunch friends. Norman Westfall came into the Glades hunting with a friend. He persuaded your mother to go away with him, but they went—*alone!*"

"You mean—"

"That they did not take a child away from the Indian village as the paper in the candlestick declares—"

"And the daughter of Theodomir?"

"Is Keela. They left her by the old chief's wigwam."

Diane stared.

CHAPTER XLIX

MR. DORRIGAN

Carl, traveling north after a day of earnest discussion in his cousin's camp, thought much of the second candlestick. Since that night in Philip's wigwam, it had haunted him persistently. Now with Diane's permission to probe its secret—if, indeed, it had one like its charred companion—he was fretting again, as he had intermittently fretted in the lodge of Mic-co, at the train of circumstances that had interposed delay.

Train and taxi were perniciously slow. Carl found his patience taxed to the utmost.

The grandfather's clock was booming eight when at length, after a gauntlet of garrulous servants, he pushed back the great, iron-bound doors of the old Spanish room in his cousin's house and entered. The war-beaten slab of table-wood, the old lanterns, the Spanish grandee above the mantel, the mended candlestick and its unmarred mate, all brought memories of another night when Starrett's glass had struck the marble fireplace. Vividly, too, he recalled how the firelight had stained the square-paneled ceiling of oak overhead, and how Diane had stood in the doorway. The room was the same. It was a little hard, however, to reconcile the sullen, resentful, impudent young scapegrace of that other night with the man of to-night.

He put out his hand to touch the second candlestick—the telephone bell rang.

Carl frowned impatiently and answered it.

"Hello," said he. "Yes, this is Carl Granberry speaking ... Who? ... Oh! Hello, Hunch, is that you?"

It plainly was. Moreover, Mr. Dorrigan was very nervous and ill at ease. Carl laughed with relish.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded. "You're stuttering like a kid ... Shut up and begin over again... Hello... Yes... Well, I've been out of town since January... Hum! ... Well," he hinted dryly, "there was sufficient time for an explanation before I went... I guess you're right... I went up to the farm in October with Wherry."

Mr. Dorrigan desperately admitted that some of the time between the escape of His Nibs and Carl's departure for the farm had been spent in panic-stricken remorse and dread—some in the hospital due to an altercation with Link Murphy, who for reasons not immediately apparent wished jealously to obliterate his other eye. He begged Carl to give him an immediate opportunity of squaring himself, for he had telephoned the house so frequently of late that the butler had grown insulting. Mr. Dorrigan added that he hoped Mr. Granberry's wholly justified wrath had somewhat abated, but that for purposes of initial communication the telephone had seemed more prudent.

He was plainly relieved at the answer.

Carl glanced at the tormenting candlestick and sighed. Another delay!

"All right," he said finally to Hunch, "come along. I'll give you twenty minutes. If you're not through then, like as not I'll stir up the grudge again—"

The telephone at the other end clicked instantly. Conceivably Hunch was already on his way up town.

Carl impatiently busied himself with some mail upon the table. It had followed him from the farm to Palm Beach and from Palm Beach to New York. There were half a dozen wild letters of gratitude from Wherry and a letter from the old doctor, Wherry's father, that brought a flush of genuine pleasure to Carl's face.

"Wherry, too!" said he softly. "Of course. He stuck that other night. I've been too blind to see." Drawing his flute from his pocket, he glanced with a curious smile and glow at a row of notches in the wood. The first notch he had cut in the flute after the rainy night in Philip's wigwam, the second by Mic-co's pool, the third was subtly linked with the marshes of Glynn, and a fourth had been furtively added in the camp of his cousin. Now with a glance at Wherry's letters, he was quietly carving a fifth. Who may say what they portended—this record of notches carved upon the one friend who had always understood!

Carl was to carve another, of which he little dreamed, before the summer waned; and the spur to its making was close at hand.

The doorbell rang as he finished, and dropping the flute back into his pocket, he rang for some whiskey and cigars for the entertainment of Mr. Dorrigan, who presently appeared, at the heels of a servant, twirling his hat with a nonchalant ease much too elaborate and at variance with the look in his good eye to be genuine.

"Lo!" said Hunch uncomfortably.

"Hello!" said Carl pleasantly, pushing the decanter across the table.

Hunch stared at his host, fidgeted, poured himself a generous drink and waited suggestively.

Carl merely laughed good-humoredly and lighted a cigar.

"Sorry, Hunch," he regretted, "but I've joined the Lithia League!"

"My Gawd!" burst forth Hunch despairingly, adding in heartfelt memory of his host's enviable steadiness of head, "My Gawd, Carl, what a waste o' talents!"

Carl laughed.

"Sit down," he invited, "and get it off your mind."

But Hunch's single eye was wandering in fascinated appraisal over Carl's dark, pleasant face. Even he, coarse and brutal in perception as he was, was conscious of a difference not wholly attributable to the Lithia League and felt himself impelled to some verbal recognition of his host's conspicuous well-being.

"Ye're on the level all right," he swore obscurely. "Ye're white! Ye're lookin' good, ye're lookin' fine— By the Lord Harry, Carl, I don't know as I blame yuh!"

Unable to fathom the nature of the censure thus withheld, Carl remained silent and Hunch fell again to staring, his immovable eye ridiculously expressive in stony conjunction with the other. Whatever he found in Carl's face this time plainly afforded him intense relief, for he seated himself with a long breath and drew a yellowish paper from his pocket.

"I says to meself," he explained, "Hunch, old sport, ye're in for it. He'll like as not drop yuh out of the window with an electric wire, feed yuh to an electric wolf or make yuh play hell-for-a-minute chess or some other o' them woozy stunts 'at pop up in his bean like mushrooms, but yuh gotta square yerself with that paper. Yuh gotta get up yer nerve an' hike up there to the brownstone with it. I ask yuh," he finished dramatically, and evidently laboring under the momentary conviction that Carl, too, was optically afflicted, "I ask yuh, Carl, to

cast yer good lamp over that there paper."

