

A Mystery Story for Girls

**HOUR OF
ENCHANTMENT**

ROY J. SNELL

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A Mystery Story for Girls

HOUR OF ENCHANTMENT

By
ROY J. SNELL

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HOUR OF ENCHANTMENT

CHAPTER I

THE THREE-BLADED KNIFE

Florence Huyler took one look at the Chinaman. He was wearing a long yellow coat and carrying a huge yellow umbrella. His back was toward her.

“I can’t be sure,” she whispered. “If—”

She paused, uncertainly. In a moment he would move, and then she would know—by his ears.

Again, for a moment, she gave herself over to a study of the magnificent panorama that lay before her. She was poised, like a pigeon in a belfry, but oh, so high up! Six hundred and twenty feet in the air, she could look down upon every skyscraper in the city.

She had been doing just this until her eyes had fallen by chance upon this Chinaman. She had been looking for a Chinaman, looking hard—for a Chinaman with prodigiously long ears. But she had decided to forget him for a time, to enjoy the Sky Ride and its observation towers. And now here he was, haunting her still.

The Sky Ride! Ah, there was a marvel indeed! Eiffel Tower, not the Ferris wheel, could be compared with this. Two steel towers reared themselves to dizzy heights. Between these there were steel cables. And darting from one tower to the other over these cables, like veritable rockets which they were made to represent, were cars of steel and glass from which one might view the magnificent spectacle of the fairgrounds at night. All aflame with a million lights, truly alive with a hundred thousand merry-makers, the grounds seemed a picture from another world.

With great eagerness she had paid her fee and entered the express elevator to go

shooting upward toward the stars.

She had decided not to take her sky ride at once. Truth was, Fate had decreed that she should not take it at all that night. This, of course, she could not know. So, quite joyously, she had shot up and up until she was at the very top of that steel tower.

She had shuddered as she left the elevator. The tower appeared to sway, as indeed it did.

“What if, by some secret power of rhythmic motion, it should be made to sway too far?” she whispered to herself now. “What if it should swing and swing, and at last bend and bend—then go crashing down!

“Nonsense!” She got a grip on herself. “That could not happen. This is one of the marvels created by our American engineers. They figure and figure for days and days. Then they set mill wheels revolving, turning out steel. They send steel workers to their tasks, and here we are. Nothing could go wrong. It’s all been figured out.”

Having settled this problem to her own satisfaction, she walked to the rail and began studying the city she had learned to love.

“It looks so strange!” she told herself. And so it did. Streets were steel-gray ribbons where automobiles, mere bugs all black, blue and yellow, crept along, blinking their fiery eyes.

Her eye was caught by twinkling lights atop a skyscraper.

Drawing forth her binoculars she focussed them upon that spot. Then she laughed. Atop that skyscraper was a home, a pent house, a gorgeous affair that shone like marble. About it, all gay with flowers, was a garden.

“A garden party,” she whispered, as if afraid they might hear. “That’s the reason for the strings of lights.”

She could see graceful women in gorgeous gowns with men all in white and black evening dress swaying to the rhythm of some entrancing music.

“They are rich,” she thought to herself. “Bankers, perhaps, or managers of great

corporations. Members of Society spelled with a big S. They don't know I am looking at them." She turned away again.

"Ah, well!" she sighed. "Even a mouse may look upon a queen. If—"

Had the tower indeed begun to sway in an ominous manner it could not have startled her more than the vision that met her gaze. The little yellow man in the long yellow coat had turned about. She could see his ears now.

"The—the long-eared Chinaman! I—I've got him!" she hissed.

At that instant the wind blew his long yellow coat aside, exposing to view the hilt of the three-bladed knife. And in the hilt of that knife jewels shone.

"I—I've—"

She spoke too soon, for without appearing to see her at all the man glided to an elevator and before she could cry: "Stop him!" shot downward.

"Oh!" she breathed, and again, "Oh!"

The next instant she too had leaped to an elevator and went shooting down after him. "I'll get him yet!" But would she?

Even as her elevator shot downward from those dizzy heights, she had time to think of the circumstances leading up to this, one of the most thrilling moments of her not uneventful life.

* * * * *

It had been night, deep, silent, mysterious night, when first she had seen that three-bladed knife, and the long-eared Chinaman. No stars had shone. No moon had cast its golden gleam across the black and sullen waters of Lake Michigan. From afar, as in a dream, seated with Petite Jeanne, her companion, on the sand before a little fire of sticks, she had caught the ceaseless rumble of the city.

"The hour of enchantment, it is near at hand," Jeanne, the little French girl, murmured.

"The—the hour of enchantment?" Florence murmured after her. Not

understanding, but being too full of dreams to care, she said no more.

“Yes, my good friend, Florence Huyler, the enchanted hour.”

Once more the little French girl lapsed into silence.

Florence moved her lips as if about to speak. But she remained silent. Why break a magic spell with mere talk?

And to her this was indeed a magic moment. For hours, earlier in the day, she had listened to the roar of the greatest carnival the world has ever known. About her had swarmed a thousand children. Brown heads, golden heads, laughing eyes, weeping eyes, dancing feet, all that goes to make up a host of youngsters on a holiday. And every day was a holiday on the grounds of this great show.

Nor did Florence miss a day of it. Indeed she could not, for she was a part of it.

On her ear drums had beat the noisy blare of the merry-go-round and the shrill whistle of the miniature train, the hilarious shouts of the joy-makers.

“And now,” she breathed, “it is night. They are home, tucked in bed, those blessed children. I have only to rest here by the fire with Jeanne.” She threw out her splendid arms in an air of abandon, then curled herself up on the dry sand before the fire.

“Only just look!” Jeanne began all over again a moment later. “See what I found to-day in the chest. That last one we bought; the oh, so mysterious chest with a dragon on its cover.”

In her hand she held an object that cast back the light of the dying fire.

For the moment Florence could not be roused from her dreamy stupor. Never had she worked so hard as on these days of the great Fair. Never had life seemed so full of joy. Jeanne was with her once more; a whole half year the French girl had been in her native land. Now she was back. There was, too, a spirit of glorious madness about this great exhibition, that somehow entered into her very soul. Cars packed with screaming visitors rocketing across the sky, airplanes drumming and dipping, speed boats thundering down the lagoon; speed, light, joy—who could resist it all?

But when day was done, the throngs departed, it was good to pick up a few broken bits of wood, kindle a small fire here on the beach and play the vagabond through one wee hour of the night. To sip black tea, to stare at the fire, to dream—who could ask for more? And yet here was Petite Jeanne insisting that she “only look.” Look at what?

Ah, well, Jeanne had not worked that day. She had no need to work. She was rich. Fortune had overtaken her at last—given her a chateau in France and much else.

“Jeanne,” she grumbled like some good-natured bear, “you have been curled up among the pillows all day, petting the cat. And now you ask me to look, to think—I, who have done nothing all day but lead children in play, march them up the magic mountain and down again, lift them on the little train and off again, follow them on—”

“Stop!” Jeanne stamped her pretty foot. “It is enough. I would not say ‘Look’ but it is yours, yours and mine, this curious dagger. You must tell me what it is. Only see! It has three blades!”

“Dagger! Three blades!” Florence found herself at last.

“Yes, yes! Three blades! A very strange dagger!”

The thing Florence took from Jeanne’s hand was indeed a curious affair. A knife with a hilt of ordinary length, it had not one blade, but three, extending in triangular formation, ten inches from the hilt.

“That,” Florence declared emphatically, “is something!”

“And see the handle!” Jeanne was her old enthusiastic self. “See how it shines in the light! Jewels, some red, some white—”

“Glass, I suppose.” Absent-mindedly Florence drew one of the white spots that glistened in the light across the crystal of her watch. Then she sat up quite abruptly.

“Dumb! Now I’ve scratched my crystal and it will break. Jeanne! Don’t ask me to buy another chest. No need to buy trouble. That, at least, you may get free.”

“But see!” Jeanne snatched the curious dagger from her. “If it indeed scratches glass, then truly it is a diamond. And see! There are one, two, three, four—oh, how is one to count them? There are many jewels, and they go round and round the handle.”

“Diamonds?”

“Yes. Surely! They are diamonds. And the red ones are rubies. Half belong to you and half to me. For see, we bought the box together, the box with the dragon on the cover.

“Truly!” she cried, dancing across the sand, waving the dagger over her head. “Truly this is for me the hour of enchantment!

“Listen!” The little French girl’s voice changed abruptly. She held up a hand.

From somewhere in the distance came the slow *D-o-n-g, D-o-n-g*, of a clock striking two.

“The enchanted hour!” Her tone was solemn.

Once again she swung her hands high. Next instant a sharp cry escaped her lips. The three-bladed knife with all its jewels was gone. Some one half concealed in the darkness at her back had snatched it from her.

It was the stout Florence who sprang to her feet and, but for Jeanne, would have dashed away in mad pursuit.

But Jeanne prevented this. She leaped forward just in time to seize her friend about the waist.

“No! No! My friend, you must not! You will be killed! He has a knife!” she exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. “He has that dagger with three blades! You—you have nothing!”

“I have my two hands!” Florence continued to struggle. “He is small, only a little Chinaman. I—I saw him. I’d break his back if he did not give me the knife!”

“But think!” Jeanne loosed her hold as Florence ceased to struggle. “It is only a dagger, a dagger I found in a box, and we paid so little for that box.”

“Only a dagger with a hilt encrusted with jewels!” Florence dropped to her place beside the dying fire.

“Rich for a moment,” she sighed, “then poor forever.

“But I’ll know that man if I ever see him again,” she added hopefully. “He had the longest ears of any person I ever saw. He wore an orange-colored cap, and there was a bit of bright glass—oval-shaped it was—shining from his forehead. And those ears!” she exclaimed. “Who could mistake them?”

“We will find him. Truly we must!” Jeanne spoke with confidence. “This is the enchanted hour. My enchanted hour!”

* * * * *

And now, twenty-four hours later, shooting down, down, down, a hundred, two, three, four hundred feet, Florence was in pursuit of that very long-eared Chinaman. From his belt had shone the jeweled hilt of the three-bladed knife.

“It’s ours!” she muttered low to herself. “Jeanne’s and mine. I’ll get him yet!”

But would she?

CHAPTER II

THE SKY WALK

As she boarded the down-going car, the girl's mind flashed through the incidents leading up to this strange chase, and then came bang up against a problem with no certain answer. Should she leave the car at the two hundred foot level, the spot from which the cars of the Sky Ride went flashing away into the night, or should she ride to the ground level?

Following instinct, when she reached the Sky Ride level she darted from the car. At once she caught her breath. There was the long-eared Chinaman.

The instant she saw him he was on the move. There was no mistaking the look in her eyes. She meant to have that three-bladed knife. He made no mistake about that. Imitating a monkey, a spider and a snake all in one, he managed by curious contortions to make his way past the waiting rocket-car and out upon the cables that carried the cars on their exciting journey.

At once the place was in a panic.

"A car from the other side will come and crush him! He will fall! He'll be electrocuted!" came from the crowd as men fought for a spot where they might view the impending catastrophe.

But no catastrophe occurred—at least not at once. Standing with the air of a tight rope walker, which indeed this long-eared one must have been, he unfolded his large yellow silk umbrella; then, apparently all unconscious of the shouting throng, he turned and walked the cables as another person might walk the street.

"If another car comes—" Florence came near to wishing she had stuck to her resolve and made it a night of pure pleasure.

No car came from the other side. A quick-witted guard had stopped it in the nick

of time, by a phone call.

So the little yellow man in a long yellow jacket with a three-bladed knife in his belt balanced himself with his yellow umbrella and proceeded blithely on his way while an ever increasing sea of faces gazed upward.

Great searchlights began playing upon him. Like fingers they pointed him out. Ten thousand, twenty, fifty, perhaps seventy thousand pairs of eyes were fixed upon him.

Not one of all these people, save Florence, knew what it was all about. “Is this one more feature, a grand surprise in this the grandest of all shows?” This is what the thousands were asking.

Other questions occupied Florence’s mind. What did the man mean to do? Did he know himself? How was it all to end?

The suspense continued. It is well that it did. The first few hundred feet of this curious person’s sky walk was over the solid earth. Beneath him was the gasping multitude. Jammed together in one solid mass, not one of them could have moved had this sky walker come hurtling down from those dizzy heights.

He did not fall. Instead, with all the grace of a fine lady out for a promenade, he moved along the cables that, being all but invisible in the night, made him seem to walk on air.

“If he were only over water!” Florence spoke without meaning to do so. “Then there would be some chance.”

“At two hundred feet?” some one doubted.

All the same, Florence waited and hoped. “Now he’s a third of the way to the place above the lagoon,” she assured herself. “Now half—now two-thirds.

“Now!”

She caught her breath. Something was happening. The man was seen to teeter.

“If he falls—” She set her lips tight. “If he does, if he falls and kills some one, I shall never forgive myself. A knife!” She all but said it aloud. “A knife with a

diamond-studded hilt—what’s that to a human life?”

But the man had regained his poise. He was tripping along as before.

“He—he’s almost there,” she sighed, as a low prayer escaped her lips. “He—he must be over the water. Thank—thank God!”

But, after all, what *did* this astounding person propose to do?

Did he plan it, or was it the work of Fate? Perhaps no one will ever know. Be that as it may, just as he reached a spot above the center of the lagoon the man was seen once more to waver.

This time he did not regain his poise, but with a movement that seemed half a leap, half a fall, launched himself into mid-air.

Florence closed her eyes. She opened them at once to find the Chinaman still going down.

“How—how remarkable!” she breathed.

“It’s the umbrella,” some one at her side volunteered. “It’s made for that purpose, like a parachute.”

She did not give the information that, as far as she could tell, the man had entertained no notion of making that unusual journey.

She continued to watch while the Chinaman plunged downward. With his fall checked by the umbrella, he had, she believed, a fair chance for a safe landing.

“And then?” Some spirit inside her appeared to ask the question. “Why, then,” she answered the spirit, “I’ll be after him!”

The Chinaman disappeared into shadows that lay above the surface of the lagoon.

At once spotlights were playing upon the water. If he came to the surface no one saw him.

“But then,” Florence assured herself, “there are a hundred boats out there on the

lagoon. A man with such a trick as that in his bag must have others. He need only come up alongside a boat, cling there until the excitement is over, then go on his way. We shall meet again.

“But not to-night,” she amended, as she surveyed the dense throng below.

“So here’s for a sky ride!”

She gave herself over to the joyous excitement of the hour.

Curiously enough, upon descending from the steel tower after a half hour of shooting through space, she bumped squarely into her roommate and pal of many strange adventures—Petite Jeanne.

“Oh, Jeanne!” she exclaimed. “I have found him, the little Chinaman with long ears.”

“And the knife?”

“He still has it.”

“Tell me about it,” Jeanne begged.

In her own truly dramatic style Florence told the story. “And when he dropped,” she ended breathlessly, “I said ‘that’s the end of him!’”

“But it was not?” Jeanne breathed.

“I am not sure it was not. We shall see him again, perhaps many times.”

“But, Florence, why does he want that three-bladed knife so very, very much?”

“It is set with jewels,” Florence spoke slowly, “but there is something more. I am sure of it. Perhaps something quite terrible. I saw it in his eyes. He’d kill some one to possess that knife, if necessary. I am quite sure of that.”

“Then, oh my Florence, you must be careful!”

“We will be careful. But we shall have the knife. It belongs to us. We bought it.”

“Yes,” Jeanne agreed, “we bought it.”

As Jeanne closed her eyes she could see the place of purchase, a long, low auction house blue with tobacco smoke; a bald-headed auctioneer shouting:

“Three dollars. Who’ll make it three-fifty?”

A Chinaman in an obscure corner was bidding against her for that chest with a blue dragon on the cover.

Sudden confusion. Three men dragging the protesting Chinaman away.

“What did it all mean?” she asked herself.

“Anyway,” she sighed, “we got the chest.”

Then a thought struck her all of a heap.

“Florence,” she cried, “there were other things in that chest. Oh, so many more!”

“Other things?” Florence fairly sprang at her. “Why did you not tell me? Is it still in our room under the bed?”

“Yes. Oh, yes.”

“Then we must hurry home. They may be in our room at this very moment, those little yellow men, carrying the chest away.”

“Yes!” Jeanne exclaimed. “Let us hurry!”

CHAPTER III FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS

All her life Florence had lived in the great and noisy city.

Not so Petite Jeanne. If you have read of her at all you will know that as a child she had been a vagabond with gypsies of France, a very beautiful vagabond, an accomplished dancer, but a vagabond all the same. How this slender, golden-haired child of France came to America and how at last France discovered her once more and carried her back to be the mistress of a grand old chateau is no part of our story.

It was enough for Jeanne that she was here with her good pal Florence, that they lived on the top floor of an ancient rooming house, that they might come and go as they pleased, and that if she chose she might once more turn vagabond for a day, a week, or a month.

For the moment she was interested most of all in this vast and most marvelous of all carnivals, the Century of Progress. For many this was not a carnival at all, but a serious attempt to place before man's eye all the stupendous achievements of mankind. For Jeanne it was a vast carnival, a place to enjoy one's self, a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

Now as she tripped along at Florence's side she whispered: "See! Are not those steel towers mysterious? They are like fingers pointing to the stars we do not see because the clouds hide them. And the little rocket cars waiting there—they seem ready not just to carry you over to the island of enchantment, but on and on through the sky to the moon, to Venus, to Mars.

"But, oo, la la! Here I am dreaming again. We must hurry. Those terrible Orientals may be turning our room upside down this very moment."

More often than not, in this life, it happens that the thing we most expect does not happen at all. With breath coming quick and short Petite Jeanne and Florence climbed the four flights of stairs leading to their room only to find everything as they had left it.

“Oh!” Jeanne breathed. “There is no one!”

“One would think,” Florence laughed, “that you were disappointed.”

“But no!” Jeanne made a face of horror. “What could one do if she were to find her room filled with queer little yellow men?”

“Throw them down the stairs.”

“Ah, yes, you—you who are always tumbling around in a gymnasium. But poor little me? Bah! It is quite im-poss-i-ble. I am glad they are not here.

“But, see!” The little French girl’s voice changed. She dragged a curious box-like trunk from beneath the bed. “See what we have here.

“I had the worst time getting it open, this box,” she complained. “The locks, they were strong.

“But, look!”

She held up a curious sort of banner on which was pictured a Chinese lady holding out her hand so that a flock of bright colored butterflies might light on it.

“Only a dusty Chinese banner!” Florence was disappointed. “Is there anything else?”

“Many more like this. Always the picture is different. I love them. They are so odd!”

“You may have them.” Florence was very weary. She began disrobing for the night.

“See! Here is a jolly little bell!” A mellow tinkle rang out.

Florence laughed. “Bronze. You can buy one just like it at the Chink store on

Wabash. It's too bad, little old sister." She put her arms affectionately about her slender companion. "We have lost the best thing—a three-bladed dagger set with rubies and diamonds.

"But cheer up!" She tossed back the bed covers. "To-morrow will come. And after that another to-morrow. I shall never forget that long-eared Chinaman. And if we meet!" She made a gesture of violence.

"Besides," she added as she crept into bed, "there are many more boxes to be sold in the future. Better luck next time."

Scarcely had her head touched the pillow than she was fast asleep.

Jeanne did not sleep. There was no need. For was she not at heart a gypsy? And did not gypsies sleep when the spirit moved them to do so? Twenty hours in one long sleep and after that, if opportunity presented itself, twenty hours of adventure.

Ah, yes, no rising at seven to gulp down toast and coffee, then to dash for a train. Jeanne was a real vagabond. Curled up among the cushions in the sunshine, she had slept long hours that day.

So now she dragged the mysterious box into their tiny living room and spread its highly colored banners on every available piece of furniture.

"Truly," she whispered, "they are grotesque." She was studying a picture, all done in some form of needlework, the picture of a god with a dozen arms and quite as many legs. "But then, they are beautiful, too. What gorgeous tapestries they would make!"

She was thinking now of the all too bare walls of the great living room in her own castle in France.

She had not found being rich in France a joyous business, this Petite Jeanne.

In France if you are young and you are rich, then you are watched over by a mother or perhaps an aunt (Jeanne had an aunt). You must see certain people. You must not see others. You must not wander away alone. You must not—oh, no, my dear, you must not—speak to strangers! No life was this for a sweet and beautiful vagabond like Petite Jeanne.

So, when Florence had written her a glowing letter telling of the city of many marvels that was spreading itself fairy-like across the waterfront in Chicago, she gave her chateau over to a caretaker, bade him allow all the good children to play on her grounds and in her forest at will, then took a ship for America and her beloved big pal, Florence.

“And now,” she sighed happily, “here I am.

“And here—” Her tone changed. “Here you are.” She was addressing the box of mysteries. “One would think—”

She broke off short to stand on tiptoe like a bird poised for flight. Had she caught a sound from without, a shuffling of soft-padded feet on the stairs? Ah, yes. There! A board creaked.

Snapping off the light, she stood in the darkness, tense, alert, listening intently.

“That box!” Her thoughts were in a tumult. “Why do they want more? They have the best.

“Shall I throw open the door and thrust the box at them?

“Ah, no, I shall not do that. Mystery, how one yearns for it! And yet how one dreads it! This box, it is ours. We have bought it. We will fight for it. I will call Florence. She will throw them down the stairs.

“But no! She is weary. They may have the knife. The lock is strong. Let them spy upon us if they must.”

Jeanne was by nature a child of the night. To sit there in the dark, to think and think, to wait and wait for that which in the end did not come, was no hardship for her.

The first faint gray light of dawn was creeping upon the towers of that magic city on the shores of Lake Michigan when at last she parted the curtains to look away at the land and the black waters that lay beyond.

“*Bon jour*, sweet world!” she murmured. “Now we have a new day. And to-night I shall go out alone to seek adventure.”

At that she shoved her pink toes beneath covers of silk filled with eiderdown and slept the sleep of perfect peace, while out there by the shores of Lake Michigan fifty thousand happy people romped through the sunshine of a bright summer's day.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN TEMPLE

Why did Petite Jeanne sleep all day to haunt strange places in the night? Who can say? Why do certain birds deep in the forest sing only at night? Why do all manner of wild things choose the night for their joyous frolics? Jeanne was as wild by nature as any of these, for had she not lived the very early years of her life with the gypsies? And is it not at night that the gypsies dance, sing and tell fortunes round the camp fire?

She did not leave her room, this little French girl, until night shadows had fallen and automobile lights like twin stars were blinking their way down the boulevard.

When she did leave she carried a well filled laundry bag. Yet, strange to say, she did not carry this bag to a laundry depository, but to a hotel two blocks away. Here she entrusted its care to a smiling check boy. The boy's smile broadened when she slipped him a bright new dollar bill with a whispered,

"I may not call for it for oh, so long. You keep it till I come. Yes?"

The boy grinned and nodded. Such occurrences were not new to him. Many young ladies entrusted their secrets to him. "But this girl," he told himself, "is different. I wonder—"

He had little time to wonder. He thrust Jeanne's bag far back in a deep recess and straightway forgot it; which is, after all, just the proper thing for a check boy to do.

