

CHAPTER LI

IN THE ADIRONDACKS

TO THE wild, out-of-the-world hunting lodge in the Adirondack wilderness of tree and lake and trout-haunted mountain stream which had been part of Norman Westfall's heritage, came, one twilight of cloud and wind, Diane, tanned with the wind and sun of a year's wandering—and very tired.

Wild relief at Carl's tale of the jealous Indian, thoughts of Philip, of Carl, of Keela, of Ronador, all these, persistently haunting the girl's harassed mind, had wearied her greatly. Moreover, Aunt Agatha was not restful; nor would she depart.

Wherefore, with the old habit when the voice of the forest called—when school and city and travel had palled and tortured—Diane had traveled feverishly north with Aunt Agatha, and thence to the Adirondack lodge which had been her hermitage since early childhood and to which, by an earlier compact, Aunt Agatha might not follow.

She had telegraphed old Roger to meet her with the buckboard. Now, as they drove up at twilight, Annie, his wife, stood in the cottage door-

way. Beyond among the rustling trees stood the log lodge of Norman Westfall, far enough away for solitude and near enough, as Aunt Agatha frequently recalled with comfort, to the cottage of the two old servants for safety.

The lake stretched away to a dusk-dimmed shore set in a whispering line of ghostly birches.

"There's wood in the fireplace, dearie!" said old Annie, patting the girl's shoulder. "It's a wee bit chill yet, for all the summer ought well be here. And you've not run away to the old lodge to cook and keep house and play gypsy this many a day!"

"No," said Diane, "I haven't." She spoke of the van and Johnny.

"Dear! Dear!" quavered Annie, raising wrinkled, wondering hands. "Think of that now! And like you, too! And you grown so like your father, child, that I can't well keep my eyes off your face. And brown as a berry from the sun. I've set a bit of a lunch in the great room yonder, dearie. You'll likely be too tired to-night to be a gypsy."

Old Roger, who had consigned the buckboard and horses to a tall awkward country lad who had slouched forward from the shadows, hurried off to light the fire in the lodge.

When Diane entered, the fire was crackling cheerfully in the great fireplace and dancing in

bright waves over the china and glass upon a table by the fire.

The old room, extending the entire width of the lodge and half its generous depth, was much as it had been in the days of Norman Westfall. By the western wall stood the old piano. Uncovered rafters and an inner wall-lining of logs hinted nothing of the substantial plaster behind it. It was a great room of homely comfort, subtly akin to the forest beyond its walls.

It was the old fashioned desk in the corner, however, upon which Diane's thoughtful gaze rested as she ate her supper. The thought of it had primarily inspired her coming. Surely the old desk, locked this many a year, might hold some breath of the tragedy that had ghostlike trailed her footsteps. Ann Westfall had kept the key until her death. She had bravely put her brother's house in order at his tragic death and transferred all the papers of value. The key hung now in a sliding panel beneath the ledge of the desk. The spirit which had kept the old room unchanged, even to the faded books of Orientalism and the old pictures strangely mellowed, had led to the hiding of the key away from vandal fingers.

Once Diane herself had unlocked the desk and peered timidly within. She remembered now the faultless order of the few dry, uninteresting papers, an ink well made of the skull of a tiny

monkey, a bamboo pen, a half-finished manuscript of wild adventure in some out-of-the-world spot in the South Pacific. There had been nothing more. But the desk was one of intricate drawers and panels.

With a sudden distaste for the food before her, Diane pushed the little table back, lighted a small lamp and crossed to her father's desk. She unlocked it with nervous fingers. The monkey skull, the bamboo pen, the few irrelevant papers were all as she remembered them.

Diane glanced hurriedly over the scribbled manuscript of adventure with a wild, choking sensation in her throat. There was no mention of the Indian wife. Hurriedly she opened each tiny drawer and panel. They were for the most part empty. Only in one, a small drawer within a drawer, lay a faded packet of letters directed to Ann Westfall in the hand that had penned the manuscript — Norman Westfall's.