

A Mystery Story for Girls

Green Eyes

Roy J. Snell

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Green Eyes

Date of first publication: 1930

Author: Roy J. Snell (1878-1959)

Date first posted: May 13, 2014

Date last updated: May 13, 2014

Faded Page eBook #20140521

E-text prepared by Stephen Hutcheson and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team (<http://www.pgdp.net>)

A Mystery Story for Girls

GREEN EYES

By
ROY J. SNELL



The Reilly & Lee Co.
Chicago New York

COPYRIGHT 1930
BY
THE REILLY & LEE CO.
PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
<u>I THE MYSTERIOUS ISLANDER</u>	11
<u>II THE LADY OF THE ISLAND</u>	22
<u>III A GYPSY SECRET</u>	29
<u>IV WHY?</u>	35
<u>V THE GYPSY CHILD</u>	45
<u>VI HAUNTING MELODY</u>	51
<u>VII GYPSY MOON</u>	57
<u>VIII SUN-TAN TILLIE</u>	61
<u>IX BANGING A BEAR</u>	68
<u>X A GASP IN THE DARK</u>	73
<u>XI A SECRET BEGUN</u>	80
<u>XII THREE RUBIES</u>	87
<u>XIII CHARMED DAYS</u>	100
<u>XIV THE DANCE OF DEATH</u>	107
<u>XV FISHING AND FIGHTING</u>	119
<u>XVI SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE TWILIGHT</u>	128
<u>XVII VOICES IN THE FOREST</u>	132
<u>XVIII REVERIES</u>	139
<u>XIX THE STOLEN TRUNK</u>	147
<u>XX 13-13 AND OTHER SIGNS</u>	157
<u>XXI "FISHIN'"</u>	163
<u>XXII KIDNAPPED</u>	175
<u>XXIII STRANGE DELIVERANCE</u>	181
<u>XXIV OUTBOUND IN THE NIGHT</u>	188
<u>XXV A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT</u>	195
<u>XXVI "A BOAT! A BOAT!"</u>	204
<u>XXVII THE "SPANK ME AGAIN"</u>	212
<u>XXVIII GLOWING WATERS</u>	219
<u>XXIX FADING SHORE LINES</u>	227
<u>XXX THEIR CROWDED HOUR</u>	232
<u>XXXI PETITE JEANNE'S DARK HOUR</u>	238
<u>XXXII PETITE JEANNE'S TRIUMPH</u>	243
<u>XXXIII FAST WORK</u>	251
<u>XXXIV THE TREASURE CHEST</u>	257

GREEN EYES

CHAPTER I THE MYSTERIOUS ISLANDER

It was night on Morton's Bay. A bright half moon painted a path of silver over water as still as the night.

At the very center of this narrow bay some dark object cast a shadow. This was a rowboat. It was painted black. The anchor lay in its prow. The boat did not drift. There are times of perfect calm on the upper waters of Lake Huron.

One figure was noticeable in this boat. A slight girl, she sat bent over as if in sleep, or perhaps in deep meditation.

There was another person in the stern of the boat. A large girl, she lay in perfect repose against a pile of pillows. Was she asleep? Did she dream? She was thinking. One thinks best when at perfect repose. Where could be found more perfect repose? Perhaps nowhere. Yet this girl, who was none other than our old friend, Florence Huyler, was slightly disturbed.

[12]

The rowboat had but now ceased rocking. The moment before, a powerful speed boat, passing at a terrific rate, had stirred the waters and had sent deep ridges and furrows to lift and drop it, lift and drop it many times.

Florence did not like speed boats. They hurried too much. She was seldom in a hurry. She and this other girl had come to the little settlement to seek repose. More than once a speed boat had interrupted her meditations. Now it had happened again.

"They're taking a wide circle," she told herself. "More than likely they'll come back. Why can't they leave us in peace?"

The circle made by the speed boat widened. Perhaps they would not return after all. Her thoughts shifted to other matters.

The figure in the forward seat was that of the blonde French girl, Petite Jeanne. She had not moved for a quarter of an hour. What were her thoughts? Or did she think?

[13]

"Perhaps she is asleep," Florence told herself. She had not stirred when the speed boat rocked them.

"Ought I to warn her if they return?" Florence asked herself. "Might topple over into the bay. She can't swim."

Yet, even as she thought this, Florence smiled at the idea of danger. What if the French girl could not swim? One swimmer was enough. And Florence could swim. Few better. Once she had swum the Ohio river, a mile wide, on a wager.

“Easy to rescue her,” she thought. “But then, why get wet?”

She shuddered at the thought of a plunge. It was August, but the season was late. These northern waters were still cold.

Once more her thoughts shifted. To her right she had caught the gleam of a light. This light suggested mystery. Where the light shone was an island; not much of an island, a pile of rocks overgrown with cedars, but an island all the same. And in the midst of the cedars, dark, mysterious, all but hidden, was a cottage. And in the cottage lived a lady who dressed in somber garments and rowed a black boat. She visited no one, was visited by no one, and was seldom seen save in early morning, or at night. This much Florence had learned by watching the cabin from a distance.

[14]

“Mystery!” she whispered. “Of all places, on these northern waters in a community where no man locks his doors. Mystery! Oh, well, probably nothing.”

For all her whispered words, she was convinced that there *was* something. She meant to find out what that something was.

But now her thoughts were rudely broken off. With a roar that was deafening, the racing speed boat was once more upon them.

Coming closer this time, it set a current of air fanning their cheeks and showered them with fine spray.

The little French girl, waking from her reverie, stared wildly about her, then clutched at the seat. Just in time. The rowboat, rocking violently, threatened to tumble them into the water.

[15]

“Selfish!” Florence muttered. “As if there wasn’t room enough for both of us in all Lake Huron!”

Just then a question entered her mind. Was there a purpose in all this? What purpose?

To these questions she could form no answer. She resolved to remain right there, all the same; at least until Petite Jeanne had finished her meditations and asked to be taken in.

“What can so completely fill the mind of little Jeanne?” she asked herself. “Perhaps it is her part in the play. Ah yes, that must be it.”

That wonderful play! At once her mind was filled with bright dreams for the little French girl.

Petite Jeanne, as you will remember if you have read our other book, *The Gypsy Shawl*, had once lived and traveled with the gypsies of France. Florence and her friend Betty had found her there in France. In her company they had passed through many thrilling adventures. When these were over, Florence had invited her to visit America. She had come.

[16]

More than that, a marvelous future had appeared like a bright, beckoning star before her. In France she had taken part in a great charity play, staged in the famous Paris Opera. There she had performed the ancient gypsy dance in the most divine manner. She had won the acclaim of the elite of Paris. Not alone this; she had caught the eye of a renowned producer of drama. Finding himself prepared to stage a drama in which the French gypsies had a part, he had sent to France for Petite Jeanne. A prolonged search had ended in America. He had found Petite Jeanne with her friend Florence Huyler in her own city, Chicago.

The director had laid his plans before her. Her most important part in the drama was to be exactly that of her feat in Paris, to dance the gypsy dance with a pet bear beneath a golden moon. There were, of course, minor parts to be played, but this was to be the crowning glory.

“Would Petite Jeanne do this?”

[17]

Would she? The little French girl had wept tears of joy. Since her success at the Paris Opera she had dreamed many dreams. This engagement promised to make these dreams come true.

Only one sorrow had come to her. There was no part in the drama for Florence.

To Florence this was no deprivation. Acting had never appealed to her. Life, to her, was more than acting on a stage. Life, vivid life, physical strength, the great out-of-doors, this was her world.

“But when you are rich and famous,” she had said to Petite Jeanne, “I will be your ‘mother.’ Every star, you know, must have a ‘mother’ to protect her from impudent and stage-struck people.”

“Yes, and well you are able to protect me!” laughed Petite Jeanne, squeezing her arm. “*Parbleu!* Your arm, it is hard and strong as a man’s!”

Florence had not waited until the French girl was rich and famous to become her guide and protector. She had entered upon the task at once.

[18]

“At least until she is safely launched upon her career, and well accustomed to America, I will stay by her side,” she had said to the great producer, Jeffrey Farnsworth.

To this Farnsworth agreed. He at once made provisions for their immediate needs.

Rehearsals had begun. They proceeded in a satisfactory manner for three weeks. Then Farnsworth announced a four weeks' breathing spell.

"Go north, where it is cool," he had said to Florence. "Our French lily droops a little in this humid climate. The north waters and woods will be medicine to her body and religion to her soul."

So here they were, drifting on a silent bay, with the moon and the stars above them and all the world, save one restless speed boat, at rest.

Far back in the bay, on a narrow point among the pines and cedars, was their temporary home. A log cabin it was, with a broad fireplace at its back, with heavily cushioned rustic chairs in every corner, and with such an air of freshness, brightness and peace hovering over it as is found only where sky, water and forest meet in the northland.

[19]

Thinking of all this, Florence, too, had fallen into a deep reverie when, with the suddenness of a world's end, catastrophe befell them.

With a rush and a roar, a demon of speed sprang at them.

"The speed boat!" she screamed in Jeanne's ear. "Jump!"

The words were not out of her mouth when, with a swirling swing, she was lost in a mountain of foam. Their rowboat toppled over, casting them into the chilling water of the bay.

At once Florence was on the surface, swimming strongly.

"But what of Jeanne? She does not swim. I must save her." These were the thoughts uppermost in her mind when a blonde head bobbed up close beside her.

[20]

Her hand flew out. It grasped something, the girl's cape. It was loose. It came away. Jeanne began to sink. One more desperate effort and Florence had her, first by the hair, then by an arm.

"Jeanne!" she panted. "Jeanne! Get hold of my blouse and cling tight!"

The frightened French girl obeyed.

When she had secured a firm hold, Florence swam slowly. She must have time to think. The boat was overturned, perhaps smashed. At any rate she could not right it. The speed boat had not paused. It was far away. The night and dark waters were all about them.

“They never slackened their pace!” she muttered bitterly. “And they laughed! I heard a laugh. It was a woman. How could they?”

What was to be done?

On the shore a single light gleamed.

“It’s the light of that mysterious islander,” she told herself. “That woman who goes out only at night. That is by far the nearest point. We must try for that. It is our only chance. She must let us in; make a fire; dry us out. Jeanne will perish of cold.”

[21]

With that she turned her face toward that light and, swimming strongly, glided silently through the dark water. The waters were not more silent than her fair burden, who floated after her like a ghost.

[22]

CHAPTER II

THE LADY OF THE ISLAND

They made a trail in the water, the two girls, one who swam and one who drifted after. The trail was short. It appeared to begin at nothing and end nowhere. The moon painted it with a touch of silver.

Florence swam steadily. She thought she knew her powers—had measured the distance well. She swam with the determination of one who prizes life as a precious gift, not lightly to be held, or carelessly put aside.

Such a girl will go far. But did she fully know her powers? True, she had gone a great distance in other waters. But this was night in the north. The water was chilling. A sudden cramp, a brief struggle, and their path of silver would vanish. Only the drifting boat would speak of the night's tragedy.

Florence did not think of this. Possible tragedies which can in no way be averted are not worthy of consideration. She thought instead of the monstrous injustice that had been done them.

[23]

“Why did they do it?” she asked. “How could they? What if they *are* rich, we poor? They have no right to override us. What if their boat *is* a thing of beauty and power, our own an old rowboat? The water does not belong to them.

“And they laughed!” she said aloud.

Jeanne heard and answered, “Yes. They laughed. I wonder why.”

“There are three boats on the bay like that one,” Florence said. “I have seen that many. Perhaps there are more. Which one could it have been?”

The little French girl did not reply.

Then, because she needed her strength for swimming, Florence lapsed into silence.

To an onlooker the outcome of this adventure might have seemed questionable. The water was cold, the distance considerable. To Florence, endowed as she was with splendid strength and great faith, not alone in her own powers but in the Creator's goodness as well, there was never a question.

[24]

Such superb endurance as she displayed! Hand over hand, arm over arm, she measured the yards without one faltering movement. Little wonder, this. Florence regarded her physical powers as a great gift. She thought of herself as the Roman maidens did of old. She was a child of the gods.

So she swam on while the moon looked down upon her and appeared to smile. And the graceful, swaying cedars beckoned. At last, with a sigh of pure joy, she felt her hand grasp the post of a tiny plank dock, and knew that her testing was over.

With one last, splendid effort she thrust her silent companion to a place on the plank surface. Then she followed.

Petite Jeanne was completely benumbed with cold. Her lips were blue. When she attempted to stand, her knees would not support her.

Gathering her in her arms as she might a child, Florence hurried toward the cottage not twenty yards away.

[25]

The place was completely dark. For all that, she did not hesitate to knock loudly at the door.

There came no answer. She knocked again, and yet again. Still no answer.

She had just placed her shoulder squarely against the door, preparatory to forcing it, when a voice demanded:

“Who’s there?”

“I,” Florence replied. “We’ve had an accident. Boat turned over. We are soaked, chilled, in danger. Let us in!”

There came a sound of movement from within. Then a heavy bar dropped back with a slam.

As the door swung open, Florence gasped. She had seen the occupant of this cottage at a distance. Since she always dressed in garments of somber hue and lived here alone, Florence had expected to find her old. Instead, there stood before her, holding a lamp high like a torch, a most dazzling creature. A young woman, certainly not past twenty-five, with tossing golden hair and penetrating blue eyes, she stood there garbed in a dressing gown of flaming red.

[26]

“Oh!” murmured Florence, for the time forgetting her urgent mission.

“Bring her right in,” said a strong voice in a steady, even tone. “There are some coals in the fireplace. I’ll soon have it roaring.”

The mysterious young lady was as good as her word. Five minutes had not elapsed ere a fire was laughing up the chimney. Stripped of their chilling garments and wrapped in blankets of the softest wool, the two girls sat before the fire while their strange hostess spent her time alternately chafing Petite Jeanne’s feet and hands and tending tea that was brewing.

Florence found time to examine the interior of the cottage. The

[27]

bar had been replaced at the door. As her eyes swept the walls, she was startled to discover that this cabin was entirely devoid of windows. More startling still was her next discovery. At the head of a low bed, within easy reach of one who slept there, were two thin, blue steel automatic pistols.

The things fascinated her. She removed her gaze from them with difficulty.

At that moment it struck her suddenly that this cabin bore all the marks of a trap. Had they been dumped out before it by someone with a purpose? Were they prisoners here?

But why? To this question she could form but a single answer. And that one seemed absurd.

“Green Eyes!” she whispered.

There was a young lady, an actress, the star of Petite Jeanne’s cast, who appeared to be intensely jealous of Jeanne. They had called her Green Eyes because, in certain lights, her eyes seemed as green as the sea. Once Florence had fancied that she had seen her in a speed boat on these waters. She could not be sure. Would she stoop to such base plotting? It did not seem possible.

“Besides,” the girl reassured herself, “this cabin is old. It was built for some other purpose. That it should have its present occupant is more or less in the nature of an accident. This woman has a purpose in hiding here. A mystery!” A thrill of pleasant anticipation shot through her, dispelling fear as the morning sun dispels the fog.

[28]

“Mystery!” she whispered to herself. “That magic word, mystery!”

“The tea is served,” said a pleasant voice. “Do you take one lump, two, or none at all?”

“N-none at all,” Florence replied, bringing herself back to the present moment with a start.

[29]

CHAPTER III

A GYPSY SECRET

Hot tea and a blazing fire took the blue from Jeanne's lips and restored the natural faint flush to her fair cheeks.

"You say your boat was overturned?" Their hostess abruptly broke the silence that had fallen upon them.

"Yes."

"A rowboat?"

"Yes."

"Was it broken?"

"I—I—" Florence hesitated. "I don't think so."

"Then we should go for it at once. The wind is rising. It is offshore. The boat will drift across the bay. I have a rowboat. Perhaps you would do well to come with me. It will be something of a task to right it."

She had spoken to Florence. When Petite Jeanne understood that she was to be left alone in this windowless cabin, she shuddered ever so slightly, but said not a word.

[30]

"I will go," replied Florence. She turned to Jeanne. "You will be more contented here. The night air is very cold."

They departed. Jeanne was alone. When she had made sure they were out of hearing distance, she closed the door and dropped the massive oaken bar in place.

Scarcely had she done this than she found herself possessed of the idea that someone beside herself was in the cabin.

"There may be other rooms," she told herself. She searched in vain for doors leading to them. She looked under the bed.

Convinced at last that she was alone, she looked with wide-eyed interest at her surroundings. The walls were made of oak paneling, very well executed and polished to the last degree. The fireplace was massive. It was built entirely of the strange honeycomb-like stone that is found in places along the upper bays of Lake Huron.

"But why does she live where there is no light?" she asked herself in amazement.

[31]

Hardly had she thought this than she became conscious for the first time of a faint flush of yellow light lying on the floor at her feet.

On looking up to discover its source, she found herself staring at a very broad double skylight some distance above her head.

“It’s like those one sees on the cabins of ships,” she told herself. “Only higher up.”

Satisfied with her inspection of the place, she dropped into a commodious chair and at once fell into a reverie which had to do with her past and the very near future.

How strange her life seemed to her as she reviewed it here in the dim lights of such unusual surroundings!

Petite Jeanne, as you well know from reading *The Gypsy Shawl*, was born in France. Her family, one of the country’s best, had been impoverished by the war. The war had left her an orphan. Possessed only of a pet bear, she had looked about for some means of support. A friendly and honorable gypsy, Bihari, had taken her into his family. She had learned to do the gypsy dances with her bear.

[32]

These she had performed so divinely that in a contest she had been chosen from many other dancers to represent the wanderers of France in a charity pageant to be given at the Paris Opera.

After many perils, brought upon her by the green-eyed jealousy of other gypsies, she had achieved a singular triumph on that great occasion.

As guests of this pageant, two Americans sat in a box that night. One was a playwright, the other a producer.

As the dance progressed, as Petite Jeanne, seeming fairly to fly through the air, passed from one movement to another in her bewitching dance, one of these men touched the other lightly on the arm to whisper: “She is the one.”

“The very one,” the other had whispered back.

“We must have her.”

“We will.”

That was all for the time. But now, after several months, Petite Jeanne, as she sat in this cabin by the side of a great lake, reveled in the dream of flitting through her gypsy dance with two thousand Americans swaying in unconscious rhythm to her every movement, and that not one night, but many nights on end.

[33]

“Nights and nights and nights,” she now murmured, as she clasped her hands before her.

But suddenly, as if a cloud had fallen over all, she became conscious once more of dim light and night. Not alone that. There came to her now a sense of approaching danger.

The gypsies are curious people. Who knows what uncanny power they possess? A gypsy, a very old woman, had in some way imparted to Petite Jeanne some of this power. It gave her the ability to divine the presence of those she knew, even when they were some distance away. Was it mental telepathy? Did these others think, and were their thoughts carried by who knows what power, as the radio message is carried over the ether, to this girl's sensitive brain? Who knows? Enough that a message now came; that it caused her to shudder and glance hurriedly about her.

"Gypsies," she said aloud. "There must be gypsies near, French gypsies, my enemies."

[34]

Yet, even as she said this, the thing seemed absurd. She had inquired of the native population concerning gypsies. They did not so much as know that such people existed. This section of the country, where the greater part of all travel is done on water, and where the people are poor, has seldom been visited by a gypsy caravan.

"And yet," she said with conviction, "they *are* near!"

[35]

CHAPTER IV

WHY?

There is that about the woods and water at night which casts upon one a spell of irresistible loneliness and sadness. It is as if all the generations of those who have lived and died in the vicinity, whose canoes have glided silently through rippling waters, whose axes have awakened echoes and whose campfires have brought dark shadows into being, return at this hour to mourn their loss of a beautiful world.

Florence felt something of this as the mystery lady donned a cloak of somber hue, then pushed a dark rowboat into the water.

A faint knock of oarlock was the only sound that disturbed the grave-like stillness.

Some dark bird, awakened from his sleep, rose in their path to go swooping away without a sound.

The lady of the island did not speak. From time to time she glanced over her shoulder to sweep the water with her eye. When some object a little darker than the water appeared in the distance, she pursued a course that led directly to it.

[36]

“There,” she said, as they bumped against the object, “is your boat. It doesn’t seem large, nor heavy. You are strong. Perhaps we can right it.”

Ten minutes of muscle testing struggle and the boat, half filled with water, lay alongside.

As Florence settled back to catch her breath before assisting in bailing out the boat, she exclaimed:

“How can rich people be so thoughtless, reckless and cruel?”

“Why!” said her hostess in a mild tone, “I haven’t found them so.”

“Didn’t they rush our boat, then laugh as it went over?”

“Did they? Tell me about it.” The young lady’s tone suddenly took on a note of lively interest.

Florence told her exactly what had happened.

[37]

“That is queer,” said the lady, as she finished. “Your boat is dark; your friend wore a dark cape. Until to-night I have spent every evening for a week in this bay, sitting just as your companion was sitting, in an attitude of meditation, you might say. Since you were lying stretched out in the stern, you would

be practically hidden by darkness. One might easily conclude that I was the intended victim of this little joke, if it may be called that, and that you had stepped in the way of it.”

“But why should they run you down?” The question slipped unbidden from Florence’s lips.

It went unanswered.

They bailed out the boat, took it in tow, then rowed back as they had come, in silence.

“Why should anyone wish to run you down?” The lady of the island asked this question quite abruptly the moment they entered the cabin.

“Why I—I don’t know.” Florence remained silent for a moment before she added, “We have heard that there is an actress visiting the Eries, those rich people over on the far point. From the description, it might be Green Eyes.”

[38]

“Green Eyes? What a name!” The mystery lady opened her eyes wide.

“It’s not her real name,” Florence hastened to assure her. “She’s Jensie Jameson.”

“Oh! I have seen her. She is quite marvelous. But why do you call her Green Eyes?”

“Perhaps we’re not quite fair to her. She seems jealous of my friend here. Green-eyed, as we have a way of saying. Besides, in some lights her eyes are truly green.”

“Green Eyes.” The tone of the mystery lady became reflective. “How terrible! What can be worse than jealousy? Hatred is bad. But jealousy! How many beautiful friendships have been destroyed, how many happy homes wrecked by jealousy. If I were given to that terrible sin, I should fight it day and night.

“As for this affair—” She changed the subject abruptly. “I think you may feel at ease. Unless I miss my guess, this bit of misfortune was not meant for you at all.

“And now—” She swung about. “What of to-night? Your clothes are not dry. I can loan you some. But are you not afraid to return to camp at this late hour?”

[39]

“We have little to fear.” Florence smiled in a strange way. “We have a bear.”

“A bear?”

“A pet bear.”

“But you?” said Petite Jeanne. “Are you not afraid to stay here

alone?”

“I have never been afraid.” The strange lady’s tone was quiet, full of assurance. “Besides, I trust God and keep my powder dry.” She glanced at the two guns hanging above her bed. “I have no right to be afraid. It is my business not to be.

“You may leave these on the little dock to-morrow,” she said, as she helped the girls into some loose fitting house dresses. “You will find your own there.”

A moment later Florence saw the door to the cabin close as she pushed away from the dock.

A dark bulk greeted them at their own door. This was Tico, Petite Jeanne’s bear, her companion in the gypsy dance which, they hoped, was to make her famous. They had brought him along in order that, alone and quite unmolested in natural surroundings, the heart of the north woods, Jeanne might practice her part in the forthcoming play.

[40]

Next morning Jeanne and Tico, the bear, wandered away into the forest.