Jeanne did not leave the hotel at once; instead, she took the elevator to the top floor, then walking to a window, looked away toward the lake front.

Though she had looked upon the scene before, she could not suppress a low

exclamation of awe: “Magnificent!”

“The city of a million lights!” she murmured.

It was all of that and more, this great Century of Progress. And night was its time of entrancing beauty. Tall towers glowing like shafts of white hot metal, great structures changing color like giant chameleons, now pink, now yellow, now pale blue, fountains of fire leaping up from the gleaming surface of the lagoon.

“It is like the end of the world,” she murmured. “All is on fire.”

To her ears, like the roar of a distant cataract, came the sound of it all. She seemed to catch the whistle of rocket cars as, gliding over steel cables, they carried screaming joy riders through space to the distant island.

“How marvelous it all is!” she murmured again. “To think that only a short time ago there was no island, that ships came to anchor where now ten thousand children play!”

But Jeanne’s eyes did not linger on the Sky Way where rocket cars glided nor the waters where fiery fountains played. Her eyes had come to rest at a spot close to Soldiers’ Field where a low roof cast back a gleam of gold.

“The Golden Temple of Jehol from that enchanting land of mystery, China!” she whispered. “I shall go there to-night. It may be that there I shall learn much regarding that very curious chest, those banners and that ancient three-bladed dagger with all those jewels in the handle.

“It may be!” She shuddered in spite of herself. “It just may happen that there I shall find the little Chinaman with those so very long ears. And if I find him? Ah, then what shall I do?”

She was not one to worry much about what should be done under certain circumstances, this little French girl. Inspiration of the moment should guide her. Tripping lightly to the elevator door, she went speeding downward and was soon on her way to the Golden Temple of Jehol.

On entering the Golden Temple Jeanne found it all but deserted.

“Ah!” she breathed. A spell seemed to take possession of her. She wished to turn

about and go away from this place of mellow lights and silence; yet some mysterious power held her.

Before her, seeming alive in that uncertain light, a fat Buddha sat and smiled. Beyond were all manner of curious objects, trumpets three yards long, miniature pagodas, images of gold and bronze, a great bell suspended from a frame.

“This,” she whispered, “is a Chinese Temple. Every part of it, twenty-eight thousand bits of wood, was made in China.”

As if taking up the story, the low melodious voice of a mandarin talking to three ladies in black said:

“Everything you see here came from the temples of China. Everything. They are all very old and quite priceless.”

Jeanne moved toward him. “This,” he went on, appearing to see her out of the corner of his eye, “is a prayer wheel. Inside this wheel, which is, you might say, like a brass drum, are bits of paper. On these are written one hundred million prayers. See!” He spoke to Jeanne. “Turn the handle.”

The girl obeyed.

“Now,” he smiled, “you have said one hundred million prayers. Is it not very easy?”

Jeanne favored him with one of her rare smiles. This chubby mandarin in his long robe could help her. “He is not that one who stole my dagger,” she assured herself. “His ears are quite short. He—”

Her thoughts broke short off. Her eyes opened wide.

“Where—where did that come from?” She was pointing to a three-bladed knife lying on a low bench.

“This,” the mandarin went on in his slow, melodious voice, “like all the rest, came from a temple. It is very old.”

“May—may I see it?” Jeanne’s heart throbbed painfully.

“Oh, yes, you may see.”

He held it out to her.

She did not take it. “That,” she said more to herself than to him, “is not the one. There are no jewels in the hilt, only gold.”

“No jewels?” The small eyes narrowed.

“You have seen one set with jewels, diamonds and rubies?”

“Only yesterday.”

“And where is it now?” The mandarin strove in vain to maintain his Oriental calm.

“Who knows?” Jeanne shrugged her shoulders. She had said too much. “A—a Chinaman had it. He is gone. I know not where.”

The mandarin went on telling in his slow way of the treasures in that golden temple; yet it was plain that his mind was not upon the ancient bell, the miniature pagoda nor the smiling Buddha. He was thinking of that knife with a jeweled handle, Jeanne was sure of that.

“I wonder how much he knows,” she thought to herself. “Could he help us find that long-eared one? I am sure of it. And if he did? Ah, well, what then?”

In the end she decided that she dared not trust him, at least not yet.

For some time she lingered in that place of soft lights and silent footsteps.

When at last with a sigh she prepared to drag herself out where humanity flowed like a great river, she dropped a coin in the mandarin’s hand and whispered:

“I will return again, and yet again.”

“Y-e-s.” The mandarin’s tone was barely audible. “Those who reveal dark secrets are often richly rewarded. It is written in a book. You have said one hundred million prayers. You will not forget.”

“I will not forget.”

She was about to leave the place when again her mind received a shock. Because the light was dim, she had not observed until now that the walls were hung with banners.

“They are like those in the chest!” she told herself with a sudden shock. “They belong to some temple. Were they stolen from a temple, all those, the knife, the bell, the banners? And did the thief, after bringing them to America, fear to claim them? Is that why we were able to buy them at that auction house where unclaimed goods are sold?”

“Ah, yes, it must be so! There was an Oriental bidding against us. Some strange persons came and dragged him away, the secret police, I am sure.”

She was trembling from head to foot. What strange Oriental mystery had caught her in its web? What intrigue had she but half unearthed?

“Bah!” She took a strong grip on herself. “It is nothing. This place, it gives me strange ideas.”

“These banners on the wall?” She spoke in the casual tone of an inquisitive visitor. “Are they also very old?”

“Many are very old.” The mandarin was smiling again. “These were made by rich Chinese ladies who wish to have the gods be very good to them. They are all made by hand, embroidered with gold and silver thread. Worth many dollars, very, very many dollars, each one of these.”

Jeanne asked not another question. She had had enough for one night. Never before had she so wished herself in the outer air.

She was nearing the door when a voice she had not heard before said:

“Would you like a book telling of the Golden Temple?”

She turned quickly to find herself looking into the face of a man, and at once she knew that here was a person well worth knowing. He was large, well built, muscular. His face was brown, the brown of one who lives in the out-of-doors. His hat was drawn low over his eyes, yet he did not inspire her with fear.

“Y-yes, I would like a book.” She held out a quarter. “Do you know China?”

“I was born there.” The man spoke in the steady, even tone of the white man who has lived long in strange lands. “Until six weeks ago I lived in China.”

“Then—then perhaps you can help me.”

“Gladly. How?”

“An—another time.” Once more Jeanne felt she had spoken too soon.

Without a backward look, she left the place to lose herself in the merry-mad throng that, whirling and swirling like autumn leaves caught in a gust of wind, revolved about the entrance to the million dollar Skyway.

CHAPTER V

A HEARSE IN THE MOONLIGHT

Petite Jeanne, too, seemed a bright autumn leaf as, dressed in a filmy orange-colored gown, she drifted down the broad paved walk.

Passing a great building that gleamed from within as if it were on fire, she marveled at the mystery of light.

“Why should I find myself intrigued by a mere Oriental dagger and one small Chinaman with long ears?” she asked herself, “when a thousand mysteries of science, chemistry, light, heat and sound lie all about me?”

Finding no answer to this question, she still kept a keen watch for that long-eared Chinaman who had snatched the jeweled dagger from her hand and later had walked the cables of the Sky Ride.

“It is like a Chinaman to have three blades to his knife where only one is needed,” she assured herself. “But why must one have a dagger in a temple? I’ll ask that interesting white man who sold me the book.”

Indeed she would, and many other questions besides. “There is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough hew them though we may.” The men we meet and pass, never to meet again, the ones who because of a passing word become part of our very lives, all their names are written in a book, and the name of that book is FATE.

A long, low bus, looking for all the world like a mammoth greyhound, stopped at Jeanne’s very feet. Because on the long seat filled with smiling people there was room for one more, Jeanne paid her fare and took her place with the rest.

Where was she going? She did not know nor care. Some time perhaps she would take this exhibition seriously. Time enough for that. The whole summer was

before her, fifteen glorious weeks. For the moment she would wander at will.

Gliding along in the bus she lost all sense of time until, with a start, she found herself at the far end of that all but endless pageant.

“*Mon Dieu!*” she exclaimed. “Why did I come all this way? Florence is waiting. She will never forgive me!”

Climbing aboard a second bus, she went gliding back the way she had come.

“Ah, my dear!” she cried as she sighted her good friend seated in a camp chair, watching the fading lights. “How can you forgive me?”

“That is not so hard,” the big girl drawled. “I’ve been sitting here half asleep, watching the throngs pass by.

“Do you know, Jeanne,” her tone became animated, “people come a long distance from north, south, east and west, thousands of miles, to view the wonders of this place. And who can blame them? But, after all, when they are here, throngs and throngs of them, they themselves are more interesting than all the marvels they come to see.”

“Ah, yes. It is so.

“But, Florence!” Jeanne cried suddenly. “I have found such a charm of a place! And we may dine there if we hurry.

“Ah, but I fear the buses are stopped. See, all the lights are fading.” Her voice dropped.

It was true. The lights were fading. Here a brightly illuminated tower went dark, there a fiery fountain became a well of blackness, and there an endless chain of light vanished into the night.

“It is like the end of the world!” Jeanne said in an awed whisper.

“But this place you speak of? Is it far?” Florence sprang to her feet.

“Oh, yes, very far.”

“Then we will go. I am tired of seeing and hearing. A long walk will be just grand.”

“And, ah! to see this place by moonlight!” Jeanne clasped her hands. “That will be so very wonderful!”

The broad, paved way, where thousands had wandered during the day, was all but deserted. Here a belated visitor hurried toward a gateway. There an attendant, his labors over, raced away to catch a home-bound car.

Down by the shore a score of camp fires were gleaming. For the first time in many years Indians were camping on Chicago’s water front. The wavering light of their fires turned their tepees into ghost-homes of the long ago.

Farther south other fires gleamed about the temporary homes of other wild men from faraway lands. All these were a part of the great show.

But it was none of these that had caught and held the little French girl’s attention.

Before them loomed the Midway. With lights out, its fantastic structures, standing out black against the sky, seemed huge beasts come to life from the past and now crouching by the roadway in their sleep.

As if feeling something of this, Jeanne quickened her pace. But not for long.

“Here!” she exclaimed. “Down here it is!”

She turned sharply to the right, hurried forward twenty steps, then halted before a door.

“If it is closed!” she breathed. “Can it be? Yes, perhaps. See! The electric light is out.

“No, no. There is some one!”

“Only a scrub woman.” Florence pressed close to the glass door.

Just then the person inside stood up. Florence caught her breath. She had not been wrong. The one who stood there had been scrubbing. Her dress was pinned

up; her arms were bare to the elbow. But surely she was not a regular scrub woman! Seldom had Florence seen a more beautiful face. She was young, too, surely not yet twenty. Cheeks aglow with natural bloom, big eyes shining, brown hair tossed back, she stood there smiling, a picture of natural youth and beauty. Smiling at what? Had she seen them? Yes, she was coming to the door.

“Would you like to come in?” she whispered.

Too astonished to answer, the girls found themselves inside.

The place they had entered was a long, low room. The floor was of rough boards. Massive beams ran from one end to the other of the paneled ceiling. At one side was a curious sort of refreshment stand, and to the right of this the broadest fireplace Florence had ever seen.

Noting the surprised look on Florence’s face, the girl said: “Have you never been here before?”

By her rich, melodious drawl, Florence knew at once that this girl came from the southern mountains.

“This,” the girl went on, “is the Rutledge Tavern. It was by this fireplace that the young man, Abe Lincoln, sat and talked for long hours to a girl with hair like corn tassels in autumn. Can you see them there now? She is sewing. He is dreaming of days that are to come.”

“So this is the spot that charmed my little French friend,” Florence whispered to herself. “Little wonder! Coming from the past with its simple grandeur, it has an appeal all its own.”

“Perhaps,” said the stranger, “you’d like to sit here by the fire. I—I’ll soon be through with my work.”

“But you,” Florence exclaimed, “surely you do not have to scrub floors all night long!”

“Oh, no! Not all night long. Only this one. And I love it!” The girl’s eyes shone. “I am Jense Crider. I am from the mountains of Kentucky. This is the Lincoln group. And Abraham Lincoln, our great President, came from the mountains where I was born. They—they let me care for these buildings because I

understand how they should be kept.

“Come!” Her voice fell to a whisper. “Come back here and you shall see those other buildings by the moonlight.”

She led the way to the back of that long room, then pointed silently. Standing there, bathed in the golden moonlight, were two small log cabins and a rough structure built of boards.

“That little cabin,” the girl whispered, “is the one in which the great President was born; no, not quite. It is exactly like it, but for me it is the same.

“Does it not seem wonderful?” Her low voice was singing now. “No windows, a stick chimney, a clay floor. He was born there, the great President. He was one of us, of our poor mountain folk. Do you wonder that I love my work?”

“No,” Florence whispered.

“But look!” Jeanne gripped her companion’s arm. “What is that strange thing over there?”

“That—” The girl’s tone changed. “That is a very old hearse. Perhaps it is the one that carried our martyred President to his grave.”

“A hearse!” Jeanne shrank back. “A hearse in the moonlight.”

“Come!” said Florence. “Let’s go and sit by the fireplace and dream.”

“Yes, do!” The mountain girl’s voice rang with hospitality. “I have some corn bread, the sort we make in the mountains, baked in an oven under the coals. I’ll make some tea very soon, and we shall have a bite to eat.”

To sit in the Rutledge Tavern, beside the fireplace where Abe Lincoln and Ann Rutledge had made love long ago! Could anything be more romantic?

A moment more and they were there, Florence and Jeanne, staring dreamily at the fire. But try as she might, Jeanne could not quite drive from her mind the image of that ancient hearse standing out there in the moonlight.

“It seems a sign,” she told herself. A sign of what? She could not tell.

The mountain girl's corn bread baked in a Dutch oven beneath the coals was delicious. Buried in strained honey which, Jencie Crider assured them, came from a bee tree away up on the side of Big Black Mountain, it was a dish to set before a king.

"Those other buildings there," Jencie explained in a quiet voice, "one is the home of Abe Lincoln in Indiana and the other, that one built of boards, is where Lincoln and Berry kept store, or tried to and failed.

"I—I'm sort of glad they failed." Her voice trailed into silence. On the broad hearth the coals glowed. Behind them, down the long room, all was shrouded in darkness. And still in the golden moonlight the dilapidated hearse stood. Jeanne thought of this, and shuddered.

"Why?" It was Florence who spoke at last. "Why are you glad that Lincoln failed."

"Because he is my hero," Jencie's tone was deeply serious. "And if my hero never failed, how could I hope to be like him? We all fail sometimes.

"Of all these buildings," she went on after a time, "I have the little cabin where he was born. I was born in just such a cabin, way up on the side of Big Black Mountain."

"Oh!" Jeanne's eyes opened wide. "And is that your home now?"

"No, no! Now we have two rooms and two real glass windows.

"Of course," Jencie half apologised, "that isn't very much. But there's a porch to sit on all summer long. And oh! it is beautiful in the mountains in the springtime. When the dogwood blossoms are like drifting snow on the hillsides, when little streams covered over with mountain ivy come dashing, cool, damp and fragrant, from far up the mountains, oh, then it is a joy to live!

"Will you come and see me there some time? You two?" Her voice rang with eagerness.

"Yes, yes!" Jeanne cried impulsively, throwing her arms about the girl and kissing her apple-red cheek. "Yes, indeed! We will come in spring when the dogwood is in bloom."

Once again silence settled over the room where darkness played hide and seek with little streaks of light among the massive hand-hewn rafters.

Only an ancient clock in a far corner disturbed the silence with its solemn *tick-tock, tick-tock*.

“Listen!” Jeanne gripped Florence’s arm. The clock made a curious noise like a very old man clearing his throat, then struck twice: *Dong! Dong!*

“Two o’clock!” Jeanne sprang to her feet. “Two o’clock! This is my hour of enchantment! We must be going!”

“Good-bye.” Once again she embraced the mountain girl. “We will be back. Many times.”

She led Florence out into the moonlight. But even as she did so she cast an apprehensive look behind her. She was thinking still of the hearse in the moonlight. A fence hid it from her view. With a shudder she exclaimed, “Come! Let us go fast!”

CHAPTER VI

“THE CHEST IS EMPTY!”

“Jeanne, you left the door open!”

Standing on the stair landing before the door to their apartment, Florence gave her companion a reproving glance.

“I? Leave the door open?” The little French girl was vigorous in her denial. “To be sure I did *not* leave it open. I closed it tight!”

“Then,” said Florence, catching her breath, “some one has been here, may be here yet.”

“If they are here still, you may throw them out of the window. See, you have my permission.” Crowding past her, Jeanne entered their living room and snapped on the light.

What she saw caused her to hold up her hands in horror. The place was in the wildest state of confusion. Cushions had been dragged from sofas and chairs, beds tumbled about, dresser drawers emptied on the floor.

“Anyway,” Jeanne sighed, “they are gone.”

“And the chest!” Florence exclaimed. “That Oriental chest?”

“The chest is empty, to be sure.” Jeanne threw back the lid. “What would you have? They came for that which was in the chest; nothing more. Why then would they not take it if they found it here?”

“Gone!” Florence sat down to stare at the chest. “And I don’t feel so sorry about that. After all, what use could we have for some dusty old Chinese banners and a silly little bell?”

“What indeed?” There was a curious light in Jeanne’s eye that Florence did not quite understand.

“But Jeanne!” Florence sprang to her feet. “If those people found what they wanted in the chest, why did they take the trouble to tear this place up so terribly?”

“Who knows?” Jeanne’s eyes were veiled, dreamy now.

When order had been restored, Florence retired for the night.

Jeanne sat up for a long time studying. She was reading the book she had purchased in the Golden Temple of Jehol.

As she read her wonder grew. From her reading she learned for certain that the embroidered panels that had but yesterday reposed in the now empty chest had indeed come from the temples of China—not one, but many temples; that they had been made of gold and silver thread. When she recalled them one by one and attempted to compute their value, it made her a little dizzy.

“But then,” she sighed at last, “it is not so much what one possesses that counts; it is what he is able to sell it for.

“And how did you come to Chicago?” She addressed the chest. “You have no address on you. No, not one! I scoured you clean. You have only a dragon on your cover. Did some one steal all those priceless things? And were they afraid at last to claim them in America?”

Once again she recalled the circumstances under which she had bought the box. Both she and Florence had long haunted auction houses. Once she had bought an ancient gypsy god.

“And did that cause me trouble!” she exclaimed in a whisper. “Oo, la, la! But it was great fun, and very mysterious, too.

“And now there is this box.” She kicked the thing with her toe. “It was lost in the express with no label on it, the auctioneer said.

“I made a bid. A Chinaman raised me. I bid again. Once more he raised. There was murder in his eye. And then—” She paused for breath. “Then some officers

in plain clothes came and carried him away.

“Poor fellow! It is hard when you wish very much to buy a package so mysterious, and you cannot.

“But then,” she added after a moment, “perhaps it was to him not so mysterious after all. Possibly he knew what was in the chest.

“Ah, well, we will keep an eye out for that one with the long ears. And if we find him? What then?”

Unable to answer this question, she crept into her bed and fell asleep.

Next day she spent three hours alternately laughing and crying over Sandburg’s life of Lincoln called *The Prairie Years*.

“Ah, now I understand it all,” she sighed, as she wiped her eyes after reading the chapter telling of the love of young Abe for Ann Rutledge. “Who would not gladly scrub the floors of those buildings where our little Jensie Crider labors? And yet, how I love her for it!”

On this day Florence was given the surprise of her life. And to Jeanne a bright new dream was born.

Florence was on her way to work on the Enchanted Island. She was about to start across the bridge over the lagoon when she saw some one leaning on the rail looking away at the water.

“Why, it’s Jeanne!” she exclaimed in a whisper. “What in the world?”

Tiptoeing up to the girl who was looking away from her, she seized her by the shoulders as she fairly shouted in her ear:

“Jeanne! How did you get here? And where did you get that jacket? It’s a peach!”

Taken by surprise, as she undoubtedly had been, the girl did not so much as start.

“My name’s not Jeanne!” Her voice was icy cold. “What’s got you?”

“Oh, come on, Jeanne,” Florence laughed, looking her full in the face, “you can’t fool me! But, honest, where *did* you get that jacket?”

A sudden and quite surprising light overspread the other girl’s face.

“Say!” There was a ring in her voice now. “I told you the truth the first time. My name’s not Jeanne. But say! Do you mean to tell me there’s a girl in this city that looks so much like me that you really can’t tell I’m not that girl even when you look me square in the face?”

Florence stared at her in blank amazement. “If you’re not Petite Jeanne, the little French girl, who are you?”

“I’m Lorena LeMar, the movie star. Surely you must recognize me from the screen!”

“I—I’m sorry. I seldom go to the movies.” Florence looked her apology. “I’m convinced now, and I—I apologise.”

She was about to pass on when the other girl seized her arm eagerly. “Who is this girl? Has she been in the movies? No, of course not. Could she act a part, do you think?”

The girl seemed so much in earnest that for a moment Florence could only stare.

When at last she found her tongue she assured the young movie star that while Jeanne had never appeared in the movies she was quite capable of acting a part, that she had once starred for an entire season in light opera and that for one glorious night she had sung a stellar part in grand opera.

“Do you believe in luck?” the girl demanded.

“Mostly in the luck that comes after a lot of hard work,” Florence smiled.

“Sometimes you get the breaks. You can’t deny that,” the girl insisted. “Might as well call it luck. Who is this friend of yours? Does she like acting? Does she need money? Is she a kindly person? Would she throw a rope to a drowning soul?”

“Mostly yes,” Florence smiled.

“Lead me to her.”

“Can’t now. Going to work.”

“What work?”

“Over on the Enchanted Island.”

“When can I see her then?”

“At eleven to-night, at the Rutledge Tavern in the Lincoln Group.” Florence was thinking fast. She must be on her way.

“That—that will be swell. Here, shake on it!” The girl gripped Florence’s hand.
“You won’t fail me?”

“We’ll be there.”

Florence went dashing across the bridge. All the way over she was saying:
“What does it all mean? What can she want of Petite Jeanne?”

No answers came to her, but deep in her soul was the conviction that Jeanne was in for one more novel adventure, and the sort of adventure she loved, at that.

Still, she had not guessed the half of it.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLACE OF DARKNESS

Florence never tired of her work on the Enchanted Island. On this island which man by his ingenuity and tireless energy had drawn from the very bottom of the lake, children romped while their elders sought amusement to their own liking.

Florence loved small children. With their gay frocks, their tossing hair, their frank smiles, she found them entrancing. Just to watch over them as they rode on gay launches or diminutive motor buses, or laughed at the talking cow and the puppet show; to climb with them the magic mountain where all manner of strange people from fairyland awaited them; then to call all this work and to receive money for it on pay day—this to her seemed absurd.