Carl opened the paper and stared.

"Hunch," he exclaimed with an involuntary glance at the mended candlestick, "where in the devil did you get this?"

"I ask yuh to remember," went on Hunch in some excitement, "that I was drunk an' the old she-wol—Gr-r-r-r-r!" Hunch cleared his heavy throat in a panic, with a rasp like the stripping of gears, and corrected himself. "The Old One," he spoke somewhat as if this singular title was a degree, "the Old One put one over on me."

"My aunt, I imagine," said Carl, "has given me a fairly accurate version of His Nibs' escape. I'll admit a pardonable anxiety to interview you for a while. As a matter of fact there was a night—when I was not in the Lithia League—that I drove down to look you up. Tell me," he added, "where you found this."

"It was not, stric'ly speakin', found," said Hunch with a modest cough. Once more, overwhelmed afresh by Carl's appearance, he let his good eye go roving.

"Tell it," said Carl with what patience he could muster, "in your own way."

"I ask yuh to remember," urged Hunch with a firm belief in the dignity of this phrase, "that I was still drunk an' batty in me thinker when the old she-wol—Gr-r-r-r-r-r—the Old One told me to dig out. So I halts on the corner to collect me wits an' by'm'by I sees a guy wid a darkish face an' lips like Link. He comes along, looks up an' down suspicious, sees the door ain't tight shut an' heel-taps it up the steps. He opens the door an' by'm'by he helps the Old One to a taxi an' makes out to walk off—see—whiles she's a watchin'. Later, when the taxi turns the corner, back he goes, heel-taps it up the steps ag'in, an' goes in at the door he ain't locked, though he'd made out he had. An' right there," said Hunch impressively, "right there is where yer Uncle Hunch feels a real

glimmer in his bean an' goes back. Thin-lips ain't in sight. Yer Uncle Hunch softly heel-taps it upstairs an' finds the darkish guy adoptin' a paper with a fatherly pat, which he slips in his coat pocket. Whereupon—whiles he's lockin' the desk drawer ag'in, aforesaid uncle slips downstairs an' out. By'm'by, Thin-lips trots out with an ugly grin on his mug—an' Uncle Hunch, gettin' soberer an' soberer by the minute, trots after him with his good lamp workin' overtime."

Carl glanced at the paper.

"Yes?" he encouraged.

"Well," said Hunch with a sheepish grin that was rendered somewhat sinister by the fixed eye, "I jostled him real rude in a crowd an' picked his pocket. An' there yuh are!"

There was some slight rustle of greenish paper in the handshake.

"I'm mighty grateful," said Carl. "That paper cost me a couple of hours of laborious preparation. It's a duplicate, Hunch, for the purpose of decoy. The original's in safe deposit."

CHAPTER I

THE OTHER CANDLESTICK

The closing of the outer door betokened the departure of Mr. Dorrigan.

Carl swiftly marked the second candlestick where the shallow receptacle in the other had begun and applied the thin, fine edge of a craftsman's saw. When at length the candled branches lay upon the table, the light of the lanterns overhead revealed, as he had hoped, a second paper.

He was to read the faded sheets, with staring, incredulous eyes, and learn that its contents were utterly unrelated to the contents of the other.

I am impelled by one of the damnable whims which sway me at times to my own undoing, to trust to some chance discovery that which under oath I may never deliberately reveal with my lips. It is the history of certain events which have heavily shadowed my life and brought me up with a tight rein from a life of reckless whim and adventure to one of terrible suffering. I write this with a wild hope that may never be gratified.

The first foreshadowing of this singular cloud came one night in the Adirondack hunting lodge of Norman Westfall, a young Southerner whose inheritance of a childless uncle's millions had made him a conspicuous figure months before. He was living there with his sister and both, as usual, were at odds with the grim old father down South who resented the wild, unconventional strain that had come into his family through the blood of his wife.

They were a wild, handsome, reckless pair—Ann and Norman Westfall—inseparable companions in wild adventure for which another woman would have neither the endurance nor the inclination.

Ann was a strong, beautiful, impetuous woman with rich coloring; deliciously feminine in her quieter moments, incredibly daring in others; keen-brained, cultured, and utterly unconventional; generous, sympathetic and a splendid musician. Norman worshiped her. She was older than he and without the occasional strain of flippancy which so maddened his father.

Norman and Ann and I had traversed the whole length of the Mississippi to New Orleans on a raft and had traveled thence to this recently inherited Adirondack tract of Norman's to rest.

"Grant," he said one night after Ann had gone to bed, "you've more brains and brawn and breeding than any man I know, and you've splendid health."

Naturally enough, I flushed.

Norman narrowed his handsome, impudent eyes and regarded me intently.

"And you're sufficiently clear-cut and good-looking," he said thoughtfully, "for the purpose. Not so handsome as Ann to be sure, but Ann's an exceptionally beautiful woman."

I was utterly at a loss to understand his reference to a purpose and said so. He laughed and shrugged and enlightened me.

"My dear fellow," he said in answer to my stammered suggestion that marriage was simpler and less fraught with perilous possibilities, "Ann and I are not in the least hoodwinked by marriage. It has enervated the whole race of womankind and led to their complete economic dependence upon a polygamous sex who abuse the trust. Now Ann believes firmly in the holiness of maternity, but she flatly refuses to take upon herself the responsibility of an unwelcome tie. In this, as in everything, I cordially endorse her views. Ann is past the callow age. She has refused a number of men who were conspicuously her inferiors, though Dad has stormed a bit. Now you are the one man whom I consider her physical and mental equal, the one man to whom I may talk in this manner without fear of bigoted misunderstanding, but—while Ann's friendship for you is warm and wholly sincere—she doesn't love you. If she did," said my impudent young friend, "she'd likely shrug away her aversion to marital custom and marry you before you were well aware of it. As it is, she declines to sacrifice the maternal inheritance of her sex and she refuses to

many. And there you are!"

