CHAPTER XVIII

Almost immediately after the singing of the "Gypsy Trail," Paula emerged from her seclusion, and Graham found himself hard put, in the tower room, to keep resolutely to his work when all the morning he could hear snatches of song and opera from her wing, or laughter and scolding of dogs from the great patio, or the continuous pulse for hours of the piano from the distant music room. But Graham, patterning after Dick, devoted his mornings to work, so that he rarely encountered Paula before lunch.

She made announcement that her spell of insomnia was over and that she was ripe for all gaieties and excursions Dick had to offer her. Further, she threatened, in case Dick grudged these personal diversions, to fill the house with guests and teach him what liveliness was. It was at this time that her Aunt Martha--Mrs. Tully--returned for a several days' visit, and that Paula resumed the driving of Duddy and Fuddy in the high, one-seated Stude-baker trap. Duddy and Fuddy were spirited trotters, but Mrs. Tully, despite her elderliness and avoirdupois, was without timidity when Paula held the reins.

As Mrs. Tully told Graham: "And that is a concession I make to no woman save Paula. She is the only woman I can trust myself to with horses. She has the horse-way about her. When she was a child she was

wild over horses. It's a wonder she didn't become a circus rider."

More, much more, Graham learned about Paula in various chats with her aunt. Of Philip Desten, Paula's father, Mrs. Tully could never say enough. Her eldest brother, and older by many years, he had been her childhood prince. His ways had been big ways, princely ways--ways that to commoner folk had betokened a streak of madness. He was continually guilty of the wildest things and the most chivalrous things. It was this streak that had enabled him to win various fortunes, and with equal facility to lose them, in the great gold adventure of Forty-nine. Himself of old New England stock, he had had for great grandfather a Frenchman--a trifle of flotsam from a mid-ocean wreck and landed to grow up among the farmer-sailormen of the coast of Maine.

"And once, and once only, in each generation, that French Desten crops out," Mrs. Tully assured Graham. "Philip was that Frenchman in his generation, and who but Paula, and in full measure, received that same inheritance in her generation. Though Lute and Ernestine are her half-sisters, no one would imagine one drop of the common blood was shared. That's why Paula, instead of going circus-riding, drifted inevitably to France. It was that old original Desten that drew her over."

And of the adventure in France, Graham learned much. Philip Desten's luck had been to die when the wheel of his fortune had turned over and down. Ernestine and Lute, little tots, had been easy enough for

Desten's sisters to manage. But Paula, who had fallen to Mrs. Tully, had been the problem--"because of that Frenchman."

"Oh, she is rigid New England," Mrs. Tully insisted, "the solidest of creatures as to honor and rectitude, dependableness and faithfulness. As a girl she really couldn't bring herself to lie, except to save others. In which case all her New England ancestry took flight and she would lie as magnificently as her father before her. And he had the same charm of manner, the same daring, the same ready laughter, the same vivacity. But what is lightsome and blithe in her, was debonaire in him. He won men's hearts always, or, failing that, their bitterest enmity. No one was left cold by him in passing. Contact with him quickened them to love or hate. Therein Paula differs, being a woman, I suppose, and not enjoying man's prerogative of tilting at windmills. I don't know that she has an enemy in the world. All love her, unless, it may well be, there are cat-women who envy her her nice husband."

And as Graham listened, Paula's singing came through the open window from somewhere down the long arcades, and there was that ever-haunting thrill in her voice that he could not escape remembering afterward. She burst into laughter, and Mrs. Tully beamed to him and nodded at the sound.

"There laughs Philip Desten," she murmured, "and all the Frenchwomen behind the original Frenchman who was brought into Penobscot, dressed in homespun, and sent to meeting. Have you noticed how Paula's laugh

invariably makes everybody look up and smile? Philip's laugh did the same thing."

"Paula had always been passionately fond of music, painting, drawing. As a little girl she could be traced around the house and grounds by the trail she left behind her of images and shapes, made in whatever medium she chanced upon--drawn on scraps of paper, scratched on bits of wood, modeled in mud and sand.

"She loved everything, and everything loved her," said Mrs. Tully. "She was never timid of animals. And yet she always stood in awe of them; but she was born sense-struck, and her awe was beauty-awe. Yes, she was an incorrigible hero-worshiper, whether the person was merely beautiful or did things. And she never will outgrow that beauty--awe of anything she loves, whether it is a grand piano, a great painting, a beautiful mare, or a bit of landscape.

"And Paula had wanted to do, to make beauty herself. But she was sorely puzzled whether she should devote herself to music or painting. In the full swing of work under the best masters in Boston, she could not refrain from straying back to her drawing. From her easel she was lured to modeling.

"And so, with her love of the best, her soul and heart full of beauty, she grew quite puzzled and worried over herself, as to which talent was the greater and if she had genius at all. I suggested a

complete rest from work and took her abroad for a year. And of all things, she developed a talent for dancing. But always she harked back to her music and painting. No, she was not flighty. Her trouble was that she was too talented--"

"Too diversely talented," Graham amplified.