Florence went fishing. There is a type of fishing for every mood. This day Florence wished to think. Since she was in no mood for silent meditation she fastened a large spoon-hook to her fifty yard line, dropped rod and reel in the bottom of the boat, wrapped the line about her right hand, then went trolling along the edge of a weed bed.

The water rippled slightly, the rushes nodded now and then to a gust of wind. Her oars made a low dip-dip as she glided across the water. She did not expect to get a bite. She was trolling more for thoughts than for fish.

Into her mind crowded many questions. Who was the lady of the island? Why did her blue eyes reflect so much of fearless daring? Why this strange retreat? Why the automatics above her bed? Why was she here at all? There was something about this young woman that suggested intrigue, crime, possible violence.

[41]

“And yet, in such surroundings!” She laughed out loud. “Could there be a more peaceful spot in all the world?”

And indeed, could there be? Half a mile down the bay a tiny village basked in the sun. A general store, a confectionery, a grocery, a post office, a few scattered cabins and cottages; this was Cedar Point. To right and left of her lay deep bays. Bays and points alike were dotted with summer cottages, where tired city people came to rest and fish. Across the bay, half a mile away, were islands. Four of these islands were small, one large. There, too, were cottages. Who lived in those cottages? To this question she could form only a vague answer. Two or three were owned by millionaires with speed boats and yachts.

“They can have them.” She gave her line a fling. “Gas driven things. Bah!” Her splendid muscles set her boat shooting forward. “What’s better than the good old oars and a boat that’s light and fast?”

“I wish, though,” she added with a scowl, “that they’d leave us alone.”

This sent her thoughts off on another tack. Once more her line was forgotten.

“Those people in that speed boat last night meant to run someone down,” she said with assurance. “Question is, who? And why? Were they after Petite Jeanne? Was it Green Eyes? Or were they after the lady of the island? She believes they were after her. But why were they after her? She didn’t tell me a thing. She—”

Of a sudden there came a great tug at her line.

“Wow!” she cried, dropping the oars and snatching at her pole. “Got a fish. Wonder what—

“Wow, what a yank!”

She gained possession of her rod in the nick of time. Not ten feet of line were on her reel when she seized the handle and held fast.

For a space of ten seconds it seemed the stout line would snap. Then it went slack.

“Dumb! Lost him. I—

“No.” She reeled in furiously. The fish was coming toward her. Then he whirled about. As the line went taut again the fish leaped high out of the water.

“A pike or a muskie!” she murmured. “I must have him!”

A battle royal followed. Now the fish, yielding stubbornly yard by yard, approached the boat. Then, catching sight of her, he leaped away, making the reel sing.

Again she had him under control. Not for long. A raging demon fighting for freedom he was.

For fully a quarter of an hour she fought him until, quite worn out, he yielded, and a twenty pound muskie shot head foremost into her landing net.

“To think,” she exclaimed, “that I could come out to mull things over and should catch such a fish!

“Ah well, life’s that way. I come to think. I catch a fish. We come here seeking absolute quiet, and what do we find?

Mystery, intrigue, and all that promises to keep us up late nights figuring out the next move on the checkerboard of life.”

CHAPTER V

THE GYPSY CHILD

In the meantime, accompanied by the lumbering bear, Petite Jeanne had followed a narrow way that led to the heart of the forest. At first her way was along a grass-grown road that narrowed to a path used in autumn by hunters. This path at last became only a trail for wild animals. In a soft marshy spot she came upon the clean-cut prints of a wild deer's hoofs and the smaller marks of her fawn. There, too, she measured the footprints of a bear.

"A small, black brother of yours," she said to Tico. The bear appeared to understand, for he reared himself on two legs to sniff the air and show his teeth.

Leaving this path at last, she climbed a low hill. There she entered a narrow grass-grown spot devoid of trees.

Here, with only the fir and balsam trees standing in a circle at a respectful distance to witness, she robed herself in one of those filmy creations known to Paris alone.

[46]

Then, with all the native grace that the Creator had bestowed upon her, she went through the steps of that weird dance that was to be the climax of the drama in which she had been given a great part.

"It is now moonlight at the back of a battlefield," she whispered softly to herself. "This is a dance to the dead, to the dead who live forevermore, to those beautiful brave souls who loved their land more than life."

Should one have happened upon her there, dancing with the bear, he must surely have been tempted to believe in fairies. So light was her step, so lissom and free her slight form, so zephyr-like her flowing costume, so great the contrast between her and the cumbersome bear, that she seemed at this moment a creature of quite another world. Yet this fairy was capable of feeling fatigue. In time she wound her filmy gown about her and threw herself on a bed of moss, to lie there panting from exhaustion brought on by her wild gyrations.

[47]

* * * * *

Florence, having thought out her problems as far as she was able to follow them, which was not far, and having conquered her muskie, had rowed home, docked her boat and entered the cabin. She remained for a few moments indoors; then she reappeared with a basket on her arm. She took the trail of Jeanne and the bear.

It was on this same trail that she experienced a severe shock.

As she trudged along over the moss padded path, her soft soled sneakers made no sound. Thus it happened that, as she rounded a clump of dark spruce trees, she came unobserved upon a little woodland fantasy played by a child and a chipmunk. The chipmunk was in the path, the child at one side. A nut was in the child's hand, a gleam of desire in the chipmunk's eye.

The little striped creature advanced a few steps, whisked his tail, retreated, then advanced again. The statuesque attitude of the child was remarkable. "Like a bronze statue," Florence told herself.

[48]

The fingers that held the nut did not tremble. One would have said that the child did not so much as wink an eye.

For a space of ten minutes that bit of a play continued. The thing was remarkable in a child so young.

"Not a day over seven," Florence told herself, as she studied the child's every feature and the last touch of her unusual attire.

At last patience won. The chipmunk sprang forward to grasp the nut, then went flying away.

Did Florence utter an unconscious, but quite audible sigh? It would seem so. For suddenly, after one startled upward glance, the child, too, disappeared.

All uninvited, a startling conviction pressed itself upon Florence's senses. The child was a gypsy.

There could be no questioning this. Her face might have been that of an Indian; her attire, never. Florence had seen too much of these strange people to make any mistake.

[49]

"Not alone that," she told herself, as she once more took up the trail. "Her people have but recently come from Europe. There is not a trace of America in her costume.

"Perhaps—" She paused to ponder. "We are near the Canadian border. Perhaps they have entered without permission and are here in hiding."

This thought was disturbing. The tribe of gypsies with which Petite Jeanne had traveled so long had many enemies. She had come to know this well enough when the terrible Panna had kidnapped Jeanne and all but brought her to her death. Panna was dead, but her numerous tribesmen were ready enough to inherit and pass on her dark secrets and black hatreds.

"If Petite Jeanne knew there were gypsies in this forest she would be greatly disturbed," Florence said to herself with a sigh.

"After all, what's the good of telling her?" was her conclusion of the matter. "Gypsies are ever on the move. We will see

[50]

nothing more of them.” In this she was wrong.

She did not tell Jeanne. Together they reveled in a feast of blueberry muffins, wild honey and caramel buns.

After Jeanne had gone through her wild dance once more, they trudged back to camp through the sweet-smelling forest while the sunset turned the woodland trail to a path of gleaming gold.

CHAPTER VI

HAUNTING MELODY

That evening Florence received a shock. The night before they had, through no purpose of their own, been thrown for an hour or two into the company of the young recluse who lived in a windowless cabin on a shadowy island. Since this person very evidently wished to be alone, Florence had not expected to see her again. Imagine her surprise, therefore, when, on stepping to the cabin door for a good-night salute to the stars, she found the lady standing there, motionless and somber as any nocturnal shadow, on their own little dock.

“I—I beg your pardon,” the mysterious one spoke. “So this is where you live? How very nice!

“But I didn’t come to make a call. I came for a favor,” she hastened to assure the astonished Florence.

“You were very kind to us last night.” Florence tried to conceal her astonishment. “We will do what we can.”

[52]

“It is but a little thing. I wish to visit an island across the bay. It is not far. Half an hour’s row. I do not wish to go alone. Will you be so kind as to accompany me?”

“What a strange request!” Florence thought. “One would suppose that she feared something. And there is nothing to fear. The island channels are safe and the bay is calm.”

“I’d be delighted to go,” she said simply.

This did not express the exact truth. There was that about the simple request that frightened her. What made it worse, she had seen, as in a flash of thought, the two pistols hanging over the strange one’s bed.

“Very well,” said the mystery lady. “Get your coat. We will go at once.”

Since Florence knew that Petite Jeanne was not afraid to be alone as long as her bear was with her, she hurried to the cabin, told Jeanne of her intentions, drew on a warm sweater, and accompanied the strange visitor to her boat.

Without a word, the lady of the island pushed her slight craft off, then taking up her oars, headed toward the far side of the bay.

[53]

“What island?” Florence asked herself.

There were four islands; three small, one large. The nearest small one was not inhabited. She and Jeanne had gone there

once to enjoy their evening meal. There was a camping place in a narrow clearing at the center. The remainder of the island was heavily forested with birch and cedar.

On another small island was a single summer cottage, a rather large and pretentious affair with a dock and boathouse.

The large one, stretching away for miles in either direction, was dotted with summer homes.

The course of their boat soon suggested to her that they were to visit the small island that held the summer cottage. Yet, even as she reached this conclusion, she was given reasons for doubting it. Their course altered slightly. They were now headed for the end where the growth of cedar and birch reached to the water's edge and where there was no sign of life. The cottage was many hundred feet from this spot.

"When one visits a place by water at night, one goes to the dock," she told herself. "Where can we be going now?"

[54]

A rocky shoal extended for some little distance out from the point of the island. The light craft skirted this, then turned abruptly toward shore. A moment later it came to rest on a narrow, sandy beach.

"If you will please remain here for a very few moments," said the lady of the island, "I shall be very grateful to you. Probably nothing will happen. Still, one never can tell. Should you catch a sound of commotion, or perhaps a scream, row away as speedily as possible and notify Deputy Sheriff Osterman at Rainy Creek at once. If I fail to return within the next half hour, do the same."

"Why—er—"

Florence's answer died on her lips. The mysterious one was gone.

"Who is she? Why are we here? What does she wish to know?" These and a hundred other haunting questions sped through the girl's mind as she stood there alone in the dark, waiting, alert, expectant, on tiptoe, listening to the tantalizing lap-lap of water on the sandy shore.

[55]

A moment passed into eternity, another, and yet another. From somewhere far out over the dim-lit waters there came the haunting, long drawn hoot of a freighter's foghorn.

Something stirred in the bush. She jumped; then chided herself for her needless fear.

"Some chipmunk, or a prowling porcupine," she told herself.

A full quarter of an hour had passed. Her nerves were all but at the breaking point, when of a sudden, without a sound, the lady

of the island stood beside her.

“O. K.,” she said in a low tone. “Let’s go.”

They were some distance from the island when at last the lady spoke again.

“That,” she said in a very matter-of-fact tone, “is Gamblers’ Island. And I am a lady cop from Chicago.”

“A—a lady cop!” Florence stared at her as if she had never seen her before.

[56]

“A lady policeman,” the other replied quietly. “In other words, a detective. Women now take part in nearly every field of endeavor. Why not in this? They should. Men have found that there are certain branches of the detective service that naturally belong to women. We are answering the challenge.

“But listen!” She held up a hand for silence.

To their waiting ears came the sound of a haunting refrain. The sound came, not from the island they had just left, but from the other, the supposedly uninhabited one.

“They say—” into the lady’s voice there crept a whimsical note, “that this island was once owned by a miser. He disappeared years ago. His cabin burned long since. Perhaps he has returned from another world to thrum a harp, or it may be only a banjo. We must have a look!”

She turned the prow of her boat that way and rowed with strength and purpose in the direction from which the sound came.

[57]

CHAPTER VII

GYPSY MOON

As they neared the tiny island, the sound of banjo and singing grew louder. From time to time the music was punctuated by shouts and clapping of hands.

“Someone playing gypsy under the gypsy moon,” said the lady of the island, glancing at the golden orb that hung like a giant Chinese lantern in the sky.

Florence made no reply. She recalled the dark-skinned child she had surprised on the trail, but kept her thoughts to herself.

“There’s a tiny beach half way round to the left,” she suggested. “We were here not long ago.”

The boat swerved. Once more they moved on in silence.

To Florence there was something startling about this night’s happenings.

“Gamblers’ Island; a lady cop,” she whispered. “And now this.”

[58]

Once more their boat grounded silently. This time, instead of finding herself left behind, the girl felt a pull at her arm and saw a hand in the moonlight beckon her on.

From the spot where they had landed, a half trail, strewn with brush and overhung with bushes, led to the little clearing at the center of the island.

Florence and Jeanne had found this trail difficult in broad daylight. Yet her guide, with a sense of direction quite uncanny, led the way through the dark without a single audible swish of brush or crack of twig until, with breath coming quick and fast, Florence parted the branches of a low growing fir tree and found herself looking upon a scene of wild, bewitching beauty.

Round a glowing campfire were grouped a dozen people.

“Gypsies,” she told herself. “All French gypsies!” Her heart sank. Here was bad news indeed.

Or was it bad? “Perhaps,” she said to herself, “they are Jeanne’s friends.”

[59]

Whether the scene boded good or ill, it enthralled her. Two beautiful gypsies, garbed in scant attire, but waving colorful shawls about them as they whirled, were dancing before the fire. Two banjos and a mandolin kept time to the wild beating of their nimble feet.

Old men, women, and children hovered in the shadows. Florence had no difficulty in locating the child of the trail who had played with the chipmunk. She was now fast asleep in her mother's arms.

Florence's reaction to all this was definite, immediate. She disliked the immodest young dancers and the musicians. The children and the older ones appealed to her.

"They have hard faces, those dancers," she told herself. "They would stop at nothing."

Of a sudden a mad notion seized her. These were water gypsies who had deserted the caravan for a speed boat. They had seen Jeanne, had recognized her, and it had been their speed boat that had overturned the rowboat.

"But that," she told herself instantly, "is impossible. Such a speed boat costs two or three thousand dollars. How can a band of gypsies hope to own one?"

[60]

Nevertheless, when her strange companion, after once more pulling at her arm, had led her back to the beach, she found the notion in full possession of her mind.

Florence offered to row back to the mainland but as if by mistake she rowed the long way round the island. This gave her a view of the entire shore.

"No speed boat, nor any other motor craft on those shores," she assured herself after a quarter of an hour of anxious scanning. "Wonder how they travel, anyway."

Thereupon she headed for the distant shore which was, for the time being, their home.

Once again her mind was troubled. Should she tell Petite Jeanne of this, her latest discovery, or should she remain silent?

[61]

CHAPTER VIII

SUN-TAN TILLIE

Next day Florence made a new friend. Petite Jeanne wished to spend the morning, which was damp and a trifle chilly, among the cushions before the fire. Florence went for a ramble in the forest.

She took a path she had not followed before. These strange trails fascinated her. Some of them, she had been told, led on and on and on into vast, trackless slashings where one might be lost for days, and perhaps never return.

She had no notion of getting herself lost. By watching every fork in the trail, and noting the direction she had taken, she made sure of finding her way back.

She had been following this trail for half an hour when of a sudden a voice shattered the silence of the forest.

“Now, Turkey, do be careful!” It was a girl’s light pitched voice. “We’ve got to get them. You know we have.”

[62]

“But what if they ain’t here?” grumbled a boy’s voice.

“What can they be after?” Florence asked herself. “And who can they be, way back here in the forest where no one lives?”

She hesitated for a moment. Then, deciding to investigate, she pushed on.

She was not long in discovering that she had been mistaken on one count. She was not in the heart of the forest. The trees thinned. She found herself on the edge of a bay where bullrushes were thick. She had crossed a point of land and had come to water again.

Near the beach, in shallow water, a boy of twelve and a girl of sixteen were struggling with a minnow net.

The net was long and hard to handle. Weeds in the water hampered their progress. They had not seen Florence. The girl labored with the determined look of one who must not pause until her task is completed.

The boy was a plain towhead. There are a thousand such on the shores of the Upper Peninsula. The girl caught Florence’s attention. She was plump, well formed, muscular. Her body was as brown as an Indian’s. She possessed a wealth of golden red hair. A single garment covered her, a bathing suit which had once been green, but was now nearly white.

[63]

“Natives,” thought Florence. “But what are they after?”

Just then the girl looked up. She took Florence in from head to toe at a glance.

“Hello.” Her tone was frank, friendly.

“Hello,” Florence came back. “What’s your name?”

“Tillie—Tillie McFadden.” The girl flashed her charming Irish smile.

“Tillie!” exclaimed Florence. “Sun-Tan Tillie!”

The smile faded for a second, then returned. “Oh! You mean I’m brown. I’ve always been that way.”

“I know girls who’d give their best dresses for your color. They buy it in boxes, and put it on with a brush, in Chicago.”

[64]

The girl laughed. Then she looked at the net and frowned. “Now we lost ’em! Turkey, we’ve got to get ’em. There’s ten autos on the way.”

“What are you catching?” asked Florence.

“Minnies.”

“Oh, minnows? Not many here, are there?”

“No. That’s the trouble. Been trying for more than an hour. Pop, he runs a tourist camp. Turkey and I catch the bait. It’s tough sometimes.”

“Over across the point,” Florence replied quickly, “there are millions. I saw them half an hour ago. Water’s black with them.”

“Morton’s Bay.” Tillie’s face lighted. “Turkey, we got to go there. It’s quite a row, but that’s the only place.”

“Why don’t you bring the net across the point?” Florence asked. “Let your brother take the boat around. I’ll slip on my bathing suit and help you.”

“Would you?” Tillie smiled gratefully.

“I’d love to. Must be a lot of fun. All those minnows tickling your toes.”

[65]

“Might be fun for some,” said Tillie doubtfully.

“Turkey,” she commanded, “you bring the boat around.”

“Why do you call him Turkey?” Florence asked when they were in the forest.

“Turkey Trot. That’s his nickname. Boys called him that because they said he ran like a turkey. He don’t mind. Up here

everybody's got a nickname."

They said no more, but marched straight on over the woodland trail. Tillie was strong and fast. There was no questioning that. She was in a hurry, too. She led the way, and the city girl experienced difficulty in holding the pace.

She had dropped a little behind. Tillie was around a curve and out of sight, when of a sudden she heard a piercing scream. The next moment she beheld Tillie nimbly climbing a tree.

The cause was not far to seek. Despite her efforts at self control, she burst out laughing. Down the path came a big brown bear. The bear wore a leather collar set with mother-of-pearl.

[66]

When she could stop laughing she screamed to Tillie: "You don't have to be afraid of him. He's our pet bear, Tico."

But what was this? Tico, if Tico it be, marched straight at her. He showed all his teeth in an ugly snarl. Florence promptly followed Tillie up the tree. From this point of vantage she was able to make a more careful study of the bear and to discover that he was not Tico after all. He was not as large as Tico. His collar, though somewhat like Tico's, was utterly different in design.

"The final laugh is on me," she said, almost gayly.

"No," replied Tillie. "It's on me. There's a tourist party of ten autos coming to our camp. They'll be there in two hours. They've got to have bait. You can't catch minnies in a tree."

This, Florence admitted, was true. However, the bear did not keep them prisoners long. For, after all, he was someone's tame bear and had eaten his breakfast. After sniffing at Tillie's net and enjoying its fishy smell, he ambled off, leaving them to continue their journey, which they did at redoubled speed.

[67]

As they hurried down the trail, one thought occupied Florence's mind. "That bear," she told herself, "belongs to those gypsies. And he's nearer our camp right now than the gypsies have been." She was thinking once more of Petite Jeanne.

[68]

CHAPTER IX

BANGING A BEAR

Arrived at the cabin, Florence hurried into her bathing suit. All the time she was changing she was thinking: "I only hope those minnows are still there. Tillie promises to become an interesting friend. I do not wish to lose her by a false move now."

She need not have feared. The minnows were there still, flashing in the sunlight.

As Florence appeared with two large buckets, Tillie cried out in great delight. "We'll get enough for two days! Put the buckets on the beach. And please hurry!"

Florence followed her instructions, then seizing one end of the net, plunged after Tillie into the water.

"Like to fish?" Tillie asked, as she executed a deft curve with the net.

"Yes. Do you?"

"I love it!" Tillie's tone was full of meaning. "But there's so little time. There are boats to bail out, camping places to clean up, lines to mend, minnies to catch, and a lot more things. We're never through. Honest, I haven't had this suit off, except at night, for days."

[69]

Florence envied her. She adored the very tasks this girl had come to hate.

"There now!" exclaimed Tillie. "We've got 'em. Just swing your end in; then up with it."

The brown mesh of the net was all ashimmer with tiny, flapping fishes.

"Seems a shame," said Florence, as she helped scoop the minnows into one of the waiting buckets. "So many tiny lives snuffed out just for fun."

"They wouldn't ever get much bigger," said Tillie philosophically. "Pop says they're just naturally little fellows like some of the rest of us."

She set the bucket down. "We'll leave this one right here. We'll take the other one down a piece. We'll get one more haul. That'll be enough. Then Turkey'll be here."

Once more they dragged the net over the sandy shallows, circled, closed in, then lifted a multitude of little fishes from

[70]

the water.

The last wriggling minnow had gone flapping into the bucket, when suddenly Tillie straightened up with first a puzzled, then an angry look on her face.

Seizing a heavy driftwood pole that lay upon the beach, she dashed away over the sand.

To her horror, Florence saw that the strange bear, who had undoubtedly followed them, had just thrust his head into their other bucket of minnows.

“Bears like fish,” she thought. “Tillie will be killed!

“Tillie! Tillie!” she screamed. “Don’t! Don’t!”

She may as well have shouted at the wind. Tillie’s stout arms brought the club down twice on the bear’s head. Thwack! Thwack!

With a loud grunt, the bear turned about and vanished into the brush.

At the same instant Petite Jeanne appeared at the door. She had heard Florence scream.

[71]

“What happened?” she asked.

“A—a—something tried to steal our minnows,” Florence stammered. “I—I think it was a dog. Tillie, here, hit him.

“Oh! Tillie, meet my buddy, Petite Jeanne. She’s from France; an actress.”

“An actress!” Tillie stared at Jeanne as she might have looked at an angel. “I’ve heard of them,” she said simply.

“I thought,” Florence said in a low tone to Tillie, “that you were afraid of that bear.”

“Afraid—” Tillie scratched her head. “Yes, I am. But when I get good and mad, as Pop says, I’m not afraid of nobody nor nothin’.”

At that moment there came a loud whoop from the water. It was Turkey Trot.

“Got any?” he shouted.

“Plenty,” Tillie shrilled back.

The boat swung in. Tillie, with a bucket in each hand, waded out to it. The precious cargo was stowed safely aboard; then seizing the oars, with a good-bye and thank you, Tillie rowed rapidly away.

“She’s a dear!” exclaimed Florence. “We’re going to like her a lot.

[72]

“Think of living in a bathing suit, not as a pose, but as a mere matter of business!” she said to herself some time later. “What a life that must be!

“Jeanne won’t know about that bear,” she resolved a moment later. “She must not know about those gypsies. It would disturb her. And she must rest; must not be disturbed in any way. Believe me, this being a ‘mother’ to a budding actress is no snap. But it’s lots of fun, all the same!”