Looking back now after five years of readjustment and metamorphosis, I marvel at the cool philosophy with which two adventurous young scapegraces settled the question of a little lad's unconventional birth.

I pass over now the heartbroken reproaches of Ann's father when my son was born. We told him the truth and he could not understand. He looked through the eyes of the world and it widened the gulf forever. Thereafter Norman and Ann lived in the lodge.

Ann was a wonderful mother and the boy as sturdy and handsome a little lad as the mother-heart of any woman ever worshiped. But I! How easy it had been to promise to make no particular advance of affection to my son—to suggest in no way my claim upon him—to take up the thread of my life again as if he had never been born—to regard myself merely as the physical instrument necessary to his creation!

I was to learn with bitter suffering the truth that my act bound me irrevocably in soul and heart to my boy and his mother.

I shall not forget the night when I faced the truth. It was in the great room of the lodge, the blazing wood fire staining the bearskin rugs. Outside, in the early twilight, there was wind, and trees hung with snow, and the dull, frozen lap of a winter lake. I had come up to the lodge at Norman's invitation. As far as he and Ann were concerned, my claim upon Ann's boy was quite forgotten.

He had grown into a dark, ruddy, handsome little lad, this son of mine, with a brain and body far beyond his years, thanks to Ann's marvelous gift of motherhood, her care and her teaching.

Ann sat by the old, square piano singing some marvelous mother's lullaby of the Norseland, her full contralto ringing with splendid tenderness. Mother and son were alone when I entered. Carl was busily at play on a rug by the fire.

In that instant, with the plaint of the Norse mother in my ears, I knew. The tie was too strong to fight. I loved my little son—I loved his mother.

I do not remember how I stumbled across the room and told her. I only know that she was greatly shocked and troubled and very kind, that she told me as gently as she could that I must try to conquer it all—that there must be no one in Carl's life but herself—that man's part in the scheme of creation was but the act of a moment; a woman's part, her whole life.

I think now that her great love for the little chap had crowded everything else out of her mind; that living up there in those snowy acres of trees away from the world, she was so calmly contented and happy that she feared an intrusive breath of any sort. And she did not love me.

Suddenly in a moment of impulsive tenderness, she bent over and caught Carl up in her arms.

"My little laddie!" she cried, her face glorified, and he nestled his head in her full, beautiful throat and laughed.

An instant later he looked up and smiled and held out his hand with a curious instinct of kindness he had, even as a very little fellow.

"Don't feel so awful bad, Uncle Grant!" he said shyly. "I love you too. Don't I, mother?" I don't know, but I think Ann cried.

I choked and stumbled from the room.

So, for me, ended the singular episode of my life that has condemned me again to the fate of a wanderer, drifting about like a thistle down in the wind of fancy.

There is but one chance in many hundred that this paper, which bears upon the back the address of solicitors who will always know my whereabouts—sealed and buried after a whim of mine as it will be—will ever come to the eyes of him for whom it is intended, but maddened by the thought that I must go through life alone—and lonely—without hinting to my son the truth, I have desperately begged from Ann the boon of the single chance, forlorn as it is, that I may have some flickering hope to feed upon. And she, out of the compassionate recognition that for the single moment of creation I am entitled to this at least, has granted it. If this paper ever comes to the eyes of my son—and I am irrevocably pledged to drop no hint of its whereabouts—then—and not until then—are all my pledges void.

Who knows? In the years to come, some wild freak of destiny may guide the feet of my son to the secret of the candlestick. I shall live and pray and likely die a childless, unhappy old man, whose Fate lies buried profoundly in the sealed, invulnerable heart of a Spanish candlestick—a stranger to his son.

Grant Satterlee.

It was the name of a wealthy bachelor whose lonely austerity of life upon a yacht which rarely lingered in any port, whose quiet acts of philanthropy as he roved hermitlike about the world, had been the talk of continents.

Reading to the end, Carl dropped the scattering sheets and buried his face in his hands, unnerved and shaking.

CHAPTER LI

IN THE ADIRONDACKS

To the wild, out-of-the-world hunting lodge in the Adirondack wilderness of tree and lake and trout-haunted mountain stream which had been part of Norman Westfall's heritage, came, one twilight of cloud and wind, Diane, tanned with the wind and sun of a year's wandering—and very tired.

Wild relief at Carl's tale of the jealous Indian, thoughts of Philip, of Carl, of Keela, of Ronador, all these, persistently haunting the girl's harassed mind, had wearied her greatly. Moreover, Aunt Agatha was not restful; nor would she depart.

Wherefore, with the old habit when the voice of the forest called—when school and city and travel had palled and tortured—Diane had traveled feverishly north with Aunt Agatha, and thence to the Adirondack lodge which had been her hermitage since early childhood and to which, by an earlier compact, Aunt Agatha might not follow.

She had telegraphed old Roger to meet her with the buckboard. Now, as they drove up at twilight, Annie, his wife, stood in the cottage doorway. Beyond among the rustling trees stood the log lodge of Norman Westfall, far enough away for solitude and near enough, as Aunt Agatha frequently recalled with comfort, to the cottage of the two old servants for safety.

The lake stretched away to a dusk-dimmed shore set in a whispering line of

ghostly birches.

"There's wood in the fireplace, dearie!" said old Annie, patting the girl's shoulder. "It's a wee bit chill yet, for all the summer ought well be here. And you've not run away to the old lodge to cook and keep house and play gypsy this many a day!"

"No," said Diane, "I haven't." She spoke of the van and Johnny.

"Dear! Dear!" quavered Annie, raising wrinkled, wondering hands. "Think of that now! And like you, too! And you grown so like your father, child, that I can't well keep my eyes off your face. And brown as a berry from the sun. I've set a bit of a lunch in the great room yonder, dearie. You'll likely be too tired to-night to be a gypsy."