And yet this was her manner of spending her day on the Enchanted Island. So absorbed in it did she become that she all but forgot to call Jeanne and tell her of the strange appointment she had made for eleven o'clock that night.

At four she did think of it, and at once dashed to the telephone.

“Oh, Jeanne!” she exclaimed, as a voice came to her over the wire. “Are you there? I’ve got exciting news. We are to meet a movie queen at the Rutledge Tavern to-night—eleven o’clock. You’ll be there?”

“Of a certainty!” Jeanne’s tone was eager. “But why?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Why can’t you tell me?”

“Because I don’t know. Good-bye. See you at eleven.”

She hung up, leaving the little French girl in a state of bewilderment, her mind

all awhirl with questions. Who was this movie person? Was she truly a queen of the cinema? Why must she meet her?

There was some question in the end regarding Jeanne's ability to keep this engagement. This, fortunately, was outside her knowledge. So, having eaten a very good dinner at the hotel, and having bestowed a knowing look upon the check boy, custodian of her mysterious laundry bag, she made her way to the fairgrounds and for a time purposely lost herself in the vast throng that, eddying now this way and now that, poured like a river down the broad walks running for miles along the lake front.

"I wonder," she mused as, jostled here and pushed aside there, she moved forward, "how a rain drop feels when it falls into the center of the great Mississippi. Snuggles right down and makes itself feel right at home. Surely this is so. And I, wandering here with this throng from all over this broad land, feel as if I had been too long away from it all, as if in some other world I had marched on and on, on and on with a vast throng that, like the Milky Way, moves forward forever."

The ebb and flow of that great human tide at last carried her to the Golden Temple. And here, more by instinct than desire, she sought once more the cool silence of a place where worship seemed the mood of the hour.

Sinking into a chair, she sat in a dreamy mood listening to the low, melodious voice of the mandarin. "This," he was saying, "is the laughing Buddha, god of happiness. Wart on temple stands for nobility. Long ears, long life."

Glancing up, Jeanne saw the long ears of this grotesque idol, and laughed. "Long ears, long life," she whispered. "There is one Chinaman who needs to avoid Florence if his life is to be long. She'd throw him into the lagoon."

The mandarin was continuing his chant. "The three-bladed knife is not for to kill. Oh, no, he is for drive demons away. Always ring little bell, swing three-bladed knife through the air. Demon go away.

"Demon very bad. Make people sick. Make people die. Make land dry. Rice not come up. Millet not get ripe. All people starve. Oh, yes, demon very bad!"

He turned to the prayer wheel. Jeanne ceased to listen. "So that is the meaning of the three-bladed knife and the bell," she was thinking to herself. "How strange! I

wonder if the demons flee if the knife is flashed through the air and no bell rings.”

Once more the stream of humanity called. Again she lost herself in that great rushing river. Nor did she emerge until she stood before an immense affair that, seeming a prodigious barrel one hundred and twenty-five feet high, stood out against the night.

As she stepped inside this gigantic barrel her mind went into a tailspin. Had she passed into another world? It seemed so.

The inner walls of that great barrel were all alive. Here she looked deep into the heart of a tropical jungle where giant tractors dragged great mahogany logs through the forest, there a magnificent trans-continental limited leaped at her from the mouth of a tunnel, and here, sailing high over the white vastness of Arctic wilds, a splendid airplane came to rest on an endless expanse of snow.

That it was a trick performed by the miracle of a hundred moving picture projectors she knew right well. Yet it did not destroy for her the sense of illusion.

She stood there lost to the world about her, entranced, when with a sudden shock she felt a hand on her shoulder.

Turning quickly, she found herself looking into the mask-like face of the long-eared Chinaman.

So sudden was the shock that she thought she might fall to the floor or scream.

But she did neither. With the lightning-like movement of a frightened deer, she darted forward. Seeing a door knob, she grasped it. The door opened. Before her was a steel ladder. She was fifty feet up that ladder before she took time to think.

At that instant the door closed. She was in profound darkness. Only far above her shone pale light, a small square of night sky.

Her heart was racing furiously. Why had she indulged in such madness? That great dome of the Transportation Building was thronged with people. Any one of these would have offered her protection.

Now here she was in a narrow place of darkness. The door was closed. Had it

shut itself? Had the long-eared Chinaman entered to close it behind him?

“He has the three-bladed knife!” she thought with a shudder.

“The three-bladed knife is not for to kill.” The mandarin’s words came back to her. Scant comfort in this. It was sharp enough to kill if the Oriental’s purpose was murder.

She was at the parting of the ways. Above her, a hundred and twenty-five feet from the ground, up that narrow ladder, was the top of the dome. Beneath her, fifty feet down, the good earth and the man she feared.

All this passed through her mind in ten seconds of time. Then, without having truly willed it, she began to climb.

Never before had she climbed so high on a ladder. Now to go higher and higher, feeling her way every step in the dark, thinking of the dizzy depths below, was agony.

But what else was there to be done? All her life she had been frightened by the mysterious silence of Orientals. They moved about with padded footsteps. Their voices were low. She seldom heard them speak.

“That man may be coming,” she told herself, “climbing like a cat—silently.”

Up, up she went. The square of light appeared to grow, to come closer and closer until with a sigh that was half a sob, she tumbled over its brink to fall upon the cold metallic surface of the dome.

“Oh!” she breathed. “Oh!”

Then, having thought of the Chinaman, she seized a trap door, slammed it shut, and sat down upon it.

“He might be able to lift me!”

Her keen eyes sought and found a bolt that could be drawn. It would fasten down the trap door. She shot the bolt into place.

Then, experiencing an overwhelming sense of relief, she sprang to her feet and,

whirling into an intoxicating rhythm, went dancing across that vast dome.

For the moment she was safe, she was free. Petite Jeanne did not bother too much about the future.

Dancing away to the very crest of the dome, which was not a dome as we think of it, but a vast inverted saucer two hundred feet in diameter, she spread her arms wide and stood there poised like some white bird ready for flight.

The scene that lay spread out far beneath her was entrancing. To her right, by the lagoon's bank, blazed the camp fire of the African village. Farther away were the tepees of the red men. Close at hand all manner of lights were blinking, racing, plunging, dancing. These were the wild thrill-producing features of the Midway. Here a vast building lifted a blue tower to the sky. Far away the rocket cars of the Sky Ride shot through space.

For a time Jeanne thought only of that which lay beneath her eye. At last her gaze wandered to the cool of Lake Michigan's vast waters by night.

And then her thoughts returned to that great circle of steel upon which she stood.

"Not a beam support, not a post nor a girder. It is suspended in air. Great steel cables hold it in place. Cut those steel cables, and—"

She shuddered at the thought. And yet, what a marvel it all was!

Then of a sudden she recalled her appointment at the Rutledge Tavern.

"Florence said I was to meet a movie queen. There was something in her tone that tells me an exciting time is to be had, and here—here I am!"

Instantly her mind sobered. She was alone on this broad dome. Should she scream for help the sound of her voice would be lost in the roar of the merry-mad throng. From the Midway came the grind of a merry-go-round. Somewhere much farther away a band was dispensing glorious music.

"I must get down. The ladder is the only way."

She shuddered. Coming up, straight up a hundred and twenty-five feet, had been nerve-wracking. What must a descent into that black hole be?

“And that terrible Chinaman!”

Well, perhaps, after all, he had not followed.

Then a thought struck her. What if some guard had seen her mount that ladder? She would surely be arrested.

“I—I’ve got to do it!” She set her teeth hard. “I’ll find out about the long-eared one; lift the trap door quick. If he’s there I’ll slam it down again.

“And if he’s not there, I—I’ve got to go down!”

Catching a quick breath and whispering: “*Now!*” she lifted the trap door.

She did not drop it. There was no one at the top of the ladder.

Who can say that it did not take courage to drag her feet off the top of the dome and allow them to dangle until they came into contact with a round of the ladder? Who can tell how many miles it seemed to the bottom?

Enough that she reached solid earth at last.

Then, catching her breath for the second time, she seized the knob, turned it, swung the door open, stepped out, closed it silently, glanced to the right and to the left, then dashed for the cool outer air of night—free!

CHAPTER VIII

JEANNE'S DOUBLE

On reaching the Tavern Jeanne found herself in a high state of agitation. The hour was late. How late? This she could not tell. Had she missed her appointment? Would the movie queen be gone? She caught her breath at the thought. Something had told her that this meeting meant an open door, one more great opportunity.

“Oh!” she breathed as, dropping into a chair, she looked at the clock. “It lacks ten minutes of the hour.”

Her eyes roved the room. “They are not here.”

“Tea,” she said to the waitress, “very black tea, one large pot of tea.”

After that experience in the great dome she felt in need of this mild stimulant.

She was in a state of mellow glow imparted by the tea, when Florence ushered into the now all but empty room a person who on the instant brought a gasp from Jeanne's pink lips.

For a full moment Jeanne and the stranger stared at one another in amazement.

“You,” said Jeanne at last, “must be I.”

“No,” said the other quite positively, “it is you who are to be some one else. You are to be Lorena LeMar. That is what we are here to talk about.

“Waiter,” she ordered, “bring us coffee, very black.”

“One demi-tasse,” Jeanne murmured.

It was only after the golden-haired movie star had drained the last drop of her coffee piping hot, that she turned to Jeanne.

“You see, I—”

“Won’t you-all draw your chairs up to the fire?” It was Jensie Crider, the rosy-cheeked mountain girl, who stood beside them. “You see everyone is gone. There is a cool breeze from the lake. The fire is so cheerful!”

“Yes, yes, let us do that!” Jeanne exclaimed quickly, touched by the girl’s simple kindness. “Yes, we shall do that, and you, my dear, shall sit with us.”

“But this—” Miss LeMar’s tone suggested caution. “This is to be something of a secret.”

“This,” Jeanne said in a sharp whisper, “does not matter. In the mountains secrets are kept as nowhere else in the world. Jensie is from the mountains. It is not so?” She turned to Jensie.

“It most certainly is true,” Jensie agreed.

“Oh, well then—” Lorena LeMar moved toward the fire.

“You see,” she threw out a petulant hand as they gathered about the fire, “I am on the lot over there in what they call ‘Little Hollywood.’ Five days from now I am to begin a picture—you know, show the people how it’s done. There are seats for thousands out there, and all that. Bah! I don’t like seats. And I hate people about, when I am making a picture!”

“But people, an audience!” Jeanne murmured, “That is wonderful!”

“Glad you like it. Not for me!” Miss LeMar tossed her head.

“And now,” she went on, “comes the opportunity of a lifetime. My opportunity. Rodney McBride, one of the richest men in Chicago, is making up a yachting party to go north. Think of it! A yacht a hundred and forty feet long! Singing, dancing, drinking! Oh, yi! yi! Moonlit waters. Mackinac Island, the Soo Canal, Isle Royale in Lake Superior, speed boats, sailboats and all that!” She sprang to her feet in a gesture of great impatience. “Think of giving up all that just to work out there on the lot with five thousand people staring at you!”

“But think of having your name on the electric signs all over the country!” Jeanne murmured.

“Nix!” Miss LeMar stamped her foot. “When it’s all over the thing’s sure to be scrapped. The picture’s too big for the lot.

“They’ve shot some fine little stories out there, short ones; but not this. No! No!” Again she stamped her foot.

“I thought—” Her tone changed as she dropped into a chair. “I thought that since you are my double, so perfectly, and since you’d been in light opera, you might —” she cleared her throat—“you might be willing to take my place on—on the lot.”

“As Lorena LeMar?” Jeanne stared at her in unbelief.

“As Lorena LeMar. It wouldn’t be hard, really.” The movie star’s tone was eager. “All you’d have to do would be to study the script, get the continuity and the lines, then just go on and—and do your bit.

“And really,” she half apologized, “it’s not as if the thing would ever get across. It never will. One of those natural things, not spicy at all—don’t you know? And besides, there’s the lot—it’s too small. It could only be done properly in Hollywood, really.”

Jeanne looked at Florence. Florence was gazing at the fire. Jeanne knew what that meant. Florence was saying to herself: “She’s off again! First it was light opera, then grand opera; now it’s to be the movies.”

“Tell me,” Jeanne’s tone was little more than a whisper, “the story of this movie.”

“The story,” Miss LeMar said lightly, “doesn’t amount to much. As I’ve told you, it may never get as far as a preview.”

“I must know,” Jeanne murmured.

“Oh, it’s just one of those mountain things.” Miss LeMar’s tone was light. “The side of Big Black Mountain; that’s the place, I think.”

“Big Black Mountain!” Jencie, who had listened quietly until now, exclaimed. “That’s my home!” Her cheek turned crimson.

“And down there somewhere Lincoln was born!” said Jeanne. There was a touch of reverence in her tone.

All this was lost on Lorena LeMar. “It’s a love story, of course,” she went on. “Boy and girl standing on the side of a mountain. Springtime. Trees in bloom. Apple trees, I guess.”

“Dogwood,” Jencie corrected. She was leaning forward eagerly.

“Well, anyway, there’s the girl, about sixteen, and a boy about eighteen. Lovers. Boy’s going away. They’re saying good-bye. No clinches. Too bashful for that. Just a touch of the hand. Girl throws her apron over her eyes after he’s gone—that sort of thing.

“The girl—her name’s Zola Setser—hears some one singing. She listens. She looks. A donkey appears around the rough path. An Italian, with big brown eyes and all that, rides the donkey bareback. He is singing ‘O Sole Mio.’

“She listens and watches. A horse comes into view. A downcast sort of woman is riding the horse; two ragged children are hanging on behind.

“Of a sudden there comes the clatter of hoofs and a fat youth, dressed to kill, all leggings, silver spurs, you know, comes dashing along on a blooded horse. He bumps into the woman, knocks the children off the horse, bumps into the Italian and sends him sprawling.

“‘Damn poor white trash!’ the fat youth swears, as he leaps from his saddle. ‘Damn Dago!’” Miss LeMar waved her hands.

“The mountain girl’s dog,” Lorena LeMar’s voice went on, “a long-eared sort of hound, comes out barking. The fat youth gives the poor hound a kick that sends him away with a wild howl.

“Then he puts on a grand air, and favors the beautiful Zola with a flattering smile while he asks the way to Pounding Mill Creek.

“Zola tells him the way. But you can see she’d much rather shoot him.

“‘Damn poor white trash!’ the Italian repeats, picking himself up from the dust after the fat youth has ridden on. ‘Damn Dago!’ Everybody like us, eh? Ha! Getta ’long fine. I gotta ten dolla’, gotta one donkey. What say we start a coal mine?’

“Zola laughs at the joke.

“But the Italian is serious. He makes good his word and starts a mine. Zola’s father owns some rough land full of coal. He and this Italian, Tony Riccordio, join as partners.

“And that,” Miss LeMar yawned, “is what you might call the first act.”

“It’s a fine beginning,” Florence enthused. “And I suppose the mine prospers. Zola marries the dark-eyed Italian, and they live happily ever after.”

“No, no, you’re wrong. That’s too simple.” Lorena LeMar took a fresh start. “They mine coal and ship it. The fat youth from the outside, who is supposed to be rich, mines coal and ships it too.

“But there is intrigue in Louisville. Tony Riccordio has his coal held on the rails. Costs pile up. He is about to go into bankruptcy and Zola’s papa with him.

“So Zola hides in a load of soft coal and rides to Louisville. The switchmen dig her out and wash her up. When they see what a swell looker she is, they swear allegiance to her cause, and the day is won.

“Zola goes back. There is a dance. Mountmorris Mortimer, the fat youth, insults Zola. Tony throws him over a cliff—not a very high cliff. Only two ribs are broken. They ship him out in a freight car.

“It turns out that Mountmorris has lost all his money. His mine closes. Tony gets rich—”

“And he marries—” Jeanne put a hand over Florence’s mouth.

“No,” Miss LeMar smiled, “the handsome mountain boy Zola was telling good-bye in the beginning comes back. He and Zola go into a clinch. Tony adds his blessing, sells his share in the mine, stuffs his pockets with money and goes riding back over the mountains, singing ‘O Sole Mio’.

“That,” Miss LeMar added with a drawl, “is the drift of the story. Of course there’s a lot more to it. But you can see. What do you say? Is it a go? I’ll see that you get five hundred dollars a week. Two full weeks if you’ll only do it.”

“Five hundred dollars for just one week!” It was Jencie, the little mountain girl who spoke in a whisper.

“That, dearie,” Lorena LeMar favored her with a smile, “is nothing, just nothing at all.

“I’m sorry,” she half apologised to Jeanne. “It’s all I can spare just now.”

“Oh, it—it’s all right.” One could see plainly enough that Jeanne was not thinking of the money at all, but of the strange circumstances that had brought this unusual opportunity to her door.

“To *be* some one else for two whole weeks,” she was saying to herself. “To forget that Petite Jeanne lives at all. To act in the movies when one has never crossed a movie lot before. It seems quite impossible. And yet—”

“It sounds like a beautiful story,” she murmured after a time.

“It *is* beautiful!” Jencie exclaimed. “But they could make it so much more beautiful if they only knew.”

“Knew what?” Miss LeMar opened her eyes wide.

“Knew the mountains.”

“But that—” The movie star’s voice was low, almost sad. There was about the little mountain girl an all but irresistible appeal. “That does not matter. It’s only an exhibition. It’ll never go on the screen.”

“It could be made very beautiful,” Jeanne repeated musingly. Then suddenly a new light sprang into her eyes.

“All right, I’ll do it!”

“Wonderful!” Miss LeMar leaped to her feet.

“I shall have to see a great deal of you in the next few days,” Jeanne insisted. “I must copy your character.”

“See me all you like, so long as I can get off on that yacht cruise. Good-night. I’ll be seeing you.” The great movie star, Lorena LeMar, was away, leaving in her wake surprise, anticipation, eager hope and blank despair.

“Why did I say ‘yes’?” Jeanne murmured at last. “Who in the world could ever do that?”

“Only one person,” Florence smiled. “And her name is Petite Jeanne.”

But could she?

CHAPTER IX

“HAUNTS”

“Does she mean that you can *really* act in the movies?” Jencie Crider’s eyes were big with wonder as she ventured this question. They were still seated by the fire.

“She undoubtedly thinks that.” Springing to her feet, the little French girl walked the length of the long room and back again.

“But it *is* too bad it is not to be a real picture.” There was genuine sadness in the little mountain girl’s tone. “I’ve seen some mountain pictures. They are so, so terrible! And they could be so beautiful!

“When the dogwood is in bloom,” she murmured softly.

“Jencie!” Jeanne cried, seizing her by the shoulders and looking far back into her deep, mysterious eyes. “If I tried to make that a real picture, would you help me?”

“I—I’d do my double-durndest!” Jencie laughed in spite of herself.

“All right, Jencie.” Jeanne was like a spring day. Sunshine and joy came one moment. The next there were clouds and rain. “All right, little girl.” Her shoulders drooped. “We—we might try it. You never can tell.”

She dropped into a chair before the fire.

Jencie went about the humble task of scrubbing the floor. Florence insisted upon helping her, so together, on hands and knees, they made their way back and forth, back and forth across the large room.

All this time Jeanne sat in deep thought. Once she murmured to herself, “It was

before the fire in Rutledge Tavern that the great one, Abraham Lincoln, who with all his greatness was so simple and kind, sat for long hours dreaming of the future, reading his fortune in the flames, reading it to a girl, Ann Rutledge who, as simple and kind as he, understood.

“And then—” She stared hard at the fire. “Then the girl was gone forever, and he had to go on alone, all the way alone.

“He was an American, this great Lincoln, and I am only a poor little French girl.

“But perhaps—” She stared once more at the flames of orange and gold. “Perhaps I might make people understand and love him more if I could give them a true picture of the mountain country where he was born.

“When the dogwood is in bloom,” she whispered. Her voice was deep and mellow, like a night bird’s call.

“Come on, Jeanne! Snap out of it!” Florence was at her side. “The floor is done. We’re going to have hot chocolate and some of those cake squares they call brownies.”

Once again Jeanne marched across the floor to the back of the room. As she turned, her gaze strayed through the window.

“The hearse,” she whispered with a shudder. “It’s still waiting in the moonlight.”

Having turned quickly about to shut out the scene, she found herself looking at a tall-backed organ standing against the wall. The moonlight falling across its ivory keys, yellow with age, gave it a ghostly appearance.

“Boo! Spooky place!”

She was glad enough to retreat to the narrow circle made by the fire’s yellow glow.

“When the dogwood is in bloom,” she whispered a moment later. With the light of the fire in her eyes, she forgot all else save those far away mountains.

She called back from memory’s hidden places one springtime when, with Bihari the gypsy and his good wife, she had stolen away to the mountains of France in a

gypsy van. They had gone to meet the loitering spring.

They had found her lingering among the hills. There tiny flowers were blooming gaily. There, too, they had caught the white drift of blossoming trees.

Never in all her wanderings had Jeanne found such simple and kindly people as those who had hewn their homes from the forests on these hills.

When nights were damp and chill they had invited her to sit beside their rough stone fireplaces. At night they had tucked her away in a corner and piled her high with blankets and coverlids woven in fantastic patterns, all woven by hand.

When Bihari had mended their pots and pans, when they were ready to journey onward, they had crowded round to press her hand and add as a blessing an invitation to return.

“And these mountains where our Jencie lives,” she whispered. “They are like that. They must be.

“Ah, yes,” she breathed, “it must be truly wonderful when the dogwood is in bloom on Big Black Mountain. Jencie shall tell me all about it. Then, who knows? If only—”

“Dreaming still,” Florence broke in. “Come! The hot chocolate and cakes are ready.”

During this late hour of refreshment, which was indeed a time of glorious fellowship, a thing happened which will linger long in their memories.

“It was in this Tavern,” Jeanne was saying, “that Abe Lincoln and Ann Rutledge sang those strange religious songs that people of those times loved so well. I read some of them only yesterday. Listen! This is one of them:

“Death like an overflowing stream
Sweeps us away. Our life’s a dream,
An empty tale, a morning flower
Cut down and withered in an hour.”

There was silence down that long, dark room, where only the dull glow of coals cast an uncertain light about the narrow semicircle. Jeanne’s soul was like a deep

pool; it reflected all that came before it. Deeply moved by the strange sad words of other days, she could move her listeners.

Presently her mellow voice rose again:

“Teach me the measure of my days,
Thou Maker of my frame.
I would survey life’s narrow space
And learn how frail I am.

“Such songs as these,” she whispered. “Is it not very strange?”

“Yes,” the little mountain girl replied, catching the spirit of the moment. “And sometimes Ann Rutledge sat before that tall old reed organ and played while they sang together. They—”

“Listen!” Jeanne held up a hand. Out from the silence of that long room came the *Dong! Dong!* of the ancient clock striking the hour. “This—” Her tone was deep and low. “This is my hour of enchantment. This—”

Who knows what she was about to say? She broke off to sit listening, stiff with sudden emotion. From the far corner where the darkness reigned came the strange, church-like notes of a reed organ.

The melody that came rolling back to them was strange, a wild, weird something, perhaps from the past—a forgotten song no living mortal had ever heard.