"Yes, that is better," Mrs. Tully nodded. "But from talent to genius is a far cry, and to save my life, at this late day, I don't know whether the child ever had a trace of genius in her. She has certainly not done anything big in any of her chosen things."

"Except to be herself," Graham added.

"Which is the big thing," Mrs. Tully accepted with a smile of enthusiasm. "She is a splendid, unusual woman, very unspoiled, very natural. And after all, what does doing things amount to? I'd give more for one of Paula's madcap escapades--oh, I heard all about swimming the big stallion--than for all her pictures if every one was a masterpiece. But she was hard for me to understand at first. Dick often calls her the girl that never grew up. But gracious, she can put on the grand air when she needs to. I call her the most mature child I have ever seen. Dick was the finest thing that ever happened to her. It was then that she really seemed for the first time to find herself. It was this way."

And Mrs. Tully went on to sketch the year of travel in Europe, the resumption of Paula's painting in Paris, and the conviction she finally reached that success could be achieved only by struggle and that her aunt's money was a handicap.

"And she had her way," Mrs. Tully sighed. "She--why, she dismissed me, sent me home. She would accept no more than the meagerest allowance, and went down into the Latin Quarter on her own, batching with two other American girls. And she met Dick. Dick was a rare one. You couldn't guess what he was doing then. Running a cabaret--oh, not these modern cabarets, but a real students' cabaret of sorts. It was very select. They were a lot of madmen. You see, he was just back from some of his wild adventuring at the ends of the earth, and, as he stated it, he wanted to stop living life for a while and to talk about life instead.

"Paula took me there once. Oh, they were engaged--the day before, and he had called on me and all that. I had known 'Lucky' Richard Forrest, and I knew all about his son. From a worldly standpoint, Paula couldn't have made a finer marriage. It was quite a romance. Paula had seen him captain the University of California eleven to victory over Stanford. And the next time she saw him was in the studio she shared with the two girls. She didn't know whether Dick was worth millions or whether he was running a cabaret because he was hard up, and she cared less. She always followed her heart. Fancy the situation: Dick the uncatchable, and Paula who never flirted. They must have sprung

forthright into each other's arms, for inside the week it was all arranged, and Dick made his call on me, as if my decision meant anything one way or the other.

"But Dick's cabaret. It was the Cabaret of the Philosophers--a small pokey place, down in a cellar, in the heart of the Quarter, and it had only one table. Fancy that for a cabaret! But such a table! A big round one, of plain boards, without even an oil-cloth, the wood stained with the countless drinks spilled by the table-pounding of the philosophers, and it could seat thirty. Women were not permitted. An exception was made for Paula and me.

"You've met Aaron Hancock here. He was one of the philosophers, and to this day he swaggers that he owed Dick a bigger bill that never was paid than any of his customers. And there they used to meet, all those wild young thinkers, and pound the table, and talk philosophy in all the tongues of Europe. Dick always had a penchant for philosophers.

"But Paula spoiled that little adventure. No sooner were they married than Dick fitted out his schooner, the All Away, and away the blessed pair of them went, honeymooning from Bordeaux to Hongkong."

"And the cabaret was closed, and the philosophers left homeless and discussionless," Graham remarked.

Mrs. Tully laughed heartily and shook her head.

"He endowed it for them," she gasped, her hand to her side. "Or partially endowed it, or something. I don't know what the arrangement was. And within the month it was raided by the police for an anarchist club."

After having learned the wide scope of her interests and talents, Graham was nevertheless surprised one day at finding Paula all by herself in a corner of a window-seat, completely absorbed in her work on a piece of fine embroidery.

"I love it," she explained. "All the costly needlework of the shops means nothing to me alongside of my own work on my own designs. Dick used to fret at my sewing. He's all for efficiency, you know, elimination of waste energy and such things. He thought sewing was a wasting of time. Peasants could be hired for a song to do what I was doing. But I succeeded in making my viewpoint clear to him.

"It's like the music one makes oneself. Of course I can buy better music than I make; but to sit down at an instrument and evoke the music oneself, with one's own fingers and brain, is an entirely different and dearer satisfaction. Whether one tries to emulate another's performance, or infuses the performance with one's own personality and interpretation, it's all the same. It is soul-joy and fulfilment.

"Take this little embroidered crust of lilies on the edge of this flounce--there is nothing like it in the world. Mine the idea, all mine, and mine the delight of giving form and being to the idea. There are better ideas and better workmanship in the shops; but this is different. It is mine. I visioned it, and I made it. And who is to say that embroidery is not art?"

She ceased speaking and with her eyes laughed the insistence of her question.

"And who is to say," Graham agreed, "that the adorning of beautiful womankind is not the worthiest of all the arts as well as the sweetest?"

"I rather stand in awe of a good milliner or modiste," she nodded gravely. "They really are artists, and important ones, as Dick would phrase it, in the world's economy."