Old Roger, who had consigned the buckboard and horses to a tall awkward country lad who had slouched forward from the shadows, hurried off to light the fire in the lodge.

When Diane entered, the fire was crackling cheerfully in the great fireplace and dancing in bright waves over the china and glass upon a table by the fire.

The old room, extending the entire width of the lodge and half its generous depth, was much as it had been in the days of Norman Westfall. By the western wall stood the old piano. Uncovered rafters and an inner wall-lining of logs hinted nothing of the substantial plaster behind it. It was a great room of homely comfort, subtly akin to the forest beyond its walls.

It was the old fashioned desk in the corner, however, upon which Diane's thoughtful gaze rested as she ate her supper. The thought of it had primarily inspired her coming. Surely the old desk, locked this many a year, might hold some breath of the tragedy that had ghostlike trailed her footsteps. Ann Westfall had kept the key until her death. She had bravely put her brother's house in

order at his tragic death and transferred all the papers of value. The key hung now in a sliding panel beneath the ledge of the desk. The spirit which had kept the old room unchanged, even to the faded books of Orientalism and the old pictures strangely mellowed, had led to the hiding of the key away from vandal fingers.

Once Diane herself had unlocked the desk and peered timidly within. She remembered now the faultless order of the few dry, uninteresting papers, an ink well made of the skull of a tiny monkey, a bamboo pen, a half-finished manuscript of wild adventure in some out-of-the-world spot in the South Pacific. There had been nothing more. But the desk was one of intricate drawers and panels.

With a sudden distaste for the food before her, Diane pushed the little table back, lighted a small lamp and crossed to her father's desk. She unlocked it with nervous fingers. The monkey skull, the bamboo pen, the few irrelevant papers were all as she remembered them.

Diane glanced hurriedly over the scribbled manuscript of adventure with a wild, choking sensation in her throat. There was no mention of the Indian wife. Hurriedly she opened each tiny drawer and panel. They were for the most part empty. Only in one, a small drawer within a drawer, lay a faded packet of letters directed to Ann Westfall in the hand that had penned the manuscript—Norman Westfall's.

CHAPTER LII

EXTRACTS FROM THE LETTERS OF NORMAN WESTFALL

Reluctantly, Diane opened the letters of long ago and read them:

Grant and I have had wild sport killing alligators with the Seminoles. A wild, dark, unexplored country, Ann, these Florida Everglades! How I wish you were with us! Tyson had an Indian guide, evoked somewhere from the wild by smoke signals, waiting for us. We traversed miles and miles of savage, uninhabitable marsh before at last we came to the isolated Indian camp. Small wonder the Seminole is still unconquered. It is a world here for wild men. I'll write as I feel inclined and bunch the letters when there is an Indian going out to the fringe of civilization.

We hunt the 'gators by night in cypress canoes. Grant sat in the bow of our boat to-night with a bull's-eye lantern in his cap. The fan of it over the silent, black water, the eyes of the 'gators blazing in the dark, these cool, bronze, turbaned devils with axes to sever the spinal cord and rifles to shatter the skull—it's a wild and thrilling scene.

I'm sorry Carl was not so well. Now that Dad is kinder to the little chap, we could have left him at St. Augustine if he'd been well enough to make the trip. It bothers me that you're not along. It's my first time without you, and you're a better shot than Grant and more dependable in mood. I can't make out what's come over him of late. He's so moody and reckless that the Indians think he's a devil. He's more prone to wild whims than ever. We've shot wild turkey and bear but I like the 'gator sport the best.

There's a curious white man here who's lived a good part of his life with the tribe. He's a Spaniard, a dark-skinned, bitter, morose sort of chap—really a Minorcan—whose Indian

wife is dead. He has a daughter, a girl of twenty or so whom the Seminoles call Nan-ces-owee. He calls her simply Nanca. She speaks Spanish fluently. The morose old Spaniard has taught her a fund of curious things. Her heavy hair, black as a storm-cloud, falls to her knees. Grant says her wonderful eyes remind him somehow of midnight water. Her eyebrows have the expressive arch of the Seminole. Her color is dark and very rich, but it's more the coloring of the Spanish father than the Seminole mother. Altogether, she's more Spanish than Indian, I take it, though she's a tantalizing combination of each in instinct. Her grace is wild and Indian—and she walks lightly and softly like a doe. Ann, her face haunts me.

Young as she is, this Nanca of whom I have written so much to you, has, they tell me, had a most romantic history. With her beauty it was of course, inevitable. Men are fools. At eighteen, urged into proud revolt against her Seminole suitors by her father, who for all his singular way of life can not forget his white heritage, she married a young foreigner who came into the Glades hunting. He seems to have been utterly without ties and decided to live with the Indians in the manner of the Spaniard. A year or so later, a young artist imitator of Catlin's made his way to the Seminole village with a guide. He had been traveling about among the Indians of the reservations painting Indian types, and had heard of this old turbaned tribe buried in the Everglades. Nanca's beauty must have driven him quite mad, I think. At any rate he wooed and won. Nanca begged the young foreigner to divorce her, which he did. The Seminole divorce custom is lenient when the marriage is childless. The artist, I fancy, was merely a wild, reckless, inconstant sort of chap who did not regard the simple Seminole marriage tie as binding. After the birth of his daughter, a tiny little elf whom Nanca has named "Red-winged Blackbird," he tried to run away, and the Indians killed him.

Red-winged Blackbird! Keela then was the child of the artist!

The old Spaniard in his gruff and haughty way has been kind to Grant and me. He's not well—some obscure cardiac trouble from which he suffers at times most horribly. He has confided to me a singular secret. The young foreigner who divorced Nanca is the crown prince of some obscure little mountain kingdom called Houdania. His name is Theodomir. He had wild revolutionary notions, hated royalty and fled at the death of his father. But America and its boasted liberty had cankers and inequalities too, and heartsick, Theodomir roamed about until at length on a hunting trip he came into the

village of the Seminoles. Here was the communistic organization of which this aristocratic young socialist had dreamed—tribal ownership of lands, coöperative equality of men and women—no jails, no poor-houses, no bolts or bars or locks—honorable old age and perfect moral order without law. What wonder that he lingered? Now that he is divorced from Nanca he wanders about from tribe to tribe. I'd like to see him.