It continued for a full five minutes. And in all that time not one of them moved or spoke.

When the last note died away, the stout Florence found her courage returning. “I’m going to see.” Her voice reached them in a low whisper.

Dropping on hands and knees, she disappeared into the dark.

“Who—who can it be?” Jeanne whispered to Jensie.

“There is no one.” Jensie’s words were scarcely audible.

After that they sat in silence until with a start Jeanne felt a hand on her shoulder.

“Oh!” She sprang to her feet.

Florence stood beside her.

“Who—who was it?”

The look on Florence’s face was strange. “There was no one.”

“Didn’t I tell you?” Jencie reminded Jeanne. “I told you there was no one.”

“Wha—what do you mean?”

“Haunts,” Jencie explained quite simply. “We have haunts in the mountains. There are good haunts and bad haunts. I think this was a good haunt. Ann Rutledge was good.”

After that, without a word, they filed out of the place in silence, locked the door behind them, then hurried away into the night.

* * * * *

For a long time that night after Florence had retired, Jeanne sat by the open window, thinking.

Far away she caught the black sweep of Lake Michigan’s waters, where dim, indistinct, a single ship’s light gleamed.

“It’s a strange and wonderful world!” she told herself. “Sometimes quite terrible, too.”

Once more she allowed her mind to drift over the events of the past few days. She saw it all as in a dream: the auction house, the mysterious chest, the fire on the beach, and the Chinaman fleeing into the night with the three-bladed knife.

“Florence will never rest until she has found him and has that precious knife back,” she told herself. “But will she find him?”

Once again in her imagination she saw their room in wild confusion—saw, too, the empty chest.

“I never told Florence about—about that laundry bag I left with the check boy at the hotel. I wonder if I should? And should I leave it there any longer? The mandarin said they were worth many, many dollars, those ancient pieces of embroidery work all done in threads of silver and gold.

“Ah well, the place to hide things is where no one will expect to find them. And as for Florence, the things you do not seem to possess are the ones that trouble you least.”

Again she sat wriggling her pink toes and staring away at that one yellow light far out upon the lake.

“But this moving picture!” she exclaimed at last. “Why did I say ‘yes’? How can I be some one else for even two short weeks?”

“But then—” Her face took on a rapt expression. “If one could but make a success of that picture when every one believes it is to be a failure. Ah, that would be marvelous! So very, very superb!”

Leaping to her feet, she danced across the floor and at last tucked herself into her bed.

CHAPTER X

ENTERING A NEW WORLD

“Of course, when I sail away on that glorious yachting party, you’ll come here to live.” That Lorena LeMar, Jeanne’s double, spoke in a matter-of-fact tone made no difference. Jeanne’s heart fluttered.

“Here!” she managed to gasp as her eyes swept the spacious hotel apartment with its glimmer of silver and gold, silk and satin. “Here? I couldn’t!”

“Oh, but you must!” In Lorena LeMar’s tone there was a note of finality. “You couldn’t well live anywhere else. This is the apartment of Lorena LeMar. Every one knows that. This is my address. They call me on the phone here, my company, my friends, my—”

“Your friends!” Jeanne gasped afresh. “Am I to be Lorena LeMar to your friends also? How—how very impossible!”

Jeanne’s head was in a wild whirl. For three days she had haunted the steps of her double, Lorena LeMar. They had been obliged to show great caution. Never had they been where others might see them together. This would have proved fatal to their plans. Nevertheless in out-of-the-way places and in this, Lorena LeMar’s apartment, Jeanne had been privileged to study her famous double until, as she expressed it to Florence, “already I am no more Petite Jeanne, but altogether Lorena LeMar.”

Never until this moment had it occurred to her that if she were to carry off her part she must abandon the shabby comfort of her rooms with Florence and come here to live, nor that Lorena LeMar’s friends must for two weeks be her friends.

“How does Lorena LeMar live?” she asked herself with a sinking heart. “And what do those friends expect of her?”

Little need to ask. Already she knew all too well. Lorena LeMar was an American, city-bred girl, no better and no worse than the average. Slender, vivacious, frank, quite lovable, she lived as those others live. There were dances, late parties, jazz and everything that went with it. Jeanne knew very little of this type of life.

“Your—your friends—” she stammered again.

“Oh, well, as to that—” Lorena LeMar shrugged her shoulders. “Shake ’em, every one of them. Tell them that Lorena LeMar, meaning you, is doing a picture, a vastly important picture, going to make you famous and all that. Tell ’em you are in mourning or something like that, no parties, no nothing until this picture is made.”

“I—I see,” Jeanne replied.

“And that,” she thought aside, “is perhaps more true than you think.”

Once again her gaze swept the room. Could she do it, live like an American queen for two weeks?

Costly paintings were on the walls, the sort she loved. Inch-deep Oriental rugs were on the floor. Against the broad wall was a great friendly hearth where a real wood fire burned. Heavy draperies were everywhere.

“Those Oriental embroideries, threads of silver and gold,” she thought suddenly. “How they would fit in here!

“But no! No! It must never be! I—”

“If you’ll step in here for a moment,” the movie queen threw open a door, “I will show you my wardrobe.”

“It’s rather poor,” she apologised. “Some good things, though.”

Jeanne found herself in a sleeping chamber. The opening of a second door revealed row upon row of coats and gowns. Here squirrel, mink and ermine vied with silk and satin.

“Oh!” she breathed. “Oo, la la!”

“Of course,” once again Lorena LeMar’s tone was matter-of-fact, “while you are Lorena LeMar you will wear these. Nothing will go so far toward perfecting your disguise.”

This time Jeanne had no word to offer. She was trying in vain to picture herself, Petite Jeanne—the little French girl who for many months had traveled with gypsies, dancing with a bear—living in this apartment and wearing these clothes.

It was true that for the better part of a year she had been considered rich. But, in France, to be rich is to be thrifty. Her people were all that. She had fallen into their way of thinking. Few garments had been added to her wardrobe.

“And now this!” she thought. “Ah, well, I am to be a queen, a queen of the movies for two weeks.”

She went skipping away across the floor in one of her wild gypsy dances.

Lorena LeMar caught her in her arms as she came dancing back. “Then you will do it? You dearest of all creatures!”

“How could I resist it?”

And yet, left alone in the midst of all this splendor while her double went on a shopping tour to secure sports clothes for her yachting trip, the little French girl was all but overcome with misgivings. It is one thing to appear on a movie lot each day and say certain words, go through certain gestures that have been learned and rehearsed; but quite another to live as your double has lived, among acquaintances, associates, friends off stage, from morning till night.

“I shall become a bookworm,” she assured herself. “When I am not rehearsing or playing a part I shall be right here curled up reading a book.”

But could she? Would Lorena LeMar’s friends permit it? What did those friends expect?

“Ah, well, time will tell,” she sighed.

“And besides, there is that so beautiful story, the movie story of mountain life, life of Lincoln’s own country, where he was born. One cannot forget, one must not forget!

“When the dogwood is in bloom,” she murmured. “If only I can do it! If only I can!”

“Ah, well,” she consoled herself, “Lorena LeMar belongs in California. All her friends are there, or nearly all. They must be.”

That she was mistaken in this, she was to know, and that almost at once. As she left the hotel elevator on the way home, a hand touched her arm. She turned about to find herself looking into a pair of smiling eyes.

“I’m Jerry,” the boy was saying. “You remember me, don’t you, Miss LeMar? Could I—”

For a second Jeanne’s head spun, then she found her senses and her ready French tongue.

“No, no, Jerry! No dates! I’m out on the lot, doing a picture, you know. It—it’s dreadfully important. Sorry, Jerry. Good-bye.”

“There now,” she whispered to herself as she leaped into a taxi, “I got away with it.”

For all that, a sinking feeling lurked around the pit of her stomach. “This,” she was thinking, quite against her will, “is but the beginning. Miss LeMar has many friends and more admirers. Not all of these will be as smiling and as kind as this Jerry.

“Oh, well,” she reassured herself, “Florence shall be my bodyguard. She’ll throw them from the window.” She smiled a merry smile.

But Florence was working. Long hours every day she was on the Enchanted Island. And just there came the blow to Jeanne’s plans.

CHAPTER XI

FROM CHINA'S ANCIENT TREASURE

While Jeanne was making the rather disturbing discovery that when you take over a double's labors you take over her friends as well, Florence was listening to words that, now thrilling her to the very depths of her soul, and now slowing up her heart until her very blood ran cold, left her at last full of half-formed hopes and well established fears.

Every afternoon from four o'clock to six, she was given a rest from her duties on the Enchanted Island. During these periods of leisure she wandered through the grounds. The wonders of science and invention that were spread out before her never failed to hold her interest. For all this, she took pleasure at times in visiting the more bizarre attractions. To watch the Seminole Indians dive beneath a great alligator with his snapping jaws and thrashing tail, to watch the little brown man's conquest of the scaly monster, gave her a thrill. To study the quaint customs of men from the heart of Africa; to don a bathing suit and take a long, long slide into the blue waters, all these things held a charm for this sturdy, adventure-loving girl.

This day she had entered the Golden Temple of Jehol to study its varied treasures from the heart of China. These things charmed and fascinated her.

The place was crowded. With such a throng pushing through its narrow aisles, the temple had lost much of its charm. She was about to wander once more into the open air, when her attention was caught and held by a face.

To her own astonishment, she stood there and stared at the man until he turned and smiled at her. Then she felt ashamed.

“Want a book?”

It was the white man who had been born in China and had lived all his life there; the one who had so held Jeanne's attention and had all but drawn from her the secret of the three-bladed dagger and the chest of Oriental embroideries. Surely here was some one it was hard to overlook. The tone in which he spoke was matter-of-fact. Yet a strange light shone from his eyes.

There are meetings that appear to have been ordered by some power outside ourselves. The instant the thing has happened we know it. With a simple flash of an eye one soul says to the other: "We are kindred spirits. We were born to be friends."

"Where—where did all this come from?" she asked rather breathlessly.

"All this stuff, the idols, the trumpets, the tapestries?"

"Yes."

"From China. Much of it from far back in the interior, even in Mongolia. I—I had a hand in gathering it. All came from temples, ancient temples—hard to get at times."

The man, who was quite young, spoke with a curious accent.

"You are not American?"

"I belong to China."

"But you are not Chinese," she laughed.

"Not Mongolian; but if you are born in China, live there always, what are you then?" He showed his fine white teeth in a grin.

Looking her up and down, taking in her costume that told she was "one of them," he said in a tone quite low and aside:

"I'll be free in half an hour. What about a cup of coffee? I'll tell you about these things."

"All—all right."

“See you then?”

“Sure.”

As she wandered out into the sunlight, something told her she had started one more friendship that would end in adventure. What she did not know was that she was about to be given one more chapter in the history of the mysterious Oriental chest and its temple treasures.

An hour after leaving the temple, she found herself seated at a narrow table in a dark little corner of a nearby coffee house, drinking black coffee and following every word of this most astonishing young man. His name, she had discovered, was Erik Nord. He had lived all his life in China and, as he expressed it, had “adventured all over the place.”

“We’d gone into Mongolia, that cold, barren land where no one is wanted,” he was saying. “The man I was with—I shall not tell you his name—had been commissioned to gather up a lot of this art treasure that is so rapidly disappearing from the decaying temples.

“There was a long-eared Chinaman who came near doing me in! Big knife and all that.”

“A—a long-eared Chinaman!” Florence exclaimed.

“Longest ears I ever saw. Looked as if some plastic surgeon had spliced pieces on from some other fellow’s ears—might have, too.

“It happened like this,” he went on, taking no notice of her stare.

“We’d picked up some things, jolly unusual they were, too; gold and silver embroidery, rare old stuff, a bell and a knife—three-bladed affair—some rare old pieces of embroidery—”

“A knife!” Florence was staring again. “Three-bladed!”

“But of course,” she added hurriedly, “they are common, I suppose. There is one over in the temple, isn’t there?”

“I must not betray secrets,” she was saying to herself. “Not to a man I have

known for only an hour.”

“This one was not common,” Erik Nord said quietly. “The hilt was all studded with jewels, diamonds and rubies.”

Once again Florence opened her mouth to speak, then thought better of it.

“We found these things,” Erik Nord went on, after a moment, “in a rather extraordinary manner. It seems some American, a curious sort of fellow, but very real in his devotion to these people, had somehow talked the whole little city out of their temple worship. He’d turned the temple into a hospital for children, Chinese children.” His voice trailed off into silence.

“Ever see any?” he asked a moment later.

“See what?” Florence asked, startled.

“Beg pardon. Ever see any Chinese children? No, of course not. Well, they’re the cutest ever.

“Look!”

Drawing a thin metal case from his pocket, he shook a handful of cards from it, then spread them out on the table.

Florence stared in astonishment. Each card was a photograph, the picture of a Chinese child. Children asleep, children crying, laughing, romping. In their quaint costumes they were indeed fascinating.

“Little children.” His voice dropped to a husky whisper. “The hospital was for them. The people had agreed that all the treasures of the temple should be sold and the money spent in equipping their hospital for children, the quaint little children of China.

“And then,” his voice changed abruptly, “the treasures were all lost. I fear the money may never be paid. And it was entirely my own fault! Can you imagine what that means to me?”

Florence did not answer. She was thinking hard. And in her thoughts the mental image of a long-eared Chinaman was blended with flashes of a three-bladed

knife and the pictures of a host of cute Chinese children.

When at last she broke the silence she was surprised to find that her voice, too, had taken on a suspicious hoarseness.

“You—you said there was a long-eared Chinaman?”

“Yes, that long-eared fellow. It—it was queer.” He took a long pull at his black coffee. “He looked like some sort of monk, or priest. A Buddhist, I mean. He nearly got the chest of treasure from us.

“You see, it was entrusted to our care. It was sold all right, but wouldn’t be paid for until delivered to the purchaser in America.

“He tried to knife the man I was with, this long-eared fellow did. Entered our tent at night. Fortunately, I was awake. I smashed him one just in time; nearly killed him. Thought I had, until he showed up in Tientsin and made a second attempt to rob us.”

“But the treasure?” Florence tried to still her wildly beating heart, to seem calm, unconcerned. “The treasure? What happened?”

“That’s just the question!” Erik Nord shrugged his broad shoulders. “It was entrusted to me. I sent the chest that contained it all—worth a lot of dollars I can tell you—to San Francisco in care of a friend. It arrived in due time. The friend paid the duty and re-shipped it to Chicago. As far as I know, it never arrived.” He sat back and stared at the ceiling. “I trusted the wrong man. He bungled it somehow.

“That,” he added in a whisper, “is one of the reasons I’m here. Somehow that long-eared Chinaman has beaten us. We’ve got to catch up with him. In time we’ll get him, too.”

“That man—”

Florence did not finish. What should she tell? All or nothing?

“Might not be the man,” she assured herself. “Might not have been the same chest. Anyway, the chest is all I have left. That’s worthless. What’s the good of getting mixed up in an Oriental intrigue? Anyway, I’ll talk it over with Jeanne.”

Thus her mind ran, and all this time Erik Nord was studying her face.

“That man,” she finished rather lamely, “must have been clever.”

“Clever no end!

“Well, time to wander back.” He rose. “It’s been a pleasure to be with you. I’d like to know about America, the best of America.”

“Do you think I belong to the best?” she laughed.

“You seem rather real.” His smile was frank. “I don’t like all this face-paint and jazz, pretty girls smoking cigarets, and all that. Well, I’m old-fashioned, I suppose. In China we put paint on the temples and burn incense in ancient copper dragons, not between young ladies’ lips.” He laughed good-naturedly, then ushered her into the twilight of the passing day.

CHAPTER XII

THE DODGE-EMS

“They say,” Florence murmured to herself, as she left the Enchanted Island that night, “that murderers always return to the scene of their crimes. That long-eared Chinaman did not commit murder when he took that sky-walk of his, but if he didn’t commit suicide he may be back. Perhaps the Sky Ride holds for him some strange fascination. I wonder.”

She was still wondering when her feet had led her to the foot of the east tower of that spectacular Sky Way. She waited for an up-going car.

“I’d like to get him,” she told herself. “I must!” A fierce determination took possession of her. Erik Nord’s story had embedded itself deeply in her soul.

“Children.” She smiled as she recalled the pictures of cute Chinese youngsters he had shown her. “And to think that they should be robbed of hospital care by one selfish Chinaman!”

Just then the elevator door opened. She stepped inside to go whirling upward. She did not cease to ponder. “Is this long-eared Chinaman merely selfish? Is he greedy for wealth?” There had been a rather startling look of fierce determination on his face. “Superstitious,” she whispered. “All Orientals are that, I suppose. There must be something about that knife, the bell and the banners that we don’t know about. He would risk his life for them, I am sure of that. Commit murder, too!” She shuddered.

“And yet—” A sudden thought struck her. “He has them all now; he must have; the chest was empty. What more can he want?”

She recalled Jeanne’s story of her flight up the ladder in that vast steel dome. “He was about to speak to her, touched her on the shoulder. What did he want?”

He—”

Her car shuddered slightly, then came to a halt. They had reached the two hundred foot level where one boards the Sky Ride.

Without really willing it, she allowed herself to be carried out with the crowd.

She was standing there only half conscious of the rocket car just loading before her, still asking herself questions. “Should she tell Jeanne Erik Nord’s story? What should she do about the whole affair? Should she tell Erik what she knew? Should—”

Of a sudden, eyes wide, arms extended, she sprang forward. But she was just one step too late. The door closed. The rocket car went shooting on its way. And in it, smiling sardonically no doubt, was the long-eared Chinaman.

* * * * *

Jeanne went for a stroll on the boulevard that night. And she wore not her own modest sport coat but one of Lorena LeMar’s wraps, a superb creation.

“You must do this,” the screen star had insisted. “You must become accustomed to wearing these things. And you *must* wear them, you know. You couldn’t be Lorena LeMar without them.”

Jeanne had not objected in the least. The truth was, she loved fine clothes. And this was such a “darb” of a cape: midnight-blue satin trimmed with real white fox, the sort of thing that catches the eye of every passer-by; that causes them to turn and stare.

And to stroll on the boulevard as she had seen so many fine ladies do! Ah, that would be heavenly!

And it was all of that. One fact troubled her a little; she was alone. She would have felt better with a woman companion dressed as she was, or a gentleman in evening clothes and a high hat.

But then, Jeanne was at heart a gypsy. Gypsies are never afraid, nor do they mind being alone.

There are beautiful shops on the boulevard. The windows of Paris are not more gay than are those of our boulevards. Jeanne went window-shopping.

“Five hundred a week!” she whispered to herself. “Two weeks. A whole thousand dollars to spend as I please! No one shall say: ‘This is an inheritance. It belongs to the past and to the future.’ I shall spend it.

“But two weeks of being Lorena LeMar!” She sighed heavily. “It will be so difficult!

“Ah, well!” She drew the gorgeous cape about her, snuggled her head in the soft fur, and for the moment felt quite recompensed.

“I shall have that dress,” she told herself, stopping before a window. “Nile-green. The color suits me well.

“And some perfume.” She paused again. “That great bottle cut like a diamond. I love bottles, the fantastic sort.

“And shoes!” She was a veritable Cinderella dreaming dreams that night. “Shoes! There are some darling ones. Golden shoes to match the Nile-green dress. And only forty dollars. Think of it!”

Yes, she was a joyous little Cinderella. But all her joy vanished on the instant.

Of a sudden three very much over-dressed young men swooped down upon her.

“Lorena! Lorena LeMar!” they shouted in a chorus.

“And now, such a night as we shall make of it!”

Jeanne was pleased and frightened at one and the same time; pleased that she had copied the LeMar manner so well that her friends were thoroughly deceived; frightened at being alone at such a time.

“Oh, no you won’t!” She tried in vain to steady her voice. “I—I’m doing a picture; on the water-wagon and all that, till it’s finished.”

“Water-wagon! Water-wagon!” they shouted in derision, crowding about her. “That’s a good one! A real wise crack!”

Of a sudden the little French girl's world whirled about her. When it steadied she happened to see, by the most fortunate chance in the world, a familiar figure standing by the corner of a skyscraper.

In appearance this person was not so very different from the three nearer at hand. Natty brown suit, black derby, bright tie, spats, and all that. But his face! Ah, there you had it! His cheeks wore a healthy glow. His muscles were smooth and hard. In the eyes of these three who had so suddenly come upon her there was a nervous twitch. Their faces spoke of excess: too much money, too much fun, too many hours in a day, too much everything.

"Oh, all right!" She tossed her head in the LeMar manner. "I'll go. Which way? Over here?" She walked rapidly toward the one on the corner.

Caught off their guard, the gay trio followed. Not until it was too late did they realize that they had been tricked.

"Why, hello, my good friend Pat!" Jeanne called suddenly, as if the meeting had been by chance. She grasped the firm hand of the one on the corner. "Boys," she trilled, "this is Pat Murphy. He's a detective, aren't you, Pat? Show them your star, Pat."

Pat grinned as he threw open his coat.

"Been looking for pickpockets and—and mashers, haven't you, Pat?" Jeanne gave her detective friend a look.

"Yeah. Just anything. A fellow's gotta make a pinch now and then to hold his job." Pat was still grinning. For all that, a queer something had stolen into his voice.

"Oh say, George!" one of the joy-hunting trio exclaimed. "Forgot something, didn't we? Directors' meeting, or something like that. It was at ten sharp, wasn't it?"

"Awfully sorry!" He turned hurriedly to Jeanne. "Be seeing you again, LeMar."

"We'll be seeing you."

"We'll be—" They were gone.

“Yeah, they forgot something!” Pat chuckled. “What’ll I do? Go and get them?”

“Oh no, please don’t!” Jeanne grasped his arm.

“You see,” she explained, “they thought I was some one else.”

“This LeMar person? Well, ain’t you?”

“No, I’m not, really.” She gave him a knowing look. “I’m just Petite Jeanne, the little French girl who lived with Bihari the gypsy. You know that, Pat. You’ve known it quite a long while.

“All the same,” she added hastily, “if you see Lorena LeMar, who looks just like me, having any trouble, you just march right up and say: ‘What’s all this about?’ Will you?” She gave his arm a squeeze and was gone.

Dashing to a corner she boarded a bus and was whirled away. No more window-shopping for her that night. Only her own top floor rooms with the door safely locked could still her heart’s wild beating.

“Not Lorena LeMar yet,” she thought, as fresh consternation seized her. “Yet I am threatened with the doubtful kindness of her friends.

“Oh, I know,” she breathed. “They were only three gay play-boys out for a good time.

“But when you don’t know what play-boys are like, when you haven’t the least notion what they expect of you—how terrifying!

“Good old Pat!” she thought with a sigh. “He saved me that time. To think what it means, this having humble friends all strewn along your pathway, scores and scores of just common folks, your friends!

“But why not?” She laughed a little laugh. “Am I not myself only Petite Jeanne, friend of the gypsies, humblest of them all?”

So she hurried home to lock the door, hang the beautiful robe carefully in a corner, settle herself in a great shabby chair and give herself over to watching the rocket cars streak across the sky far above the great Fair.