[73]

CHAPTER X

A GASP IN THE DARK

That evening Florence, reposing on an affair of white birch and pillows that was half chair and half couch, lived for a time in both the past and the future.

Once more beneath the moon she battled her way toward the mystery cabin on the island. Again she stood looking at its strange interior and its puzzling tenant.

With a vividness that was all but real, she saw the gleam of black waters as they neared Gamblers' Island.

"Gamblers' Island," she mused. "A lady cop. What is one to make of all that?"

"And the gypsies? How did they come to that island? Can it be that they truly have a speed boat? Did they run us down? Or was it the young people at the millionaire's cabin, and Green Eyes?"

"Perhaps neither. It may be that the lady cop is right; that someone meant to run her down instead. But who could it be?"

[74]

A thought came to her. That day she had seen a speed boat leave Gamblers' Island. Might there not be reason enough for the gamblers wishing to run down the mystery lady?

"A lady cop. What could be more natural? Gamblers fear detectives.

"But are there gamblers on that island?" Once more she was up against a stone wall. She knew nothing of those who lived on the island. She wished that the lady cop were more communicative.

"Perhaps she will tell me much in time."

Only one thing stood out clearly. In so far as was possible, Petite Jeanne must be protected from all these uncertainties and strange doings. She must have peace and rest. Great opportunity lay just before her. She must be prepared for it.

As if reading her thoughts, Jeanne suddenly sprang to her feet.

"I wish," she exclaimed, "that I might practice my part back there in the forest in the moonlight. It would help to make it real."

[75]

"Well, why not?" Florence rose.

"Why not, indeed?" Jeanne danced across the floor.

“Come, Tico!” she called, as she danced out of her bathrobe and into a gaudy gypsy costume. “To-night there is work to be done.”

Florence knew that it required real courage for Jeanne to take this step. She was afraid of dark places at night.

“And what is more spooky than a woodland trail at night?” she asked herself.

Her admiration for the little French girl grew. “She has real grit,” she told herself. “She means to succeed; she will do anything that will aid in making success possible.

“And she will succeed! She must!”

By the gleam of a small flashlight, they made their way, now between tall cedars that stood like sentinels beside their path, and now beneath broad fir trees that in the night seemed dark Indian wigwams.

They crossed a narrow clearing where the vacant windows of an abandoned homesteader shanty stared at them. They entered the forest again, to find it darker than before. The moon had gone under a black cloud.

[76]

“Boo!” shuddered Jeanne. “How quite terrible it all is!”

Tico rubbed against her. He appeared to understand.

When at last they came to the little grass-grown spot where Jeanne was accustomed to do her bit of acting, the moon was out again, the grass glowed soft and green, and the whole setting seemed quite jolly as Tico playfully chased a rabbit into a clump of balsams.

“It is charming,” said Jeanne, clapping her hands. “Now I shall dance as I have never danced before.”

And she did.

Florence, who had witnessed the whole drama as it was played on the stage, dropped to a tuft of green that lay in the shadowy path, and allowed herself to enter fully into the scene as it would be enacted on that memorable night when the little French girl should make her first appearance before an American audience.

[77]

“It is night on a battlefield of France,” she whispered to herself. “The wounded and dead have been carried away. Only broken rifles and two shattered cannon are to be seen. Petite Jeanne is alone with it all.

“Jeanne is a blonde-haired gypsy. Until this moment she has cherished a great hope. Now she has learned that the hope is groundless. More than that, she believes that her gypsy lover

has perished in this day's battle.

"The depth of her sorrow is immeasurable. One fact alone brings her comfort. She has still her pet bear and her art, the art of dancing.

"On this lonely battlefield, with the golden moon beaming down upon her, she begins to do the rhythmic dance of the gypsy."

Even as she came to this part of the drama's story, Jeanne and the bear began to dance.

"It is exquisite!" she whispered softly. "The moonlight has got into her very blood. If only, on that great night, she can feel the thing as she does to-night!"

[78]

She did not say more. She did not even think any more. She watched with parted lips as the slender girl, appearing to turn into an elf, went gliding across the green.

The dance was all but at an end when suddenly, without warning, the big girl was given a shock that set her blood running cold.

A twig snapped directly behind her. It was followed by an audible gasp.

At such a time, in such a place, carried away as she had been by the dramatic picture spread out before her, nothing could have startled her more.

Yet she must act. She was Jeanne's defender. Strangers were here in the night. Who? Gypsies? Gamblers? Indians?

She sprang to her feet and whirled about to stare down the trail.

"No one," she whispered.

The dance was at an end. Jeanne threw herself upon the ground, exhausted but apparently quite unafraid.

"She did not hear. I must not frighten her. She may never know." Florence walked slowly toward her companion.

[79]

"Come," she said quietly. "It is damp here; not a safe place to rest. We must go."

Jeanne rose wearily to follow her.

Strangely enough, as they made their way back over the trail they came upon no sign that anyone had been there besides themselves.

Stranger still, Florence and Jeanne were to hear of that gasp

weeks later, and in a place far, far away. Of such weird miracles are some lives made.

CHAPTER XI

A SECRET BEGUN

Next day it rained. And how it did rain! The lake was a gray mass of spattered suds. The trees wept.

Petite Jeanne was quite content. She had started to read a long French novel. There was a box of bonbons by her side, and plenty of wood for the fire.

“It does not matter.” She shrugged her shoulders. “To-morrow the sun will shine again.” At that she lost herself in her book.

Florence enjoyed reading. Sometimes. But never in the north woods. Each day, every day, the woods and water called to her. She endured inaction until lunch time had come and gone. Then she drew on her red raincoat and announced her intention of going fishing.

“In the rain!” Jeanne arched her brows, then shuddered. “Such a cold rain.”

“It’s the best time, especially for bass. Rain spatters the water. They can’t see you, so they take your bait.”

[81]

She drew a pair of men’s hip boots up over her shoes and knickers, donned a black waterproof hat, and, so attired, sallied forth to fish.

“The sprinkle box is a good place,” she told herself.

John Kingfisher, an Indian, had told her of the sprinkle box. The sprinkle box belonged to a past age for that country; the age of logging. To keep trails smooth, that huge loads of logs might glide easily to the water’s edge, trails in those days had been sprinkled from a large tank, or box, on a sled. The water from the box froze on the trail. This made the sleds move easily.

When an anchorage for a very large raft had been needed one spring, a sprinkle box had been filled with rocks and had been sunk in the bay.

Since water preserves wood, the box remains to-day, at the bottom of the bay, as it was twenty years ago.

“You find it by lining a big poplar tree on shore with a boathouse on the next point,” the Indian had told her. On a quiet day she had found it. She had seen, too, that some big black bass were lurking there.

[82]

They would not bite; seemed, indeed, to turn up their noses at her offering. “You wait. I’ll get you yet!” She had shaken a fist

at them.

So now, with the rain beating a tattoo on her raincoat, she rowed away and at last dropped her line close to the submerged sprinkle box.

Fish are strange creatures. You may make a date with them, but you never can be sure of finding them at home at the appointed hour. A rainy day is a good day for fishing. Sometimes. The fish of the ancient sprinkle box very evidently were not at home on this rainy day. Florence fished for two solid hours. Never a bite. She tried all the tricks she knew. Never a nibble.

She was rolling in her line preparatory to returning home, when, on the little dock on Mystery Island that led to the lady cop's abode, she spied a solitary figure. This figure was garbed from head to toe in rubber hat and slicker. Like some dark scarecrow, it put out a hand and beckoned.

[83]

"The lady cop!" Florence caught her breath. "What adventure now?"

She welcomed this promised innovation for a rainy day. A few strong pulls at the oars and she was beside the dock.

"Come up," said the lady cop, giving her a hand. "Come in. I must talk."

"Talk!" The girl's heart leaped. "Talk. The lady cop is about to talk. What will she tell?" She followed gladly enough.

When the bar was down at the door and they had found seats before the fire, she glanced about the room. Everything was just as it had been on that other occasion. The furnishings were meager; a sort of bed-couch, a rustic table, some chairs, a fireplace. No stove. And on the walls, still those two objects, the automatic pistols. But these did not seem so strange now.

"I live here," the young lady began, "because this place fits my purpose. I must not be known to many. I have told you a little. No other living soul in this community knows as much about me."

[84]

"And even I do not know your name," Florence suggested quietly.

"A name. That means little in the world of crime and police. The criminal takes a new name when it suits his purpose. So does a detective. For the moment I am Miss Weightman." She smiled. "I am not at liberty for the present to tell you whether or not that is my true name. And it really does not matter."

For a time after that she stared moodily at the fire. Florence respected her very evident desire for silence.

When at last the lady cop spoke, it was in a tone deep and full

of meaning. “There are days,” she began, “when silence is welcome, when it is a joy to be alone. Sunshine, shadowy paths, gleaming waters, golden sunsets. You know what I mean.

“But on a dreary day of rain and fog, of leaden skies, dripping trees and dull gray waters, one needs a friend.”

[85]

Florence nodded.

“If you were to be a detective, a lady detective,” Miss Weightman asked quite abruptly, “what sort would you wish to be, the sort that stays about courts, prisons and parks, looking after women and children, or one who goes out and tracks down really dangerous wrongdoers?”

“I’d want to go after the bad ones.” Florence squared her shoulders.

“Of course you would,” her hostess approved. “I’m after a dangerous one now, a man who is known from Maine to Florida, from Chicago to San Francisco. And he’s up here right now.”

The last declaration burst upon the girl with the force of a bombshell.

“In—in a quiet place like this!” She could not believe her ears.

“It’s a way crooks have of doing,” the other explained. “When they have committed a particularly dangerous crime, or are in possession of stolen goods difficult to dispose of, when the police are after them, they hide out in some quiet place where you’d least expect to find them.

[86]

“Besides,” she added, “this location is particularly advantageous. The Canadian border is not far away. In a speed boat, it is but a matter of an hour or two, and you are over the line. He has a speed boat. He has some young men with him. Perhaps they are his sons. Who knows?”

“But this—” she checked herself. “This is starting at the wrong end of my story. It can do no harm for you to know the facts from the beginning. I need not pledge you to secrecy. Through my work I have learned to judge character fairly accurately.”

“Thanks!” said Florence, charmed by this compliment from so strange a hostess.

[87]

CHAPTER XII

THREE RUBIES

“Life,” said the lady cop, as the toe of her shoe traced odd patterns in the ashes before the fire, “at times seems very strange. We are born with certain impulses. They are with us when we enter the world. They are in us, a part of our very being. There is in these very impulses the power to make or break us.

“One of these impulses sometimes takes the form of a vague longing. We do not always understand it. We want something. But what do we want? This we cannot tell.

“As this longing takes form, many times it discloses itself as a desire for change. We feel an impulse that drives us on. We wish to go, go, go. For most of us, extensive travel is impossible. We have our homes, our friends, our duties. We do not wander as the Indians and the Eskimos do. Spring, with its showers and budding trees, beckons to us in vain. So, too, does the bright, golden autumn.

[88]

“But, after all, what is at the back of all this longing but a desire to take a chance? The savage, roving from place to place, wagers his very life upon his ability to procure food in the strange land in which he wanders.

“So we, too, at times, feel a desire to make wagers with life. But we are city-dwellers, living in homes. No matter. We must take a chance.

“No more wholesome impulse can be found in a human soul than this. Without this impulse implanted in a human heart, the New World would never have been known. Man would still be dressing in skins, living in caves, and retiring to his rest by the light of a tallow dip.

“The desire to take a chance is in every heart. No one knows this better than does the professional gambler. He seizes upon this impulse, invites it to act, and reaps a rich harvest.”

She paused to throw fresh fuel upon the fire. There was dry birch bark in it. It flamed up at once. As the light illumined her intense face and caused her eyes to glow, she said with startling suddenness:

[89]

“Somewhere there are three priceless rubies. I must find them!”

Florence sat up quite suddenly and stared at her.

“Three—three rubies!” she exclaimed. Not the words, but the manner in which they had been spoken, had startled her.

“Three large rubies set in a manner so unique as to make the whole affair well nigh priceless,” the lady cop went on quietly.

“You see,” she said, leaning toward Florence, “the thing is Oriental in its design and workmanship. In fact it came from Japan. They are clever, those little Japs. This bit of jewelry is very old. Perhaps it once graced an Empress’s olive brow, or was worn by a priest of some long lost religion.

“Yes,” she mused, “it is priceless; and these gamblers have it.”

Once more she paused to stare at the fire.

[90]

“Do you know,” she said at last, “that the finest impulses in life often lead to ruin? Take that one desire for change, for risking something we hold dear for some other thing that lies beyond us. If it is not properly directed, it may ruin us.

“No habit ever formed is so hard to break as the habit of gambling; not even the habit of excessive drinking. Go ask some man who has battled both habits after each has become his master. He will tell you.

“And yet, in our cities to-day, boys and girls, some of them in their early teens, are frequenting the worst type of gambling houses and risking all: money, jewels, their very honor, on the turn of a wheel, the flip of a card.

“Strangest of all, they allow some crooked scoundrel to spin the wheel or flip the card.

“There was a girl,” she stared hard at the fire, “a very beautiful girl, from a rich and cultured family, who gambled once and lost. To-day, in her own sight at least, she stands disgraced.

“And because I know her, because she is kind and good in spite of her father’s wealth, I am striving to help her. For, after all, what matters most in life is our own estimation of ourselves. If you feel that your life is ruined, that you face everlasting disgrace, what does it matter that the world bows, or even applauds? It is the judgment handed down from the throne of one’s own soul that counts most of all.

[91]

“This girl—she is hardly sixteen, a mere slip of a thing with wistful blue eyes—as I said, belongs to a rich family. They have a cottage up here on this very bay, I am told, and she is here now. Yet I have not seen her. She does not know I am pulling for her, that I have resolved to retrieve that priceless trinket and return it to her.

“Life is often that way. While we work, or play, even as we sleep, there are those in the world who are thinking of us, striving to help us, acting the part of fairy godmothers to us. Is it not wonderful?”

“But these rubies?” Florence asked in a puzzled tone. “If those

[92]

people are so very rich, cannot they forgive the loss of one valuable plaything? And did it not belong to the girl, after all?"

"No," replied Miss Weightman, "it did not belong to the girl. There's the rub. And you misjudge rich people if you think they do not prize their least possessions. Perhaps they prize them more than do the poor or the moderately rich. That is why they are rich. Their bump of ownership is well developed. Their hands and hearts were shaped to grasp and hold. At times this grows into selfish greed and thousands of poor people suffer for it.

"The three rubies, set in the strangest manner, were part of a rare collection gathered from the corners of the earth only after years of search. It is little wonder that the owner was indignant when it was broken into.

"The collection was in the girl's home. She had access to it. In a moment of bravado, at her chum's suggestion, she slipped about her neck a chain, to which the jewels were attached by a sort of pendant.

"Some other fancy seized her and she promptly forgot the jewels still gleaming at her throat. A telephone rang. She answered it, consented to join a party of her school friends, and was whirled away into one of those wild nights that too often end in disaster.

[93]

"The gambling place they entered was Oriental. At least those who appeared to run it were Japanese men. Back of them was an American, a professional gambler."

She paused.

"Last night I saw that man."

"On—on that island!" Florence stared.

"I am sure he is the man. But I want him less than the jewels. I am not on duty. This is my vacation. I am doing this on my own time."

"Why?"

"Desire for a professional triumph, perhaps. Besides, as I said, I like the girl."

"Getting back to that night," the lady cop went on after a pause, "the place that girl and her friends entered was one of those that are quite typical in some big cities. Secret passages, peculiar knock, and all that. And then bright lights, whirling wheels, gleaming balls. All dazzling, and dangerous.

[94]

"The little girl gambled with the rest. She won. The narrow eyes of an Oriental had spied that priceless pendant. He knew its value; resolved to play for it.

“For a long time the girl won. Her pockets bulged with money. Her companions applauded. She would break the bank. Her eyes shone. Her cheeks were flushed. Her hands trembled as she placed her wagers.

“But she didn’t break the bank.” The lady cop sighed as she stared at the dying fire. “They never do, except in cheap fiction. Instead, she began to lose. She lost rapidly. Soon all her money was gone. Still the mad gambling craze was upon her. She borrowed and lost again. She offered her I.O.U. It was accepted. Once more she lost.

“At last she gave up in despair. Then the Oriental’s eyes became mere slits as he demanded:

“‘Pay.’

“‘But how am I to pay?’ she asked in despair.

[95]

“His slim brown finger pointed to the three rubies that gleamed like three red eyes at her throat.

“It was the first time she had thought of them for hours. Scarcely knowing what she did, she unhooked the chain and left the rubies as a pledge.

“There were other places to visit. There was dancing far into the night.

“She awoke at ten o’clock the next morning with a sense of guilt and fear. She thought of the pendant.

“In horror, she phoned her friends. They promised to go to the place and redeem the pledge.

“There was no longer such a place. In the night the gamblers had folded their tents like the Arabs and silently stolen away. They were in possession of a priceless bauble. They would make the most of it.

“That,” she concluded, “was the last seen of the three rubies in their Oriental setting. Where are they now? A reward was offered for their return. No answer. The police and highly paid private detectives have been on the trail. They have found nothing. Only last night I saw the man I suspect. I must make the most of a great opportunity. I must return the jewels. Then I will get that man!”

[96]

Those words sounded strange, coming as they did from a woman’s lips. Yet, as Florence looked into those flaming eyes she did not doubt that the lady cop would make good.

“But how?” she asked herself. “How?” She was destined to ask that question many times in the days that were to come.

Miss Weightman threw fresh fuel on the fire and hung a pot of

water over it to boil. Soon they were sipping tea and munching strangely delicious biscuits.

As they sat listening to the steady beat of the rain on the skylight of that mysterious cabin, Florence allowed her eyes to wander from corner to corner of the place as she speculated upon the possible motives that might induce one to erect such a home.

“May belong to old Indian days,” she told herself. “Or, since we are near the border, it may have been a smuggler’s cabin.”

[97]

Neither of these solutions satisfied her. She was about to ask the lady cop what she knew concerning its history, when she heard the sound of a voice, rising above the storm.

“Rollin’ along. Just rollin’ along.” It was the voice of a girl. “Just rollin’ along. Just singin’ a song.”

“That,” said Florence, “is Sun-Tan Tillie.”

“And who is Sun-Tan Tillie?” asked her hostess with evident interest.

“She is Turkey Trot’s sister.”

“And who is Turkey Trot?” The young lady seemed amused.

“They are native people here—run a tourist camp; rent boats; catch minnows, and all that. Tillie’s a dear.”

“What is she doing in the rain?”

“I’ll ask her.” Springing to the door, she threw it open.

“Yoo-hoo!” she shouted. “Yoo-hoo! Tillie! What are you doing?”

“Just rollin’ along,” Tillie came back with a laugh.

[98]

That expressed it. She was out rowing in the rain. To her inevitable bathing suit had been added a yellow slicker and a black rubber hat.

“Tell her to come in and get warm,” said Miss Weightman, joining Florence at the door.

Florence obeyed instructions. Tillie acquiesced readily, so the three of them might soon have been seen sitting before the fire.

They had not talked long before Florence discovered the motive behind the lady cop’s interest in Tillie.

Tillie had lived here all her life. She knew every nook and cranny of the islands, points and bays. More than that, she knew a great deal about the inhabitants of Gamblers’ Island and Erie

Point. It was plain to see that this information was given out freely enough, and would prove of great service to the lady cop in her future movements.

But Miss Weightman was not, as you may have learned, a totally selfish person. A friendship to her was never one-sided.

[99]

There was born in that strange cabin, on that rainy afternoon, a loyal little club of three friends: the lady cop, Florence and Tillie, which was to lead to many a secret meeting, for the most part in this very cabin, and many an undertaking which in the end was to result in benefit to all.

[100]

CHAPTER XIII

CHARMED DAYS

For Florence, the days that followed were filled with glorious adventure. The wind, the sun, the forest and the water of that north country have moods for every hour. Florence, the strong, healthy, joyous child of nature, had a mood to match each change.

There were days when sky and water were gray, and the forest full of shadows. At such times Florence wandered far into the forest's depths to sit and wonder about many things. What was this world she lived in? Who had created it? What were these creatures called human beings that had been allowed to wander for a time upon its surface? Why were they not like horses and dogs and monkeys? Or were they very different from these, after all?

"Yes, yes!" she would cry out to the trees that appeared to ask the questions. "They are different! They think! Think! Do you think, you trees? Do you think?" she would demand of a whisking chipmunk. The answer never came except in that still small voice that was never far away. That voice whispered, "Only men think."

[101]

When the sky cleared and the waters sparkled, she was another person. No problems came to her then. Enough that she was alive; that all the world lay spread out before her. Then all her being called for action.

And to Florence, as long as water was near, action meant oars and a boat. To her the very touch of an oar, the lift and fall of a tossing wave, imparted a magic charm. Her splendid muscles responded to the touch of water on the tips of her oars as the robin responds to the first beam of the morning sun.

Oars, a boat, and away. Sometimes they entered little land-locked bays where spotted perch lay fanning the water among the pike weed. Again, they sought out a great submerged rock, beneath whose shadows the black bass lurked.

Often, too, they left rod and reel untouched to watch a mother duck and her young busy themselves at the task of gathering the day's supply of young frogs, bugs and snails.

[102]

There were wild, windy days, too, that seemed to shout at the wanton spirit of youth that was hers. This seemed always a challenge. Leaving Petite Jeanne to sit by the fire and dream of her beloved France, she would push her frail craft off from the shore to battle winds, waves and foam for hours on end.

As the wind rose and screamed at her, she would turn her face to it, let her hair fly wildly out, and scream back in wild

defiance.

At such times as these, it seemed to her that she must have lived before, that for years on end she had battled winds and waves.

There are those who believe that we live our lives many times; that in some new form we return to earth to face life's problems anew. Florence knew of this belief. As she battled the elements, it pleased her to assume the role of a Norseman's bride. In fancy, riding at the head of some sturdy crew, she faced the battling waves of the fierce Atlantic and entered dark caves at night, to sit by a great roaring fire munching hard bread and venison roasted over the coals.

[103]

Florence Huyler's love of nature amounted almost to a religion. And who will say that she might not have found a less desirable subject for devotion?

What is sweeter and finer than the heart of the forest, what purer than the soul of a crested wave?

For Petite Jeanne, too, woods and water held a great charm. Only her manner of responding to it differed. She lay for hours on the warm, sandy beach beneath a great umbrella, half asleep, dreaming. She, too, wandered in the forest. From these wanderings she returned in a pensive mood. These trees, these winding paths, reminded her of the forests of France. They whispered all too loudly of many happy days spent on the edge of those forests with the gypsies.

On a certain day Florence learned in a forceful manner just what the little French girl's feelings were toward the strange people of her adoption. They were rowing past the end of a private dock which extended some distance into the waters of the bay, when Petite Jeanne suddenly cried out:

[104]

"Oh look! Look! Stop! Let me read it!"

Florence looked in the direction indicated, then stared at her in astonishment. She saw before her only a large post, part of the dock, which rose some three feet above the water. On the post was no note, sign or any other manner of writing that might be read.

Yet Petite Jeanne seized an oar to turn them about and bring their boat up close to the post.

Then for the first time Florence saw what had attracted her companion's attention—three twigs pinned together by a small nail and fastened securely to the post.

To the uninitiated this would have seemed the work of a playful child. To Jeanne it spoke volumes. Even Florence understood enough of its meaning to cause her worry.