Ann, I must write the truth. The face of this Spanish girl haunts me day and night. There is a madness in my blood. I wish you were here! I am tormented by terrible doubts and misgivings. If Dad were not so intolerant!

Nanca has fled from the Indian village with Grant and me. Oh, Ann, it had to come! I lost my head. The old Spaniard died three days ago. That was the cause of it. Nanca's grief was wild and terrible. Her wailing dirge was all Indian, yet immediately she cried out that the Indian way of life for her was impossible without her father. She begged me to take her away. And yet—Oh, Ann, Ann! How could I take that other man's child? We left her outside the old chief's wigwam.

Much as I have scoffed at marriage, I have married Nanca. Grant insisted. He was a little bitter. I do not know what makes him so.

I have seen Dad. We quarreled bitterly. Agatha was there with him. I can hardly write what followed. By some God-forsaken twist of Fate, a jealous, sullen-eyed young Indian who had loved Nanca and had been spumed by her father, followed us relentlessly from the Glades to St. Augustine. He told Dad that Nanca had not been married to the artist—that she was a mother and not a wife—and Dad believed it. I told him patiently enough that there is no ceremony among the Seminoles—that the man goes forth to the home of the girl at the setting of the sun, and that he is then as legally her husband as if all the courts in Christendom had tied the knot. Dad can not see it. I shall be in New York in two weeks. Nanca and I are going to Spain. I can not forget Dad's white, horror-struck face nor what he said. He is bigoted and unjust. God help me, I hope that I may never set eyes upon him again!

We have been very happy here in Spain. I have run across a wonderful old room in a Spanish castle. Ceiling, doors, fireplace, paintings, table, chairs and lanterns, I am transplanting. What a setting for Nanca!

We are sailing for home. Nanca is not so well as I could hope. She grieves, I think, for the little girl in Florida. There are times when I am bitterly jealous of those two other men.

There was a lapse of weeks in the letters. Then came a long one from New York.

Grant came that night just after you had gone. He has been with me a week. His notions are more erratic than ever. For instance, last night, while we were smoking, I told him the story of Prince Theodomir. He was greatly interested.

"What a chance!" said he softly. "What a chance, Norman, for wild commotion in your ridiculous little court. I've been there. It's a kingdom of crazy patriots who grant freedom of marital choice to their princes to freshen and strengthen the royal blood; and they boast an ancient line of queens wiser than Catherine of Russia. A hidden paper purporting to be a deathbed statement of Prince Theodomir's—this little daughter of Nanca and the artist—and, Lord! what complications we could have immediately. How easily she might have been the child of Theodomir and a princess!"

And sitting there by the table, Ann, he drew up an ingenious document couched in the stilted English of a foreigner. Like most of Grant's notions, it was infernally clever. It suggested that my marriage to Nanca had been childless and that we had brought a child—the daughter of Theodomir and Nanca—away from the Indian village and had reared her with my name. Then he showed me with a laugh where three conflicting meanings might be read from the stilted phrasing and eccentric punctuation.

"Drop that, old man," said he, "into your chauvinistic little Punch and Judy court along with the name of the missing Theodomir and watch the blaze!"

After all, I do not think we will stay here in New York. Nanca is not at all well. She longs for trees and the open country. We are coming up to the lodge.

I'm glad Dad sent for you. I think he is growing fonder of Carl, though of course his prejudices will probably always flash out now and then... He's fond of us both, Ann, for all he raves so. No word of Grant since that night of which you told me... I am sorry.

You tell me Grant has written to you. Tell him when you write—to write to me. I miss

Grant has sent me a giant pair of candlesticks from Spain. They are six feet tall, of age-old wood and Spanish carving. He begs that they may stand in the Spanish room and makes some incoherent reference to you in connection with them, out of which I can't for the life of me extract a grain of sense. If you could have cared for him a little, Ann!

I will not take this thing that fate has whipped into my face with a scornful jeer. Nanca is dead! Her life went out with the life she gave my daughter. Oh, Ann, Ann, why are you not with me now when I need you most. After all what is this mortal tegument but a shell which a man sloughs off in eternal evolution. Outside, the moon is very bright upon the lake. The "Mulberry Moon," Nanca called it, and loved its light. It shines in at her window now, but she can not see it. Ann, because the moon is so bright to-night—because the name of the moon goddess bears within it your name—let the name of my poor, motherless little girl be Diane. Nanca called her "Little Red-winged Blackbird!" I believe at the end she was thinking of the little girl we left in the Indian village. They are very much alike. Poor Nanca!

The writing broke off with a wild scrawl. With agonized eyes Diane pushed the letters away and stared at the quiet firelit room, building again within its log walls the tragedy of her father's death. He had lain there by the fire, his life snuffed out like a candle by his own hand. The broken-hearted old man down South had carried the child of his son away, fiercely denied the Indian blood, and pledged Aunt Agatha to the keeping of the secret. And this was the net that had driven Carl to the verge of insanity and sent Themar to his death in a Florida swamp!

There was no princess—no child of the exiled Theodomir. The paper stuffed in the candle-stick in a reckless moment had been but the ingenious figment of a man's brain for the entertainment of an hour. The old chief and Sho-caw with their broken tale to Philip had but tangled the net the more. As the blood of the Indian mother had driven Diane forth to the forest, so had the blood of the artist

father driven Keela forth from the Indian village, a wanderer apart from her people, and Fate had relentlessly knotted the threads of their lives in a Southern pine wood.