* * * * *

And in one of these cars, hoping against hope that she might at the other end catch up with the long-eared Chinaman, was Florence.

“No chance!” she breathed a moment later, as she sent one wide sweeping glance across the landing platform. “He’s gone. But which way? Down or across?”

Choosing to re-cross the broad expanse, she once more boarded a rocket car and went speeding away.

This time, having all but given up hope of catching the fugitive, she gave herself over to enjoyment of the moment.

Never, though she rode the Sky Ride a thousand times, would she lose that feeling of breath-taking thrill that came over her as, hanging high in air, she watched the ever changing lights and the milling throng upon the land, the flashing fountains, the darting boats on the lagoon.

“It’s marvelous!” she breathed. “Why must one be disturbed by the problems of others? Why should not one—”

Once more they were across. She leaped to her feet, was first at the door.

“There! There he is! He—he’s going down!”

Leaping for the descending car, she caught it just in time, only to find herself wedged in between a very fat man and two extremely tall women. The Chinaman was in the car, of that she was sure. Yet, crane her neck as she might, she could not catch sight of him.

Nor was she more fortunate upon landing. He was gone before she caught a glimpse of him. Only one thing she knew, he had gone toward the lagoon. Throngs were pressing in that direction. All other avenues were clear.

Following more by instinct than knowledge, she arrived at the shore of the lagoon just in time to see a fluttering yellow jacket go gliding across the water in a Dodge-Em.

“Here!” She crowded a young couple aside, pressed a half dollar into the

starter's hand, leaped into a Dodge-Em and was away.

A Dodge-Em is a curious sort of boat. It is short and broad, is very heavy and has a motor that appears to run forever. That it does not run forever Florence was to learn later, to her sorrow.

You may stand on the edge of a Dodge-Em. It will not tip you out. You may run it nose first into another Dodge-Em or into a stone wall—yet you will not harm the Dodge-Em. It has a solid rubber prow and heavily padded sides. A truly remarkable craft is a Dodge-Em. Only one thing you cannot do; you can never make a Dodge-Em go faster than its accustomed speed, which is some four miles per hour.

This last Florence learned to her great disgust. Step on the gas as she might, and did, she could get no burst of speed from that indolent Dodge-Em.

So, in the end, she lost the race. Having crossed the lagoon, the fleeing one abandoned his boat, climbed the breakwater and disappeared in the Florida orange grove that by some touch of magic had been made to grow on the shores of Chicago.

“Oh, well,” she sighed, settling back in her seat. “It’s a grand night for dreaming, and who could fail to dream at night in a slow old Dodge-Em. I—”

“Hello there! Out for a ride?”

It was Erik Nord who called from another Dodge-Em.

“Did—did you see him, too?”

She spoke before she thought.

“See him?”

“Yes—er—well, there was a curious sort of person out here on the water. Gone now.” She would not tell him, not just yet.

“Let’s double up,” he suggested. “Fine night for sport.”

So it happened that she found herself seated in his Dodge-Em, gliding across the

blue waters.

The hour was late. There were few boats on the lagoon.

“Queer, the things you can do with these things.” He steered his craft toward the shadows. In the shadows was another Dodge-Em. Without appearing to plan it, he allowed his boat to strike the other a glancing blow.

Came a scream from the other boat.

“Hey! Watch out! What are you doing?”

“Beg your pardon!”

Erik and Florence glided away. “No,” he chuckled, “you can’t hurt ’em, these Dodge-Ems. Don’t hurt the spooners to shake ’em up a bit.”

“Look out!” Florence gripped his arm. He was headed square for a Dodge-Em coming from the other way. Too late. Came a sudden jolt, a growl from a placid fat man who, up to that moment, had been dreaming along in his own slow way.

“Nope, you can’t hurt them. And they can’t hurt you!” Once again they were away.

They passed out no more sudden shocks that night, but gliding down the lagoon and back again, talked of many things, of customs in China, of temples and gardens, of America and her own ways and of the great Fair.

“It’s been a pleasure to be with you,” he said, as he bade her good-night at the gate. “Here’s hoping we meet again!”

“Here’s hoping.” She hurried away into the night.

There was little need to hope. They would indeed be together again and that under the most unusual circumstances.

CHAPTER XIII

DANCES AND DREAMS

“Jeanne, what can you be doing?”

Florence stared at her eccentric little friend in surprise.

“But can you not see?” Jeanne did not pause for an instant. “I am doing a gypsy dance, practicing for my so very wonderful moving picture. We begin rehearsals to-morrow, and must I not be prepared?”

“Yes, but—”

Florence could say no more. The whole affair was too fantastic for words. Here was Jeanne in the sumptuous apartment of Lorena LeMar. She was clothed in a filmy thing of Nile-green that floated around her as clouds float about a mountain peak. She was as radiant, too, as any mountain peak at dawn. She was doing one of her gypsy dances, one of those exotic, fairy-like dances that, now dreamy, now wild as a bird in flight, drug one’s very senses.

“But Jeanne!” she exclaimed, when at last the little French girl threw herself upon a low couch. “Your moving picture is to be one of those simple, human affairs, a story of the Cumberlands. You are to be Zola, an innocent little mountain child.”

“Ah, yes!” Jeanne sat up. Vibrant, alive to the very tips of her toes, she shook her finger at Florence. “There is the trouble! No contrast, none at all. And what is a movie, what can any dramatic thing be, without contrast?”

“Our Zola,” she hurried on, “is not so simple as you think.

“You remember she is rescued from a car-load of soft coal, very black, and she is scrubbed up?”

“Yes.” Florence smiled.

“Well!” Jeanne struck a dramatic pose. “When she is washed up she is introduced to the president of the railroad. He thinks she is a—how would you say it?—a ‘wow’!”

“So! He takes her home. He has a son and a daughter about her own age. This daughter dresses her up in this.” She touched the filmy gown.

“They are in a place like this.” She glanced about the apartment. “Only grander, much grander; you know: high ceilings, marble pillars, ancestral portraits, butler, and all that.” She threw her arms wide.

“When they have dressed our Zola of the box car up, she does like this.”

Once again she went drifting like a butterfly across the room and again alighted upon her downy perch.

“And then,” she cried exultantly, “they *know* she is a wow!”

“But, Jeanne,” Florence objected, “where could a little mountain girl learn that dance?”

“Gypsies, traveling gypsies. They go everywhere.

“And,” she went on, “when Zola does that dance, they want to keep her—just the way you’d like to keep a beautiful wild bird who flies into your window.

“They do keep her, too, for a few days. But the little wild thing longs for her mountain home. So, one starry night, she folds up the gorgeous pink nightie they have given her, puts on her old calico dress and steals away, back to her home on the side of Big Black Mountain.

“See!” she exclaimed. “Contrast! Is it not wonderful?” Once again, like some strange tropical bird, she drifted across the room.

“But Jeanne!” Again the skeptic protested. “Is all this in the scenario?”

“Not yet. I am putting it in to-morrow.”

“Putting it in?” Florence was aghast.

“Yes, yes. And why not? Why must one be a star, a movie queen, if she is not to have her own way?”

“And Lorena LeMar is gone?”

“Yes. She ’phoned me this morning, only a few words. She was off on the yacht. I must move in this very day. To-morrow we must rehearse. And *voila!* Here we are!”

“And you do not know where you can reach her in case—”

“In case what?”

“In case they detect that you are an impostor.”

“Oh, no, my friend, not an impostor!” Jeanne held up her hands in horror. “Only a twin star.”

“Or in case you fail.”

“Fail? But how could I? The movie is already—how shall I say it?—a flop.

“And I—I shall make it a grand success. I, Petite Jeanne, who has never failed. Nevair! I have willed that this so beautiful picture shall be a success!”

“Well,” Florence’s voice was deep and low, “here’s wishing you success.

“To-morrow—” She spoke again after some moments of silence. “To-morrow will tell the story. If you can carry it off to-morrow you are on your way.”

“Ah, yes!” Jeanne was drooping a little now. She was like a butterfly who has ridden the sunbeams long and far. “Ah, yes. To-morrow we shall know.”

CHAPTER XIV

TWO BLACK HORSES AND A COFFIN

For a full half hour the little French girl reposed upon that luxurious couch. Now and again her slender fingers touched the folds of her filmy gown. Often her eyes wandered from pictures to tapestries, then to little touches everywhere that told of lavish expenditure.

As a kitten lying on the doorstep basks in the sunshine, she basked in the warmth of elegance that was all about her.

“I am Lorena LeMar,” she was telling herself. “I am no longer a very careful little French girl. I am care-free, extravagant. I must tip the porter and the bell boy. I must ride in a taxi. I must—

“Oh!” she exclaimed, springing to her feet. “I came near to forgetting. We must go to the Tavern. I must see Jensie.”

“To-night?”

“At once.”

Jeanne was out of her finery and into street clothes in a jiffy.

“Now down the elevator and into a taxi.” They were away like a streak. “You see,” she explained, “there is so very much I do not know about those blessed mountains. Jensie must tell me. She must go with me to-morrow. Ah! That most terrible to-morrow!” she sighed.

Florence scarcely heard her. She was thinking of many things, of the long-eared Chinaman, of Erik Nord’s story, of the three-bladed knife and last but not least of Jensie and her “haunts.”

“Jeanne,” she said quite suddenly, “you didn’t believe that, did you?”

“Believe what?” Jeanne’s tone showed her astonishment.

“Oh,” Florence laughed, “I forgot you were not reading my mind. You don’t believe that a ghost was playing the reed organ in the Tavern that night, do you?”

“What should one believe? You saw no one?”

“No one.”

“And the doors were locked?”

“Of course.”

“The windows, too?”

“Yes, I—I’m sure of it.”

“Well then, what shall we say?”

Florence gave up. Jeanne was at heart a gypsy. And for gypsies all manner of curious creatures are real, ghosts and devils, goblins and witches, all quite real, so what *could* she say?

It was a dark and gloomy night. Black clouds hurried over the black waters of Lake Michigan. The Tavern seemed dark, mysterious, uninviting. Yet, as ever, there was the pale light, the low fire of coals, the slender girl scrubbing on hands and knees.

“Jensie,” said Jeanne. Her voice was low and friendly when at last they sat before the fire, which had been made to glow a little. “Jensie, when the big show is over, shall you go back to your mountain home?”

“It is beautiful.” Jensie spoke slowly, and with seeming reluctance. “Y-e-s, I shall probably go back.”

“But you do not wish it?” Jeanne was surprised.

“I have been through eighth grade down there. It is as far as I can go. I walked four miles every morning and night for that. I—I would like to study—study

more.”

“Where?” Jeanne’s voice was low.

“There is a place—” The mountain girl’s voice took on a new note of enthusiasm. “Such a beautiful place! A school. Lena, my chum, is there now. Her father has a coal mine.

“And this place—” She stared at the fire. “There are trees, great spreading elm trees, very old. And the brown stone building at the top of the hill is old, all grown over with ivy. Some of the teachers are old too. Their hair is like silver. But they are kind, oh so very kind. And they teach you so much. I have visited there. I know.” Her voice fell.

“Is it far?” Jeanne asked.

“Only an hour’s ride from here.”

“We shall go there some time, you and I.

“But Jencie—” The little French girl was all business now. “To-morrow I must go out to the lot.”

“The lot?”

“Where they make moving pictures. Will you go with me?”

“I’d love to.”

“Will you help me? Will you tell me if the trees are wrong, if the porch on the cabin is right, if the old mountaineer says his lines right?”

“I—I’ll do all I can.”

“Jencie,” Jeanne threw her arms about her. “You are a dear! We will make a picture, oh, such a marvelous picture of the land where your great Lincoln was born. And I—I shall be famous as—as Lorena LeMar. And you, ah, well, I shall not tell you now, but if we succeed you shall have something so very wonderful!”

Releasing her little mountain friend, she went flying away down the dark room in a wild gypsy dance.

Ten seconds later, she was back on tiptoe, her face white with terror.

“The hearse!” she whispered hoarsely. “There are now two black horses and a coffin. It moves! Oh, it moves!”

It was a full five minutes before even the stout-hearted Florence found courage to drive her reluctant feet down the long room. When she did, and had taken one look out of the window, she returned in haste.

“It’s gone,” she murmured hoarsely, “the hearse is gone!”

“I told you!” Jeanne repeated. “Two black horses and a coffin.”

“Haunts!” Jencie’s tone was solemn. “The hearse will be back there in the morning.”

“Will it?” Florence asked herself.

Gliding silently out of the room, they locked the door, then hurried away into the darkness with not a single backward look.

CHAPTER XV

TRANSFORMING A MOUNTAIN

If Jeanne carried her heart in her mouth as she passed through the gate and walked out on the lot of that “Little Bit of Hollywood” in Chicago that day, neither her face nor her feet betrayed her. She was smiling. Her feet moved in a sort of rhythmic motion that was almost a dance.

“Come over here.” She steered Jencie, who was at her side, into the shadow of the stadium for spectators.

Before the stadium, a proper distance off, a liberal section of a mountain had been reproduced. This was surprisingly real with trees, bushes, grass and rocks. Real flowers were in bloom.

This did not astonish Jeanne. She had become accustomed to the magic of Chicago scenery. It came and went, she knew that well enough. Four months before this greatest of all Fairs had opened there had not been a tree nor even a shrub upon its grounds. And now, there they were, hundreds of trees, some towering fifty feet in air, thousands of shrubs, miles of hedges.

“Magic,” Jeanne murmured.

“It’s very beautiful.” Jencie’s voice was low. “A very beautiful mountain. But it’s not Big Black Mountain.”

“Why? Tell me!” Jeanne’s voice was eager.

Jencie did tell her. For a full quarter of an hour Jeanne listened, and not a word escaped her.

When at last a short chubby man, who walked with a slight limp, appeared at the foot of the mountain she was ready. That Lorena LeMar was capable of an

imperious manner befitting a queen, she knew well enough. She was Lorena LeMar now. She would be imperious.

“Ah! Miss LeMar!” The little man gripped the tips of her fingers. “What a day!” he enthused. “It is so bright, like a child with a washed face. And look! What a mountain I have got for you!”

Jeanne looked into his bright little eyes. She was shaking at the knees, but her voice was steady.

“It’s a very pretty mountain, Mr. Soloman. But it’s not right.”

“What’s this? Not right, you say?” He stared in unfeigned astonishment.

“This story,” she went on, “is about Big Black Mountain. You have pines, young pines all over it. There are no pines on Big Black Mountain. There is mountain ivy, rhododendrons and dogwood in bloom. That’s the title, ‘When the Dogwood Is in Bloom.’ Where is it? Not a twig!”

“But Miss LeMar, you know—”

“Yes, I know.” Jeanne was going fast now. “You think the story can never be on the screen. What of that? These people who come to see pictures taken, many of them have traveled in the mountains of Kentucky and Virginia. They will look at your mountain and laugh.”

“Laugh? Laugh at me! At Abe Soloman!” The little director fairly danced. “I shall have it changed. You shall have your way, your ivy and your dogwood and what was it you said?”

“Rhododendrons.”

“Yes, and your dogwood, all over the lot.”

“Oh, thanks, Mr. Soloman.” The queen held out an imaginary sceptre.

“And Mr. Soloman,” Jeanne had intended going no further that day, but an irresistible impulse carried her on, “we can make a success of this picture, a real big success!”

The small eyes gave her a look that bored like a gimlet into her very soul. Had he guessed? Had she betrayed herself? She felt that her trembling knees would betray her. Too late now. She took a fresh start.

“It’s a truly beautiful story. All it lacks is contrast. When this mountain is done over it will do. We—we can shoot the indoor scenes in some fine home. I—I have rich friends.”

“Indoor scenes? Miss LeMar, there are no indoor scenes.”

“Oh, but Mr. Soloman!” In her eagerness Jeanne had her hand on the little man’s shoulder. “There must be indoor scenes. All this, this outside beauty and simplicity is fine, but there must be a palace, silks, gold, grandeur, just for contrast.

“When Zola, the little mountain girl, gets to Louisville in a box car she must be taken up by rich people who live in a grand house. They must dress her up in gowns, silk gowns and all that.”

Jeanne was running down like an eight-day alarm clock, but the little man did not appear to notice it. Before he caught up with her she was off again.

“These people!” She waved a hand at the half-filled stadium. “They come from everywhere. If they see a little bit of a feature picture shot, they’ll want to see the finished picture. That’s natural. Put up a big sign where they can see it. ‘The picture now being made is WHEN THE DOGWOOD IS IN BLOOM. See it in your home theater next month.’ And won’t they be there?”

“And how!” the little man muttered hoarsely, as he gripped her hand hard. “Miss LeMar, you are a vunder! A vunder! How did you ever get that vay?”

Not daring to utter another word, Jeanne fled precipitately from the spot.

As she rested in the shadow of the stadium, trying in vain to still her wildly beating heart, momentous questions crowded her brain. Had she gotten away with it? Had she truly? It seemed impossible.

“He’s a Jew, Mr. Soloman is a Jew. And whoever deceived a Jew? They are the keenest people living. I didn’t know he was a Jew. If I had known—”

If she had known, what then? Would she have refused? She did not know.

“There’s nothing for it now but to go on until some one shouts: ‘Stop!’” she assured herself as her mind sobered and her heart ceased its wild flutter.

She was still very much in the doldrums when, hours later, she sat wrapped in a satin bathrobe, looking out at the city by night.

“If I only were not so impulsive!” she was saying to Florence. “I meant to unfold my bright ideas one at a time. And there I blurted them out all at once, like some little child.

“And now,” she sighed, “he says there’ll be nothing more done on the picture for two days.

“Nothing more!” Her tone took on a bitter tinge. “Nothing has been done. We went through the motions and the dialogue to-day; did it just the best we knew how, too! The camera men seemed to be making shots. But it was all a fake. People in the stadium got a big kick out of it. But it made me feel all sick inside.

“The others in the cast are so fine, too.” Her voice changed. “This boy who’s playing the part of an Italian riding into the mountains on a donkey is a dear. Just a kid, but such smooth cheeks, such big eyes, such black hair!

“And he’s nice! Not hard as steel the way you expect movie men to be. He told me this was the first real part he’d ever been in, and oh, how he did want it to be a success! But he’d heard it was all set to be a flop.”

“And did you tell him you were going to make it a grand success?”

“No, I—” Jeanne’s voice trailed off. “I—I couldn’t. I—”

“You need more faith,” Florence said quietly. “Did you ever think, Jeanne, that nothing really worth while is ever accomplished without a tremendous amount of faith? You must believe in things and in people. You must believe that this picture is awfully worth while. You must believe in Mr. Soloman and your young Italian. Most of all, you must believe in yourself! Faith! That’s a grand word!”

“Yes. And I *will* have faith!” Springing to her feet, Jeanne went into such a wild

whirl as set her blood racing and brought her back to her place at last with cheeks as rosy as those of her little Kentucky mountain friend.

“Do you know what?” she whispered, as if afraid of being overheard. “Jensie told me the old hearse at the back of the Tavern was in its place as usual this morning!”

“Of course. What did you expect?”

“But there were horses!” Jeanne’s tone carried conviction. “There were two black horses. I saw them. And there was a coffin! I saw that too. And the horses were hauling the hearse away!”

CHAPTER XVI

MAGIC FROM THE EAST

Long after Florence had retired for the night Jeanne paced slowly back and forth in that magnificently furnished living room. Her bare feet sank deep in the softest of Oriental rugs. Her filmy gown shimmered in the moonlight.

Oblivious of all these surroundings, Jeanne was deep in thought. "Faith!" she murmured. "Faith! Faith in one's self, in one's associates, one's tasks. Faith in one's future. Faith in a kind Providence.

"Faith. Faith. Ah, yes, I shall have faith."

But the future? How strange the past had been! In her thoughts three-bladed knives, Buddhas and curious Oriental banners were strangely mixed with log cabins, a hearse drawn by black horses, and an organ playing itself.

"Ah, yes, but the future!" she exclaimed. "There is always a to-morrow, to-morrow, and to-morrow. The grand, good, golden future! Who can be afraid?"

At that she snapped out the light to stand looking down upon the vast, mysterious city until the distant chimes rang out the hour of two.

"Ah!" she whispered. "My hour of enchantment!"

For a moment she stood with bowed head as if in prayer. After that, for long hours, this entrancing room knew her not. For long hours she was wrapped in sleep.

It was well that she had faith in the future for to-morrow was to bring events mysterious and terrifying.

The clock was preparing to strike the hour of ten on the following night before

she ventured forth from her well-kept fortress, Lorena LeMar's apartment. She had not forgotten her narrow escape from Miss LeMar's friends, the three rich and very badly spoiled play-boys. "Not that they were likely to do me any real harm," she had confided to Florence. "They were out for one wild night and wished me to join them. And that for me?" She had made a face. "No! No! Not for me! Never!"

That she might escape danger from this quarter, she had garbed herself in her ancient gypsy costume of bright red and had hidden herself inside a long drab coat that came to her ankles.

She realized that perfect safety was to be had only by remaining inside. But who wants perfect safety? Certainly not our little French girl.

As a further precaution she descended a back stairway and left the building from a little-used doorway.

A half hour later she might have been found in the throng of joy hunters on the Midway of the great Fair.

She had just emerged from a breath-taking crush when off to the right she caught sight of a curious group gathered about some person beating a drum.

Tum, tum, tum, the dull monotony of beats played upon her ears.

Having joined the circle, she found herself looking at a very dark-skinned person with deep, piercing eyes. The man wore a long white robe. On his head was something resembling a Turkish towel twisted into a large knot.

Seated on the ground near this man were two others quite as dark as he. One was beating a curious sort of drum, the other squeaking away at something resembling a flute.

"Now watch! I will make him go up! Up! He will climb the rope. He will disappear utterly. Utterly!" The dark man's voice, coming as it did from deep down in his throat, suggested that he might be talking from a well.

Upon hearing these words a small man stepped forward. The dark-faced one drew a circle about this little man.

At once the dark one began to whirl, then to dance.

Jeanne had witnessed many strange dances, but none so weird as this. The man whirled round and round until his robe seemed a winding sheet for a ghost. He began revolving about in a circle. And inside that circle stood the little man who was, Jeanne discovered, dressed in a curious sort of yellow gown.

Faster and faster went the drum beats, squeak-squeak went the flute, wilder and wilder flew the dancer.

“What can be going to happen?” the girl asked herself. In a vague sort of way she wished herself somewhere else, but to her astonishment she found herself unable to move.

Then a discovery, that under normal circumstances must have fairly bowled her over, came to her as in a dream: The little man standing there in the center garbed in an orange gown was none other than the long-eared Chinaman who had snatched the three-bladed knife from her hand.

“You can get him. Get him now,” a low voice seemed to whisper.

“Ah, yes, but you won’t,” a stronger voice appeared to reach her. “You’re going to see this thing through.”

And so she was.

Of a sudden, without for an instant abandoning his mad whirl, the dark-faced conjurer from India, for such he was, produced a rope. Three times he lifted his hand high.