“Now she will know,” she whispered to herself.

The three sticks were a gypsy “patteran,” a part of the sign language left by these wandering people at every crossroad.

[105]

“See!” exclaimed Jeanne. “There are gypsies about. And oh! they are French gypsies!” She clapped her hands. “Only in France do they make a patteran like that.

“See! I will read it. They say they are three; a man, a woman and a little girl. They have gone up the bay and will stay tonight at a small island.”

Florence marveled that so much could be told by three crossed sticks. Still, she did not doubt the French girl’s reading.

Yet more astonishing was Jeanne’s attitude toward the whole matter. She appeared bubbling over with joy. Such a smile illumined her face as had not been there for weeks.

“But, Jeanne,” said Florence, “do you not fear the gypsies? Once you were kidnapped and nearly killed by them.”

“Oh—” Jeanne spread her hands, then pretended to blow a feather from her fingers. “That is all long ago. In spirit I am still a gypsy. And the gypsies live, not for the past, not for tomorrow, but for this day only. This day is quite enough.

[106]

“Besides,” she added after a moment, “I do not know fear as many do. Gypsies are not afraid. They love life so much that danger, even death itself, is forgotten. See! I must tell you a story; then you will understand.”

[107]

CHAPTER XIV

THE DANCE OF DEATH

“In France, at one time,” Jeanne began, as she settled back in her place and Florence rested on her oars, “the gypsies were treated as outlaws. They were hunted from province to province. Many were hanged on trees. Perhaps—” She shrugged her shoulders. “Perhaps this was their own fault. They may have behaved badly.

“All this did not rob them of their love for life. They danced and sang all the same.

“Sometimes they had rifles and bullets. One time they had none. A company of soldiers were stealing upon them through the forest. They were expected at midnight, when a young man, Bratu Vaicu, who was in love with the old chief’s daughter, said to him:

“‘This is the time Tinka promised to marry me.’

“‘Spoken like a brave gypsy!’ exclaimed the chief. ‘Let the wedding go on.’

[108]

“Danger meant nothing to these gypsies when a bridal feast and a dance were at hand. They kindled fires. The women prepared the feast.

“Stan and Marga decided to be married, too. Two other couples joined them. Four couples, four weddings in all. What a night of joy for a gypsy camp!

“They cleared a space among the trees. Old Radu took down his fiddle. He began to sing. They all started dancing, doing the tarantella, the most beautiful dance in the world.”

“Yes, the most beautiful,” Florence agreed.

“Shots sounded in the distance,” Jeanne went on, in a tone that was musical, dramatic. “The shots did not disturb the gypsies. Bullets meant death. But what was death? Were they not living now as they had never lived before?

“The dance grew wilder. Shots came closer. Bullets whizzed by. Still they danced.

“A soldier peered through the branches. He expected to see grim faces and muzzles of rifles. Instead, he saw laughing eyes and flashing heels. What did it mean? He did not understand.

[109]

“He was joined by another, another, and yet another. A beautiful gypsy girl saw them. She seized one soldier and drew him into the dance. Others followed. Soon all the soldiers were

dancing.

“Morning found the soldiers without swords or rifles. Who cared? They had found true happiness. They would join the gypsies. And they did.

“So you see,” Jeanne ended with a sigh, “by their very love of life, their disregard for danger and death, they won more abundant life. But surely you can see, too, that gypsies are not really afraid.

“Neither am I. If there are gypsies from France in these forests, I wish to see them, to speak their language, to hear them speak my own beloved tongue. In this strange land we have a bond of brotherhood.”

“So that is the way she feels about it!” Florence thought in some surprise. “Then I must find her some gypsies.”

[110]

She did find them, and that very soon—the same three who had left their patteran on the dock post. She lost them, too, only to be found by them long weeks afterward under the most unusual circumstances.

In the meantime, there was the rowboat and water that was like glass. She rowed on and on down the bay until the cottages, the store, the ancient sawmill, the dock, were all but specks in the distance. Then, with a fir tree on a point as her guide, she rowed straight for their cabin.

They ate their lunch on the beach that evening. Then Jeanne went for a stroll along the shore.

Florence pushed her boat out into the bay and rowed toward the open lake. She loved this spot. No small lake could have so won her affection. Here in this land-locked bay she was always safe from storms. Yet, just beyond, through the gap between two points of land, she could see Lake Huron. “Makes you feel that you are part of something tremendous,” she had said to Tillie, once. And Tillie had understood.

[111]

Now she dropped her oars and sat there alone, watching the light fade from the sky while “some artist Saint spilled his paint adown the western sky.”

She was glad to be alone. She wished to think. Jeanne had a disturbing way of reading one’s thoughts, or very nearly reading them, that was uncanny. It was of Jeanne, in part, that she wished to think.

“It is positively weird,” she told herself, “the way exciting happenings keep bobbing up in this quiet place. Just when I think those gypsies have left these parts and Jeanne is free from any harm they might do her, she discovers that patteran and gets excited about it.”

She had not expected Jeanne to be so anxious to see the gypsies. Now she was in a quandary. Should she attempt to find the gypsies and bring them to Jeanne? She did not doubt that this could be done.

“Their camp is just over there,” she told herself, nodding toward the little island that lay across the bay. “But if I find them, if they meet Jeanne face to face, what then?”

[112]

Who could answer this question? Certainly it was beyond her. There were times when she felt certain that this gypsy band had come to America for the purpose of revenge; that they had somehow secured possession of a speed boat, had perhaps stolen it, and that it had been they who tipped over the rowboat and had come near drowning Jeanne on that other night.

Just now she was not so sure of this. “If they stole a speed boat they would not dare remain so long in one place,” she thought. “But, after all, what other motive can they have for remaining in this vicinity?” What, indeed? They were not to be seen at the village, nor along the shore selling baskets and telling fortunes as gypsies are accustomed to do. Yet they did not go away.

“If they did not run us down, who did?” she asked herself for the hundredth time. She all but hated herself for clinging so tenaciously to this question.

[113]

She thought of the rich people who lived on Erie Point. At first she had blamed them for the near catastrophe—had thought of it as a cruel prank. The lady cop’s opinion of rich young people had cast a deep shadow upon this theory. Still she had not wholly abandoned it.

Then, of course, there were the people on Gamblers’ Island. The lady cop had said she believed someone had mistaken their boat for hers. “That would mean that they know she is after them, and they wish to destroy her,” she reasoned. “And yet she hides from them as if they knew nothing about her. It’s all very puzzling.”

She recalled her latest visit to the lady cop’s cabin. They had been seated by the lady cop’s fire when Tillie said, “O-oo! How thrilling to be the friend of a lady detective!”

“It may be thrilling,” Miss Weightman had replied, “but you must not forget that it is dangerous, too.”

“Dangerous!” Tillie had stared.

“The crook, the lawbreaker is sought by the detective,” the lady cop had continued soberly. “Too often the tables are turned. The detective is hunted by the crook. There is an age-long war between the law and the breakers of the law.”

[114]

“Such peril,” Florence assured herself now, “should be welcomed by every right-minded person. If being a friend to

justice and to those who uphold the arm of the law puts one in danger, then welcome, oh you danger!”

All the while she was thinking these problems through, she was conscious of a drumming sound beating in upon her senses. Now it suddenly grew into a roar.

“Another speed boat. And I am alone, far out at sea,” she thought to herself in sudden consternation as, gripping the sides of her boat, she braced herself for a sudden shock.

The shock did not come. Instead the put-put-put of a motor ceased and, ten seconds later, the strangest craft Florence had ever seen glided up beside her boat. She stared at it in amazement. The thing was not one quarter the size of her rowboat; yet it boasted an outboard motor capable of handling a twenty foot boat. It had no keel. The prow was flat as a surfboard. There was one seat, large enough for a single person. In that seat reposed a grinning boy of some eighteen summers.

[115]

“What is it?” The question escaped her lips unbidden.

“Name’s ‘Spank Me Again.’” The boy’s grin broadened.

“But what is it?” she persisted.

“Guess.”

“I can’t.” She was beginning to feel amused. “It makes a noise like an airplane. But it has no wings. Looks like a surfboat. But surfboats don’t have their own power. It can’t be a boat because it has no keel. I guess it’s a what’s-it.”

“Correct,” laughed the boy. “And I’m a who’s-it. I’m Bradford Erie. My dad’s frightfully rich, so I have to have this thing to advertise.”

“Advertise?” Florence was puzzled.

“To advertise the fact that I’m just like everybody else. People think rich folks are not. But they are. How could they be different, even if they wanted to? They eat and sleep, drink, fish, play, fight and go to school if they are boys. And what does anyone else do? Exactly the same.”

[116]

“I think I could like that boy,” Florence thought to herself.

She said to him in a mocking tone, “It must be truly dreadful to be rich.”

“Oh! it is!

“Want a tow back?” He changed the subject.

“That might be thrilling, and perhaps a trifle dangerous.”

“I won’t dump you out. I’m no rotter. Give me a try.”

She gave him a try. It was indeed a thrilling ride. His boat cut the foam as it leaped from side to side. She got some spray in her face, and was home before she knew it.

“With that boy at the wheel,” she told herself, after thanking him and bidding him good-night, “no speed boat would run down a humbler craft. But then, perhaps he only mans the ‘Spank Me Again.’”

[117]

“That thing will be the death of him,” she said, as she finished telling Jeanne of this little adventure. “It will turn over when it’s going at full speed. The motor will take it to the bottom, and him with it.” Little she knew how nearly a true prophetess she was.

That evening Florence sat for some time before the fire. She was trying to read the future by the pictures in the flames. The pictures were dim and distorted. She read little there. But often the smiling face of the “poor little rich boy,” who found it necessary to advertise the fact that he was just like other folks, danced and faded in the flames.

“He’s a real sport,” she told herself. “I hope we meet again.”

Strangely enough, with this wish came the conviction that they would meet again, that his life and her life, the life of Tillie, of Jeanne, and of the lady cop, were inseparably linked together.

“But after all,” she told herself skeptically, “this, too, may be but a dream of the passing flames.”

[118]

[119]

CHAPTER XV

FISHING AND FIGHTING

“Do you want to catch some fish, some real big black bass?”
Tillie’s face shone, as she shouted this to Florence.

Did she? The supreme thrill of a born fisherman, that which comes from seeing one’s line shoot out sweet and clean, telling of a bass on the hook, had come to her but three times in all her young life.

“Do I!” She seized Tillie and gave her an impulsive hug. “Lead on!”

“It’s a long way out. Two miles; maybe more.”

“What’s two miles?” Florence tightened the muscles of her right arm till they were hard as stone.

“We’ll go,” said Tillie. “I saw them yesterday; three big black bass. And were they black! And big! Long as your arm. Anyway, half. They all marched out to see my minnie, like three churchmen in black robes. They looked, then turned up their noses and marched right back into the weeds.”

[120]

“But now!” Her eyes shone in triumph. “I got crawdads (soft-shell crawfish). Five of them. And do they like ’em! You’ll see!”

Half an hour later, in Florence’s clinker-built rowboat, their two pairs of bronzed arms flashing in perfect unison as they plied four stout ash oars, they glided down the bay toward Gull Rock Point.

A second half hour had not elapsed before they were silently drifting toward the edge of a weed bed that ran along a narrow point.

“It’s right there before us,” Tillie said in a low tone. “You can see the bullrushes. You can’t see the pikeweed, only a top sticking up here and there. The pikeweed’s got wide leaves and stands thick on the bottom like a forest. Fish hide there just as wolves and bears do in the woods.

“Here’s the spot.” She dropped her anchor without the slightest splash.

“You catch ’em by the back,” she whispered, seizing a crawfish. “So they can’t pinch you, you hook ’em through the tail. Then you spit on ’em. That’s for luck.”

[121]

When she had performed all these ceremonies, she tossed her crawfish far out toward the edge of the weed bed.

“Now for yours.” She adjusted Florence’s struggling crab, then sent him off at another angle from the boat.

After that she jammed her boy’s cap down over one eye, squinted at the water with the other, and sat quietly down to wait.

A moment passed into eternity; another, and yet another. Five minutes, ten, fifteen. The water lapped and gurgled about the boat. A slight breeze set the bullrushes murmuring. A great, green dragon fly came bobbing along over the water. A sea gull soared aloft, but uttered never a sound. From his point of vantage, what did he see? Two girls fishing. Quite true. But what of the fish? Were those three bass lying among the weeds? Had they seen the crawfish?

It was Tillie who first knew the answer. The rattler was off her reel. The reel spun round with no effort and no sound. Suddenly it stopped.

[122]

Tillie placed a thumb on the spool, then counted in a whisper. “One, two, three, four, five.”

The tip of her pole executed a whip-like motion. The fish was hooked, the battle begun.

She gave him line. She reeled him in. He saw the boat and ran. He leaped a full foot from the water. He came down with a splash. The line slackened. Was he off? No. One more wild tug.

And after that a slow, relentless battle in which the girl won.

The fish lay flopping in the boat, a fine three pounder. Tillie bent over him, exultant, when with startling suddenness a voice sounded in her ear.

“Hey, you kids! Beat it! This is our fishing hole.” The tone was cold and gruff.

Tillie looked up in amazement. Then she scowled. A trim sailboat, manned by two boys and a girl, all in their late teens, had glided silently up to them and dropped anchor.

[123]

Tillie fixed her keen blue eyes upon the trio. All were dressed in silk pajamas and were smoking cigarettes.

“Since when?” she demanded, as her hands moved toward an oar.

“Since then!” The older of the two boys seized a short pike pole from the deck and struck her across the back.

To Florence, who looked on, it seemed that Tillie’s red hair stood on end, as she seized her oar and, using it as a spear, gave the intruder a sharp thrust in the stomach that doubled him

up and sent him reeling off the narrow deck into the water.

“Hey, you little devil!” The other youth turned purple with rage.

All to no purpose. Tillie’s oar mowed him down. He, too, went into the water.

“That for all your robbin’, gamblin’ lot!” Tillie screamed.

Then in quite another tone, “Up anchor and away. There’s a storm brewing.”

They were away before the first of their adversaries had reached the side of the sailboat.

[124]

The shore was not far away. Tillie headed straight for it.

“Got to defend our ship,” she breathed. “But we lack ammunition.”

Gull Rock Point is a finger of land three rods wide, a quarter of a mile long, extending straight out into the bay. Its shores are moderately steep and composed entirely of small rocks.

They bumped the shore, threw off their anchor, caught at overhanging branches, and climbed to land.

They looked about. The two boys were on board the sailboat now. They were lifting anchor and setting sail.

“They’ll come after us,” said Tillie, in the calmly assured tone of a great commander. “Load up.” She set the example by piling her left arm with rocks the size of a baseball.

“Don’t shoot till you see the whites of their eyes,” she murmured. “Make every shot count. We can retreat if we must. They’d never find us in the brush. But don’t give up the ship.”

[125]

Silence once more hung over the bay as the sailboat glided forward. The rushes whispered, the dragon fly bobbed and the water winked in the sun.

The sailboat was a beautiful thing. Highly varnished it was, and all trimmed in brass.

“Must have cost a small fortune,” was Florence’s mental comment. “They’re rich. How does Tillie dare?”

In all this there was no thought of disloyalty to Tillie. She was ready to fight the affair through at her side.

“Come on,” shouted Tillie, as the boat drew near. “Come on, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field.”

The answer was a contemptuous laugh.

This angered Tillie still more. "Come on!" she screamed, "come on, you crooks, you tin horn gamblers, you—!"

The names Tillie called her adversaries belong only to the land of the north. Florence heard them that day for the first time. We shall not repeat them here, but utter a little prayer that Tillie may be forgiven in Heaven.

[126]

She punctuated her last remark with a wild swing of the arm. Not so wild as it seemed, however, for a stone, crashing against the side of the highly polished craft, cut a jagged line of white for fully two feet.

"Come on!" she screamed. "We'll make your pretty boat look like a tin can the day after Fourth of July!" A second swing, a second streak of white down the shiny surface of brown.

Suddenly, the younger of the two boys took command. He veered the boat sharply about, then went sailing away.

"We win!"

For the first time Florence saw that Tillie's face had gone white. She slumped down among the rocks to hide her face in her hands.

"I forgot!" she moaned at last. "I got mad, and I forgot. Now they'll ruin us. Dad told me not to do it. But I done it all the same."

After that, for a long time the bay belonged to the rushes, the ripples and the dragon flies alone.

[127]

Rising at last, Tillie seized the anchor line, drew the rowboat close in, climbed aboard, motioned to Florence to do the same, seized the oars and began to row.

They fished no more that day. Not a word was spoken until the boat bumped at Tillie's dock.

Then Tillie, dangling the fine black bass from the end of a string, said,

"Here! You take it. I couldn't eat a bite of it. It'd choke me."

"Thanks."

"It's all right. You're a brick."

"So are you."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Tillie was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

SHIPS THAT PASS IN THE TWILIGHT

That evening, while the sky was still pink and the water changing from blue to purple and then to gold, Florence went for a row alone. She wanted to think. The events of that day had stirred her to the very depths. She had not believed that there were such persons in the world as those three young people who had attempted to drive them from Tillie's fishing hole.

"Rich, that's it," she told herself. Yet, in the depths of her heart she knew that this was not all.

"Tillie called them crooks, gamblers," she told herself. "A professional gambler must have a cold heart. He takes money in an unfair way from men who have earned it and need it. How can one expect to find a warm heart in the breast of a gambler's son?"

As she asked herself this question, she rounded a small island that lay a little way out from the point upon which the palatial summer home of Erie, the millionaire, had been erected.

[129]

She barely missed bumping into a canoe that lay motionless in the water. The canoe held a solitary occupant, a girl of sixteen.

Instinctively Florence knew that this was the millionaire's daughter, she who had lost the three priceless rubies in a gambling den.

Instantly her heart warmed. The girl was beautiful. She was rich. Yet, on her face was a look of loneliness and sadness such as Florence had seldom seen on any face.

"It's not so much the disgrace of losing the rubies," she told herself. "This girl is young. She is just launching out into life. She has found it strange and rather terrible. She doesn't understand."

Her first impulse was to pause close beside the girl, to tell her that she had heard much about her; that she longed to aid her; that she and the lady cop would help her; that if she would but allow it they would explain life to her; that in the end they would restore the rubies to their proper place.

[130]

"But she is rich," thought Florence, with a quick intake of breath. "I am poor. Her family is in society. I will never be."

Ah, yes, "society," that mysterious something to which people have given this name. She did not understand it. There was a barrier. She must not speak. So she passed on. And the twilight

deepened into night.

She was just turning the prow of her boat toward the lights of home when a speed boat came roaring by. Just as they were opposite her, the searchlight from a larger boat played for an instant on the faces of those in the speed boat. She recognized them instantly.

“Green Eyes, Jense Jameson, and that boy who sometimes rides in the ‘Spank Me Again’!” she exclaimed beneath her breath. “So she is truly here. Could it have been they who ran us down that night?”

“Green Eyes, perhaps. But not that boy. I’d trust him anywhere.”

Yet, even as she thought this, she was tempted to question her judgment.

[131]

“Surely,” she told herself, “I have placed every confidence in other persons, and in the end have found them unworthy. Why not this boy?”

She rowed silently and rather sadly back to their little dock. Surely this was a puzzling world. Perhaps, after all, she understood it as little as the “poor little rich girl,” back there in the canoe.

[132]

CHAPTER XVII

VOICES IN THE FOREST

The following day the weather was threatening. Dark clouds came rolling down from the north. The biting chill they brought told that they had journeyed far, from the very shores of Hudson Bay.

Petite Jeanne took one look at the out-of-doors; then she threw fresh wood upon the fire, curled up in her favorite chair, and lost herself in a French romance.

Not so, Florence. For her all days were alike. Come sunshine, come rain, come heat, come cold, calm, or storm, it was all the same to her. The world outside ever beckoned, and she must go.

This day she chose to wander alone over unfamiliar trails. As she plunged into the depths of the forest, she felt the cold and gloom press in upon her. It did not rain; yet the trees shed tears. From all about her came the sound of their slow drip-drip-drip. A cold mist, sweeping in from the lake, enveloped all. Now and again, as she passed through a grove of cottonwoods, a flurry of golden leaves came fluttering down.

[133]

“Autumn is here,” she told herself. “We must be going back soon. But how I long to stay!

“I love you, love you, love you,” she sang. And the song was meant for lake and beach, forest and stream, alike.

Her trail was long that day. She wandered so far that she began to be a little frightened.

“Can I find my way back?” she asked herself.

Well enough she knew that before her lay endless miles of slashings and young timber which were known only to the wild deer and the porcupine; that it was quite possible for one to become lost here for days and perhaps die of exposure and starvation.

She was thinking of turning back, when to her great surprise she heard voices.

“In such a place!” she whispered to herself.

[134]

At the same moment she noted that the forest ahead of her had grown thin, that she could see patches of sky beyond.

Once more she had crossed a broad point and had come to a strange shore.

But what shore? And who were these people?

Again she paused. As before, she caught the sound of voices, this time much more distinct.

“But what a strange language!” she thought to herself.

She concluded that she must be entering some Finnish settlement.

“Safe enough,” she reassured herself.

For all that, she moved forward cautiously. Safety first. She was far from her own cabin.

She had just reached a point where, by parting the bushes, she thought she might be able to catch a glimpse of the strangers, when, with the suddenness of an eagle’s cry, a scream rent the air. And after that, another and yet another. They were a woman’s screams.

“What is this?” she asked herself, as her cheeks blanched and the blood seemed to stand still in her veins. “Is this a murder?”

[135]

The question spurred her to action. She was young and strong as a man. If someone needed aid, it was her duty to step out and do her bit.

With little thought of further concealment, she moved rapidly through the thin screen of brush.

Imagine her surprise when, upon emerging, she saw a man and a woman, gypsies, both splashing through the lake water to their waists.

Mystification replaced surprise and fear but for a moment. It was replaced by sorrow; for, suddenly stooping beside a great rock, the gypsy man put out his hand and lifted a small form from the water.

“The child!” she exclaimed in a low voice, tense with emotion. “Their child! She has been playing on the rocks. A wave caused by some passing ship carried her away. Perhaps they did not notice in time. She may be dead.”

Without having seen Florence, the gypsies waded ashore. There, with a look of infinite sadness, the man placed the dripping child on the ground.

[136]

The woman joined him. And there they stood, the two of them, in the bowed attitudes of those who mourn for the dead.

It came to the girl then that these gypsies, who had spent all their lives in caravans on land, knew little or nothing of the water, which they had apparently adopted as their temporary home.

No sooner had she thought this than she sprang into action. Without so much as a "May I?" or "If you please," she leaped forward, pushed the astonished parents aside, seized the child and held her, head down, in the air. Water poured from the child's nose and mouth. Next, Florence placed her across the trunk of a fallen tree and rocked her back and forth. At last she laid her on the ground and began to work her arms in an attempt to restore respiration.

All this time the gypsies stood looking upon her as if she might be a goddess or a demon, sent to restore or devour their child.

[137]

Suddenly the child sneezed.

On hearing this, the gypsy woman once more sent forth a piercing scream, then threw herself upon Florence's neck.

Shaking herself free, Florence resumed her work.

A moment later the child began to cry.

A few husky wails from the child, and Florence's work was complete.

After removing the child's damp clothing, Florence joined the man in making a fire. She taught the woman, who had partially regained her composure, how to chafe the child's hands and feet; then she prepared to leave them.