CHAPTER LIII

BY MIC-CO'S POOL

To the dark, old-fashioned house in St. Augustine in which Baron Tregar was a "paying guest" came one twilight, a man for whom compassionately he had waited. His visitor was sadly white and tired, with heavy lines about his sullen mouth and the dust of the highway upon his motoring rig. There was no fire in his eyes; rather a stupid apathy which in a man with less strength about the mouth and chin might easily have become commonness.

"Tregar," he said with an effort, "you told me to come when I needed you. I am here. I can not see my way—"

Tregar held out his hand in silence. Only he knew the sacrifice of insolent pride that had brought his guest so low.

Ronador took his hand and reddened.

"My father rightly counts upon your loyalty," he choked and walked away to the window.

Suddenly he wheeled with blazing eyes of agony.

"Why must that old horrible remorse grind and tear!" he cried, "now when I can not bear it! It is keener and crueler now than it was that day when you found me in the forest. Every new twist of this damnable mess has been a barb

tearing the old wound open afresh. And now—I—I can not even find Miss Westfall. I have motored over the roads in vain. The van is gone from the lake shore. It seemed that I must make one final desperate effort to make her understand—"

With the memory of the eyes of Diane and Philip flashing messages of utter trust that day beneath the trees, the Baron sighed.

"Ronador," he said kindly, "it would have been in vain."

"And now," Ronador moistened his pallid lips, "there is a rumble of war from Galituria."

"Yes," said Tregar sadly, "Themar was a traitor."

"I told him much," said Ronador, great drops of moisture standing forth upon his forehead. "It seemed that I must, to make him understand the urgent need of silencing Granberry forever. He cabled the news to Galituria and sold it. I am ill and discouraged. There is fever in my blood, Tregar, from this climate of eternal summer—a fever in my head—"

Tregar stroked his beard.

"There is a doctor," he said quietly, "of whom Poynter has told me much—a doctor who healed Granberry's mind as well as his body. I had thought to go to him myself—to rest. I, too, am tired, Ronador. One goes to a little hamlet and an old man guides by a road to the south into the Everglades. Let us go there together."

"No!" said Ronador sullenly. "Let us rather go home. I am sick of this land of insolent men like Granberry and Poynter, who bend the knee to no man."

"You would go back then, ill, sullen, resentful, with the news that we must lay before your father? By Heaven, no!" thundered the Baron with one of his

infrequent outbursts. "Let us go back smiling, for all we have lost, and seek to tell of this child of Theodomir with what grace we can muster. Poynter is at the bedside of his father. Granberry has gone to learn the tale of the other candlestick. These men, Ronador, we must see again before we sail. In the meantime, there is Poynter's physician."

"Very well," said Ronador, goaded to a sudden consent by a fevered wave of nausea and shaking, "let us go to him."

So came Prince Ronador and the Baron to the island lodge of Mic-co.

Though Ronador in the first disorder of rebellious mind and body, had fancied himself sicker than he really was, he was suffering more now than even Tregar guessed. The last stage of the journey to a man of less indomitable grit and courage would have been impossible. It was no sickness of the mind alone. His body was wildly ravaged by a fever.

Through a dizzy blur which distorted every object and which frowningly he sought to drive away with clenched hands, he stared at the lodge, stared at Keela, stared at the grave and quiet face of Mic-co. He was still staring vaguely about him when night curtained the lilled pool and the stars flashed brightly overhead.

"I am not ill, Tregar!" he insisted curtly. "Let me rest by the pool. There is peace here and I am tired. We traveled rapidly—"

Nevertheless, for all his feverish denial, his desperate attempts to keep to the thread of desultory talk were pitiful. He frowned heavily, began his sentences slowly and trailed off incoherently to a halt and silence.

The Baron turned compassionately away from him to Mic-co with a question.

"Names," said Mic-co, "are nothing to me, Baron Tregar. They are merely a part of that great world from which I live apart. I am a Heidelberg man, since you feel sufficiently interested to inquire. Though my choice of a profession was merely a careless desire to know some one thing well, I have never regretted it."

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered the Baron and glanced keenly at Mic-co.

"It is a habit of mine," hinted Mic-co, "to take what confidence a man may offer and let him withhold what he will."

"There is nothing to withhold!" flashed Ronador with sudden fierceness. "Why do you speak of it?"

Mic-co thought of a white-faced young fellow who had stubbornly refused to accept his hospitality, one morning beneath the live oaks, until he might name aloud his offenses in the sight of God and Man. This man before him, sweeping rapidly into the black gulf of delirium, was of a different caliber.

By the pool Ronador leaped suddenly, his face quite colorless save where the flame of fever burned in his cheeks.

"That Voice!" he said, standing in curious attitude of listening. "You hear it, Tregar? Always—always it comes so in the quietest hours. Tell him! Tell him! Why should I tell him? What is he to me? I may not purchase relief at the price of any man's respect. Only Tregar knows. Hush!—In God's name, hush! Thou shalt not kill! Thou shalt not kill!" He seemed, without conscious effort, to be repeating the words of this Voice with which he held this terrible communion, and waved Tregar back with an imperious gesture of defiance. Facing Mic-co he flung out his arm.

"I am a murderer in the sight of God and Man!" he choked. "I murdered my cousin Theodomir for a dream of empire. I can not forget—Oh, God! I can not

forget. The Voice bids me tell!"

He dropped wildly to his knees, his eyes imploring.

"Oh, God!" he prayed with pallid lips, "hear this, my prayer. I have paid in black hours of bitter suffering. I have played and lost and the fire of life is but ashes in my hand. Give me peace—peace!"

He stayed so long upon his knees that Tregar touched him gently on the shoulder.

"Ronador," he said gently. "Come. You are very ill and know not what you say."

Ronador staggered blindly to his feet. Once more he waved the Baron aside and took up his terrible dialogue with the inner Voice.