“Now watch! Watch closely. He will go up.” In his voice there was a strange hypnotic cadence.

Like a thing shot from a gun, the rope rose straight in the air and, in so far as Jeanne’s eyes told her the truth, remained there standing on air.

The next instant a figure all in orange began passing up that rope. Up, up a yard, two yards, three, four, five. Up, up until the darkness appeared to stretch out black-robed arms to receive him.

Then of a sudden the dark-faced one ceased whirling. The drum gave forth one more loud boom, the flute one more squeak, and all was still.

With a sigh that was all but a whisper, Jeanne took one long, full breath.

She closed her eyes for an instant, then opened them.

To her astonishment she saw no dark-faced one in a white robe. The musicians, too, were gone.

“And the Chinaman!” she exclaimed aloud. “He has vanished also!”

“What has happened?” It was Erik Nord, the man from China, who spoke to her. He had just come up. “You must have seen a ghost.”

“No. I—I saw a Chinaman go up a rope that was fastened to nothing but air.”

“There was no rope,” Erik Nord laughed, “at least not in air, and no Chinaman.”

“Oh, yes! I saw him!”

“Well, perhaps. But he did not go up the rope.

“That man in the white robe,” he explained, “was India’s cleverest conjurer. With his weird music and wild whirling he cast a spell over you. You saw what he wished you to see. Perhaps you were hypnotized. Who can say?”

“But that Chinaman!” Jeanne murmured. “He was—was—”

She was about to tell the story of the three-bladed knife. Thinking better of it, she made some commonplace remark, then bade this chance acquaintance good-night as he hurried away to fill an engagement.

It is little wonder that, after such a mystifying experience as this, Jeanne should straightway walk into a trap. This is exactly what she did.

CHAPTER XVII

A SCREAM BRINGS STARTLING RESULTS

Erik Nord was to be found anywhere and everywhere. Young, very strong, full of the vigor of youth, he was in what was to him a strange land—America. Little wonder, then, that an hour after he had imparted valuable information to Petite Jeanne, Florence should have come upon him standing near the breakwater of the lagoon.

He was looking at a ship, a battered old windjammer tied up there by the shore.

“Stout little old boat, that!” he said to her with a friendly smile. “Can’t help but admire her, can you?”

“Why?” Florence wondered.

“Don’t you know the story? Come on board, and I’ll tell you.”

They mounted the gangplank, then wandered across the upper deck and descended to the deck below.

“See those!” Nord touched a ten-inch hand-hewn beam of ironwood. “Look at those knees! All hand-hewn. Know how old this ship is? Fifty years.

“And yet—” He paused. “And yet, when Richard Byrd wanted a ship that would carry him safely through the polar ice of the Antarctic, Roald Amundsen, who had sailed on this ship as a boy, said: ‘She’s the one you want.’

“They found her,” his voice was mellow, almost tender, “tied up to a dock far north in Norway. They’d thought she was through; everyone who knew her thought that. And yet, isn’t it magnificent! To-day she’s about the most famous ship afloat. Byrd’s Polar Ship, they call her.

“She’s Scandinavian built,” he said proudly. “My ancestors were Norsemen. Can you blame me for admiring this old ship?”

“No,” said Florence. “I’m glad you told me. This ship was built right, wasn’t it?”

“Right and honest. They took their time about it, too.”

“And if we build our lives that way, right and honest, taking our time, we’ll last, too.”

“There’s reason to hope so.” He gave forth a low chuckle.

“Shall we go up on deck and sit a while?”

“I’d love to.”

So it happened that they found themselves settled comfortably in a dark corner watching the parade of boats pass by.

It was a warm night. The lagoon was crowded. All manner of boats were there, speed boats and tiny motor boats, row boats, canoes, dugouts and gondolas. For some time Florence watched in vain for a certain type of boat. When at last her vigil was rewarded, she received a shock.

“Look!” she exclaimed, seizing Erik Nord by the arm. “Look there, at that Dodge-Em!”

“What’s unusual about that?” He looked at her curiously.

“But see who’s riding in it!”

“A Chinaman.” Erik chuckled. “Suits their style. Goes only just so fast. A Chink is seldom in a hurry.”

“But look who it really is—your long-eared Chinaman! The one who—”

There was not time to finish. One look and Erik Nord was away, dragging Florence by the hand across the deck.

* * * * *

Having witnessed the astonishing performance of Indian magic, Jeanne spent an hour wandering about the Fair grounds in a sort of trance. It was impossible to drive from her highly sensitive mind the memory of the booming drum, squeaking flute and whirling magician. And this walking in a trance, as we have suggested, ended in her undoing.

She had wandered, without thinking much about it, into an all but deserted corner of the grounds, when with the suddenness of thought three figures swooped down upon her.

“Lorena! Lorena LeMar!”

The sound of their voices warned her of danger, but too late.

“The play-boys!” Her mind registered these words, then like a ship sinking at sea her brain went into a wild whirl.

Before she could scream or flee, they were upon her, all three of the play-boys. A hand went over her mouth, others lifted her from the earth. She was dropped with little ceremony onto an upholstered seat, a powerful motor purred, and they were away.

As the car shot down the drive an observer might have noticed that a tall, thin young man loitering near had suddenly leaped into action. Spinning about, he dashed to the nearest waiting taxi, delivered an order in a low tone, leaped in and went rushing away in the direction the car had taken.

Poor little French girl! Once inside that car she found her head spinning round with unimaginable terror. What was to happen? For a time she was unable to think.

When at last a certain degree of composure took possession of her, the car had passed from the Fair grounds and was speeding along the boulevard.

“They think me Lorena LeMar,” she told herself. She shuddered afresh as she thought how she had tricked them on that other occasion.

“They must have been furious.” Her heart sank. “Miss LeMar had been their playmate on other occasions; then to treat them like that!

“Oh, if I get out of that I’ll—”

What would she do? That mattered very little now. What truly mattered was the problem of her immediate conduct and ultimate escape.

“Of course,” she assured herself, “I could tell them I am not Lorena LeMar. But would they believe it? Probably not. And if they did?”

She thought of her hopes and plans, of the movie that had inspired her, of the young Italian actor who was dreaming dreams, and of Jencie.

“No,” she whispered, “not if I can help it.

“I know what I’ll do! I’ll play up to them. Let them think I am Miss LeMar. They will want me to dance. Very good, I shall dance.

“They will—”

She dared think no further.

“I’ll escape,” she told herself stoutly. “I must! But how?”

Her heart sank. Too often she had read of the cruelties practiced by these rich play-boys.

“They should not be permitted to be at large!” she told herself bitterly.

“But none of this! I must seem happy, full of spirits, gay. I must sing, I must dance. And then—”

Before a three-story gray stone building the car came to a grinding halt. All the curtains were drawn, but lights shone through the cracks.

“Some sort of club,” she told herself.

If it indeed was a club it was a very little frequented place. She did not see a person beside her escort as, carrying out her well-formed plan, she romped with them up the steps and into a rather large room where there were numerous chairs and a rather large wood-topped table.

At the far end of the room was a broad fireplace and near it were card tables with

cards scattered over them.

“A kindergarten for rich play-boys,” Jeanne smiled to herself in spite of her predicament.

Throwing off her dull coat, with an air of abandon she did a dozen fancy steps across the polished floor.

“Oh, look!” exclaimed the tallest of the three play-boys. “Lorena’s a gypsy to-night!”

Truth was, until that moment Jeanne had forgotten her gown.

“Yes!” she exclaimed in a tone of forced gaiety. “I’m a gypsy to-night. Shall I dance my gypsy dance?”

“Yes, yes!”

“On the table!” A pair of stout arms caught her to toss her up.

Catlike, she landed on her feet. She was angry. “But I must not! I must not be angry!” she told herself fiercely. “I must dance. Time must pass. Surely something will happen.”

Forgetting time and place, she began the weird, wild dance of the gypsies. That her audience was impressed she knew at once. So she prolonged the dance.

All things must have an end. The end of the dance found her heart all aflutter. What next?

“Bravo! Bravo!” they applauded. “That calls for refreshments.”

Taking a bottle from a concealed locker, the shortest of the trio filled four glasses.

“Now! A toast!” He passed one glass to her. “Here’s to Lorena LeMar! Here’s to the new picture!”

When the play-boys lifted their glasses Jeanne followed their example. The stuff in the glass burned her lips. The glass slipped from her hand to go crashing upon

the table.

“Oh! She dropped it! Too bad! Here’s another.” There was a note of insolence in the voice of the youth as he poured a second glass. “Here! Drink this!”

“No, my friend!” Her voice was like thin, clear ice. “No, I will not drink it.” No longer was she Lorena LeMar. She was Jeanne, the gypsy. In her veins there coursed the wild, free, fighting spirit of a true vagabond. Had she possessed a knife.... Ah, well, she had no knife.

One weapon alone she possessed, truly a woman’s weapon—a scream.

This weapon she used. Not in vain had she practiced for hours a stage scream. When her slender voice rose shrill and high the three play-boys became rigid as stone.

The effect of that scream was sudden and most astonishing. Some bulk struck the door. Again; yet again. Then the lock broke and a tall, slim youth half stepped, half fell into the room. He was followed by a taxi driver.

Recovering from his shock, the leader of the play-boys took a step forward. Hot words were on his lips. They were not spoken. He was met by a heavy chair thrown with lightning-like speed by the astonishing stranger.

Taking him in the pit of the stomach the chair hurled the play-boy backward into his companions. Like so many tenpins they went down with a crash.

Not a word was spoken as the tall stranger gathered Jeanne up in his arms, marched out of the room and down the steps, deposited his burden in the taxi, sprang in beside her, gave the driver orders, then watched the building narrowly as they drove away.

“And I would take my oath I never saw him,” Jeanne whispered to herself. Sinking deep among the cushions, she suddenly felt very small, very young and quite helpless.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SLIM STRANGER

When Erik Nord and Florence caught sight of the long-eared Chinaman placidly cruising the lagoon in a Dodge-Em, Erik, as we have said, led the girl away in hot pursuit.

Unfortunately, on reaching the nearest available craft, they found it to be but another slow going, doddering old Dodge-Em.

“We’ll take it,” Erik decided on the instant.

“Have to. Nothing else in sight. Probably he hasn’t seen us. Slip up on him without the least trouble.”

“And if he goes ashore I’ll get him. I can run. No Chinaman has out-distanced me yet.” He stepped on the gas and they were away, away at the breakneck speed of four miles an hour.

“Think of finding him right here in Chicago!” Erik exulted. “How’d you come to know him?”

Florence did not reply.

“Look!” She leaned far forward. “There he goes! He’s headed straight down the lagoon.”

“He’ll never go outside. Probably land. We’ll get him!” Erik trod angrily on the lever that kept the motor going. “If only a fellow could get one burst of speed out of this thing!”

He was making that same remark a quarter of an hour later. The long-eared one had not gone ashore. Instead, he had headed straight down the lagoon and out

into the open lake where darkness and silence reigned. And Erik Nord, with all the stubbornness of his race, had followed in slow pursuit.

“It’s a turtle race,” he said without apparent emotion. “Two turtles. The question is, which will tire first?”

“We’ll run out of gas,” Florence murmured.

“Something like that.”

“And be stuck out here for the night.” Florence thought this, but did not say it. The moon would be out in an hour. And then—

Slowly but doggedly the Dodge-Em pushed its stout rubber nose through the black water. The Chinaman, a dark spot above the water, was ever before them. They did not lose. They did not gain. They only followed on.

“I’ve been told that a man crossed the lake in one of these,” Erik rumbled. “Safe enough, I guess. Anyway, when you’ve lived in China you get used to any mode of travel.”

Florence wondered if they would cross the lake. “And after that?” she whispered to herself. The rumble of the city was dying away in the distance, the lights of the Fair were growing dim. It was strange to be out here in the night with one she had known for so short a time. And yet this was the turn chance had taken.

Leaning back, she closed her eyes. It had been a long day. The night air sweeping in from the lake fanned her cheek. The darkness had been kind to her tired eyes. Now she felt the need for rest.

Did she fall asleep? Perhaps. Perhaps not. All she knew was that when she opened her eyes at last she became conscious of a change. “Wha—what is it?”

“Motor stopped. We lose,” Erik grumbled. “We lose.”

“And here we are.” She caught a long breath. The moon was just beginning to roll, a ball of red, along the black horizon.

“Here we are,” Erik agreed, then settled back comfortably in his corner.

* * * * *

It was at about this same moment that Jeanne found herself speeding away in a taxi with a man she had never seen before.

“He saved me,” she told herself. “Saved me from a horrible night. He knew I was there. How? He willed to get me out of that place. Why?” To these questions she could find no answers. There was, she believed, but one thing to do; to sit back and allow the future to unfold itself.

They were entering the Loop. There was comfort in that. In the Loop were many people. And in numbers there is always a degree of safety.

“You’ll be in need of a cup of coffee after that,” her companion suggested. “Supposing we stop in here.” The cab had stopped before a well lighted coffee house.

Without a word Jeanne followed him inside and back to a small table in the rear. “Who is he? What does he want?” She was determined now to see the thing through.

“I’m Tom Tobin of the *News*,” the strange rescuer announced when coffee had been ordered.

“Oh!” Jeanne caught her breath. “You were after news! And—and I—I will be in the paper! That explains—”

“It explains nothing.” Tom Tobin’s smile was disarming. “I wasn’t looking for news, and this will not get you in the paper. Far from it.

“I was keeping tab on you,” he added.

“Tab on me?” Her wide eyes registered astonishment.

“Well, sort of guarding you, if that sounds better. I did it for a very good reason, too.

“You see,” he leaned forward over the table, speaking in a voice scarcely above a whisper, “I know you better than you think. You are not Lorena LeMar.”

“Not—”

He held up a hand for silence. “No use!” he warned. “You are the little French girl, Petite Jeanne.

“No, I’ll not betray you.” He had read the consternation in her eyes. “Why should I? You—you’re doing a big thing for me.”

“For you?”

“You are planning to make a success of the scenario I wrote, ‘When the Dogwood Is in Bloom.’”

“You wrote it? How—how wonderful!” Jeanne stretched a slim white hand across the table. Tom Tobin grasped it frankly. “Here’s luck!” His frank eyes shone.

“And here’s our coffee. How jolly!” Fear had flown from Jeanne’s eyes. She was her own bright, joyous self once more.

“But how could you know I am to make a success of your picture?” she demanded eagerly. “I do not know it myself.”

“Old Sollie, Mr. Soloman, your producer, told me. He’s all het up about it; says you showed him how to make a great picture of it and get a lot of free publicity. He’s working on the scene, got men after real mountain ivy and rhododendrons and dogwood. Sent for two log cabins like the ones in the Lincoln Group, and all that.

“Say!” he exclaimed, “Suppose we get together and work over the dialogue and all that! Sollie says you know a lot about the mountains.”

“No, I’ve never been there.”

“But he told me—”

“Yes, I know.” Jeanne smiled. “I have a friend who prompted me. She has lived there all her life.”

“Then she’ll help us. We’ll work it over together, beginning to-morrow

afternoon.”

“That—” Jeanne favored him with her loveliest smile. “That—how do you say it? That is a *go*! Eh, what?”

“That’s it!” Tom grinned. “We’ll get on grand. You’re a regular guy!”

“And why not?” Jeanne laughed a merry laugh.

A half hour later, as Jeanne entered the lobby of the hotel after bidding Tom Tobin a heartfelt “Happy dreams!” the porter stared at her for a moment as if uncertain of her identity, then said in a matter-of-fact tone: “Your trunk has gone up, Miss LeMar.”

“My trunk?” She stared. “Oh, but I have not—”

She broke short off. Was she about to betray her secret? She was Miss LeMar. Perhaps the real Lorena LeMar had ordered a trunk sent over without informing her.

Her tone changed. “Very well. Thank you.” She dropped a coin into his hand, then hurried away.

“But a trunk?” she thought. “A trunk in our apartment!” An unreasoning terror swept upon her.

“But only a trunk!” She shook herself free of this wild fear. “What is a trunk?”

What indeed?

CHAPTER XIX

A SOUND IN THE NIGHT

“Tell me about that mysterious land, China.” Florence settled back in her place in the stupid little Dodge-Em that, refusing to travel farther, had left them stalled far out on the black waters of night.

“China.” Erik Nord’s tone was full of the enchanting melody of the Far East. “How is one to tell you of China? There are sampans where whole families live their lives away, sampans on the river and great cities on their banks. Farther up there are villages and on the river great old junks. Ships from out of the past, they loom before you in the dark. You never know whether they are manned by brigands who will rob you or soldiers who may take your possessions from you in the name of the law. You—”

“Listen!” Her hand was on his arm. There had come a sound from the water. “Do—do you think his Dodge-Em has stalled too? Wouldn’t it be strange if we drifted together in the moonlight?”

“Nothing would suit me better!”

Florence believed him.

“But that long-eared one has the knife,” she told herself as a thrill coursed up her spine. Closing her eyes she seemed to witness a battle on the water, a fight between a square-jawed white man from China whose ancestors had built boats that were good fifty years later, and a Chinaman inspired by who knows what superstitious terror.

“If only we’d sight him!” Nord’s words came from between his teeth. “I think I might help out a bit, rip a board off this tub of ours and use it for a paddle or something.”

“It seems pretty solid.” Florence felt the boat over. “Besides, we haven’t seen him, we’ve only caught a sound. It might not have been his boat. Probably his gas held out and he’s gone back to land, vanished by now—the vanishing Chinaman.”

“By the way,” Erik’s voice took on a new note, “how did it happen you recognized him out there on the water?”

“I—why, I’ve seen him before.” She was stalling for time. Should she tell him all about the chest, the knife, the banners? She was not proud of the affair. They had been careless, she could see that now. And yet, if he knew, they might work together.

She looked away at the golden moon. Her eyes followed the path it painted across the water.

“Yes,” she said, “I’ll tell you. It was like this. We bought that chest full of your treasures at an auction sale, bought it for I—I’m ashamed to tell you how little. And now—now it’s gone; all gone but the chest.”

“Gone?”

“He got it, that long-eared one.”

“Tell me about it.” Erik leaned forward eagerly.

She told him all there was to tell, described the knife, the bell and all the banners as best she could.

“Gone!” he murmured. “All gone. You have missed much, and the little ones of China have missed more. There was a reward for the return of that chest, five hundred dollars.

“Five hun—”

“Five hundred in gold. With that you could have visited this land that seems to you so mysterious. With care you could have stayed a long time in China, delved into all manner of Oriental mysteries.”

“I’ll do it yet!” He saw her stout figure stiffen with resolve. “I’ll get that long-

earned one yet! You wait! You shall have all those treasures back, every one!”

“Splendid! But have a care, my friend. Have a care!” There was a note of warning in his voice. “Those Orientals are dangerous when some superstitious terror takes possession of them. There is something we do not know about those temple adornments; that knife and bell are forces to fight demons. Who can say what demons have taken possession of our vanishing Chinaman? Have a care! Just when you wish for your very life’s sake that he might vanish, you will find him insisting upon being very much of a present reality. He—”

“Listen!” Again her hand rested on his arm.

* * * * *

There are certain people who “feel” events before they transpire. This, psychologists will tell you, is intuition. Jeanne’s intuition caused her knees to tremble as she walked from the elevator to Lorena LeMar’s apartment which, for the time, was her own.

“A trunk,” she whispered. “A trunk beyond that door.” By this time her key was in the lock. She wished to turn back; she willed to go forward. In the end courage won. She pushed open the door. She entered the room.

But she did not go far. One look was enough. The trunk, a huge affair such as is used by commercial traveling men, stood in the center of the room. Its lid was up. It was empty! And the whole apartment, as far as her startled eyes could take it in, was in a state of wild confusion.

Next, without exactly knowing how it happened, she found herself outside with the door locked behind her.

Her heart was beating painfully. As if to still its wild beating she clutched at her breast. Her brain was in a state of wild confusion. For some little time she could not think two thoughts in a row.

When at last her senses returned it all came to her in a flash. “It is that little yellow man with the long ears,” she assured herself. “He or one of his friends. He believed that those things, those priceless banners and that curious bell from the temple, were in this place. He had himself strapped tight in that monstrous trunk and shipped himself to this hotel, ‘To Miss LeMar’s apartment.’ To—”

She broke off. "He knows!" The thought fairly floored her. "This long-eared one knows I am not Lorena LeMar. He knows I am Petite Jeanne. Will he tell? Will he spoil all my fine plans?" Here indeed was a terrible probability.

"If I make it possible for him to have just what he wants," she whispered slowly, "perhaps he will go away and no one will know, no one but Florence and Miss LeMar and Tom Tobin, who will never tell."

Here indeed was temptation. She did not know that these treasures had been intended as a gift to a children's hospital, for the little ones of China. Florence had not told her. She only knew that at present they were her own, that she and Florence had bought them and had received a bill of sale for them.

Startling as was this revelation, it did not occupy her thoughts long. Her mind took a fresh turn.

"Florence," she whispered. "Where is she? The hour is late."

Once again her head was in a whirl. Where could Florence be?

"Perhaps she is in there! They may have found her. She may have been murd—"

She could not say the word. Her love for her big companion was all but compelling her to re-enter that room.

"He may still be there, that little yellow one with the long ears." She was fairly beside herself.

Should she call the house detective? This she feared to do. In the excitement of the moment she might give away the secret of her dual personality.

"No! No! I must not! I must be brave!"

Once again she approached the door. Her fingers trembled as she fitted key to lock, yet she did not turn back. The lock clicked. The door opened. She stepped inside. The door closed behind her.

CHAPTER XX

PICTURES ON THE CLOUDS

The sound that came to Florence's listening ears out there on the lake in the stalled Dodge-Em was a welcome one: the low *put-put* of a motor boat.

"If it only comes close enough we're saved from a night on the water," she said hopefully.

"Chilly business, staying out here," Erik Nord agreed.

The *put-put* grew louder. A light came swimming across the expanse of black water. Now they saw it and now it was gone.

"She's passing to the right of us," Erik judged. "We'll have to hail her."

Standing up in the boat he cupped his hands to shout:

"*Ahoy there!*"

Never had Florence heard such a roar.

"*Ahoy there!*" came floating back faintly.

"Give us a lift. We're stalled."

"Right O! We're coming!" The voice seemed very far away.

Presently across the shimmering waters of night a dark bulk loomed.

It was only a fishing boat headed for the dock. This craft smelled of herring and tar, but she carried, too, a hearty welcome such as one might not find on a handsomer boat.

“Give us yer line!

“Now! There we are! Where y’ bound fer in that thing?” the sun-tanned skipper boomed.

“Nowhere in particular. We want to get back to the lagoon.”

“Right O! We’ll tow y’ in.”

Next moment the stranded ones found themselves leaning back comfortably in the broad seat, watching the play of moonlight upon the water that rippled and rolled about their prow.

“It would be a grand world to live in,” Erik murmured, “if all its people were as simple and obliging as these fishermen.”

“They’re common folks.” There was a world of meaning in the girl’s words.

“Uncommon, I’d say, very uncommon indeed.”