* * * * *

Another time, seeking the library for Andean reference, Graham came upon Paula, sprawled gracefully over a sheet of paper on a big table and flanked by ponderous architectural portfolios, engaged in drawing plans of a log bungalow or camp for the sages of the madroño grove.

"It's a problem," she sighed. "Dick says that if I build it I must

build it for seven. We've got four sages now, and his heart is set on seven. He says never mind showers and such things, because what philosopher ever bathes? And he has suggested seriously seven stoves and seven kitchens, because it is just over such mundane things that philosophers always quarrel."

"Wasn't it Voltaire who quarreled with a king over candle-ends?" Graham queried, pleasuring in the sight of her graceful abandon. Thirty-eight! It was impossible. She seemed almost a girl, petulant and flushed over some school task. Then he remembered Mrs. Tully's remark that Paula was the most mature child she had ever known.

It made him wonder. Was she the one, who, under the oaks at the hitching rails, with two brief sentences had cut to the heart of an impending situation? "So I apprehend," she had said. What had she apprehended? Had she used the phrase glibly, without meaning? Yet she it was who had thrilled and fluttered to him and with him when they had sung the "Gypsy Trail." That he knew. But again, had he not seen her warm and glow to the playing of Donald Ware? But here Graham's ego had its will of him, for he told himself that with Donald Ware it was different. And he smiled to himself and at himself at the thought.

"What amuses you?" Paula was asking.

"Heaven knows I am no architect. And I challenge you to house seven

philosophers according to all the absurd stipulations laid down by Dick."

Back in his tower room with his Andean books unopened before him, Graham gnawed his lip and meditated. The woman was no woman. She was the veriest child. Or--and he hesitated at the thought--was this naturalness that was overdone? Did she in truth apprehend? It must be. It had to be. She was of the world. She knew the world. She was very wise. No remembered look of her gray eyes but gave the impression of poise and power. That was it--strength! He recalled her that first night when she had seemed at times to glint an impression of steel, of thin and jewel-like steel. In his fancy, at the time, he remembered likening her strength to ivory, to carven pearl shell, to sennit twisted of maidens' hair.

And he knew, now, ever since the brief words at the hitching rails and the singing of the "Gypsy Trail," that whenever their eyes looked into each other's it was with a mutual knowledge of unsaid things.

In vain he turned the pages of the books for the information he sought. He tried to continue his chapter without the information, but no words flowed from his pen. A maddening restlessness was upon him. He seized a time table and pondered the departure of trains, changed his mind, switched the room telephone to the house barn, and asked to have Altadena saddled.

It was a perfect morning of California early summer. No breath of wind stirred over the drowsing fields, from which arose the calls of quail and the notes of meadowlarks. The air was heavy with lilac fragrance, and from the distance, as he rode between the lilac hedges, Graham heard the throaty nicker of Mountain Lad and the silvery answering whinney of the Fotherington Princess.

Why was he here astride Dick Forrest's horse? Graham asked himself. Why was he not even then on the way to the station to catch that first train he had noted on the time table? This unaccustomed weakness of decision and action was a new rôle for him, he considered bitterly. But--and he was on fire with the thought of it--this was his one life, and this was the one woman in the world.

He reined aside to let a herd of Angora goats go by. Each was a doe, and there were several hundred of them; and they were moved slowly by the Basque herdsmen, with frequent pauses, for each doe was accompanied by a young kid. In the paddock were many mares with new-born colts; and once, receiving warning in time, Graham raced into a crossroad to escape a drove of thirty yearling stallions being moved somewhere across the ranch. Their excitement was communicated to that entire portion of the ranch, so that the air was filled with shrill nickerings and squealings and answering whinneys, while Mountain Lad, beside himself at sight and sound of so many rivals, raged up and down his paddock, and again and again trumpeted his challenging conviction that he was the most amazing and mightiest thing that had ever

occurred on earth in the way of horse flesh.

Dick Forrest pranced and sidled into the cross road on the Outlaw, his face beaming with delight at the little tempest among his many creatures.

"Fecundity! Fecundity!"--he chanted in greeting, as he reined in to a halt, if halt it might be called, with his tan-golden sorrel mare a-fret and a-froth, wickedly reaching with her teeth now for his leg and next for Graham's, one moment pawing the roadway, the next moment, in sheer impotence of resentfulness, kicking the empty air with one hind leg and kicking the air repeatedly, a dozen times.

"Those youngsters certainly put Mountain Lad on his mettle," Dick laughed. "Listen to his song:

"'Hear me! I am Eros. I stamp upon the hills. I fill the wide valleys. The mares hear me, and startle, in quiet pastures; for they know me. The land is filled with fatness, and the sap is in the trees. It is the spring. The spring is mine. I am monarch of my kingdom of the spring. The mares remember my voice. They knew me aforetime through their mothers before them. Hear me! I am Eros. I stamp upon the hills, and the wide valleys are my heralds, echoing the sound of my approach.'"