"I wish Jeanne were here," she told herself. "I would like to know who they are, where they came from, and why they are here. So would Jeanne. But Jeanne is far away. If I bring her here they will be gone. I cannot take them to her. Have to trust to good fortune to bring us together again."

Did she trust in vain?

If she had seen the look on that woman's face as she once more vanished into the forest, she would have known certainly that in this world there was one person who would, if fate required it, go to the gallows or the electric chair for her.

[138]

Thus does fate play with the children of men. She casts before them golden opportunities. If they prove themselves steadfast, true and fearless, in her own good time, in some far future it may be, in ways of which they do not dream, she sends her reward.

[139]

CHAPTER XVIII

REVERIES

Florence had not lost herself in the forest. Though she had not the slightest notion what shore she stood on at the time she brought the gypsy child back to life, she experienced little difficulty in finding her way back to her cabin.

Two hours had not elapsed when once more she sat before her own fire, drinking strong coffee and relating her adventure to Jeanne.

“But the poor gypsy child!” Jeanne exclaimed as she finished. “Out in such weather. And after such an adventure!”

“Their camp must have been very near,” replied Florence. “And you know well enough that the gypsies can arrange a cozy camp out of less than nothing at all.”

“Oh yes, yes, surely that is so!” exclaimed the little French girl.

“But how unkind fate is.” Her tone changed. She became sad. “Here I am pining my heart away for one look at some gypsy friends. And all I see is three tiny twigs they have touched, their patteran, while you, who care so little, meet them at every turn.”

[140]

“When the storm is over,” Florence sought to console her, “we will row over to that island where we saw their camp. Perhaps they are still there.”

“They will not be.” Jeanne refused to be comforted. “Always they are on the move. When one meets them, the proper thing to say is, ‘Where do you come from to-day? Where do you go to-morrow?’”

“How strange these gypsies are!” Jeanne mused after a moment of silence. “Always they are on islands and on points of land where there are no roads. They travel by water. Water gypsies. How quite novel that is! And yet, in southern France there are some such people. There are villages where all the fisher-folk are gypsies. Brave and daring seamen they are, too.

“Ah, yes, very brave. You must not think that gypsies are cowards. Gypsies fought in the great war, fought and died. Ah, yes! So you see this beautiful story of the stage, this play in which I am to have so wonderful a part, this tale of gypsies in war, is not without its parallel in life.”

[141]

At that she lapsed into silence. She was thinking again of that night, which each sunset found a day nearer, when on an American stage, before many hundreds of people, she should dance the gypsy tarantella on a miniature battlefield beneath the

light of an imaginary moon.

At such times as this, Florence loved to watch the changes that passed over Jeanne's face. As she imagined herself in the wings, awaiting her cue, a look of uncertainty, almost of fear, was written there. As, still in her imagination, she stepped out to face her audience, a wistful expression banished fear. After that, as she entered into the compelling rhythm of the dance, came complete transformation. Her face, warmed as if by the mellow light of the morning sun, became the face of a Madonna.

"I only hope," Florence thought to herself, "that the play proves a great success. It means so much to her. And she is so kind-hearted, so unspoiled. She has lost so much; has so much to win."

[142]

"Listen to the rain!" cried Jeanne. "Who would believe it could come down so hard?"

"Three days' rain. That's what the old timers say it will be. We have so little time to spend here. And there is so much that might be done." Florence sighed.

"Do you know," she spoke again, after watching the glow of the fire and listening to the steady patter-patter on the roof, "living in a place like this affects me strangely."

She stretched herself full length in the great cedar chair. "I feel as if I had always lived here, never been out of the woods; as if I were very poor, ignorant and strong. I find it hard to believe that I have warm, soft, bright garments of fine spun cotton and silk. It is as if my garments had always been of brown homespun, my boots of coarsest leather, my hat of rain-proof stuff; as if I tramped days and days over miles of trail that would weary city-dwellers, but can only bring fresh joy to the one of browned features and brawny limbs.

[143]

"And why not?" she cried with some passion, sitting up quite abruptly. "Why not a cabin like this, and peace? In winter the trap line, a long, long tramp in high boots through drifted snow. A weasel pelt here, a mink there, and by this pond muskrat skins.

"And out over the lake's four foot ice, far across the frozen inland sea to Goose Island. There a fish shanty, a hole in the ice, twenty fathoms of line and a rich catch of lake trout and sturgeon. Why not always at night the crackling fire, the bacon and corn bread eaten with a relish because one is truly hungry?

"Why not? No worry about room rent, a run in a silk stocking or a frayed Sunday dress. Why not always boots of cowhide and coats of canvas that do not wear out?"

"Oh! but after all you are a girl," smiled Petite Jeanne.

“In this day,” said Florence with great emphasis, “that does not matter. All that matters is that I am as strong as a man; that if I choose I can follow a man’s trap line or fish in a man’s shanty over the frozen lake.”

[144]

“That is not all.” The French girl’s tone was quiet, full of assurance. “Women are born with a desire for beauty, softness and color. We live for that which we see and touch; your eye catches the glorious red, the orange, the blue of a gown, and it enchants you. Is it not so?”

“Yes, but here at the edge of the lake we have the sunset. What could be more gorgeous?”

“Ah! But that you cannot touch.

“Did you never note?” Jeanne’s tone grew serious. “Did you never come to realize how much we live for the sense of touch? A scarf of silken gold is held out before you. You say, ‘Let me see it.’ But you hold out a hand. Why? You wish to touch it. You have missed a friend for a long time. She returns. Your hands, your lips, meet. Why? Because you are not happy until you have touched the one you love.

“No, no, Miss Florence! This is very wonderful, very peaceful. It is so very grand. But after all, it is only for now.

[145]

“To-morrow, next day, sometime very soon you are going to hear the call of the city, to feel its pull at your heart. All the bright lights, the colors, the shouts, the throngs will call to you. And you will go. For there, after all, is life. Life—beautiful, rushing, throbbing life. That, my dear friend, is a city. It is found nowhere else.”

Leaping from her chair, the little French girl went whirling across the floor in her fantastic dance. She danced herself quite out of the cabin and out into the rain, leaving Florence to meditate upon her strange words, to conclude that Jeanne was more than half right, then to spring suddenly to her feet, crying:

“Come back here, Petite Jeanne! Come back right now. You will die of pneumonia.”

“Ever hear of a sprite dying of pneumonia?” Jeanne’s eyes were as full of laughter as her golden locks were of water, as she came dancing back.

[146]

“You’re not a sprite,” said Florence. “Even if you were one, who had taken human form, I’d have to keep you human until that play had its run.”

“Oh! the blessed play!” said the French girl contritely, at the same time snatching at her drenched garments. “How one does hate being in training for anything.”

Ten minutes later, wrapped in a white, woolly blanket, she sat

toasting before a fire. At this moment everything, past and future, was forgotten in the glorious now.

CHAPTER XIX

THE STOLEN TRUNK

The three days' rain became a reality. A steady downpour, that set the forest mourning in earnest and turned the lake into a blanket of gray, settled down over all.

Petite Jeanne did not care. She had been sent north to rest. There was still a pile of unread romances in the corner cupboard. The shed at the back of the cabin was piled high with dry wood. The fire burned ever brightly. What more could she wish?

When she tired of reading she called to Tico, who lay sleeping by the fire hours on end, and together they went through some difficult step of the gypsy dance.

To Florence, save for one condition, this prolonged downpour would have seemed nothing short of a catastrophe. She was shut away from her beloved out-of-doors, but this only gave her more time to spend with that fascinating person, the lady cop.

The lady cop had become all but a pal to Florence and Tillie. Every evening, after the day's work was done and darkness had blanketed the water, Tillie came stealing over to the mystery cabin.

[148]

And she never lacked a welcome. She gave the lady cop many a needed bit of information. With her aid, the lady cop had so far progressed in her investigation that she whispered to them on the second day of the rain that soon she would be ready to wire for reinforcements. When these arrived she would spring the trap.

"And then?" Florence breathed.

"Then the three rubies will be in my hands. And someone will go to jail.

"But let's not talk too much," she added. "The best laid plans fail often enough."

The hour of the day that Florence and Tillie loved best was the one which preceded the lady cop's shooping them out for the night. At that hour, after brewing herself a cup of coffee and drinking it steaming hot, she spun weird tales of her adventures as a lady detective.

An only child of a police captain, at the age of eighteen she had seen her father brought home dead, shot in the back while assisting in a raid on a notorious gambling house. Over her father's dead body she had vowed that she would take his

[149]

place.

When the time came, when she was of age, her mother, having no boys to give to the great service of protecting humanity, had smilingly, tearfully, given that which she had, a girl. And to the city she had already proved herself a priceless gift.

Working her way secretly into places where no man could ever have entered, she had brought to light places of vice and crime which for long years had remained hidden in the dark.

Time and again she had succeeded in attaching herself to some wild young set, and in so doing had not alone shown them their folly, but had also brought those who preyed upon them to justice.

“It’s not always easy to place money on the board,” she said one night, “on the gaming board, with a hand that does not tremble, when you realize that there are those watching who would gladly kill you, did they but know who you were.”

[150]

“Twice I was discovered and locked up. One of these times I let myself out of the window to the street two floors below on a rope made of my own skirt. The other time a squad wagon came in time to release me.

“Listen to this!” Her eyes burned brightly. “Never believe the stories you read in cheap magazines. These stories tell you that crooks are really good sports, generous, chivalrous and all that. They are not—not one in a thousand. They are hard as flint; cruel, heartless, ready for any savage deed that will give them liberty and the wild life they crave.”

After this outburst on that second rainy night, she lapsed into silence.

In time she sprang to her feet and drew on her raincoat. “I am going out for a row alone in the dark,” she said. “Stay here and keep the fire burning. It’s not late. I’ll be back in an hour.”

She left the cabin. Tillie and Florence sat by the fire.

[151]

“Ever hear how this cabin came here?” Tillie asked.

“No,” Florence replied quickly.

“It’s sort of interesting. I’ll tell you.”

“Oh! Please do!”

“This,” Tillie began, “was once the cabin of a ship.”

“It looks the part,” replied Florence. “But where are the portholes?”

“Someone has covered them.” Tillie stepped to the wall,

fumbled for a short time with a fastening, then swung back a section of the paneling which was, in reality, a small door, revealing a circle of brass framing a glass.

“But why a ship’s cabin on land?” Florence’s face took on a puzzled frown.

“It was all on account of old Captain Abner Jones. His ship was wrecked on the shoals near Goose Island. She was the ‘Mary C,’ just a freighter, but a good strong one.

“Captain Abner Jones had her for his first command. She was his last, too. He lived in this cabin and sailed the Great Lakes for thirty-five years.

[152]

“Then, when she struck one stormy night, through no fault of his, he refused to leave her. All through the storm he stuck there, though she was half torn to pieces. When the storm was over, his men went out to get him.

“Still he wouldn’t come. ‘No, men. Much obliged all the same,’ he told them. ‘You’ve been a good crew. You’ll find other berths. But mine’s here. I’ll never leave this cabin.’

“The men went aside. I’ve heard my father tell it lots of times. They talked it over. They loved their old skipper. They knew the next storm would do for the ship, and him, too, if he stayed. So they made a plan.

“‘All right, Cap,’ the first mate said, when they had come back to him, ‘you have your way. And we’ll have ours, too. Give us a day, mebbly two, and we’ll put this cabin in a safe place.’

“‘Meanin’ what?’ the captain asked.

“‘That we’ll set the cabin ashore, and you in her.’

[153]

“I guess the captain saw they were too strong for him, so he let them have their way.

“They took a lot more than two days. You see what a neat job they did. Why, there’s even a hold to the place! They built it of ship’s timbers.”

“A hold!” Florence stared at her.

By way of answer, Tillie began rolling up the canvas that covered the floor. When she had done this, she pried up a plank, then another. Next she sent the gleam of a flashlight into the dark depths below.

“Sure enough, a real hold!” exclaimed Florence.

“And there’s a trunk!” Tillie, too, was surprised. “How long do you suppose it’s been there?”

“Not long. See! The copper is not tarnished. It’s her trunk.” She spoke of the lady cop.

“It must be. But such a queer trunk!”

It was indeed an unusual bit of baggage. Made of some very hard tropical wood, it was bound by broad bands of copper. Strangest of all were its straps. They were four inches wide and fully three quarters of an inch thick.

[154]

“What monster has a hide like that?” Tillie asked in amazement.

“A walrus or an elephant.”

“It’s empty.”

“Quite naturally. One does not leave one’s things in a trunk in a cellar like this.”

“But it’s wide open.”

“That’s a bit strange.”

“It’s all strange. A woman with a trunk like that!”

For a moment they stood there, staring down into that dark chasm.

“Tell you what!” exclaimed Tillie at last. “I’ve got an idea!”

Tillie was given to having ideas. Some of them were quite wild, for Tillie was more than half wild herself.

“Let’s steal her trunk!” she cried, clapping her hands.

“That,” said Florence in some disgust, “seems a dumb idea.”

“Not so dumb as you think. Listen. Day before yesterday I brought the lady cop a small bag of balsam tips; you know, the green end of twigs that smell so swell.”

[155]

“Yes?”

“She took one sniff of them, then threw up her hands and said, ‘I’d like a trunk full, a whole trunk full to take home to my friends, for making pillows.’”

“We’ll steal her trunk and hide it in the woods. We’ll fill it with balsam tips. Turkey Trot and I will bring it back. She’ll drop dead when she sees it. She’ll never know it’s been gone until she sees the balsam tips. Come on. Give me a hand. She’ll be back pretty soon. We’ll just hide it in the brush until we go home. Then we’ll carry it over to your point.”

Florence, though not fully convinced of the wisdom of such high-handed proceedings, was quite carried away by Tillie’s

bubbling enthusiasm. In less time than it takes to tell it, the trunk was up from the dark hole and away to the brush, the planks down again, the canvas spread smoothly in place.

They were not a moment too soon. Shaking the rain from her coat, the lady cop came breezing in.

[156]

“It’s glorious!” she enthused. “Even in the night and the rain. I hate to leave it all. But I fear I must. Very soon.”

This last remark sent a chill running up Florence’s spine. But she said never a word.

[157]

CHAPTER XX

13-13 AND OTHER SIGNS

“Look at this cabin!” The lady cop’s voice was filled with consternation as she spoke. Florence and Tillie could only stand and stare. The lady cop’s room was a wreck. She had gone out before dawn; had been gone an hour, had picked up Florence and Tillie on her way back, and now this!

Florence had never seen such a roomful of confusion. Table upside down, chairs overturned, clothing scattered everywhere, broken glass from the transom overhead, the canvas torn up, a gaping hole where the imitation ship’s hold was; such was the scene upon which she gazed in the utmost astonishment.

“You know,” said Tillie in a tone that was both serious and solemn, “we girls didn’t do that.”

“Of course not, child!” The lady cop laughed in spite of herself. “For all that, I know who did it. And soon enough they shall have their pay.

[158]

“I know, too, what it was they wanted. And they—” The lady cop advanced to the center of the room to cast one glance to the void below, “and they got it!”

“Wha—what was it they wanted?” Florence managed to stammer. She knew the answer, but wanted it from the lady cop’s lips.

“My trunk.”

“Your trunk! Why should they want that? It was—” She checked herself in time.

The lady cop gave her a sharp look, but proceeded to answer her question as well as she might.

“The truth is, I don’t know why they wanted that trunk,” she began. “They have wanted it for a long time. Now that they have it, I hope they are satisfied. I can get a tin one down at the store for a few dollars. And it, I hope, will contain no secrets.”

“Secrets!” Florence wished to tell her own secret, that the mysterious trunk was safely locked up in a hunting cabin back in the woods where she and Tillie had carried it through the rain and the dark. She did not quite dare.

[159]

“That trunk,” said the lady cop, up-ending a chair and dropping into it, “has been the most spooky thing you ever saw.

“My cousin bought it for me at a police auction sale.”

“A police auction sale!” Tillie stared at her hard.

“Once a year the police department sells all the lost, stolen and unclaimed articles that have come into its keeping. You’d be surprised at the variety of articles sold there; electric drills, oriental rugs, watches, knives, burglars’ tools, suitcases full of silks—everything.

“This trunk was in the sale. It was filled with a lot of worthless clothing. But my cousin bought it for me. It was such an unusual affair. Teakwood, heavy copper, walrus hide. You wouldn’t understand unless you saw it.”

Florence and Tillie exchanged significant glances.

“This cousin of mine is a queer chap,” the lady cop went on. “He’s always trying to break up superstitions. Belongs to a Thirteen Club formed in his academy days. Thirteen fellows lived in a building numbered 1313. Table always set for thirteen, whether they were all there or not. Such things as that.

[160]

“Now every year on the thirteenth day of a month, Friday if possible, they have a banquet. Six of the thirteen are dead. Four met violent deaths. Yet they keep it up. Thirteen places set. Seven seats filled. Six vacant.

“Makes you shudder to think of it. But he loves it.

“He bought this trunk because a crook had owned it. That’s supposed to bring bad luck.

“He hadn’t got half way home with it before someone dragged it off the truck. He crowned the fellow with half a brick and retrieved the trunk.

“He took it home. That night he woke up to see it disappearing out of the window. When he fired a shot through the window the trunk paused in its journey and he took it back.

“Then, because I am a policewoman, he presented it to me. And here—here it is not. They got it at last!”

[161]

Once more the two girls exchanged glances. They said never a word.

“Queerest part of it all is,” the lady cop concluded, “the thing was chuck empty!

“But come on!” she exclaimed, springing up. “Let’s get this place straightened out. Then we’ll fry some bacon.”

“Shall we tell her?” Tillie asked in a low tone as she and Florence walked down the little dock half an hour later.

“I don’t know. Not just yet.” Florence’s face took on a puzzled look. “If that trunk has such wandering ways, perhaps it’s safer

where it is. Does anyone go to that hunting shack?"

"Not this time of year."

"And no one besides us knows where the trunk is, and we won't tell."

"Cross my heart!"

"See you this afternoon," Tillie added. "We're going fishing."

"Are we?"

"You know it! Got to work this forenoon. Can go after dinner. And boy! Will there be fishing!"

[162]

"You know," she added with all the wisdom of an old timer, "after a three days' storm is the very best time to fish. When it is sunny and still, the fish lay round and get lazy; too lazy to eat. A storm stirs 'em up. Watch 'em bite this P. M. So long!" She went skipping away.

[163]

CHAPTER XXI

“FISHIN’”

Youth is the time of life when perils, sorrows and battles are soon forgotten; when joy persists, and the anticipation of some fresh thrill is ever uppermost in the mind. As they started on the proposed fishing trip rather late that afternoon, Tillie, to all appearances, had forgotten her battle with the children of a rich city gambler. The splendid black bass they had captured, the memory of the thrill of the chase, was still with her.

“Do you know,” she said to Florence, “I think the other two bass are larger, much larger? Perhaps one is a five pounder.

“We are going to have a grand time!” she enthused. “There are two big muskies lurking in those weeds. I saw them once. They may strike to-day.”

“You don’t think those hateful people will come back?”
Florence wrinkled her brow.

[164]

“Guess we gave ’em enough!” Tillie clipped her words short.

“You said they’d ruin you.”

“Mebby they can’t.” Tillie’s strong arms worked fast at the oars.

They arrived at the fishing hole. Once more the conditions were ideal. Dark, slaty clouds lay spread across the sky. A slight breeze roughened the surface of the water. Such water as it was! Gray, shadowy water that suggested fish of immense proportions and infinite fighting power.

The whispering rushes, the gurgling water, the bobbing dragon fly, were all there.

“As if we had been gone but an hour,” Florence said, as she dropped the anchor.

“Yes,” replied Tillie, “this old bay changes very little. I climbed up on Gull Rock to steal a gull’s eggs when I was three. And there it stands still. And still the gulls lay their eggs there. Only difference is, I have learned how foolish it is to steal their eggs.”

She baited her hook with a large minnow, drew out her line until thirty feet of it hung loosely coiled in her left hand; then with a deft toss landed the minnow thirty feet from the boat.

[165]

“There,” she sighed, “right over there.”

Florence was obliged to satisfy herself with a shorter cast.

“Do you know,” said Tillie, and the sound of her voice glided along like the air of some old song, “this has been my fishing hole ever since I was old enough to paddle the first little tub of a boat I ever owned? But it’s never lost its mystery, this hole hasn’t.

“There have been times when I thought I knew all about it. I’ve skated over it in winter when the ice was like glass. I could see every stone, every stick and log at the bottom. I peered in between every little forest of pikeweed and said, ‘Nope, there’s nothing there.’

“There have been times in summer when the surface of the water was smooth as a looking-glass. Then I peeked around in every little corner down there in the depths of it, and I said, ‘Ah, ha! At last I have you! I know all about you. You’re only a hole full of water with a sandy bottom and a shelving bank. You’re full of weeds and other common things.’

“Just about then the sun goes under a cloud. A little breeze ripples the water. I can’t see a thing. I wait. The rain comes pattering down. I put a shiny minnow or a dark old crawdad on my hook and throw it far out over the edge of the old fishing hole. Pretty soon the line starts stealing away. My reel goes round and round, silent as a whisper. Then of a sudden I jerk. I begin reeling in. A beautiful thing all green and gold leaps from the water. But I have him still.

[166]

“‘Ah!’ I cry. ‘A black bass. Where did he come from? The old fishing hole, to be sure.’ And right away that old pool with its mysterious blue-green top of rippled, spattered water is as full of mystery as it ever was.”

“Isn’t it wonderful to have such a fishing hole!” Florence enthused.

“Don’t all boys and girls have fishing holes?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“In the cities, of course not. It’s too bad.”

For a time after that they were silent. It was Florence who broke the Sabbath-like stillness of the old fishing hole.

[167]

“People,” she mused, “are very much like fishing holes. You have a friend. You are with him a great deal. He tells you all he can about himself. He turns the light of truth upon himself and allows you to gaze into the very depths of his soul. At last you say, ‘There is no mystery left in his being. I know it all.’ Then of a sudden, in time of joyous tempest, splendid success or dark storm of disappointment and sorrow, in a moment demanding heroic courage, he shows you in an instant that there are possibilities in his being of which you never dreamed.

“Cities are like that, too,” she went on. “Take the great city I

call home. It's a very plain city where millions toil for their daily bread. I've been all over it. I often say to myself, 'There is no further mystery in this city.' I have no more than said it than I come upon a Chinatown, a theatre, a court room, some dark place at night where such persons meet as I have never known. Then that old city seems to look up and laugh as it exclaims, 'No mystery!'"

"It must be wonderful to explore such a city!" Tillie's words were filled with longing.

[168]

"Perhaps," replied Florence, "we can do it together some time."

A large perch took Florence's minnow. She reeled him in and threw him in the live-net.

"Probably all I'll get," she commented, "but they are fine fried brown in butter."

"None better."

Tillie lost her minnow. A second and a third disappeared into that dark expanse.

"Somebody's stealing my bait." She selected a very large minnow and hooked it on with meticulous care. Then out into the deep he went to join his comrades.

The manner in which he did this was startling in the extreme. Hardly had he hit the water than Tillie's reel flew round and round, quite beyond control. With a quick glance toward the sky, she assured herself that some thieving bird had not seized her bait, then she pressed a thumb on her reel as she seized the handle to end its wild flight. Fortunately her line was long and strong. She had the fish under control in another moment.