“All a matter of point of view, I suppose.”

The fishermen had demanded no pay for their services, were loath in the end to accept it. They did not, however, depart unrewarded.

When, a half hour later, Florence burst into the apartment, she found Jeanne sitting before the window, looking out into the night. The trunk had been sent to a room where empty trunks were kept. The apartment was in apple pie order. Jeanne did not say, “Oh, my friend, such a terrible thing has happened! We have been searched again.” She said nothing at all; she just kept on looking out into the night.

The reason for this is apparent enough. The little French girl harbored a secret. This secret she had hidden even from her bosom pal. The secret had to do with that laundry bag still reposing in a cubicle back there in the small hotel near their own shabby rooms. The check boy was still custodian of her secret.

Why did Jeanne guard this secret so closely? Perhaps for no reason at all. Jeanne was at heart a gypsy. A gypsy has a reason for doing a thing if he chooses. A mere impulse is reason enough for him. Life for him is action, not thought. He

dances, he sings, he plays the violin. He travels where he will. If you say to him, "Why?" he shrugs his shoulders. Jeanne was like that.

But to Jeanne, as on other nights long after Florence was asleep, there came, as she sat there before the window, strange fantastic pictures of the past and visions of the future. Of these she wondered as in a dream.

Clouds had come drifting in from the west. They filled the sky. From time to time a powerful radio beacon, swinging in its orbit, appeared to paint pictures on those clouds. In Jeanne's fanciful vision these pictures took on fantastic forms.

Some of the pictures that came to her as she sat there were vivid, as real as life itself, and some were as indistinct as a mirage on the far horizon.

A hearse in the moonlight. "A sign." She shuddered. "A hearse with two black horses and a coffin." Again she shuddered.

But now it was gone. Instead there was a sloping hillside where little streams rushed from beneath dark canopies of mountain ivy. The dark clouds turned white under the powerful light.

"Will it ever be?" She dared to hope now. "Will our moving picture succeed?" Tom Tobin had inspired her. She could see his face on the clouds. Young, slender, eager, full of vitality, he invited hope as sunshine invites a bud to become a flower.

But now in a cavern of the darkened clouds a great trunk yawned. Out from it, like a jack-in-the-box, leaped a little yellow man with long ears. "He wants that bell, those banners. He risks everything to get them. I wonder why?" She mused for a moment; then the scene in this fairyland of clouds changed once more.

A slender white cloud curled upward. Its tip became a rope that rose higher, higher, higher, toward a dark night sky. Up that rope a figure appeared to glide. "He did go up!" she whispered hoarsely. "I saw him!"

The airplane beacon swung about. The sky went black. It became dark waters, and on those waters were two boats gliding one after the other, moving silently out to sea.

"That long-eared one," she murmured, "he is everywhere at once.

“But Florence—” A smile played about her lips. “Florence and that white man from China. How romantic to be out there with him beneath the moon all alone! Surely one may endure mystery, suspense, anything, if it leads to romance!”

Strangely enough, the night sky took on a tinge of green. In this she saw a frail child of France garbed all in green and gold. Her eyes opened wide. It was her very own self.

Yet even as she looked the picture faded, and in its place was a broad green hill topped by a stately building of brown stone. And after that all visions vanished.

Florence found her there in the morning fast asleep in the great upholstered chair before the window. A shaft of sunshine playing across her face made her seem to smile. A morning breeze from the lake set her golden hair waving a salute.

She did not sleep long after Florence had stolen away to her work, this little French girl. Tom Tobin had wakened hope in her heart. He had set her glorious mind to dreaming. And dreamers seldom sleep too much.

Having wakened, she sprang into action. A shower, ten minutes of wild dancing to set her blood racing, a cup of coffee with crisp squares of hard toast, and she was away.

Gathering up the little mountain girl, Jensie, she hurried her away to the movie lot. There, by great good chance, she came upon Mr. Soloman, who was, after all, only Assistant Production Manager for a great Hollywood producer, and no one to be greatly afraid of.

“Ah, Miss LeMar!” he exclaimed. “How very good it is to see you. Look! Already they have mountain ivy and rhododendrons from the nursery. The dogwood, too, will come, and there are two cabins to come. And now, Miss LeMar, might I ask what more would you suggest?”

“This,” said Jeanne, pushing Jensie forward, “is my property lady. We will look over the set together.”

An hour later when she and Jensie reappeared they carried four pages of notes.

Seated there on the improvised hillside in the sun, they discussed details with the eager Mr. Soloman, who said, “Yes, Miss LeMar. Yes, Miss LeMar, this also can

be done,” through it all. “A coonskin drying on the outside of the cabin, a well with an oaken bucket, hound dogs, yes, yes, three hound dogs. A long-barreled rifle. Yes, yes, we will have all these.

“And, Miss LeMar, I am wiring Hollywood to-day for approval of my plans. If they say O. K., then we will have a special car and we will go to this Big Black Mountain for long shots and such things that cannot be taken here. What would you say to that?”

“Oh, Mr. Soloman!” Before Jeanne knew what she was doing she had kissed the chubby little man on the cheek.

“Think, Jencie!” she cried. “Think of going right down to your Big Black Mountain! And of course you must come along!”

“But my work!”

“Only for two or three days. We will fix that.” The little man smiled broadly.

“That is all for to-day?” said Jeanne.

“That is all, Miss LeMar. You are very beautiful to-day, Miss LeMar. There is color in your cheeks. Ha! This is wonderful!” He gave Jeanne such a sharp look that deep in her soul she trembled. Was he beginning to guess? And if he knew?

She returned to Lorena LeMar’s apartment with a very sober face. Life had begun to be quite wonderful. If some one spoiled it all by a sudden discovery or a betrayal, what then?

CHAPTER XXI

WORK AND DREAMS

By early afternoon Jeanne's old cheerful smile was back again. And why not? Was she not seated between two friends, Jensie and Tom, studying the dialogue of this altogether absorbing movie that hour by hour took on a more vivid picture of reality?

They were having a gay time there in Lorena LeMar's living room. From time to time peals of laughter came drifting out through the open window.

Jensie was the critic. And a very expert critic she turned out to be.

"No. He would never say that, your old Jud who lives at the foot of Big Black Mountain. He would not say, 'Those horses are fast travelers.' He'd say, 'Them's the travelin'est hosses I ever most seed.' He wouldn't say, 'It's done.' He'd say, 'I done done it.'"

"But Jensie," Jeanne protested, "if we change all this, how are the people going to know what it's all about? Might as well have him talk German."

"W-e-l-l, you asked me." Jensie puckered her fair brow. "That's the way we talk down there. We don't say 'rifle,' but 'rifle-gun.' We say 'we-uns' and 'you-all.'"

"Well," said Tom after a moment's thought, "a great deal of that is easy enough to understand. It does make the whole thing seem a lot more real. And if we find old Jud talking too much, why, we'll just shut him up and make him talk with his hands and his feet."

"And his pistol-gun," Jensie added. "Pistol-guns talk a heap down there in the mountings."

They all had a good laugh, and once more the work moved on smoothly.

“To-morrow,” Jeanne said to Jensie before bidding her good-bye, “to-morrow morning we will go out to that so beautiful college you have been telling me about. What do you say?”

“That,” Jensie laughed joyfully, “that’s a right smart clever idea.”

“Then we shall go.” Jeanne gave her hand a squeeze. “I am tired. There are trees, you say, and grass, very much grass. Good! We shall sit upon the grass beneath those spreading elms and forget this noisy city.”

They went. The electric car whirled them away to the country. It seemed that but a moment had passed when they found themselves walking up a path shaded by two rows of ancient elms.

“So green the grass!” Jeanne murmured. “So graceful the trees and so strong! And that fine old building of limestone. It is like France, my so beautiful France!

“But listen!”

She paused. From a smaller building with very high windows there floated the words of a song.

“Singing? It is Chapel! Come!” Jeanne seized Jensie by the hand. “Come quick! We will slip into a back seat. It has been so long, oh, so long since I heard such singing.”

As they entered the door all heads were bowed in prayer. Deeply religious, as all the best of her race are, Jeanne bowed her head reverently.

The prayer at an end, six hundred young voices burst into song.

“And how they sing it!” There were tears in Jeanne’s eyes. “They sing what they believe. How very, very wonderful!”

Hidden away in a high-backed seat, they listened to the simple, sincere message of a white-haired professor as he talked to this silent audience of young people about God and His relation to their lives.

Jeanne was strangely silent as she left the place. Perhaps in her mind was a picture of the little stone church in her own land where she had so often knelt in

prayer.

“It is good,” she murmured at last. “Tomorrow as I try to tell to the world in pictures the story of simple, kindly folks who live in the mountains, I shall do it better because of having been here.”

For a long time they sat on the grass beneath the elms. A gray squirrel came down a tree to chatter at them. A robin, whose nest was in a nearby lilac bush, sang them a song. A cricket chirped. From far away came a dog’s bark. A cobweb went floating high overhead.

“Come!” Jeanne whispered reluctantly. “We must go back.”

That night as she sat looking out into the half darkness of the night, Jeanne saw again in her mind’s eye the girl in a Nile-green dress and golden slippers. And as before, the green changed its shade and became a sloping hill where broad elms sighed in the breeze.

“There will be no Nile-green dress and golden slippers,” she whispered. “Instead, if success is ours, Jense shall go to that so beautiful college where they sing that which they believe and ask such wonderful prayers.”

And down in her heart of hearts she knew that she would strive harder for success than ever before, because she was working for another’s happiness and not entirely for her own.

CHAPTER XXII

BENEATH THE FLOODLIGHTS

This brief period of rest was the last Petite Jeanne was to enjoy for many days. The work on that little section of Big Black Mountain progressed more rapidly than had been expected. In order that the re-making of the scenario should progress quite as rapidly, Tom Tobin secured a brief leave of absence from his newspaper work. He and Jeanne, together with Jensie when she could be spared from her beloved Tavern, were together at all hours of day and night.

So long as Tom was with her, Jeanne had no fear of Lorena LeMar's boy friends. Her only fear was that they might discover that she was not Miss LeMar at all, and end by betraying her secret.

"But what do you care!" Tom exploded one day. "You are as good as Lorena LeMar."

"Not in pictures!" Jeanne protested. "No, no! And then you know I have promised. I said, 'Yes, I will be Lorena LeMar.' And Lorena LeMar I must be."

It was with grave misgiving that she approached the movie lot on the first day of actual work. "There is so much I do not know," she told herself. "If it is necessary to explain much to me, what must that sharp-eyed Mr. Soloman think?"

These fears vanished as she saw the rows on rows of faces packed in the stadium ready to witness the actual making of a movie feature, for it was this and nothing less that the keen Mr. Soloman had advertised in big electric words outside the gate.

"I must succeed! I must! I must!" She set her will to the task.

To her vast surprise she found that first day passing as serenely as a journey

down a country lane. The scenes were simple ones, the lines short and easy. She came to it all with a simple naturalness that pleased both Soloman and her audience.

But, as the days passed, it seemed to her that the whole affair was like a gigantic machine that gathers speed as its many wheels revolve.

Not three days had passed ere every person in the cast realized that here was a real task, the making of a genuine feature in record time on an improvised stage. "Seldom has it been done," they were told. "All the more reason for succeeding," came their answer.

Powerful lights were hung over the mountain and long after the spectators were gone the cast of the play toiled on.

Important scenes were filmed not once or twice, but six, eight, ten times. Each little detail must be right.

Those burning lights burned into Jeanne's very soul. What matter this? She must smile. She must weep. She must shout for pure joy when the script said, smile, weep, shout.

And all this time she felt the small eyes of Soloman upon her. At times his eyes merely twinkled; at others his lips curled in a smile. Then again he seemed anxious.

When, on rare occasions, he broke the silence to murmur, "Beautiful! Beautiful!" she knew that the praise came from the very depths of his soul and she was glad.

"Does he know that I am not Lorena LeMar?" she said to Tom one night. "He must!"

"N-no. Well, perhaps. I am sure he does not know who you are."

"And if he did?" Jeanne's heart stood still.

"If God found a human as perfect as you are mixed with the angels," Tom smiled, "I think He would let that human remain with the angels."

"But Soloman is not God."

“He’s no fool either.”

They left it at that, but Jeanne did not cease, at times, to tremble.

There was no picture on the clouds these days. So weary was she when at last each day was done, that she crept away to Lorena LeMar’s sumptuous apartment to sleep the hours away.

The long-eared Chinaman, the three-bladed knife, the hearse and the two black horses, Rutledge Tavern, even the laundry bag checked in the little hotel were for the moment crowded out of her life.

And then came the marvelous news that they were to board a special car and speed away to the real mountains.

So weary was Jeanne, by the time she reached that car, that she crept beneath the blankets in her berth and did not awaken until the morning sun and the green hills of Kentucky greeted her eyes.

At noon of that same day Jeanne found herself seated on a great rock at the foot of Big Black Mountain. She was dressed in boys’ unionalls. Her feet were bare. On her head, slouched down about her ears, she wore an old straw hat. Gripped in both hands was a fishing rod made from the branch of a chestnut tree. She was fishing, fishing joyously for “green perch.” What mattered it that a movie camera was clicking across the stream, or that the villain of the movie tried in vain to talk to her of love? All this was but play stuff. The fishing was real.

When the fishing was over she dived, clothes and all, into that deep, limpid pool to enjoy a glorious swim while the camera clicked on, and from time to time Ted Hunter, the director, shouted “Cut! Cut!”

“This,” Jeanne whispered to Jencie when the day was over and they stood before a spring dashing handfuls of clear, cool water over their faces, “This is not work! It is play.”

And so it seemed to them all. Catching the spirit of the mountains, of the easy-going, beauty-loving, loyal people of the Cumberlands, they dreamed the hours away. Only Ted Hunter’s sharp “No! No! Not that!” and “Yes! Yes! That’s it!” made them realize that they were making a moving picture.

As for the members of the company, in this mellow atmosphere Jeanne came to love them all. Anthony Hope, the droll, handsome youth who in the first and last scenes of the movie made bashful love to her; Scott Ramsey, the aged character actor; Pietro, the young Italian; and even the chubby villain came to have a safe little spot in Jeanne's generous heart.

There were hours off. And what could be more delightful than to don those boys' overalls once more and with Pietro as guard against bears, to climb far up the side of Big Black Mountain?

Having climbed and climbed until they had lost their breath, they came at last upon a lovely spot where the sunlight, sifting through the leafy bower above, wove strange patterns in the moss.

There Pietro threw himself flat upon nature's soft bed to stare up at an eagle wheeling high in the sky. It was then that he spoke to her, sometimes calmly, sometimes passionately, of his hopes, his dreams and his moments of black despair.

"You think I was born in Italy!" he exclaimed. "I was not, but in Chicago. Not beautiful Chicago, but ugly Chicago, the near West Side.

"There are seven of us. Three boys. Four girls. I am the oldest.

"I studied hard. I graduated from High School. And then what? Nothing. I tramped the streets looking for work, any work. There was no work.

"One month, two, three, four, five months!" His voice took on a bitter note. "Six months I tramped the streets! No work.

"I said, 'I will get tough. I will join the 42 Gang.' I—"

"No! No! Never! You would not!" Jeanne's tone was deep with emotion.

"It was not so much that I would not." Pietro sat up. "It was that I *could* not. My people were honest. I could not steal.

"And then—" His voice mellowed. "Then I met a fat little Jew. He said, 'Come with me, my boy. I will give you a chance.'

“I did not wish to go. I said to myself, ‘He is a Jew. A Jew!’

“But what was there to do?

“I went. He has taught me how to act in pictures, this little Jew, your friend, my friend, Mr. Soloman.” There was a touch almost of reverence in his voice. “And now, here I am,” he concluded.

“And, Miss LeMar—” His eyes appeared to look into her very soul. So deep was her feeling at that moment that she actually feared he was reading her true name from her very eyes. But he was not. “Miss LeMar,” he repeated softly, “tell me that this picture, this ‘Dogwood in Bloom’ story, is to be a success, a real success!”

“Pietro,” her hand was on his arm, “if you and I and all the rest can make it a success, then it shall be—a grand, a very glorious success. I can say no more.”

“Good!”

Putting out a hand, solemn as a priest in a temple, he lifted her white fingers to his lips and kissed them.

Then, as if a little ashamed, he sprang to his feet to lead the way back down the mountain.

CHAPTER XXIII

GOLDEN DAYS

It was night. All alone Jeanne sat upon the side of that man-made section of Big Black Mountain there on the studio lot in Chicago. The faint light that reached her, coming from afar, served only to intensify the shadows of trees and shrubs all about her.

It was perfect, this bit of Big Black Mountain. The trees, the shrubs, the rocks, the little rushing stream, all were perfect.

“Perfect,” she whispered. “And the picture we have been making, will it be perfect, too?” Her brow wrinkled. She was to know. To-night was the great night. The picture was finished. To-night came the preview.

“At midnight,” she breathed. “Midnight, one o’clock, and after that my hour of enchantment. Shall it truly be? Shall—?”

She broke short off to cast a hurried glance up the slope above her. Had she caught some sound, the snapping of a twig, the rolling of a stone?

“Perhaps nothing,” she told herself. “I am excited. This is a grand night.”

Ah, yes, this was the night of nights. Two weeks had passed since Lorena LeMar had walked out of her richly furnished apartment and Jeanne had walked in.

Two weeks, fourteen days, and such days as they had been! Jeanne sighed as she thought of it now. And yet her lips were able to form the words “Golden Days.” They had been just that, beautiful, glorious, golden days.

“It is perfect, this mountain,” she whispered. “Even in the dark one senses the beauty of it. Ah, the rushing cold water, the scent of mountain ivy, the glint of sunbeams through the trees!”

Yes, it was a perfect little corner of Big Black Mountain, but the little French girl's thoughts were far away. They had wandered to the spot where Big Black Mountain itself stretched away, away and away until its glorious green turned to blue that blended with a cloudless sky.

She was thinking of Pietro who rode a donkey so badly he had actually fallen off more than once, and who sang his Italian songs so divinely.

She was thinking of Tom Tobin and wondering vaguely which of the two she liked best.

"I want the picture to be a success for them," she whispered. Her words were almost a prayer. "Oh, God, make the critics kind! It is for them, for Pietro and Jencie, for Old Scott Ramsey, for Soloman and—and for Tom."

Tom had been with her on her visit to Big Black Mountain. Yes, Tom had gone, for by this time the story of the possible success of a real feature written by a Chicago boy and being filmed at Chicago's front door had become town talk.

There had been publicity. "Ah, yes, such publicity!" she sighed. Every day for a week her picture had appeared in the paper. She had been shown among the dogwood blossoms on the movie lot, on the Enchanted Island with a hundred beautiful children crowding about her, in a gondola riding down the lagoon like a queen. Ah, yes, there had been publicity.

"And always," she breathed, "I am not Petite Jeanne at all, but Lorena LeMar. Ah, well, what can it matter? To-day one is a queen, to-morrow she is forgotten.

"And besides—" She smiled a bit wearily. "Besides, how shall I say it? This picture may, after all, be a flop, and if it is, then it is Lorena LeMar who has failed and not I."

Again a little tremor shot up her spine. She *had* caught a sound above her. She half rose as if to flee. But the night was warm. The day had been a hard one. It was good to be alone. Soon the floodlights would be turned on, the press men with their cameras would be here. To-night was the preview of that much talked of picture, "When the Dogwood Is in Bloom." It had been arranged that the showing should take place in the Children's Theatre on the Enchanted Island of the Fair.

“There is no one up there.” She settled back. “Only a few moments more to think.”

Strangely enough, her thoughts for a moment whirled through a score of mysteries, the hearse and the two black horses in the dark night, the organ that played its own tunes, the three-bladed knife, the long-eared Chinaman, all these remained as mysteries.

“But these,” she told herself, “these are not for to-night. To-morrow or the day after, perhaps.”

Oh, were they not, though? One may not always elect the hour for the unfolding of life’s mysteries. Fate at times takes a hand.

But one may choose the subject of one’s own thoughts. Jeanne chose to think of the real Big Black Mountain. What a glorious time she had down there in the hills of Kentucky! Climbing steep slopes, she had dropped upon beds of moss to catch the call of a yellow-hammer or the chatter of a squirrel.

At night she had sat for long hours before a narrow home-made fireplace, to creep at last beneath home-woven blankets, and with Jensie at her side to sleep the long night through.

That had lasted only two days. And then back to the city they were whirled.

“We must go back!” the producer had exclaimed. “The public is clamoring for a look at the task we are at, making a feature right in Chicago.”

The public had been there. Every afternoon, as they worked at the unfolding of this tense drama, the stadium had been packed.

The picture had grown, too. Under the inspiration of the hour, new fragments of plot were added, new scenes sprang into being. A mountain feud was added. The scene in a mansion which Jeanne suggested had sprung into being. A friend of Lorena LeMar, a rich society fan of the movies, had thrown her home open to them. And there in the midst of the greatest splendor Jeanne had tripped with dainty feet down a winding marble staircase, only to cast aside her silken finery at last and don her calico gown to go stealing out of the mansion and borrow a ride in a box car back to her beloved mountains.

All this had become part of the thing they were making. Working at white heat, inspired by one grand idea that success was to be achieved where failure had been expected, they had poured their very lives into the business of creating a thing of beauty that in the hearts of men would be a joy forever.

Never, even in the good days of light opera, had Jeanne so thoroughly lost herself in the thing she was doing. Day and night she lived, moved and breathed as Zola, the mountain girl.

She had worked untiringly, not so much for herself as for others. Once again she had gathered about her a golden circle of friends. Pietro, Soloman, Tom, Jensie, Scott Ramsey, all these and many others were included in her Golden Circle.

“And now—” She caught a short breath as she sat there among the trees. “Now we have done all that can be done. To-night we shall know.

“We shall know.” How her heart raced. Not one foot of that film had she seen thrown upon the screen. To-night she was to see it all—the picture she had made.

“I—I can’t wait!” She sprang to her feet.

At that instant floodlights flashed on. Instantly night was turned into day.

Involuntarily she glanced in the direction from which that disturbing sound had come.

It was only by exerting the utmost of will power that she avoided screaming. There, crouching with the three-bladed knife in his hand, not ten feet away, was the long-eared Chinaman.

“I must not scream! I will not!” She shut her lips tight.

She looked again. *He was gone.*

Scarcely believing her eyes, she stood staring at the spot.

“I must not say a word,” she whispered to herself. “This is to be the big night. There must be no scene! No hue and cry, no wild man-hunt! No! No! No!”

And there was none.

Five minutes later when the photographers came to take one more picture of the “Queen” on the mountainside, she stood calm and smiling as a June bride.

“To think,” she said to Tom Tobin when this ordeal was over, “to-morrow this beautiful mountain will be a thing of the past! Not one stick, nor stone, nor even a handful of earth will remain. To-morrow a new picture is to begin, a desert scene, new director, new cast, new setting, a brand new movie world.”

“Sort of life-like,” Tom philosophized. “We move a little slower, stay a little longer on this good, green earth, that’s all.”

