

## CHAPTER XXXII

### FOREST FRIENDS

**N**ORTHWARD 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; over-

head 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-mâché* 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 comfort-

ably 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-bridegroom. 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.