But to play him, to land him—that was the problem.

[169]

"What is he?" Florence asked in an awed whisper.

"Who knows?"

Tillie reeled him in for twenty yards, then let him take the line slowly out.

"Tire him out," she explained.

This she repeated three times. Then as a look of fixed determination settled on her face she said quite calmly:

"The landing net."

Florence was ready. Settling her feet firmly, Tillie began to reel in. The manner in which she reeled in that mysterious monster was a thing to marvel at. And he came, foot by foot,

yard by yard, fathom by fathom, until a great gaping mouth appeared close to the surface.

“A pike!” Tillie’s voice betrayed her disappointment. “But he’s a darb. We must have him. Get ready. When I give him line, get the net ahead of him.”

[170]

Florence obeyed with trembling fingers. She was a second too late. Tillie did not give the powerful fish line. He took it. Grazing the rim of the landing net, he shot away, taking fathoms of line with him.

The process of wearing him out was repeated. Once again he was brought to the side of the boat. This time Tillie gave him very little line. Unfortunately it was not enough. As his head shot toward the landing net, the hook that protruded through his jaw caught on the rim of the net. There was a thundering of water, a whirlpool of white spray, and he was gone.

“Dumb!” exclaimed Tillie, throwing down her rod.

“Lost him!” Florence dropped the net. “But then,” she added, “a pike’s no good except to look at.”

“That’s right,” agreed Tillie. “And we came out here for a big black bass. We’ll have him too!” She baited her hook anew.

An hour passed, and another. The sun hung for a time above the cedars, then slowly sank from sight. The water turned golden, then red, then steel blue. Still they fished on.

[171]

The number of fine perch, nine, ten, twelve inches long, which Florence dropped into the live-net, grew and grew. Tillie flung hers overboard in great contempt, as soon as they were hooked, and grumbled because they took her bait.

“Do you know,” said Florence teasingly, “I believe I have five pounds of fish? You have tried all afternoon for a five pounder, and got nothing. In life one should humbly accept that which comes, and hope for bigger things.”

“I wonder.” Tillie studied her face with tired eyes. “I wonder if that’s so, or do you win best if you insist on having only the big things?”

“I suppose,” Florence replied, “that one does that which one’s nature demands. I can’t throw a good perch away. You can’t keep one. It’s a queer old world.”

“It is!” Tillie punctuated her remark with a vigorous overhand throw that landed her minnow far out into the darkening water.

[172]

“Watch!” she exclaimed a moment later. “See that line go out! It’s a bass!”

There is nothing sweeter than the swift run of a bass before he

turns his minnow and swallows it.

Zing! Tillie snapped the line. "Hooked!" she exclaimed, planting her feet far apart.

The ripples had subsided. The water was like polished steel at the surface. Yet one could see far into those mysterious depths.

"See!" she exclaimed tensely. "I've got him! The big one! And how meekly he comes in!"

What she said seemed true. She was reeling in rapidly. At the same time a monster of the lake, such a bass as Florence had never dreamed of, came racing toward the boat.

Three yards, five, he shot forward. Florence stared. The expression on Tillie's face was a strange thing to see. Hope, joy, triumph vied there with fear, distrust, despair. It was her great chance. She had staked all in the one cast. Was she to win or lose?

During all this time the afterglow of the sun had lighted the water. In an instant, without warning, it faded and near darkness came. Not so soon, however, but that the girls were able to witness a strange sight. With a sudden stop and whirl, the big bass changed course and shot away. But Tillie's reel? It did not spin. She still reeled in. A steady tug held her line taut. Ten seconds later a beautiful green-tinted bass, weighing perhaps a pound, broke the water and landed with scarcely a struggle in the boat.

[173]

What had happened? This little one and the giant companion had fought for the deadly minnow. He had won.

For fully half a minute, while the end of twilight became night, Tillie stood staring at her catch. He had flapped himself loose from the line and lay there in the boat snapping about.

Suddenly she seized him and threw him far into the rushes. Then she dropped into a seat to hide her face in her hands.

Tillie was of the emotional type. Some people are. What of it? Theirs is the privilege to weep or to shout for joy. Tillie wept.

[174]

But what was this? Of a sudden their boat gave a lurch that sent Florence sprawling over the stern seat.

What had happened? Her eyes told her in an instant. Her heart went to her throat. A speed boat, with power shut off, had glided upon them unobserved. The now invisible occupants had seized their anchor line, then started their powerful motor. They were now headed for the outermost point of land and the open sea.

"They've got us!" Tillie exclaimed. "They've got us!"

“Who?” Florence screamed. “In the name of all that’s good, who?”

Tillie did not reply. She was making her way forward.

CHAPTER XXII

KIDNAPPED

“They are carrying us away!” Florence cried. Her tone was that of despair.

“We must cut the tiller,” was Tillie’s answer.

“Then they’ll run us down, as they did Jeanne and me.”

“No matter! We must cut the tiller!”

“But how? We have no knife.”

Tillie thought a moment. Then once more she crept forward toward the bobbing prow. Once there, she gripped the boat’s gunwale, reached far forward, then set her teeth in the strong rope.

The tiller was an extra thick one, and quite new. Nature had provided Tillie with a most excellent set of teeth. She used them now with a skill born of despair. Both she and Florence were strong swimmers. Though their boat were wrecked, they might still reach land.

“If only we do not get out of the channel,” she thought as she renewed her attack on the stubborn strands of rope.

[176]

As they left Hoyt’s Bay behind, the water grew rougher. Shooting forward, the slight rowboat plowed through waves instead of riding over them. Tillie was drenched to the skin. There were times when her very form was lost in spray. Yet she stuck to her post.

Night had come. There was no moon. The sky was black. The sea was black. The night was cold. Florence shuddered. Then, feeling the water creeping over her feet, she began to bail.

Tillie’s task was half done. How stout the rope was. The pull on it was tremendous, yet with half the strands cut, the boat rode on.

“How—how many more strands?” she asked herself as she spat out a mouthful of bristly fibre.

“Soon it will be too late,” she told herself. No longer could she distinguish land from water, but years of experience told her that they were fast leaving land behind, that they would, in a very brief space of time, be in the open waters of Lake Huron.

[177]

“And then—” she breathed. She dare not think.

The rope was at last three-fourths eaten away. The strain on the remaining strands was telling. They were beginning to stretch

when suddenly a final cowardly and brutal act capped the atrocities of the heartless invisible ones. Had they been watching? Did they know the girl's purpose? Had they judged their position? Who knows? Enough that of a sudden their boat gave a swerve to the right. It executed a curve that no light rowboat could endure. Next instant the girls found themselves pitched head foremost into the icy waters, while their empty boat sped on.

Florence struck out with hands and feet. She gave herself half a minute to regain composure. Then she looked for Tillie. Tillie was swimming with one hand while she shook a belligerent fist at the fast disappearing speed boat.

[178]

"Well!" she exclaimed when she had completed this ceremony to her satisfaction. "We are free!"

"Free as a gull. Where's land?"

"I don't know."

"How long can you swim?"

"A long time. How long can you?"

"A long time. But in this water?"

"I don't know. Boo! It's cold. Let's swim."

"Where to?"

"I don't know."

At that moment, as if in answer to an unuttered prayer, a strange thing happened. A golden light shone across the water. A golden disk appeared on the horizon.

"The moon! Thank—thank God!" Tillie's tone was reverent.

"The moon, yes," said Florence. "It usually rises."

"But can't you see? It's not rising behind water, but trees. That's Goose Island over there. It's three miles from the mainland."

[179]

"What's Goose Island?"

"It's where we go fishing through the ice in winter."

"Anybody live there?"

"No."

"Any cabins?"

"No."

“Then—”

Florence stopped herself. She was about to say that outside a cabin, with no fire, drenched to the skin, they would be chilled to death, when a voice seemed to whisper, “One thing at a time. Only one.”

“We’ll swim for it,” she said quietly. “How far do you think it is?”

“Two miles, perhaps.”

Two miles! Her heart sank.

“But the wind and waves are with us. We’ll make it.”

“The winds and the waves obey Thy will,” rang through Florence’s ears. “Yes,” she replied, “we will make it.”

For a long time there was no sound save the dip-dip of their strong arms and the occasional swirl of a whitecap as it broke near them.

[180]

[181]

CHAPTER XXIII

STRANGE DELIVERANCE

An hour passed and still two dark spots, like markers for a gill net, rose above the waves. The moon, rising higher and higher, brought out more distinctly the ragged tree line of Goose Island.

At times the weary girls turned on their backs to float like so much lifeless driftwood. When their weary muscles had gained renewed strength, they began their task again.

There were times when Florence, stout-hearted though she was, was tempted to give up hope. At such times she envisioned the rocky beach, the cabinless forest of scrub trees that must grace the surface of the island. She felt, too, the chill of the wind that must await them there.

“What’s the use?” she asked herself many times. And always the answer came, “One step at a time is enough for me.” She must trust the future.

[182]

As for Tillie, she never faltered. Such is the soul of one bred to the rigor, the suffering and perils of the north country. It accepts the condition that each moment offers and awaits the rest. Who will say that this, as a rule of life, is not best?

“Cheerio, old thing!” Tillie exclaimed at last. “Another quarter of an hour, and we will be there.”

There was courage in her voice, but a look of utter weariness in her eye.

“Will she last?” Florence drew one more portion from her reserve strength, prepared, if need be, to see her gallant friend through.

Her aid was not needed. The sturdy muscles and vigorous heart of this backwoods girl carried her through. Certainly no city cousin of hers who starves her body and poisons her blood to obtain a slim and graceful figure could have done as much. Who wants to be a wisp that contains a soul? Who would not rather be a Greek goddess?

They landed at last upon a broad and pebbly beach.

[183]

As they crept up away from the waves, the sharp pebbles brought no pain to hands and knees. They were benumbed by cold, too exhausted to feel pain.

Yet, after Tillie had laid there for a moment, she drew herself to a sitting position to say an astonishing thing.

“Florence,” she exclaimed, “we’ll get that old black bass yet!”

In spite of the cold and exhaustion, Florence laughed. The laugh did them both good.

“If we are going to do that,” she said, rising stiffly, “we will have to keep moving. If we don’t, we’ll be no better than the wreck of the Hesperus. Let’s go somewhere. It’s a little late, but some place on the island may still be open. A ham and egg place. Haven’t any money, but they’ll trust us. We look *so* honest, and our clothes are *so* spick and span.” She looked at Tillie, in her blouse that clung like a rag and knickers that turned her slim legs into pipe stems, and laughed again.

“Come on,” said Tillie, struggling to keep up the illusion. “I know a place to go.”

[184]

She made her way up the gravel beach to a spot where the surface was soft, sandy and half overgrown with grass. Then they started to skirt the shore.

They had not gone a hundred yards before Florence began to feel that Tillie was leading a lost hope. The wind was rising. The cold seemed more bitter.

“Never will stand it,” she told herself with grim conviction. “Never in the world!”

Still she trudged on. Her limbs were growing stiff, her eyes blurred. As they rounded a clump of scrub birch trees, she thought her eyes deceived her. There appeared to be something over there that was not a tree; a small square thing like an overgrown chimney.

“Look!” She pulled Tillie by the arm. “Look, Tillie! Is there something over there?”

Tillie looked, then cried out for very joy.

“It’s a fish shanty! Daddy Red Johnson’s fish shanty! He left it here winter before last. Then he died. Nobody touched it. Oh, thank God!”

[185]

She dropped to her knees, but was up in an instant.

“It doesn’t look like a shanty,” said Florence as they approached it. “Looks like a tall box.”

“That’s about all it is. Four sides and a roof. Three feet square. Just a protection from wind and snow while you fish.

“But oh, good old Daddy Johnson, if you see us now,” she murmured, talking to the sky, “you know we need your fish shanty a heap worse than you ever did!

“Here’s the door,” she said a moment later. “Walk right in and

make yourself at home.”

Inside this curious box-like affair, which is moved so easily over the ice during the winter fishing, there was only standing room for two.

But how warm it seemed! “As if there were a fire.” Florence hugged Tillie for very joy. Then she thanked the Creator of all for this miraculous deliverance.

“It’s going to be hard,” she told herself, as she thought of standing there all night, “but we’ll make it. And to-morrow we will improve our condition.

[186]

“Do boats pass this island?” she asked.

“Only very far away.”

“Could they see a signal flag of distress?”

“I doubt it. Besides, they wouldn’t be looking for it. No one is ever stranded here.

“Speaking of fire,” mused Tillie, returning to the old subject, “Daddy Red Johnson used to keep a few sticks in the upper corner.

“Here they are!” she cried as her hand searched the corner.

“Everybody liked Daddy Red Johnson.” There were tears in her voice. “He was a good man. Nobody would touch his things, not even after he was dead.

“He always kept a box of matches right down here.” Her hand groped for a moment. Then such a shout of joy!

“Here they are! Saved, Florence!”

With trembling fingers she drew out a safety match and struck it on the box. It flared out cheerily, dispelling the dark.

“Come on!” she cried. “We’ll carry this shanty to the beach. We’ll build a roaring fire before it and be all warm and dry before you know it.”

[187]

As they tumbled out of the shanty, then tipped it over, something fell to the ground with a thud. It was a short handled axe.

“I forgot the axe,” said Tillie, tucking it under her arm. “He used that for cutting his hole through the ice, Daddy Red Johnson did. Shouldn’t wonder if his fish line was here, too.”

[188]

CHAPTER XXIV

OUTBOUND IN THE NIGHT

Petite Jeanne was disturbed. Nine o'clock had come and passed. Reluctantly she made tea and drank it alone. Florence was not back. It was strange.

"They went fishing, she and Sun-Tan Tillie," she said to Tico, the bear. "One does not fish at night, unless it is for bull-heads. And who wishes for bull-heads? Bah! They are like snakes. You cut off their heads, and still they bite your finger."

Ten o'clock found her pacing the floor. Having at last arrived at a decision, she dressed hurriedly in knickers and a heavy jacket, drew a pair of men's rubber boots on over her shoes, called to Tico, and went out.

There was, she knew, a trail through the forest to the village. She had never followed it. She dared try it now. So, armed only with a flashlight, with the bear at her heels, she set out.

[189]

She was disturbed more than she cared to admit, even to herself. She feared, not for herself, but for Florence. All these strange, half told tales that had reached her ears, tales of gamblers and lady detectives, of strange water gypsies and half savage bears, had worked upon her imagination. One who knows no fear for his own safety is often the first to fear for others. Such was the nature of the little French girl. So she started out over an unknown trail at night in search of aid.

The trail was long and winding. More than once she lost herself. It was boggy in places. There was need for boots. At times she was obliged to take one step at a time, then lift the other foot out of the mud by the boot straps.

When at last she reached the silent, sleeping village, she was near exhaustion. The silence of the village frightened her more than the lonely forest.

"It is as if everyone in the world were dead," she told herself through teeth that chattered.

[190]

"I must find that boy, Turkey Trot," she said to Tico. "He may know something."

A faint light at the rear of Tillie's house was reassuring. Someone was there.

She knocked loudly at the door. A boy appeared with a lamp held high over his head.

The lamp descended with a crash. Fortunately it went out. The boy, who was Turkey Trot, had seen the bear, and had not seen

Jeanne standing in the shadows. He vanished.

Driven to desperation, Jeanne sprang after him, seized him by the collar, and flashed her light in his eyes.

“Why do you run?” she demanded fiercely. “Where is my friend? Where is Florence?”

“It was the bear!” Turkey Trot still trembled. “Where is Tillie?”

“You do not know?”

“Not me.”

“And you are alone?”

“Folks went to the Soo this morning. Be back to-morrow.

“But I got a motor, an outboard motor,” he added cheerfully.

“Man gave it to me this morning. It’s a hummer. Plenty of boats. We’ll go find them. Broke an oar, like as not.”

[191]

“Oh! Do you think so? Could we?”

This tow-headed boy had suddenly become a savior in Jeanne’s eyes.

“What’ll we do with the bear?” the boy asked doubtfully.

“Do you think we could take him?”

“Don’t he bite?”

“Tico? Never! He is tame. Oh, very!”

“We might try.”

Ten minutes later an outboard motor began its put-put-put. A sixteen foot boat with Jeanne in the prow, Turkey Trot in the stern, and the ponderous bear in the middle, was headed out toward Gull Rock Point.

“Know where they fish, I do,” Turkey Trot shouted above the noise of the motor. “Find ’em out there somewhere.”

“Perhaps,” Jeanne whispered to herself. There was doubt in her mind and misgiving in her heart. Florence had not stayed out like that before, without announcing her purpose. And there were strange doings about, very strange doings indeed.

The water was black with the peculiar blackness that is night. The path of pale light cast across it by the moon only served to intensify that blackness. From time to time Jeanne sent a narrow pencil of light from her electric torch. In a wavering circle this light searched the sea. Its efforts were in vain. No craft was on the water at all at that late hour. Florence and

[192]

Tillie, as you know, were far away.

They reached Gull Rock Point. Still they discovered nothing. They began circling the deep bays between points of land. One wide circle passed within their view, a second and a third.

Then, all of a sudden, Turkey Trot, whose eyes were familiar with every detail of those shores, uttered a low exclamation. Turning sharply, he headed straight for a log-strewn, sandy beach.

Petite Jeanne had seen only logs. Turkey Trot had seen that which set his blood racing.

[193]

* * * * *

In the meantime, on their bleak and barren island, Tillie and Florence were not idle. The fish shanty which they had found was composed of a light frame of wood and an outer covering of fibre board. Tillie seized the edge of the roof, Florence the bottom. Thus, in the half darkness, stumbling over stumps and stones, but cheered by the thought that here at last was shelter and a degree of warmth, they made their way to the beach.

There, with the aid of the axe, they split a dry cedar stick into small splints. They next lay down side by side in order to break the force of the wind, and Tillie struck a match. It flickered and flashed, then blazed up. Another moment, and the dry cedar was crackling like corn in a popper.

“A fire!” Florence breathed. “A fire! Oh, Tillie, a fire!”

For the moment she was as emotional as her companion.

Soon they had a roaring fire of driftwood. The lake level had risen three feet that spring. Great quantities of dead timber, to say nothing of logs and planks from docks, had been carried away. There was no scarcity of fuel.

[194]

The dance they did that night beneath the moon while their clothes were drying was a thing of wild witchery. But what of that? There was none to witness save the stars. The island was all their own.

When at last their clothes were dry, with a fire of hot coals before them, they packed themselves like two very large sardines into the fish shanty, which lay side down on the beach with its door open to the fire. In ten minutes they were both sound asleep.

[195]

CHAPTER XXV

A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

The object that had caught Turkey Trot's eye as he skirted the log-strewn beach was a rowboat that, bumping on the beach now and then as if in a futile attempt to drive itself ashore, lifted its prow in the air.

"It's Tillie's!" he breathed as they came close.

"It is." Jeanne's tone was low.

"The anchor's gone. Painter cut." The boy's trained eye took in every detail. The oars, too, were gone. But within the boat, on a stout cord, mute testimony to Florence's afternoon of perch fishing, lay a dozen or more dead perch.

"They fished," said Turkey Trot.

"How long?"

The boy shrugged.

"Is fishing good in this bay?"

"We never come here. Tillie never does. Sand and small rocks. No weeds in the bay. They didn't fish here."

[196]

"Then why did they come?"

For a time Turkey Trot did not answer. Then suddenly his face brightened. "Lots of raspberries back there." He nodded toward the fringe of forest that skirted the shore. "Clearing, back a little way. Lots of trails. Might have gone back there and got lost."

"But the anchor? The cut painter? The dead fish?"

Once more the boy shrugged. "All I know is, we might find something back there. We can't find anything more here."

To this argument Jeanne found no answer. They silently grounded their boat on the sand. Turkey Trot drew it up on the beach. He did the same for Tillie's light craft.

"It's funny," he murmured, as he gazed at the painter. "Brand new rope. Looks like it had been chewed off."

Turning, he put out his hand for the flashlight, then led the way into the timber.

What can be more spooky than following a woodland trail far from the homes of men at the dead of night? Nor was this particular trail devoid of sad ruins telling of other days. They

[197]

had not followed the narrow, winding, tree-shadowed trail a hundred rods when they came to the ruins of what had once been a prosperous logging camp.

Years had passed since the last sound of axe, the last buzz of saw, the last shout of teamster had died away. The roof of the cook shack had fallen in. A score of bushes had lifted their heads through its rotting floor.

The bunk house, proudly displaying its roof, still stood. Its door, which hung awry, was wide open. Into this door, from off the shadowy trail, a dark spot dashed.

Petite Jeanne started, then drew back. Was it a wolf, a wandering dog, or some less formidable creature? Without glancing back, she at last plodded doggedly on. Since Turkey Trot carried the torch, she was obliged to follow or be left in the dark.

Once more they were lost in the shadows of cedars and birches as the trail wound up a low hill. And then they came upon the most mournful sight of all, an abandoned home.

[198]

Standing as it did at the center of a grass-grown clearing, with door ajar and broken windows agape, the thing stared at them as a blind man sometimes appears to stare with sightless eyes. To make matters worse, three tall pines with mournful drooping branches stood in a graveyard-like cluster near the door, while beneath them, shining white, some object seemed a marble slab.

“Boo!” Turkey Trot’s stolid young soul at last was stirred. “We—we won’t pass that way!”

He turned down a trail that forked to the right.

Hardly had he done this than Petite Jeanne gripped his arm.

“Listen!” Her voice was tense.

Turkey Trot did listen, and to his ears came the sound of music.

“It—it’s a banjo or somethin’,” he muttered. “And—and singin’.”

He turned a startled gaze toward the deserted cabin. The sound appeared to come from there. His feet moved restlessly. He appeared about to flee.

[199]

“‘Tain’t them,” he said in a near whisper. He spoke of Florence and Tillie. “They didn’t have no banjo. And besides, they wouldn’t.”

“Of course not.” Petite Jeanne had him by the arm. “All the same, we must see. They may know something. Many things.”

They moved a few steps down the trail they had chosen. At once they were able to see more clearly. Behind the cabin, and within its shadows, was a half burned-out camp fire. And about the fire people sat.

“Who can these be?” Jeanne asked.

Turkey Trot did not reply. Instead, he took her by the hand and led her farther down the trail.

In time this trail, after circling the narrow hill, came up again, thus bringing them nearer the camp fire.

At last the boy dropped on hands and knees and began to crawl. Following his example, Jeanne lost herself in the thick bed of tall ferns.

[200]

They had crept silently forward to a point where it seemed that a parting of the ferns would show them the camp of the strangers, when suddenly a blood curdling scream rent the air.

Instantly Turkey Trot flattened himself to the earth. As Jeanne did the same, she found her heart beating like waves on a rocky shore.

She thought of Tillie and Florence. The tiller of their boat had been cut. She recalled this. Their boat was adrift. Had they been kidnapped and carried here?

Instantly she was on her feet and darting forward. Knowing nothing of her thoughts, anxious only for her safety, the boy seized her foot. She fell heavily, then lay there motionless, as if dead.

The boy was in a panic. But not for long. She was only stunned. Presently she sat up dizzily.

They listened. Then they rose to their feet. A strange sound had come to them. They guessed its origin.

When they reached the camp fire no person was there. Old Tico stood grunting with satisfaction over a box of berries spilled in someone’s hurried departure.

