

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 prowls by night. Moon-checked 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,

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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 wigwam—"

"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 Shocaw?"

"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 —"

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"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 — afore 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.

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"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.