"The Voice! The Voice!" he whispered. "Thou shalt not kill! Thou shalt not kill! You lie!" he cried in a sudden outburst of terrible fierceness. "He was not a fool. He loved men more than the mockery and cant of courts. He loved—he trusted me—and I betrayed him. Who knew when he fled wildly away from the pomp and inequalities he hated? I! Who watched for his secret letters? I! Who came to America when his letter of homesick pleading came? I! I! I! Who killed him when conscience and duty would have sent him back to the court of his father? I, his cousin whom he loved above all men. You lie. I did love him. I was drunk with the royal glitter ahead. I craved it even as he hated it. Thou shalt not kill! Thou shalt not kill! Mercy! Mercy! I can not bear it."

He fell groveling upon the floor and crawled to Mic-co's feet.

"The Voice bids me tell!" he whispered, clutching fearfully at Mic-co's hand. "Twice, since, I would have killed to keep this thing of the candlestick from creeping back and back until that thing of long ago lay uncovered and I

disgraced! ... Theodomir hid in the Seminole village. No—no, you must listen—the Voice bids me tell or lose my reason. I came there at his bidding—his marriage to the Indian girl had been unhappy. He was homesick and this fair land of liberty had a rotten core. I struck him down and fled. You will heal and fight the Voice—"

Mic-co bent and raised the groveling figure.

"Peace!" he said, his face very white. "We will heal and quiet the Voice forever. Come!" Gently he led the sick man away.

"He will sleep now, I think," he said a little later. "A drug is best when a Voice is mocking?—"

The Baron leaned forward and caught Mic-co's arm in a grasp of iron.

"Who are you," he whispered, "that you suffer with him now? You are white and shaking. Who are you that you know the tongue of my country?"

Mic-co sighed.

"I," said he sadly, "am that man he thought to kill!"

White-faced, the Baron stared at the snowy beard and hair and the fine, dark eyes.

"Theodomir!" he whispered brokenly. "Theodomir! It—it can not be."

He fell to pacing the floor in violent agitation.

"The eyes are quieter," he said at length with an effort, "but the hair and heard so white! I would not have guessed—I would not have guessed!" Again he stared.

"Are you man or saint," he cried at last, "that you can forgive as I have seen your eyes forgive to-night?"

"May a man look upon such remorse as that," asked Mic-co, "and not forgive? I loved him greatly. Had I loved him less—had I loved her less—that Indian wife who had no love in her heart for me, this hair of mine would not have turned snow-white when the Indians were fanning the flickering spark of life into a blaze again."

"There is peace in your face," said Tregar a little bitterly, "and none of the old fretful discontent. Have you no single thought of regret for that fair land of ours you left?"

"For that fatherland of rugged mountain and silver waterfall—yes!" cried Theodomir with sudden fire. "For the festering core of imperialism that darkens its beauty with sable wing—no! No single thought of regret. How pitiful and absurd our Lilliputian game of empire! What man is better than another? Tolstoi and Buddha, they are the men who knew. Was not my wildest error," he demanded reverting afresh to the other's reproach, "that homesick letter that brought him to my side? Peace came to me, Tregar, in building this lodge, in working in the field and hunting, in doctoring these primitive people who saved my life, in teaching the child of my Indian wife—"

"The child of your wife! You mean your daughter?"

"I have no child," said Theodomir. "The girl you saw to-night is my foster daughter, the child of my wife and the man for whose whim she begged me to divorce her."

"No child!" exclaimed the Baron with a sickening flash of realization. "My poor Ronador!"

"My kindness to her," said Mic-co, "was at first a discipline. Her mother

deserted her and the old chief granted me half her life. I could not bear the touch of her hands or the look in her eyes for many months, but through her, Tregar, at last I learned peace and forgiveness and forbearance, as men should. I built the lodge for her and me. I taught her the ways of her white father. I made myself proficient in the English tongue that those traders and hunters and naturalists who stray here might guess nothing of my origin. I shall never again leave the peace and quiet of this island home. And you and I, Tregar, must quiet that Voice forever!"

"Is that possible?" choked Tregar.

"I think so," said Mic-co. "I think we may some day send him home with the Voice quieted forever and the remorse and suffering healed. Had I thought he was strong enough to bear it, I would have told him to-night."

"Let me tell you," said Tregar with strong emotion, "how I found him in the forest, when years back I came to know this secret I have tried so hard to keep for him. I had been hunting with the King and lost my way in the forests of Grimwald. I found him there in the thickest part—naked, slashing his body wildly with a knife in an agony of remorse and penance and the most terrible grief I have ever witnessed. Before he well knew what he was about he had blurted forth the whole pitiful story—that he had killed his cousin in a moment of passion—that he must scourge and torture his body to discipline his soul. I—I shall not forget his face."

"Poor fellow!" said Mic-co. "My poor cousin!"

They wheeled suddenly at a choking sound in the doorway. Some wild memory of the Grimwald had surged through the fevered brain of the sick man. His clothes were gone, his body slashed cruelly in a dozen places. He had torn down the buckskin curtain at his window and bound it about his body in the fashion of earlier ages. How long he had stood there in the doorway they did not know. Now as they turned, he rushed forward and flung himself with a great

heart-broken sob at the feet of his cousin.

"Theodimir! Theodimir!" he cried.

Tregar turned away from the sound of his terrible sobbing.

CHAPTER LIV

ON THE WESTFALL LAKE

Hurrying clouds curtained the silver shield of a full moon and found themselves fringed gloriously with ragged light. It was a lake of white, whispering ghosts locking spectral branches in the wind, of slumbering lilies rustled by the drift of a boat; a lake of checkered lights and shadows fitfully mirroring stars at the mercy of the moon-flecked clouds. On the western shore of the wide, wind-ruffled sheet of water, on a wooded knoll, glimmered the lights of the village.

To Diane, stretched comfortably upon the cushions of the boat, which had drifted idly about since early twilight, the night's sounds were indescribably peaceful. The lap and purl of water, the rustle of birch, the call of an owl in the forest, the noise of frog and tree toad and innumerable crickets, they were all, paradoxically enough, the wildwood sounds of silence.

