

THE INDIAN DRUM

(Continued from page 9.)

wealthy families, she seemed to Alan to have gained young womanhood in far greater degree in some respects than the girls he knew, while, at the same time, in other ways, she retained more than they some characteristics of a child. Her slender figure had a woman's assurance and grace; her soft brown hair was dressed like a woman's; her gray eyes had the open directness of the girl. Her face—smoothly oval, with straight brows and a skin so delicate that at the blue temples the veins showed dimly blue—was at once womanly and youthful; and there was something altogether likable and simple about her, as she studied Alan now. She had on a street dress and hat; whether it was this, or whether it was the contrast of her youth and vitality with this somber, darkened house that told him, Alan could not tell, but he felt instinctively that this house was not her home. More likely, it was some indefinable, yet convincing expression of her manner that gave him that impression. While he hazarded, with fast beating heart, what privilege of acquaintance with her Alan Conrad might have, she moved a little nearer to him. She was slightly pale, he noticed now, and there were lines of strain and trouble about her eyes.

"I am Constance Sherrill," she announced. Her tone implied quite evidently that she expected him to have some knowledge of her, and she seemed surprised to see that her name did not mean more to him.

"Mr. Corvet is not here this morning," she said.

He hesitated, but persisted: "I was to see him here to-day, Miss Sherrill. He wrote me, and I telegraphed him I would be here to-day."

"I know," she answered. "We had your telegram. Mr. Corvet was not here when it came, so my father opened it." Her voice broke oddly, and he studied her in indecision, wondering who that father might be that opened Mr. Corvet's telegrams.

"Mr. Corvet went away very suddenly," she explained. She seemed, he thought, to be trying to make something plain to him which might be a shock to him; yet herself to be uncertain what the nature of that shock might be. Her look was scrutinizing, questioning, anxious, but not unfriendly. "After he had written you and something else had happened—I think—to alarm my father about him, father came here to his house to look after him. He thought something might have . . . happened to Mr. Corvet here in his house. But Mr. Corvet was not here."

"You mean he has—disappeared?"

"Yes; he has disappeared."

Alan gazed at her dizzily. Benjamin Corvet—whenever he might be—had disappeared; he had gone. Did any one else, then, know about Alan Conrad?

"No one has seen Mr. Corvet," she said, "since the day he wrote to you. We know that—that he became so disturbed after doing that—writing to you—that we thought you must bring with you information of him."

"Information!"

"So we have been waiting for you to come here and tell us what you

know about him or—your connection with him."

CHAPTER III.

Discussion of a Shadow.

ALAN, as he looked confusedly, and blankly at her, made no attempt to answer the question she had asked, or to explain. For the moment, as he fought to realize what she had said and its meaning for himself, all his thought was lost in mere dismay, in the denial and checking of what he had been feeling as he entered the house. His silence and confusion, he knew, must seem to Constance Sherrill unwillingness to answer her; for she did not suspect that he was unable to answer her. She plainly took it in that way; but she did not seem offended; it was sympathy, rather, that she showed. She seemed to appreciate, without understanding except through her feelings, that—for some reason—answer was difficult and dismaying for him.

"You would rather explain to father than to me," she decided.

He hesitated. What he wanted now was time to think, to learn who she was and who her father was, and to adjust himself to this strange reversal of expectations.

"Yes; I would rather do that," he said.

"Will you come around to our house, then, please?"

She caught up her fur collar and muff from a chair and spoke a word to the servant. As she went out on to the porch, he followed her and stooped to pick up his suitcase.

"Simons will bring that," she said, "unless you'd rather have it with you. It is only a short walk."

He was recovering from the first shock of her question now, and, reflecting that men who accompanied Constance Sherrill probably did not

carry hand baggage, he put the suitcase down and followed her to the wall. As she turned north and he caught step beside her, he studied her with quick interested glances, realizing her difference from all other girls he ever had walked with, but he did not speak to her nor she to him. Turning east at the first corner, they came within sight and hearing again of the turmoil of the lake.

"We go south here," she said at the corner of the Drive. "Our house is almost back to back with Mr. Corvet's."

Alan, looking up after he had made the turn with her, recognized the block as one he had seen pictured sometimes in magazines and illustrated papers as a "row" of the city's most beautiful homes. Larger, handsomer, and finer than the mansions on Astor Street, each had its lawn or terrace in front and on both sides, where snow-mantled shrubs and straw-bound rosebushes suggested the gardens of spring. They turned in at the entrance of a house in the middle of the block and went up the low, wide stone steps; the door opened to them without ring or knock; a servant in the hall within took Alan's hat and coat, and he followed Constance past some great room upon his right to a smaller one farther down the hall.

"Will you wait here, please?" she asked.

He sat down, and she left him; when her footsteps had died away, and he could hear no other sounds except the occasional soft tread of some servant, he twisted himself about in his chair and looked around. A door between the room he was in and the large room which had been upon his right as they came in—a drawing-room—stood open; he could see into the drawing-room, and he could see through the other door a portion of the hall; his inspection of these increased the bewilderment he felt. Who were these Sherrills? Who was Corvet, and what was his relation to the Sherrills? What, beyond all, was their and Corvet's relation to Alan Conrad—to himself? The shock and confusion he had

felt at the nature of his reception in Corvet's house, and the strangeness of his transition from his little Kansas town to a place and people such as this, had prevented him from inquiring directly from Constance Sherrill as to that; and, on her part, she had assumed, plainly, that he already knew and need not be told.

HE got up and moved about the rooms; they, like all rooms, must tell something about the people who lived in them. The rooms were large and open; Alan, in dreaming and fancying to himself the places to which he might some day be summoned, had never dreamed of entering such a home as this. For it was a home; in its light and in its furnishings there was nothing of the stiffness and aloofness which Alan, never having seen such rooms except in pictures, had imagined to be necessary evils accompanying riches and luxury; it was not the richness of its furnishings that impressed him first, it was its livableness. Among the more modern pieces in the drawing-room and hall were some which were antique. In the part of the hall that he could see, a black and ancient-looking chair whose lines he recognized, stood against the wall. He had seen chairs like that, heirlooms of colonial Massachusetts or Connecticut, cherished in Kansas farmhouses and recalling some long-past exodus of the family from New England. On the wall of the drawing-room, among the beautiful and elusive paintings and etchings, was a picture of a ship, plainly framed; he moved closer to look at it, but he did not know what kind of ship it was except that it was a sailing ship of some long-disused design. Then he drew back again into the smaller room where he had been left, and sat down again to wait.

A comfortable fire of cannel coal was burning in this smaller room in a black fire-basket set in a white marble grate, obviously much older than the house; there were big easy leather chairs before it, and beside it there were bookcases. On one of these stood a two-handled silver trophy cup,



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