

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 foot-fall 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.