

CHAPTER LIV

ON THE WESTFALL LAKE

HURRYING clouds curtained the silver shield of a full moon and found themselves fringed gloriously with ragged light. It was a lake of white, whispering ghosts locking spectral branches in the wind, of slumbering lilies rustled by the drift of a boat; a lake of checkered lights and shadows fitfully mirroring stars at the mercy of the moon-flecked clouds. On the western shore of the wide, wind-ruffled sheet of water, on a wooded knoll, glimmered the lights of the village.

To Diane, stretched comfortably upon the cushions of the boat, which had drifted idly about since early twilight, the night's sounds were indescribably peaceful. The lap and purl of water, the rustle of birch, the call of an owl in the forest, the noise of frog and tree toad and innumerable crickets, they were all, paradoxically enough, the wildwood sounds of silence.

With a sigh the girl presently paddled in to shore. As she moored her boat, the moon swept majestically from the clouds and shone full upon a second boatman paddling briskly by the lily beds. The boat came on with a musical swirl of

water; the bareheaded boatman waved his hand lazily to the girl standing motionless upon the moonlit wharf, and as lazily floated in.

"Hello!" he called cheerfully.

The moon, doomed to erotic service, was again upon the head of Mr. Poynter.

"It's the milkman's boat!" explained Philip smiling. "He's a mighty decent chap."

Diane's face was as pale as a lily.

"How did you know?" she asked, but her eyes, for Philip, were welcome enough.

"I saw Carl," said he, dexterously rounding to a point at her feet. "He told me."

He lazily rocked the boat, met her troubled glance with frank serenity and said with his eyes what for the moment his laughing lips withheld.

"Come, row about a bit," he said gently. "There's a lot to tell—"

"The other candlestick?"

"That," said Philip as he helped her in, "and more."

The boat shot forth into the moonlit water.

"And your father, Philip?"

"Better," said Philip and feathered his oars conspicuously in a moment of constraint. Then flushing slightly, he met her glance with his usual frank directness. "Dad and I had quarreled, Diane," he said quietly, "and he was fretting. And now, though the fundamental cause of

grievance still remains, we're better friends. Ames, the doctor, said that helped a lot." He was silent. "A dash of Spanish," he began thoughtfully, "a dash of Indian, and the blood of the old southern cavaliers—it's a ripping combination for loveliness, Diane!"

Not quite so pale, Diane glanced demurely at the moon.

"Yes, I know," nodded Philip with slightly impudent assurance; "but the moon is kind to lovers."

"Tell me," begged Diane with a bright flush, "about the second candlestick."

Somewhat reluctantly, with the moon urging him to madness, Philip obeyed. To Diane his words supplied the final link in the chain of mystery.

"And Satterlee's yacht," finished Philip, leaning on his oars, "was laid up in Hoboken for repairs. Carl phoned his attorneys."

"You spoke of seeing Carl?"

"Yes. He was with his father then. Telegraphed me Monday. I have yet to see such glow and warmth in the faces of men. They're going back to Mic-co's lodge together for a while. Odd!" he added thoughtfully. "I've known Satterlee for years, a quiet chap of wonderful kindness and generosity. But I've heard Dad tell

mad tales of his reckless whims when he was younger.”

“And the first paper?”

“Satterlee had almost forgotten it. It's so long ago. If he thought at all of its discovery it was to doubt any other fate for it than a waste-paper basket or a fire. Anything else was too preposterous. But he brooded a lot over the other. The most terrible results of his foolhardy whim Carl pledged me not to tell him. Says the blame is all his and he'll shoulder it. What little we did reveal, horrified Satterlee inexpressibly. You see he'd found the candlesticks in a ruined castle. They were sadly battered and he consigned them to a queer old wood-carver to patch up. In the patching, the shallow wells came to light, packed with faded, musty love letters from some young Spanish gallant to somebody's inconstant wife, and the carver spoke of them. Satterlee impetuously bade him halt his work and wrote a wild letter to Ann Westfall begging her to let him hide the truth in the well of the candlestick with the forlorn hope that one day Carl might know. This she granted. Later he had the candlesticks brought to his apartments to be sealed in his presence. As he took from his pocket the written account intended for Carl, another paper fluttered to the floor. It was the deathbed statement of Theodomir which in a whimsical

moment he had drawn up for the entertainment of your father. He promptly consigned it to the other well with a shrug. He was greatly agitated and thought no more about it."

"A careless act," said Diane, "to be fraught with such terrible results." Then she told the history of her father's letters.

"A persistent moon!" said Philip, glancing up at its mild radiance. "And my head is queer again. Likely that very moon is shining on the minister in the village yonder."

"Likely," said Diane cautiously.

The boat swept boldly toward the western shore.

Diane raised questioning eyes to his.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," said Philip. "I did mean to tell you before. It's abduction."

"Abduction!"

"I'm to be married in the village to-night. And I'm awfully afraid the benevolent old gentleman in the parsonage is waiting. He promised. Diane, I can't pretend to swing this function without you!"

"Philip!" faltered Diane and meeting his level, imploring gaze, laughed and colored deliciously.

"A matrimonial pirate!" said Philip. "That's what I am. I've got to be."

“Aunt Agatha!” whispered Diane despairingly.

“I’ll patch it up with Aunt Agatha,” promised Philip. “You forget I’m in strong with her now. Didn’t I rescue a dime from the fish?”

“And the Seminole girl makes her lover a shirt—it’s always customary—”

“You’ve forgotten,” said that young practitioner with his most charming smile, “I’ve a shirt mended nicely along the sleeve and shoulder by my lady’s fingers. Indeed, dear, I have it on! And to-morrow—it’s Arcadia for you and me—”

Somehow, with the words came a flood of memory pictures. There was Philip by the camp fire in Arcadia whittling his ridiculous wildwood pipe; Philip aboard the hay-camp and Philip in the garb of a nomadic Greek; Philip unwinding the music-machine for the staring Indians and building himself a tunic with Sho-caw’s sewing machine; Philip and a moon above the marsh—

Utter loyalty and unchanging protection! Shaking, the girl covered her face with her hands.

The boat’s bow touched the shore; whistling softly, Philip leaped ashore and moored it.

“Diane!” he said gently.

The girl raised glistening, glorified eyes to his face and smiled, a radiant smile for all her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

Philip held out his arms.

The silvered sheet of water rippled placidly at their feet. There was wind among the birches. They watched the great moon sail behind a cloud and emerge, flooding the sylvan world with light.

“Sweetheart,” said Philip suddenly, “I thought that Arcadia was back there in Connecticut by the river, but it’s here too! Dear little gypsy, it is everywhere that you are!”

“It will be Arcadia — always!” said Diane, “for Arcadia is Together-land, isn’t it, Philip?”

The moon and Philip answered.