“Ah, yes, but to-night let us forget.” Jeanne gripped his arm impulsively. “This, my friend, is our big moment, yours and mine. Let us dream for a moment, hope for an hour. Let us dare hope.

“And—” Her voice dropped to a whisper. “And if it is not too much, let us pray a little.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BATTLE IN THE ORANGE GROVE

It was Florence who next saw the mysterious Chinaman, and that not an hour from the time he disappeared from Jeanne's delectable mountain. Her day's work at an end, she had retired to the orange grove on the banks of the lagoon for a short period of rest. She had been here often of late. There was something very unusual and charming about this orange grove thriving here in the very front yard of Chicago.

The place was in reality a tropical garden. As she lay there, propped up on an elbow, the fragrance of tropical flowers, the pungent odor of ripe tropical fruit suggested that she might be thousands of miles from her native city, at the edge of some Central American jungle.

And yet, as she opened her eyes to look away across the lagoon, her eyes told her that she was in truth at the very heart of a fantastical world of play.

"How like a theatre it is!" she exclaimed.

And indeed, as she allowed her eyes to follow the lagoon until it lost itself in the broader waters of the lake, she found them filled with the ever-changing lights of a stage on opening night. Gayly decorated barges drawn by small power boats drifted past. A bevy of girls, all garbed in gowns of bright red, shot past in a speed boat. They were singing, "Sailing! Sailing!"

From a floating platform came the martial music of a band. Overhead an airplane motor droned. The plane was shooting out a spiral of smoke. The smoke formed itself into clouds and on these clouds there played living, moving pictures.

As she lay there on the grass, head propped on elbow, watching, dreaming, like Petite Jeanne, she caught an unusual sound.

“Not far away,” she whispered. “Over there among the banana leaves, perhaps.” She thought of investigating this. But she was tired, and as she had promised to wait for Jeanne’s preview she wished to rest.

So she dismissed the matter from her mind and once again allowed her mind to drift.

“Wonderful spot, this,” she whispered to herself. “Probably never be seen in Chicago again, orange trees loaded with fruits and flowers.”

This was true. With endless pains men had grown trees in boxes, then had shipped them to the Fair. There were lemon trees, and mangoes, and tall trees that grew tropical melons. In one spot there was a perfect tangle of tropical vegetation.

“Yes, and banana trees.”

Once again her eyes were upon that cluster of banana trees.

“There *is* something moving there.”

Getting a grip on herself, she kept up the semblance of dreaming. In reality she was very much alert, quite alive—watching.

Nor did she watch in vain.

As she watched, fascinated, waiting for she knew not what, ready on the instant to go dashing away, she saw the banana leaves stir, move to one side, then fall back into their original position.

Every muscle in her splendid body was tense now. Had she caught a glimpse of a face? She believed so.

“And yet, one is so easily deceived.”

She should leave the place. This was plain enough; yet stubbornly she stayed.

She watched the darting rocket cars as they flashed across the sky, followed the course of an airplane by its spark of light, allowed her mind to wander for an instant to Jeanne and her problems. But all the time she was thinking, “I must be

on my guard.”

With all this, when at last the banana leaves parted and a form crept out, she was surprised beyond measure. She recognized the person on the instant. The very stealth of his movements gave him away. It was the long-eared Chinaman.

She gasped. “Has he seen me?”

“If he has, he’s playing a game.” He did not look her way.

Then it was that, as though it were some picture on the clouds, she saw faces of children, hundreds of faces, cute Chinese children, and above them all, resolute, determined, hopeful, the serious face of Erik Nord, the white man from China.

“Ah! Now I have you!” Was it she who thought this? Or was it Erik Nord thinking through her? She did not pause for an answer. Instead, she sprang squarely at the crouching figure.

Her plan, if she might be said to have one, was to snatch the precious three-bladed knife from beneath his long coat, then to run for it.

In this she failed. With a panther-like spring, the yellow man eluded her. Then, perceiving perhaps that escape was impossible, he took the offensive.

He did not draw the knife. There was not time. Then, too, it was for demons, not for men, nor for girls either. Instead, with a leap and the swing of an arm he encircled her neck in such a vice-like grip that for a space of ten seconds she was helpless.

“You shall give the bell!” he hissed. “The bell and the banners you shall give!”

Too close to the point of strangulation to reply or so much as think clearly, she placed her hands against his chest, then suddenly threw all her superb strength into one tremendous thrust.

Did she hear a bone crack in his wrist? Was her own neck being broken?

For a space of seconds, with head ready to burst, she could not tell. Then, with a sighing groan the intruder relaxed his hold and all but fell to the ground.

Following up this advantage she fell toward him in such a manner as to start him rolling down the hill. And then, all in a flash, she caught a gleam of white on the grass at her feet.

“The knife! The three-bladed knife! If only—”

With one more tremendous push she set the yellow man into a spin that landed him with a splash into the water of the lagoon.

“He swims well enough,” she assured herself.

Then, with heart thumping wildly, she snatched up the much coveted knife with the jeweled hilt and went sprinting away up the slope, away to the south and across the bridge over the lagoon, to lose herself at last in a throng that had gathered about a wandering Egyptian street fakir.

“Have I lost him?” she whispered.

The answer, though she could not know it now, was “Yes, but not for long.”

CHAPTER XXV

ONCE AGAIN THE ORGAN PLAYS AT MIDNIGHT

“I promised to wait for Jeanne on Byrd’s Polar Ship,” she recalled. “I’ll go there now. Peter Nordsen, the watchman, will be there. People will be passing through. It will be safe enough now.” She had hidden the three-bladed knife beneath her blouse. For all this, she did not feel quite easy about it.

To her surprise, when she arrived at the spot where the ship had been moored she found it gone.

“Gone!” she exclaimed in surprise.

This surprise lasted but an instant. “Oh! I forgot. There was a parade of ships on the lake to-day. Byrd’s ship was in that parade. It will be tied up outside the bridge. The mast must come down before she’ll go under the bridge.

“That’s fine!” she exulted. “I’ll have a good rest on the old ship with no one about but old Peter Nordsen smoking his pipe. If Jeanne doesn’t show up I’ll go to the little theatre at midnight.”

She found the ship readily enough, gave Peter a smile and a “Good evening,” then went forward to a seat well up in the prow.

“Sturdy old ship!” she murmured as she sank into the chair. Then she relaxed in a fit attitude for dreaming.

She had learned to love this old ship. It was easy to imagine it in motion, booming along with all sails set before a nor’west wind.

“Good old ship!” she murmured again. “If only I could sail with you over the

seven seas. Australia, the South Sea Islands, Japan, China and—” She drew a deep breath. “That mysterious land, China.”

She thought quite suddenly of the jewel-hilted knife. “I should hunt up Erik Nord and give it to him at once,” she told herself. “But then, I have no notion where he is; he went off duty an hour ago.”

She laughed a little low laugh as she thought of the Chinaman splashing in the water of the lagoon. Then, of a sudden there came a thought that puzzled her. “He said we had the bell and the banners. How absurd! The chest was empty. They were gone. Who could have taken them if he did not?”

The thought did not remain with her. No thought did. This was an hour for relaxation and dreaming. But she must not dream too long. This was Jeanne’s big night. She must not miss it. “Jeanne’s big night,” she murmured.

She allowed her eyes to wander once more over the magnificent spectacle that lay before her. What a sight! Fountains playing amid golden walls, a hundred lights gleaming as white as diamonds from a lofty tower, trees turning red and gold under the touch of many-hued lamps, and a ladder of light towering skyward. All this exercised upon this impressionable girl a semi-hypnotic spell.

“I must not forget. This is Jeanne’s big night. I must not be late. I—I will not fail —”

For all that, her head sank lower and lower. The day had been a long one. The battle in the orange grove had drawn heavily from her reserve of energy. The hypnotic spell of night and the ever-changing panorama of light sank deep. She nodded twice, then her head fell slowly forward. She was asleep.

Along the breakwater at that moment there glided a mysterious figure. By his nervous stops and starts one might judge him to be in a high state of nervous excitement. Yet there was in his movements a suggestion of extreme caution.

As he came near to the spot where the Polar ship lay anchored, he came to a sudden halt, stood there for a full moment as if rooted to the spot, then dashed away at full speed.

* * * * *

At this moment Jeanne was standing with Jensie at the back of the Rutledge Tavern. They were looking out into the night. As if for mutual protection, they had their arms locked tightly together.

“There it is!” Jensie whispered.

“The hearse!” Jeanne shuddered.

And there most certainly it was, standing in the moonlight just as it had been on that first memorable night.

“Ah, well,” Jeanne whispered to herself, “much has happened since then.”

They were all here at the Tavern, her little company. They had come here for a late dinner; Soloman, Anthony Hope, Scott Ramsey, Pietro, Tom and Jensie were by the fireplace.

Now as Jeanne felt the urge to retreat she said to Jensie in a tone that came from down deep in her throat, “There were two black horses and a coffin. I saw them.”

“Yes,” Jensie agreed. “There were. And, Jeanne,” her voice took on an air of mystery, “last night the organ played again.”

“It played again?” Looking into the mountain girl’s eyes, Jeanne thought she detected there a curious unwonted gleam, but she said not another word as they wandered back to their place by the fireside.

CHAPTER XXVI

CARRIED AWAY IN THE NIGHT

Florence awoke with a start. She sprang to her feet. Where was she? She knew on the instant, or thought she knew. But truly, where *was* she? Cold fear gripped her heart. All the bright glory of the Fair, the changing lights, splashing fountains, clashing rocket cars had faded into mere nothing, a dull blue against the horizon.

Was she going blind? Men had gone blind in just that way. She rubbed her eyes, then looked at her hand. She could see it, indistinctly it is true, but with plenty of detail.

She looked over the rail. Black water was all about her. The old ship swayed slightly. To her ears there came the sound of a motor.

“But this old ship has no motor. Byrd took it out before he passed through the Panama Canal.”

For all this, she was convinced that the ship was in motion. She looked up. Masts, but no sails.

“A tow! Some one is giving it a tow!” Once again her blood chilled. There had been no plans for moving the ship; this she knew. The old night watchman had said that the masts would be lowered during the night and the ship would be brought back within the lagoon.

“But this? What can it mean?”

She had not long to wait. A light came swinging forward. A gas lantern, it was carried by a short man. Two others were just behind him.

As they came into view she gasped. The leader of the trio was the long-eared

Chinaman. The others were his fellow-countrymen. As if sure of his ground, he advanced slowly. There was something sinister, deadly, about that slow advance, like a march of death.

“Caught!” Her head whirled. She thought of leaping overboard. A strong swimmer, she might make land. But the blur of red and gold that was the Fair was dim, indistinct.

“We’re far off shore.” Taking a grip on herself, she held her ground.

She took to counting the short, gliding steps of those who approached. “One, two, three, four, five.”

They came to a halt. The leader advanced two steps farther.

“You will give me that knife!” His tone was low, smooth, musical, menacing.

“No!” Her tone was defiant.

“The water is deep; the distance is very far.” His tone had not changed. “You will give me the knife.”

“No.”

“This knife is for Chinaman. Very old, that knife.” His body rocked slowly back and forth. His voice rose in a sort of chant. “Very powerful, that knife. Not fight man, that knife. Fight demons. Very ’fraid demons. Wave that knife, ring that bell, demons gone. You have that bell. You also give bell, give banners.”

“We do not have the banners or the bell. But if we had, you should not have them.” Florence held her ground.

“You not speak truth. You have bell, have banners. You will give. The water is deep. The distance is far.

“Long time fight demons, that knife.” He was chanting again. “Far away, back very far in China, people all happy, all demons ’fraid, stay away. Priests of Buddha fight demons, that knife.

“White man take knife, take bell, take banners. Now demons come back. Make

people sick, those demons. Many people die. No knife, no bell, no banners, can't fight demons.

"Very dry, no rain. No millet, no rice. Demons make land dry. No knife, no bell, no banner. Can't fight demons. I come for knife. He come. He come." He nodded at his statue-like companions. "Come for knife, for bell, for banners. You give."

"No." The girl's figure stiffened. "You will not get the knife. I do not have those others. You have them. You stole them. The chest was empty."

"All you have said is nonsense!" Her voice rose. "Demons do not make men die. If your people are sick they should go to the white doctor. He will cure them. All those things, the knife, the bell, the banners were sold for money, much money. That money would buy things for the white doctor. You have no right to them. You stole them. You have them all but the knife. You will not get the knife."

"The water is deep. The distance is very far. You will give the knife!" He advanced a step. Without appearing to move their feet, the statue-like pair advanced.

The whole scene, the dark ship, the menacing men, the water, the night, was so like a play that Florence could scarcely believe her senses.

Then to her alert ears came a sound, a low chant:

"A hey, yuh! A hey, yuh! A hey, yuh!"

She had heard that sound before. But where? For ten seconds she wracked her brain. Then she knew.

"Listen!" She endeavored to speak quietly. "You believe in demons. Listen! What do you hear?"

The long-eared one stood rigid, silent, listening.

The sound grew louder: "A hey, yuh! A hey, yuh! A hey, yuh!"

"You believe in demons," she repeated. "Well, here are demons for you, black demons with long knives in their belts. They are coming to rescue me. And let

me tell you, you will need a hundred three-bladed knives to frighten these away, and men to use the knives. You are only three. They are many. They are big, black!”

The menacing ones and the statues glided back a step.

The sound they had heard was the chant of a crew of black men from the heart of Africa. A part of this great carnival, they were practicing in their forty-foot dugout, a hollow log boat, for a race.

What she had said was, she supposed, pure fiction. Now her courage forsook her. They were not coming for her. They would pass a long way off. They would turn and go back before they came within hailing distance.

For once luck was with her. What she had said was true. Jeanne, having come in search of her, had found the ship gone and had seen a frantic watchman, who had left the ship “but for one short breathing spell,” racing up and down the breakwater.

At that instant the boatload of black men hove into view. Fearing treachery, Jeanne had begged them to take her in search of the missing ship.

So now here they were, out on the dark waters of night. The watchman in the prow, twenty black men from the heart of Africa at the oars, and the golden-haired Petite Jeanne urging them on and shouting with them:

“A hey, yuh! A hey, yuh! A hey, yuh!”

It was no time at all before it became plain that their destination was the misplaced ship. And at this the three yellow men vanished. Came the sound of a boat’s motor throbbing. Then that sound grew fainter and fainter in the distance.

“They are gone!” Florence breathed. “And I still have the knife!”

CHAPTER XXVII

HER BIG NIGHT

It was the crew of smiling blacks who carried Florence and Jeanne back to shore. A stout little tug came out for the Polar ship, but that was too slow for them.

With oars flashing in the moonlight, with their crew chanting a weird song, they went sweeping back to Jeanne's "Big Night."

All their friends, the movie company, Tom Tobin and even Erik Nord were waiting.

"I have it," Florence whispered to Erik. "The three-bladed knife." She slipped it into his hand.

"Wonderful!" He gripped her hand. "But the bell? The banners?"

"There's something strange about them."

"Tell me what happened."

She told him briefly as they hurried along with the others to the little theatre.

"You'll never see him again," Erik said with conviction. "The emigration officers are on his trail. They'll get him. He'll go back to China."

"Do you know," Florence spoke in a low, serious tone, "I feel rather sorry for him."

"Yes, one does. But that is often so in China. The old is losing out, the new is coming. That is always sad. But it must be."

They were at the theatre entrance.

* * * * *

Once, while Jeanne, still quite a young girl, was traveling with the gypsies a man had asked permission to take her picture as she danced with the bear. Proudly she had posed for the camera man. That had been spring.

“In the autumn when you return this way you shall see your picture,” the kindly white-haired photographer had said to her.

She recalled all that now as she sat in the little theatre waiting for the preview of her picture to begin.

“Ah, yes,” she thought, “How thrilled I was when at last we returned to that village and I was permitted to see that picture! But this! How much more wonderful! But, perhaps—how terrible!”

And indeed, what an occasion was this! Never before had she seen herself in motion. Never had she heard her own voice after the sound had been allowed to grow cold. And now, now she was to see and hear a feature never before shown on the screen. And in this feature she was the star. Each act, each movement, every little habit of gesture, yes, almost of thought, was recorded here. Her very book of life was to be opened up before her, or so she believed. And not before herself alone was she to appear, but to an assembled group of notable people. There were rich men and their wives, friends of the producer. There were reporters and critics. By the judgment of these last the picture must stand or fall. Little wonder then that she actually shuddered and leaned hard on Florence’s arm as Ted Hunter, the director, stepped into the spotlight to make the accustomed announcement.

It seemed that there were to be still some moments of suspense. They had made, Ted Hunter announced, a very short mystery reel which they would now run as a curtain-raiser to the main event.

Too much overcome by thoughts of the immediate future to focus her attention on this mystery, Jeanne watched with half closed eyes until with a sudden start she sat straight up, to grip Jense’s arm and whisper shrilly:

“Jense! Only look!”

There was no need for this. Jense had seen and was staring hard, for upon the

screen there walked with solemn tread two black horses. They were hitched to an ancient, dilapidated hearse, and on that hearse there rested a coffin.

That this was a part of the mystery Jeanne knew, but what that part was she could not guess. She had not followed the plot. One thing was plain and this she whispered to Jensie.

“That’s the old hearse. It belongs back of the Tavern in the Lincoln Group. They—they must have borrowed it for this picture. They took it in the night. That was the time I saw the black horses and the coffin.”

“Yes. And you know that organ?” the mountain girl whispered back. “I found out about that. It was a colored girl who washes dishes at the Tavern. She loves music, so she hid in the closet and slipped out to play the organ at night. I—I caught her.”

“Sh—sh!”

The mystery was over. Once again Ted Hunter was in the spotlight’s glare. The great moment was at hand.

Never will Jeanne forget the hour that followed. From a distance she heard the motor hum. Next instant she saw herself upon the screen. One good look, ten seconds, she saw herself. Then she, Petite Jeanne, vanished. In her place, standing among the rhododendrons at the side of Big Black Mountain was Zola the child of that mountain.

All that hour she looked upon the screen, listened and lived with Zola. She laughed when it was time to laugh, wept when others wept and shouted as they shouted.

And when the camera gave its last click, when the screen went white and the lights flashed on, she said to herself, “It was not I.”

Yet, even as she sat there they crowded about her, the members of the cast of that picture, the reporters, the critics. They lifted her to their shoulders, carried her to the platform, set her on her feet, and shouted.

“Speech! Speech!”

Speech? Her head was in a wild whirl.

Then her eyes fell upon the clock. "Listen!" She held up a hand for silence.

"Listen!" Her voice rose like a captain's shouting a command. A hush, the hush that can come only at two in the morning, fell over the group. But into that hush there came no unusual sound, only the distant chimes heralding the hour of two in the morning.

"My hour of enchantment!" Jeanne sighed blissfully.

"And now you listen!" It was Florence who spoke. "I have heard you say that many times. What do you mean—your hour of enchantment?"

"All right, I'll tell you." The little French girl's face beamed. "Long ago a gypsy woman, a very old and very wise fortune teller, said to me, 'Your hour of enchantment is two o'clock in the morning.'

"You too," she hurried on, "each one of you has an enchanted hour—an hour when wonderful things will come to you; good fortune, riches, a proposal, marriage, all these will come to you on that enchanted hour.

"It is true!" She was deeply in earnest, this little French girl, so sincerely in earnest that she did not realize that she was about to betray a secret.

"You think it strange that my enchanted hour is two in the morning when most good people are in their beds.

"But you are forgetting that I am at heart a gypsy, that indeed I once *was* a gypsy, a French gypsy, a very good gypsy." She smiled. "But a gypsy all the same." At this instant the lips of Mr. Soloman parted in a low exclamation of excitement.

"So that is who you are!" he exclaimed. "You are the little French girl, Petite Jeanne! For days I have wracked my brain saying to myself, 'She is not Lorena LeMar. Who is she?' And now look! You are Petite Jeanne, the star of my most wonderful picture."

"Oh, Mr. Soloman!" Jeanne's arms came perilously near encircling his fat neck. "You knew I was a fraud, and yet you let me go on! How—how so very

wonderful!”

“A fraud!” he thundered. “No! I did not know you were a fraud. I knew you were a very great star.

“And now, Miss Jeanne,” his voice became confidential, “your name will go on that picture and in the lights of every Broadway of the land, for it was you who made that picture, not Lorena LeMar.”

“Oh!” Jeanne caught her breath. “Do you think that would be right?”

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” came in screams from the crowd.

“And what a story that will make!”

“Boys,” the producer turned to a group of reporters, “those pictures you took, they must go with the greatest story of all time, the story of a double who in two short weeks became a star.”

“Yes! Yes! You bet! Rah, rah, for Jeanne!” came from the reporters.

“And now, Miss Jeanne.” Soloman drew a paper from his pocket. “Here is a contract for you. We have made you—no, no, you have made yourself—a star; and of course you will make another picture; many, many more.”

“Please,” Jeanne pressed the paper back into his hand, “not to-night. My head is in a whirl. Perhaps never at all, but surely not to-night.”

“To-morrow then. I can wait.” The great little man folded his paper neatly and thrust it deep in his pocket.

“This moving picture,” said Jeanne, still feeling that she must make a speech. “It is beautiful. I have seen. You have seen. It is truly beautiful. But it is not I who have made it. It is you, my friends, Mr. Soloman, Pietro, Anthony, Scott Ramsey and all the rest. It is the spirit of those so beautiful mountains. It is the soul of that so great American, Mr. Lincoln. It is every one. It is everything. It is not I.

“And now,” she murmured after the applause had died away, “I am very tired. Will you please take me home, not to that so grand hotel but to the little rooms where my good Florence and I have lived so happily. No longer am I Lorena

LeMar. I am only Petite Jeanne, the gypsy.”

Once more they bore her in triumph on their shoulders, and tucked her away at last in the taxi between Florence and Jencie, while Erik Nord and Tom Tobin took their places on the drop seats before her.

There was little left to be told. It was told in the shabby third floor rooms that were the private castle of Florence and Jeanne. With Tom as her bodyguard Jeanne hurried to the little hotel where she presented her check and received in exchange her well filled laundry bag.

When Tom had carried this to the top floor room, she bade him pour its contents on the floor.

“Behold the bell, the banners!” she exclaimed. “I have had them hidden away all the time. Do not ask me why. I am a gypsy. A gypsy needs no reason.

“And now, Mr. Nord, with my good friend’s permission, I return them to you. Florence has told me of the cute Chinese children. May they all get well speedily.”

“And the reward?” Erik Nord looked from Florence to Jeanne.

“Florence may have the reward,” Jeanne responded quickly.

“And you will visit China?” He smiled at Florence.

“Perhaps. Some time.” She looked away quickly.

Jencie went to college. Jeanne was called back to France. The great Fair closed, as all fairs do. So ended another year.

Did Jeanne return to America? Did she renew her rightful claim of stardom in the movie world? Did Florence indeed visit that “mysterious land, China”? You may find the answer in the next book, *The Phantom Violin*.

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