

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 ag-grieved 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 impetu-ously, "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.