[201]

“Tico!” exclaimed Jeanne. “We forgot him!”

It was true. In their excitement they had forgotten the bear. Having smelled refreshments, he had taken a direct course to the strangers’ camp. Beyond doubt he had poked his nose over the shoulder of some fair young lady. A scream, panic, and hasty retreat had followed.

But who were these people that indulged in an after midnight feast in so lonely a spot? To this question the boy and girl immediately sought an answer.

They were not long in forming a partial answer. It was Jeanne who cried out:

“See this handkerchief. Only a gypsy, a French gypsy, wears one like it.

“And this cigarette case!” she added a moment later. “See! It is from France, too!

“Gypsies, French gypsies!” A note of sorrow crept into her voice. “They have been here. Now they are gone. I wanted to see them, only to hear them speak!”

[202]

How little she knew.

“Listen!” The boy held up a hand.

From the nearby shore came the thunder of a speed boat leaving the beach.

“Do gypsies have speed boats?” Jeanne asked in surprise.

“Who knows?” was the boy’s wise answer.

“But where are our friends?”

“We won’t find them here.”

Little Turkey Trot was now fully convinced that his sister and Florence had been taken captive by these strange dark people. He knew little of gypsies. He had heard that they carried people away. He did not wish to disturb Petite Jeanne, so he said not a word. Such was the big heart of the village boy.

“Might as well go home,” was his conclusion.

Jeanne did not question this. They passed around the staring cabin and down the trail toward the ruins of the lumber camp.

Turkey Trot walked rapidly. Jeanne, who was afraid of tripping in the dark, was a little way behind him, when she came abreast of the black bunk house that gloomed in the dark. She stole one glance at it. Then her heart stood still. From the depths of that darkness two eyes gleamed at her.

[203]

“Green eyes!” She barely missed crying aloud.

With three bounds she was at Turkey Trot’s side.

Even then she did not speak. The boy had not seen the things. Why disturb him? Perhaps she had seen nothing. Those eyes may have been a creation of her overwrought imagination. So she reasoned, and was silent.

Turkey Trot was firm in his belief that the missing girls had been carried away. He fastened a rope to the remains of

Tillie's painter, and took the boat in tow.

"They won't be back for it," he muttered. "Big seas come in here. Smash it up."

At that he started his motor and they went pop-popping toward home in the deep darkness that lay just before dawn.

CHAPTER XXVI

“A BOAT! A BOAT!”

The sun was high when Florence and Tillie woke on the island where for a time they were Crusoes. Their first thought was of food. To Tillie, Goose Island was no unknown land. She had been here often in winter. The time had been when wild geese laid their eggs here. They came no more. There would be no eggs for breakfast.

“Fish for breakfast,” Tillie declared. “It’s our only chance.”

“No line,” said Florence.

“Yes. Here’s one.” Tillie produced one from the pocket of her knickers.

“Got a can of worms in your pocket, too?” Florence asked with a laugh. To her the affair was becoming a lark. The sun was bright and cheering, the sea a glorious blue. There was not a cloud in the sky.

“Someone will find us,” she declared hopefully.

[205]

“We’re a long way off the ship channel,” said Tillie. “We may be here for days. They’ll search the shores for our boats and our bodies.” She shuddered. “They’ll beat the forest for miles before they think of looking on Goose Island. And you may be sure enough that those villains, whoever they were, will never whisper a word of it. They think we are at the bottom of the lake. That’s what they hope, too.

“Florence.” Her tone became quite solemn. “It’s not whether you are rich or poor that counts. It’s whether you are honest and loyal and kind. Take Daddy Red Johnson. He was poor. But he was square and kind. Once when he was fishing for trout he caught a ninety pound sturgeon. Mighty near pulled him through the hole. He got over ten dollars for it. He called that Providence. Said God sent the sturgeon so he could help out a poor Indian who was sick and had only dried fish to eat.

“He was poor. But he was good and kind. Then there’s the Eries. They’ve got millions; yacht worth a hundred thousand, big cottage up here, sailboats, speed boat, everything. But they’re just as square as any poor folks.

[206]

“Wait till we get back!” she exclaimed. “Somebody’ll suffer for this! Cedar Point has had enough of that sort of thing. Crooks rob city folks in the winter. Then they come up here to try and have a good time like real people. Do you think they ever can? Not much! Man with a black heart never has a good time anywhere. Cedar Point has had enough badness.

“But there’s the question of breakfast!” she exclaimed. “Plenty of minnows if we can catch ’em. Pull off your shoes.”

For half an hour they labored on the sandy beach, in shallow water, constructing a minnow trap of stones and sticks. They made a narrow pond that could be closed quickly. After corralling a school of sand minnows, they closed them in. One of them was soon flopping on Tillie’s hook.

“Have to swim for my breakfast,” she explained, rapidly disrobing. “Some big old rock bass out there beneath that rock, I’ll bet.”

[207]

She plunged into the water, swam thirty yards, then mounted the rock.

Standing there in the morning sunshine, she seemed a statue of bronze.

The statue became a thing of great animation shortly after her minnow hit the water. She had hooked a fish.

“He’s a whopper!” she shouted back. “We’ll get more, too.”

They did. Half an hour later four plump rock bass, spiked to a broad plank, were roasting to a delicious brown.

“Nothing better than planked fish,” said Tillie, as she cleaned up the last morsel and sucked her fingers. “Next problem is one of transportation.”

“Tickets for two,” replied Florence, “and no return tickets, please.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Tillie philosophically. “This isn’t half bad; not near so bad as what was intended for us.”

“No,” Florence’s tone was a sober one, “it’s not.”

[208]

“Well,” Florence’s voice took on a more cheerful tone, “this appears to be our island. We’d better explore it. There may be some ‘Man Friday’ just around the corner.”

They started out along the pebbly beach. Here and there they came upon bits of wreckage from cottagers’ docks that had been carried away by the high water. Two posts joined by cross pieces, long planks very full of spikes, short bits of broken boards—such was the driftwood that obstructed their path.

“Enough planks and nails to build a house,” was Tillie’s comment.

“Why not?” Florence became enthusiastic at once. “At least we could build a three-sided shelter with one side open to the fire. That’s good sound lumber.” She struck one plank a thwack

with the small axe she carried in her hand.

“We might,” admitted Tillie. “We’d better go farther. Find the best place.”

They trudged on. Then, quite unexpectedly, as they turned a corner, they saw something looming in the distance.

[209]

“A boat! A boat!” Florence fairly shrieked this as she went racing away.

She was not wholly wrong. It was a boat. But one of those heavy, flat bottomed affairs, used only by commercial fishermen, it lay bottom up, displaying three stoved-in planks.

“Let’s turn her over.” Tillie’s tone was wholly practical. She had been brought up in a boat.

They put their shoulders to the craft, and over it went.

Tillie tapped it here and hacked at it there with the axe. “Not so bad,” was her final judgment. “Sides are sound. Stern, too. Have to give her three new planks in her bottom. We can calk up the seams with moss and rosin. Make some oars out of cedar poles, and there you are. It’ll be a stiff pull. All of two miles to shore. But we’ll make it.”

“How long will all that take?”

“Maybe two days.”

At once Florence became downcast. She was beginning to think of Petite Jeanne. She had come to this place for rest. “Little rest she’ll get while I am missing!” she thought gloomily. “We ought to get away from here at once. But how can we?”

[210]

“All right,” she spoke in as cheerful a tone as she could command. “Let’s get to work at once.”

They did get to work, and made famous progress, too. Lunch forgotten, supper forgotten, they toiled on until, just as the sun was dropping low, Tillie declared the clumsy craft would float.

“No oars,” objected Florence.

“Can pole her close to shore,” replied Tillie. “Try to take her down to our camp.”

This proved a Herculean task. The boat was clumsy and hard to steer. Three times she filled and all but sank. Bailing with a small wooden box they found was slow work. They reached camp at last, tired, soaked to the skin, and ravenously hungry.

“Ought to have caught some fish,” Tillie said remorsefully.

[211]

“Too late now. Only bullheads bite in the dark. They stay in the bullrushes. None here.”

They made a fire, dried their clothes, then heated some water in a hollow stone. To this water they added bitter willow leaves. As they sipped this they pretended they were drinking tea.

“To-morrow,” said Tillie with a sigh, “I’ll catch a lot of fish.”

“To-morrow I would like to go home.”

“Well, maybe,” replied Tillie thoughtfully. “All depends on that old boat. If she only soaks up so she don’t leak like a gill net, we might.”

There was nothing left for it but to attempt to round out the night with sleep. They were tired enough for that, beyond question.

After building a hot fire, they curled up in their herring box shelter and prepared to sleep.

Florence had all but drifted off to the land of dreams, when she fancied she heard the throb of a motor. The impression was half real, half dream. Reality struggled for a time with dream life. Dream life won, and she slept.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE “SPANK ME AGAIN”

Florence awoke with a start. She sat up abruptly, rubbing her eyes in a futile attempt to remember where she was.

“I am—” she muttered. “This is—”

A dull red glow met her eyes. Like a flash she knew. She and Tillie had started their second night on Goose Island. The red glow was their camp fire, burned low. She had been asleep for some time.

“But that sound!” She was now fully awake. A loud throbbing beat in upon her eardrums.

“It’s a boat! Some sort of motor boat!” she fairly screamed. “Tillie! Tillie! Wake up! There’s a boat!”

Tillie did wake up. She sprang to her feet to stare into the darkness at a spot where a dot of red light was cutting its way through the night.

“He’s passing!” she exclaimed. “It’s that boy in the ‘Spank Me Again.’ He has not seen our fire. We must scream.”

[213]

Scream they did, fairly splitting their lungs. And with the most astonishing results.

The crazy little craft gave vent to a series of sharp sput-sput-sputs. Then suddenly it went dead; the light disappeared. Night, dark and silent as the grave, hung over all.

“We—we frightened him,” Tillie gasped. “He—he—went over. He may be hurt, may drown. We must save him!”

“How?”

“Swim.” Tillie was kicking off her shoes.

Florence followed her example. Together they entered the chilling water to begin one more long swim, to the spot where the strange little motor boat had last been seen.

“He’s hurt,” Tillie panted between strokes, “or he’d yell for help.”

Florence thought this probable, and her heart chilled. In their eagerness for deliverance, had they caused another to lose his life? She redoubled her efforts.

A dark bulk, lying close to the water, appeared before them.

[214]

“The boat,” thought Florence, “it did not sink. There is hope.”

She was right. As they reached the overturned boat, they found the Erie boy, in a semi-conscious condition and with a bad cut on his temple, clinging feebly to the stern.

To assist him to a position across the boat's narrow hull, then to push and pull the small craft ashore, was the work of an hour.

By the time they reached the beach, the boy had so far regained his strength that he was able, with their assistance, to walk to their camp.

A great fire was soon busy dispelling the cold, while clouds of steam rose from their drenched clothing.

Florence bandaged the boy's head; then, with all the skill of a trained nurse, she brought him fully back to life by chafing his hands and feet.

"So—so that's who it was?" he found words to gasp at last.

"I thought it was—well, meebby I didn't think at all. I just lost control and she went over. Good thing you were here."

[215]

"It was." There was conviction in Tillie's tone. "I always knew that thing would kill you. And it's pretty near done it."

"Mighty close," he agreed.

"But why are you here?" he asked in some amazement, as he took in their crude accommodations.

"Because we can't get away. We're marooned," Florence explained.

She proceeded to relate in a dramatic manner their strange adventure.

"The beasts!" exclaimed the boy. "How could they?"

"Guess that gets asked pretty often these days," said Florence soberly.

"Question is," mused the boy, "how are we to get away?"

"Your boat—" began Florence.

"Soaked. Engine dead. Besides, she carries only one person. Positively. Couldn't even hold one of you on my lap."

"We've fixed up a sort of boat, wreck of an old dory," suggested Tillie.

[216]

"Will she float?"

"I think so."

“Fine! Give you a tow.

“Tell you what!” The boy stood up. “We’d better get my motor and bring it to the fire. Dry it out by morning. Got a three gallon can of gas. Be away with the dawn.”

The motor was soon doing its share of steaming by the fire.

“Got some rations?” the boy asked. “Of course you haven’t. But I have. Regular feast, all in cans. Always carried ’em for just such a time as this. Boiled chicken in one can, chili con carne in another, and a sealed tin of pilot biscuits.”

He brought this unbelievable feast to the place before the fire. When the chicken and the chili had been warmed, they enjoyed a repast such as even the millionaire’s son had seldom eaten.

“Well,” he sighed, as the last morsel disappeared, “as it says in ‘The Call of the Wild,’ ‘He folded his hands across his feet before the fire, allowed his head to drop forward on his breast and fell fast asleep.’”

[217]

“Oh no!” exclaimed Tillie. “Let’s not try to sleep. Let’s tell ghost stories till morning.”

“Agreed!” the boy seconded with enthusiasm. “And the one who tells the best one wins this.” He laid a shining gold piece before them on a rock.

The contest was carried forward with spirit and animation. But Sun-Tan Tillie, with her weird stories of that north country was easily winner.

“Now we shall see how it performs,” said the boy, rising stiffly as day began to dawn.

He lifted his motor from its place before the fire, and carried it to his boat. Five minutes had not elapsed before it began to sput-sput merrily.

“Have you home for breakfast,” he predicted.

He made good his word. Just as Jeanne and Turkey Trot, after one more night of fruitless search, sat down to their oatmeal, bacon, and coffee, two well soaked girls broke in upon them. By dint of diligent bailing they had forced their crazy dory, towed by the equally crazy “Spank Me Again,” to carry them home.

[218]

[219]

CHAPTER XXVIII

GLOWING WATERS

There were dark looks on many faces as the story of the kidnapping of the two girls and the atrocious attempt at their lives spread about the village. The native population of this Northland is intensely loyal to its own people. The summer sojourners, too, had come to have a great love for the happy, carefree Tillie, who caught their minnows and helped to launch their boats.

“Something will come of this,” was the word on many a tongue.

As for Florence, after receiving Jeanne’s open-hearted and joyous welcome home, her first thought was of the lady cop.

“We must tell her at once,” she said to Tillie. “Our experience may fit into the task she has before her.”

“Yes,” replied Tillie, “we must.”

They rowed at once to the lonely cabin among the cedars.

[220]

But what was this? As they made their way up from the dock, they spied a white paper fluttering at the door.

“Gone!” was Florence’s intuition.

She was right. On the paper, written in the round hand of the lady cop, were these words:

They are gone. I must follow. Good-bye, girls. And thank you. I hope to meet you in another world.

The Lady Cop.

For a moment they stared in silence.

“Gone!” Florence repeated at last. “They have gone! She means the gamblers.”

“Another world,” Jeanne read in a daze.

“And we have her trunk!” Florence exclaimed suddenly.

“Her trunk?” Jeanne’s eyes opened wide in astonishment. She had not been told of this episode.

“Sit down.” Florence eased herself unsteadily to a low railing. Then she told the story of the trunk.

“And now,” she concluded, “we have that mysterious trunk, which was wanted by the gamblers, though why, not even the lady cop could guess, on our hands. They want it. She wants it. We have it. And we do not know her real name. She implied the Miss Weightman was an assumed name. What a pickle!”

“What a sour pickle indeed!” agreed Jeanne.

“And to-morrow we leave for Chicago.”

“To-morrow! It does not seem possible.” The little French girl’s heart went into a flutter. This meant that ten days from this time she would be at the center of a great stage strewn with broken instruments of war, and lighted only by an artificial moon, doing the gypsy tarantella while a vast audience looked on and—

Applauded? Who could say? So much must come of this crowded quarter of an hour. Her heart stood still; then it went racing.

“Ah, well,” she sighed, “only time can tell.”

“I guess that’s true,” Florence agreed, thinking of quite another matter. “We may be able to find her in Chicago and return her trunk.

“And now—” She closed her eyes for a moment. “Now I must go to our cabin and sleep.”

The remainder of that day was uneventful. But night set all the village agog.

After a good sleep, Florence had assisted Jeanne with the packing in preparation for the morrow’s departure. They had said their sad farewell to night and the stars, a farewell that night and stars were not to accept as final. They had crept beneath their blankets and had fallen fast asleep.

Florence awoke some time later with the glow of an unusual light in her eyes.

Springing out of bed, she rushed to the window. The next instant she was shaking Jeanne as she exclaimed excitedly:

“Jeanne! Jeanne! Wake up! There is a fire! A big fire somewhere on the bay!”

After struggling into their outer garments, they rushed to the water’s edge and launched their boat.

They had not gone far before they discovered the location of the fire.

“It’s on Gamblers’ Island.” Her voice was tense with emotion. “It’s the gamblers’ cottage. It will burn to the ground.”

This last seemed certain. Already the flames were mounting high. Even in the village there was scant fire protection. On the smaller islands there was none.

Florence seemed to hear the beating of her own heart. Here was swift revenge for a cowardly crime.

But was it revenge? The lady cop had said the gamblers were gone. Perhaps they were not all gone. One might have remained behind to light the blaze, to cover some evil deed. Who could tell?

Then again, the fire might have been accidental, a mouse chewing a match.

All this time Florence was rowing sturdily. They were approaching the scene of the fire. Other boats were coming. Rowboats, motor boats, speed boats, like particles of steel attracted by the magnet, they came nearer and nearer to a common center, the fire.

At a certain distance all paused. The night was very nearly still. A faint breeze carried the soaring sparks away from the tiny island forest and out toward the water.

[224]

As the scores of craft came to rest they formed a semi-circle.

It was strange. The quiet of the night, the flames rushing silently upward. The light on the water, the faces of two hundred people, tense, motionless, lighted red by the flames. And above it all a million stars.

Florence had seen something akin to this pictured in a book. She searched her mind for that picture and found it; a circle of gray wolves sitting in a circle about a half burned-out camp fire, beside which a lone wanderer slept.

“Only these are not wolves,” she told herself. “They are people, kind-hearted people. It is the home of wolves that is going up in flames. May they never return!”

“And they never will.” She started at the sound of a voice at her elbow. Unconsciously she had spoken aloud. Tillie, who had slipped up beside her in her rowboat, had answered.

“That is not their island,” Tillie explained. “They only leased it. Now they will not be allowed to rebuild.”

[225]

“You should thank God for that.”

“I have,” Tillie replied frankly.

Once more there was silence.

Some time later Tillie spoke again. “We have her trunk, the lady cop’s. You are goin’ to-morrow. Will you take it?”

“I believe not,” Florence said thoughtfully. “I haven’t her true name. It will be safer here. If I find her I will send for it.”

After that for a space of a full half hour silence reigned supreme. Not a boat left that unbroken circle. What held them there? There was nothing they could do. What is the dread, all-potent charm that holds a throng to the scene of a fire until the last shingle has flared up, the last rafter fallen? Does it hark back to days when our ancestors knew no homes, but slept by camp fires in the forest? Who can say?

As the last wall crumbled in and the chimney came down with a crash, as if touched by a magic wand the circle melted away into the night.

[226]

Half an hour later Florence and Jeanne were once more sleeping soundly. Such is the boundless peace of youth.

[227]

CHAPTER XXIX

FADING SHORE LINES

The following night found Florence seated on the after deck of a large lake steamer bound for Chicago. Strange and varied were the thoughts and emotions that stirred her soul as she watched the dark shoreline of the North Peninsula fade in the distance.

There was a moment when she sprang to her feet and stretched her arms far out as she cried, "I want to go back! Oh, I want to go back!"

At this moment the woods and the water, the sunsets, the moon at midnight, the fish, all the wild forest creatures were calling her back.

Yet, even as this yearning passed, she felt the smooth comfort of silk stockings, caught the bright gleam of red and blue in her dress and knew that here, too, was joy. In her imagination she heard the rush and felt the thrill of a great city, experienced again the push and pull of it, and once more accepted its challenge.

[228]

"I am strong!" she cried aloud. "The summer, this wild life, has renewed my powers."

But Jeanne? Ah, there was the question. She had accepted a mission. She had agreed to take the little French girl into the north woods and see that she had rest. Had she performed this mission well or ill?

To this question she could form no certain answer. Life in this out-of-the-way place had so pressed in upon her, adventure and mystery had so completely taken possession of her, that she had found too little time to think of Jeanne.

"What if I have failed?" Her heart sank. "What if the doctor says I have failed?"

Jeanne was asleep in her stateroom. She seemed well and happy, quite prepared for the great testing which lay just before her. But who could tell?

"So often," she thought to herself, "we are led away from the main purpose of our lives by some surprising affair which springs straight up before our eyes and for the moment blinds us."

[229]

Yet, as she reviewed the events of the past weeks she experienced few regrets. She had been working, not for her own glory, but that others might find success and happiness.

“But what came of it all?” she asked herself. “What mysteries did we solve?”

The problems that had perplexed her now passed, like soldiers on parade, before her mind’s eye. Who had run them down and all but drowned them on that first night? The gamblers? The gypsies? Green Eyes and her rich friends? She had found no answer.

Where were the three priceless rubies? Did they lie among the ashes of the gamblers’ cottage? Had the gamblers taken them when they departed? Had the lady cop regained possession of them? Where was the lady cop, and what was her real name? Again no answer.

What of the lady cop’s trunk? Why had the gamblers turned the cabin upside down in search of an empty trunk? How were Tillie and she ever to return it now?

[230]

The problem that stood out in her mind strongest of all was this: Who had taken them for that terrible ride out into the night waters of Lake Huron?

“The gamblers, to be sure!” Tillie would have said at once. It seemed probable that the villagers thought the same.

“And perhaps they burned the gamblers’ cottage for that reason,” she told herself. Yet, of this there was no proof.

Turkey Trot and Jeanne had surprised gypsies in a feast near Tillie’s abandoned boat. Jeanne believed these gypsies had taken them on that all but fatal ride. Had they?

“If they did,” she told herself, “they were striking at Jeanne. They may strike again.”

The conclusion she reached at the end of this review of affairs was that she must keep a close watch on Petite Jeanne until the first night’s performance was over.

“They kidnapped her on the eve of her other great success,” she murmured. “They may repeat.”

[231]

“And yet, that was France. This is America.”

At that she rose and walked away to their stateroom.

[232]

CHAPTER XXX

THEIR CROWDED HOUR

Petite Jeanne's one big night was at hand. Already the shadows were growing long in her modest little sitting room. To-night, for one brief hour at least, she was to be an actress. How the thought thrilled her! An actress for an hour. And then?

True, she had acted once upon the stage of the famous Paris Opera. But that was but a fete, an affair of a single night. To-night much was to be decided. Would the play go on? Night after night would she dance the gypsy tarantella under the stage moon? Would these Americans applaud?

"Americans," she said aloud, as she sat looking away into the gathering darkness. "After all, how little I know about them."

"Americans are like all the rest of the world," Florence replied. "They love laughter, dancing and song. Then, too, they can feel a pang of pity and shed a tear. Just dream that you are on the stage of the Paris Opera, and all will be well."

[233]

Petite Jeanne was not sure. She had suddenly gone quite cold, and was not a little afraid.

"Green Eyes will be there. She hates me, I fear," she murmured.

"On the stage, when the great act comes, there will be only Tico and you. The night, the broken cannons and the moon."

"Ah, yes." The little French girl sighed. "I must try to feel it and see it all as I felt and saw it, a small child in France."

"In half an hour we must go to the theatre," said Florence. "We will have a cup of tea, as we did sometimes when we were in our cabin."

