

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### ON THE LAKE SHORE

**W**ITH 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 ag-grieved 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 reit-erated 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 ob-tained in the village — and facts of similar irrele-vancy.

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 sup-plemented 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 tensivity. 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 fash-

ion 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. Theodimir 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.