With a sigh the girl presently paddled in to shore. As she moored her boat, the moon swept majestically from the clouds and shone full upon a second boatman paddling briskly by the lily beds. The boat came on with a musical swirl of water; the bareheaded boatman waved his hand lazily to the girl standing motionless upon the moonlit wharf, and as lazily floated in.

"Hello!" he called cheerfully.

The moon, doomed to erotic service, was again upon the head of Mr.

Poynter.

"It's the milkman's boat!" explained Philip smiling. "He's a mighty decent chap."

Diane's face was as pale as a lily.

"How did you know?" she asked, but her eyes, for Philip, were welcome enough.

"I saw Carl," said he, dexterously rounding to a point at her feet. "He told me."

He lazily rocked the boat, met her troubled glance with frank serenity and said with his eyes what for the moment his laughing lips withheld.

"Come, row about a bit," he said gently. "There's a lot to tell—"

"The other candlestick?"

"That," said Philip as he helped her in, "and more."

The boat shot forth into the moonlit water.

"And your father, Philip?"

"Better," said Philip and feathered his oars conspicuously in a moment of constraint. Then flushing slightly, he met her glance with his usual frank directness. "Dad and I had quarreled, Diane," he said quietly, "and he was fretting. And now, though the fundamental cause of grievance still remains, we're better friends. Ames, the doctor, said that helped a lot." He was silent. "A dash of Spanish," he began thoughtfully, "a dash of Indian, and the blood of the old southern cavaliers—it's a ripping combination for loveliness, Diane!"

Not quite so pale, Diane glanced demurely at the moon.

"Yes, I know," nodded Philip with slightly impudent assurance; "but the moon is kind to lovers."

"Tell me," begged Diane with a bright flush, "about the second candlestick."

Somewhat reluctantly, with the moon urging him to madness, Philip obeyed. To Diane his words supplied the final link in the chain of mystery.

"And Satterlee's yacht," finished Philip, leaning on his oars, "was laid up in Hoboken for repairs. Carl phoned his attorneys."

"You spoke of seeing Carl?"

"Yes. He was with his father then. Telegraphed me Monday. I have yet to see such glow and warmth in the faces of men. They're going back to Mic-co's lodge together for a while. Odd!" he added thoughtfully. "I've known Satterlee for years, a quiet chap of wonderful kindness and generosity. But I've heard Dad tell mad tales of his reckless whims when he was younger."

"And the first paper?"

"Satterlee had almost forgotten it. It's so long ago. If he thought at all of its discovery it was to doubt any other fate for it than a waste-paper basket or a fire. Anything else was too preposterous. But he brooded a lot over the other. The most terrible results of his foolhardy whim Carl pledged me not to tell him. Says the blame is all his and he'll shoulder it. What little we did reveal, horrified Satterlee inexpressibly. You see he'd found the candlesticks in a ruined castle. They were sadly battered and he consigned them to a queer old wood-carver to patch up. In the patching, the shallow wells came to light, packed with faded, musty love letters from some young Spanish gallant to somebody's inconstant wife, and the carver spoke of them. Satterlee impetuously bade him halt his

work and wrote a wild letter to Ann Westfall begging her to let him hide the truth in the well of the candlestick with the forlorn hope that one day Carl might know. This she granted. Later he had the candlesticks brought to his apartments to be sealed in his presence. As he took from his pocket the written account intended for Carl, another paper fluttered to the floor. It was the deathbed statement of Theodomir which in a whimsical moment he had drawn up for the entertainment of your father. He promptly consigned it to the other well with a shrug. He was greatly agitated and thought no more about it."

"A careless act," said Diane, "to be fraught with such terrible results." Then she told the history of her father's letters.

"A persistent moon!" said Philip, glancing up at its mild radiance. "And my head is queer again. Likely that very moon is shining on the minister in the village yonder."

"Likely," said Diane cautiously.

The boat swept boldly toward the western shore.

Diane raised questioning eyes to his.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," said Philip. "I did mean to tell you before. It's abduction."

"Abduction!"

"I'm to be married in the village to-night. And I'm awfully afraid the benevolent old gentleman in the parsonage is waiting. He promised. Diane, I can't pretend to swing this function without you!"

"Philip!" faltered Diane and meeting his level, imploring gaze, laughed and colored deliciously.

"A matrimonial pirate!" said Philip. "That's what I am. I've got to be."

"Aunt Agatha!" whispered Diane despairingly.

"I'll patch it up with Aunt Agatha," promised Philip. "You forget I'm in strong with her now. Didn't I rescue a dime from the fish?"

"And the Seminole girl makes her lover a shirt—it's always customary—"

"You've forgotten," said that young practician with his most charming smile, "I've a shirt mended nicely along the sleeve and shoulder by my lady's fingers. Indeed, dear, I have it on! And to-morrow—it's Arcadia for you and me—"

Somehow, with the words came a flood of memory pictures. There was Philip by the camp fire in Arcadia whittling his ridiculous wildwood pipe; Philip aboard the hay-camp and Philip in the garb of a nomadic Greek; Philip unwinding the music-machine for the staring Indians and building himself a tunic with Sho-caw's sewing machine; Philip and a moon above the marsh—

Utter loyalty and unchanging protection! Shaking, the girl covered her face with her hands.

The boat's bow touched the shore; whistling softly, Philip leaped ashore and moored it.

"Diane!" he said gently.

The girl raised glistening, glorified eyes to his face and smiled, a radiant smile for all her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

Philip held out his arms.

The silvered sheet of water rippled placidly at their feet. There was wind

among the birches. They watched the great moon sail behind a cloud and emerge, flooding the sylvan world with light.

"Sweetheart," said Philip suddenly, "I thought that Arcadia was back there in Connecticut by the river, but it's here too! Dear little gypsy, it is everywhere that you are!"

"It will be Arcadia—always!" said Diane, "for Arcadia is Together-land, isn't it, Philip?"

The moon and Philip answered.

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