"If only we were there now," sighed the little French girl. "Oh, why must we be ambitious? Why do we struggle so for success and yet more success, when peace awaits us in some quiet place?"

To this Florence found no answer. She rose to turn on the electric plate for tea, when the telephone rang.

[234]

She went to answer it. Petite Jeanne heard her answer the telephone, but paid no attention to her conversation until she caught the word gypsy. Then she sat straight up.

"I must meet her to-night?" Florence was saying. "A gypsy woman? But that is quite impossible."

“She is being taken to Canada to-night by the officials, you say? But how can it be necessary for me to see a gypsy? I know no gypsies. Besides, I can see no one to-night. Believe me—”

Her words were broken in upon by Petite Jeanne. “If it is a gypsy, you must see her!” The little French girl was pulling at her arm impulsively. “It is important. It must be. Besides, gypsies, they are my friends. You must remain here. I will go to the theatre alone.”

One look at Petite Jeanne’s tense face told Florence that she had no choice in the matter.

“I will see her,” she spoke into the telephone. “Send her over at once.”

They drank their tea in silence. The night was too full of portent for words.

[235]

“Gypsy?” Florence thought. “What can she want of me?”

Then she thought of those gypsies they had seen in the north country. Had they made their way to Chicago? That was not impossible. And if they had, what did this woman have to tell?

“Promise me one thing.” Petite Jeanne suddenly leaned toward her. “Bring that gypsy woman to the play. She is French. She knows the tarantella. She has known war, as it was in France. I will dance for her. She will understand.”

“I promise,” Florence replied solemnly.

The moment for Jeanne’s departure arrived. Florence saw her carefully packed into the car sent from the theatre, then she returned to her room to wait.

With Jeanne gone, the place seemed strangely still. The clock ticked solemnly. From somewhere in the distance a fire siren set up a mournful wail.

“She is too much for me,” she whispered, speaking of Jeanne. “Think of her forcing me to remain here to meet a ragged gypsy, and this the night of all nights. And then I must bring that strange person to her show her first night!”

[236]

A knock sounded at the door. She sprang up to open it. A man stood there, not a woman. For a moment she did not see the woman behind him in the shadows.

“I beg your pardon,” said the man, “I am an immigration officer. This woman and her companions entered our country without permission. We found them in the west side settlement. They must return to Canada. This woman insisted upon seeing you.” He pushed the short, brown woman into the light.

Instantly the girl recognized her, and gasped. She was the

mother of the beautiful child that had so narrowly escaped drowning.

“You wished to see me?” she asked as soon as she gained possession of her voice.

“Yes. You good. You kind. You not bad. Gypsy not forget. I must tell.”

Mystified, Florence motioned her to a seat.

[237]

The tale the woman had to tell was a long one, and passing strange. In her broken tongue, with many repetitions, it was long in the telling.

And all the time the clock was ticking away the moments. Petite Jeanne’s great hour approached.

[238]

CHAPTER XXXI

PETITE JEANNE'S DARK HOUR

Petite Jeanne reached the theatre. She was quite alone. She entered at the stage door unnoticed. A chill numbed her being as the shadowy hallway leading to the dressing rooms engulfed her.

The past ten days, as she reviewed them now, seemed a bad dream. Rehearsals had been carried to the last degree of rigor. The director had been tireless and exacting. On her return the physician had pronounced her physically perfect; yet, at this moment her knees seemed ready to cave in beneath her.

“The first night!” she whispered to herself. How often, in the last few days, she had heard those words. Experienced actors who had known many “first nights” and many failures as well, spoke them in whispers. Inexperienced youngsters shouted them. As for Jeanne, no one had heard these words fall from her lips.

“So much depends upon to-night,” she told herself. “Success or failure. And who does not wish to succeed grandly?”

[239]

The curtain was down, the stage deserted, as she paused in the wings before going to her dressing room, where Tico, curled up in a warm corner, awaited her.

Many times she had stared up into the dark rows of empty seats as she did her dance. In her mind's eye she could see them even now. But now, too, she caught the rustle of programs. The seats were filling, filling with Americans—to her the great unknown. In wild panic she fled to her dressing room.

The place was bare, barn-like. Only Tico greeted her. It was cruel that Florence could not be here now.

“But she will come,” she assured herself, as a feeling of great hope surged through her being. “They will be there in the audience, she and the gypsy woman. I will see them. They will give me much courage.”

As she changed to her stage costume, a great peace stole over her. But this was not for long.

[240]

The sound of the orchestra's opening number sent fresh chills up her spine. What was she to do? How could she find fresh courage for this hour? No answer came.

The curtain went up. Then, amid such a hush as she had never before experienced, she tremblingly took her place on the stage. The scene was a French gypsy camp, for the play told of gypsy life during the World War.

Fortunately her part in the first act, also in the second, was small. She sat unobtrusively beside the bear in her corner, or moved silently to the side of the ancient gypsy fortune teller.

The story of the gypsies during that war is a fascinating one. Their young men volunteered. They died as bravely as any other true Frenchmen. The older ones, the women and children, wandered here, there, everywhere, enduring the suffering and privation that had fallen upon the land.

In the story of this play, at its beginning, like Cinderella, Petite Jeanne, a diminutive figure, was held in the background. Marie Condelli, a fascinating dark-eyed gypsy girl, dressed in many bright silk skirts, took the front of the stage. It was she for whom feasts were arranged, she with whom a great American officer fell madly in love on the very day before his heroic death on the battlefield, she who was the very darling of gypsy camp and war camp alike.

[241]

One night, so the play ran in its second act, the two girls, the dark-eyed one and Petite Jeanne, sat at the feet of the fortune teller when that aged person spread her arms wide as she cried:

“I see a vision. It is a battlefield. Many are dying. A great officer is wounded. He falls. He is a father. She, his child, comes to him. It is a girl, a young woman. She bends over him. I see her face. Now I do not see it. But yes. It is Marie. No, it is little Jeanne. No! No! It is one. Which is it? My God, the vision is gone!” She falls to the earth in a spasm. When she comes to herself, the two girls implore her to tell them the truth. Had she seen one? Had it been the other? For both Marie and Petite Jeanne had been brought up like orphans in the gypsy camp. It had been rumored that one of these was stolen as a babe from a great French family. But which? No one knew.

[242]

Such is the story of that drama up to the great third act in which Petite Jeanne was to emerge from her obscurity and play an important role.

One fact we have not mentioned. Early in this play, it is revealed that Petite Jeanne’s gypsy lover has gone to war, and is believed to have been killed.

All during the first act, and again through the second, Jeanne’s eyes strayed to one spot, to the seats that had been allotted to Florence and any friend she might care to bring. Always the seats were unoccupied. At each fresh disappointment her despair deepened.

“Will they not come?” she asked herself over and over. “They must! They *must!*”

[243]

CHAPTER XXXII

PETITE JEANNE'S TRIUMPH

The tale the gypsy woman had to tell was as astonishing as it was fascinating. As we have said, told in her halting speech, it was long. Florence's face showed her consternation as she looked at her watch when it was done.

"Come!" she cried, seizing the woman's arm. "We must go to the theatre at once! We will miss some. We must not miss all. It is the first big night."

She started and all but screamed as a man loomed before her. The officer! She had quite forgotten him.

"No tricks!" he warned. "She must start for Canada to-night."

"But she must go with me first." Florence was quick in recovery.

"No tricks," he repeated.

"None at all. You may go with us. Only—" she hesitated, "we have but two seats." [244]

The man bent a steady look upon her. "You look all right. I'll meet you at the box office after the show."

"Oh, thank—thanks! But we must rush!" Florence was halfway out of the door.

Down the stairs they raced, then round the corner to a taxi stand.

Only once they paused before reaching the theatre. Leaping from the taxi, Florence dashed into a telegraph office. There she sent the following message to Sun-Tan Tillie at her home in the north woods:

"Bring the trunk at once. Your expenses will be paid."

On returning to the taxi, she murmured, more to herself than to the gypsy woman:

"So they were in that trunk all the time! How perfectly marvelous!"

A moment later the taxi came to a grinding stop before the theatre. Here they were, at last. [245]

* * * * *

At that moment Petite Jeanne sat in a dark corner backstage, engulfed in despair. The curtain was down. The scene shifters

were preparing for the great third act. The orchestra could be heard faintly. Her zero hour was at hand.

Thus far, the play had gone well. Its fate now lay in her hands. The big scene, the gypsy dance on a battlefield under the moon, would decide all.

And to Petite Jeanne at that moment all seemed lost. "If only they were my own French people," she moaned.

At that moment all the hateful acts performed by her people against visiting Americans since the war, passed through her mind.

"How they must hate us!" she thought in deep despair. "And they know I am French. These Americans. They are so tremendous in their approval, so terrible in their disapproval! How can I dance before them? If only Florence and that gypsy woman were here!"

At that moment of sheer despair, a hand was laid upon her shoulder. A voice spoke to her.

"Cheer up, sister!" the voice said. "You are going to be a wonder! Only forget them all, and dance as you danced that night in the forest beneath a real moon. That was heavenly!"

[246]

The little French girl started in astonishment. She found herself looking up into the peculiar greenish eyes of the stage star she had thought of as her enemy.

"You—you saw?" Her eyes were filled with wonder. "And you do not hate me?"

"I? Hate you? I am your sister of the stage. Your success is the success of all."

Petite Jeanne's mind whirled. Then her thoughts cleared. She stood up straight and strong. She planted one kiss on the cheek of Green Eyes, shed one hot tear, then she was gone.

A few moments later, in the hush of moonlight, with a great throng looking down upon them, she and Tico appeared upon the stage.

In this act, as the play runs, the dark-eyed rival of the girl portrayed by Jeanne discovers her father, a great French officer who has lived unknown to his daughter for years, only to find that he is dying.

[247]

The light-haired gypsy comes upon the scene to find the other girl in her dying father's embrace, thus to learn that her hope of finding as a father some noble Frenchman is dashed to the ground.

Downhearted, despairing, her lover gone, hopes vanished, she

remains with bowed head while the dying officer is carried away. Then, as her bear's nose touches her hand, she remembers her art, the art of dancing. In this art she finds solace.

Moving gracefully into the dance, Petite Jeanne danced as she had never danced before. One pair of eyes in all that vast audience inspired her most. Gypsy eyes they were, the eyes of a stranger who had belonged to the camps of her enemy in France, but who, in a strange land, had become her friend. Florence and the strange gypsy had arrived in time.

The spell woven over the audience at that hour was sheer magic. The moonlight, the battlefield with its broken cannons; all this, with the bewitching dance of the tarantella, held the throng breathless, spellbound.

[248]

Then, at the dramatic moment, a soldier appeared. He was dressed in the uniform of a French poilu, but his face was the face of a gypsy.

He stood motionless, entranced, till the dance was done. Then, with a cry of joy, he clasped Petite Jeanne to his heart. He was her long lost lover.

To crown all, there comes from the distance a sound of shouting. Jeanne lifts her head to listen.

“What is it?” she asks hoarsely.

“That?” There is the joy of heaven in her lover's eyes. “That is the armistice. The war is over!”

At these words, like the roar of a pent-up torrent, applause from those silent walls of humanity broke loose. Never before in the history of the theatre had there been such acclaim.

Petite Jeanne took curtain after curtain. She dragged forth her rival and her lover, all the cast. At last, quite exhausted, she fled to her dressing room, where she found Florence and the faithful Tico awaiting her.

[249]

“Oh, Florence!” Her voice broke as she threw herself into her boon companion's arms. “These Americans! They are so very wonderful!”

“Down deep in our hearts we love the French as we love no other people.” Florence's tone was solemn. “Two millions of our boys have lived in your villages. They shared your homes. They ate at your tables. They know how brave and generous the French people are. How could they help loving them?”

“But, oh, Jeanne!” Her voice rose to a high tremolo. “I know all! All that we wish to know about those mysterious affairs of the north country!”

“Stop!” implored the little French girl. “You shall not tell me now. We must escape. We will go to our room. There we will have coffee and some most wonderful wafers, and we shall talk until it is day. Is this not the way of actors? And I am an actress now!” She laughed a merry laugh.

“Yes,” said Florence, “you are a very great actress!”

[250]

“Tico and I are very great,” Petite Jeanne laughed again, for at that moment she was the happiest girl in the world.

One moment that wild enthusiasm lasted; then again came desire to know, to hear the answers to many sealed secrets.

“Come!” she said. “Let us tell secrets by the light of a candle.”

[251]

CHAPTER XXXIII

FAST WORK

In the meantime, in the far-away Northland, there was great commotion within one small cottage. Tillie had received Florence's message. She had read it over twice before showing it to her father and to Turkey Trot.

At last she read it aloud: "Bring the trunk at once. Your expenses will be paid."

"What trunk does she mean?" her father asked in surprise.

"It's a trunk we foolishly took from the lady cop's cottage last summer," Tillie replied, and groaned.

"But oh, father!" she cried a moment later, "I must go!"

Without a word her father disappeared through a door. He reappeared a moment later holding a well-worn leather bag. In it were their summer's savings. He counted out some soiled bills. "She said she'd pay it back," was his quiet comment. "Such folks don't often go back on their word. Here's the money."

[252]

"Turkey," he addressed himself next to his son, "you hitch old Billy to the stone-boat and go after the trunk. We'll get Mike Donovan to drive Tillie over to the station. If we hurry, there'll be just about time."

So it happened that an excited girl stepped from the train in mid-afternoon of the next day in the great city of Chicago. This was Tillie. She had wired ahead to Florence, who was there to meet her. They clasped each other tightly.

"Have you got it?" Florence asked breathlessly.

"The trunk? I have. Here's the check."

"Good! It's fearfully important and too mysterious for words. Let's go after it at once."

They were some little time in finding the baggage room in the large depot. When they did there was a crowd waiting and they were obliged to stand in line. To such a pair of eager spirits these waits seemed endless. But at last their time came. With trembling fingers Florence handed over the check. The agent disappeared with it. After some little delay he returned. The check was in his hand.

[253]

"Sorry," he apologized. "Not here yet."

"Not in," Florence voiced her disappointment. "It was on the

Copper Express.”

“The Copper Express!” The man seemed puzzled. “What sort of a trunk? That baggage—”

Just then a strange thing happened. Gripping Florence’s arm hard, Tillie exclaimed in a shrill whisper, “Look! There goes the trunk! That young man has it!”

Florence could not believe her ears. She did not doubt the testimony of her eyes. The mystery trunk was fast disappearing down a passageway that led to the street. It was on a strange young man’s back.

“Come on!” she cried. “He is stealing it! We must not let him.”

After that things happened so rapidly that there was no time to call for aid. They dashed away after the thief. They found him dumping the trunk into the back of a low-built, high power automobile. Another young man was seated at the wheel. With a sudden leap of the heart, Florence recognized this young man. He was the one Tillie had pitched so unceremoniously into the water.

[254]

“Here, you,” she cried, seizing the trunk stealer by the shoulder and whirling him about, “that’s our trunk.”

Taken completely by surprise, the man did not act at once. It was well, for when he did come to his senses, he flashed an automatic. A second too late. He saw his gun whirl into space as Florence launched her full one hundred and sixty pounds against his chest. He went down in a heap.

His companion, attempting to come to his aid, found himself expertly tripped by the versatile Tillie. The next instant, like some jaguar, she was at his throat and he heard her hiss: “Now we got you. You gamblin’, robbin’ kidnapper.”

It was fortunate for the girls that they were not obliged to hold their poses long. Half a dozen coppers arrived in time to give them aid, and assured them that matters would be adjusted in court at the proper time.

[255]

An investigation revealed the astonishing fact that the slick crooks had learned in some way, perhaps through Florence’s telegram, that the trunk was on the way. They had boarded the train at an up-state station, forged a check for the trunk and claimed it.

“They nearly got it that time,” Florence sighed as two red-caps tumbled the trunk into a waiting taxi and she and Tillie whirled away. “We’ll take it to Petite Jeanne’s apartment. It will be safe enough there. The gypsy told us where we could find the lady cop. We have located her. She and the ‘poor little rich girl’ will be with us at Petite Jeanne’s show to-night. After that we will go to the apartment and have the formal opening of the

trunk. Won't that give us a thrill?"

"Won't it, though?" Tillie bobbed up and down in her excitement.

"Those young men we just caught," Florence said after a time, "were the last of the band."

[256]

"What band?"

"A band of gamblers and thieves the law has been after for a long time. Through information provided by our gypsy friend, the others were taken to-day. They will not be bothering the kindly people of your settlement for some time to come. There is enough chalked up against them to last half a lifetime."

"I suppose," replied Tillie thoughtfully, "that I should feel sorry for them. But I just can't. They went too far."

"About two miles too far," agreed Florence, recalling their heart-breaking swim in the cold night waters of Lake Huron.

[257]

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE TREASURE CHEST

That night, just as the clock was striking twelve, an interesting company gathered in Petite Jeanne's parlor. The lady cop was there. So, too, was Sun-Tan Tillie. Minus her faded bathing suit, looking quite stunning in a new dress of dark green, her big eyes shining with interest, Tillie sat in a corner. Close beside her was the "poor little rich girl," who once had pledged her parents' rubies, and lost. She knew Tillie and, without having the least notion what it was all about, had come at her request. Petite Jeanne and Florence completed the company.

A tale was to be told. Secrets, they hoped, were to be revealed. With her taste for the dramatic, Petite Jeanne had insisted that the affair be carried off in the grand manner.

Electric lights were off. Shades were down. Four flickering candles furnished faint illumination for the room. On the very center of the rug rested the mysterious oriental trunk which had caused many a palpitation of the heart. It gave off a pungent odor of the forest.

[258]

"But how did you get it?" the lady cop exclaimed, on seeing it. "When I learned that the gamblers did not take it on their flight, I gave it up. Thought it was burned in their cottage."

Florence held up a hand. It had been Jeanne's decree that she should tell the story. "You will remember," Florence began, "that it was my good fortune to be permitted to pour a few quarts of water from the lungs of a gypsy child."

"In other words, you saved her life," suggested the lady cop.

"Something like that. The gypsies are a loyal and grateful people. I have always known that. From the time I saved her child's life, that gypsy mother had it in mind to repay the service. She has done it. Three nights ago she told me the answer to the riddles that have vexed our minds and lost us sleep. Yes, she even told me where I would find the three oriental rubies, which were so unfairly taken from Miss Erie."

[259]

"The—the rubies!" The Erie girl sprang to her feet.

Tillie pulled her down. "Wait!" she whispered.

At that moment Florence felt her heart sink to her shoes. What if, for once, the uncanny knowledge of the gypsy woman had failed? What if the three rubies were, after all, irrevocably lost?

"The die is cast," she told herself sternly. "I must go on."

“You will recall,” she said, turning to the lady cop, “that on the night when we first entered your cabin we, Petite Jeanne and I, had just had our rowboat swamped by some reckless, or willfully wicked people in a speed boat.”

The lady cop nodded.

“You thought they had been after you. I thought it was the reckless prank of some rich young people. You were right. The boat was driven by one of the younger gamblers. His pal and two gypsies were on board. They suspected you; meant to drown you. They got us instead. And that’s that.” Florence sighed.

[260]

“Now the trunk.” Everyone moved forward. “Not so fast,” she cautioned. “I am going to account for its presence here.

“You thought—” again she turned to the lady cop, “that the gamblers got your trunk. They meant to. They were a few hours late. Tillie and I got it the night before.”

“You?” There was incredulity in the lady cop’s eyes.

“That’s once when a prank turned out well,” Florence smiled. “Tillie and I meant to fill it with balsam tips and return it. We have. See!”

She threw up the lid of the trunk, and at once the air of the room was heavy with the natural perfume of the forest.

“We kept the trunk till now,” she said quietly. “And that’s that.

“And now we come to our big night, Tillie’s and mine, the night we were kidnapped.

“In this instance there were three possibilities. It might have been a prank indulged in by reckless young people. The gamblers may have done it, or the gypsies. Tillie thought it was the work of the gamblers. Because she came upon a gypsy feast that night, Jeanne blamed the gypsies. They were both right.

[261]

“By this time the two rather striking young gypsy girls had learned who Jeanne was. They had hated her in France. They hated her still. They could not get at her. She stayed in the cabin. They proposed to take out their spite on her friends. The gamblers hated Tillie. They combined forces and prepared to show us a rough time. Well,” she ended grimly, “they succeeded.

“After cutting our boat loose, they came ashore to prepare a meal and eat it. It was this feast that Jeanne’s bear interrupted. They fled.”

“And all this,” said Petite Jeanne, coming out from among pillows in a dark corner, “goes to prove that we owe a most humble apology to my beloved Green Eyes and to her friends

[262]

of the Erie cottage. We suspected you of pranks which were quite impossible for you to perform.” She spoke the last to Miss Erie.

“Oh, that’s quite all right!” The rich girl’s tone was friendly. “We do not expect to be entirely understood. We were taught by my father when we were very young that to take advantage of others because of wealth or power is the act of a coward. That there are such rich cowards, one can’t deny. We hope they are very few.”

Jeanne beamed her thanks for this speech. “But, Florence!” she cried suddenly. “This does not explain the green eyes I saw in the deserted lumber camp that night.”

“You must work out your own solution for that.” Again Florence smiled. “Some wild creature was hiding there, or you were having a case of nerves. Our gypsy friend knew a surprising lot. She did not know everything. No more could she tell what caused the fire on Gamblers’ Island.”

“But—but the rubies!” exclaimed Miss Erie, as the story seemed about to end.

“That,” said Florence, true to Jeanne’s dramatic conception, “is to be the last touch. According to our gypsy friend’s story the three rubies are supposed to have been hidden in some secret pocket of this ancient trunk, and there they should be still.”

[263]

“The trunk!” “The trunk!” “Trunk!” came from the lips of Tillie, the lady cop and the Erie girl all at once.

“We will now proceed to find out.” Florence’s voice took on a business-like tone. “Jeanne, a blanket. We’ll dump these balsam tips in it and tie up the corners.”

When the trunk seemed empty, all crowded around.

Lighted only by candles, Florence began prodding and thumping with a chisel until at last she brought forth a hollow sound. A section of the trunk’s false bottom was pried up, and then they started back. For, in that dim light, small eyes appeared to gleam up at them.

The spell lasted for but a moment. Then Florence’s hand went down and came out full of gems.

“A regular treasure chest!” There was awe in the lady cop’s voice.

[264]

The next instant she had taken something from beneath her coat and was pinning it on Florence’s breast. It was her detective badge.

“Now,” she exclaimed, “that is where it belongs!”

“No! No!” The girl removed the badge and returned it to its place. “I had all the luck. It will be quite different in the future.”

“Who knows?” said the lady cop quite soberly.

The trunk proved to be the hiding place for a noteworthy collection of gems. The police had taken it in a raid and, quite ignorant of its value, had sold it. Some of the jewels were returned to their rightful owners. Several remained unclaimed. So Florence, Petite Jeanne, Tillie, and the lady cop are all richer by a jewel or two; while the “poor little rich girl” regained her standing in her family by returning the much prized bauble to its place in the collection.

The gypsy drama, with Petite Jeanne playing a leading role, enjoyed a long run. In the meantime, Florence was not idle. Fresh adventures came to her. Was the lady cop one of her companions? Was Petite Jeanne? Was Tillie? Did Betty come back? You will find the answer to all these questions in our next book, to be entitled *The Golden Circle*.

[265]

[The end of *Green Eyes* by Roy J. Snell]