



***CAROLYN
WELLS***

***THE DEEP-
LAKE
MYSTERY***



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Carolyn Wells

The Deep-Lake Mystery

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To my dear friend

LUCY C. JOYCE

Chapter I.

“A Stately Pleasure Dome

...”

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As I look back on my life, eventful enough in spots, but placid, even monotonous in the long stretches between spots, I think the greatest thrill I ever experienced was when I saw the dead body of Sampson Tracy.

Imagine to yourself a man, dead in his own bed, with no sign of violence or maltreatment. Eyes partly closed, as he might be peacefully thinking, and no expression of fear or horror on his calm face.

Now add to your mental picture the fact that he had round his brow a few flowers arranged as a wreath. More flowers diagonally across his breast, like a garland. Clapsed in his right hand, against his heart, an ivory crucifix, and in his left hand an orange.

Sticking up from behind his head showed the plume of a red feather duster!

And draped round all this, like a frame, was a red chiffon scarf, a filmy but voluminous affair, deftly tucked in here and there, and encircling all the strange and bizarre details I have enumerated.

On a pillow, near the dead face, lay two small crackers and a clean, folded handkerchief.

As I stared, my imagination flew to the Indians or the ancient Egyptians, who provided their dead with food and toilet implements, which were buried with them.

But in this case——

I believe it was Abraham Lincoln who said: "If you have a story to tell, begin at the beginning, go through with the tale, and leave off at the ending." So, as I most assuredly have a story to tell, I will begin at the beginning and follow the prescribed directions.

It all began, I suppose, the night Keeley Moore came to see me about fishing tackle. Kee is a wonderful detective and all that, but when it comes to fishing he's mighty glad to ask my advice.

And Lord knows I'm glad to give it to him.

We used to go fishing together, every summer. Then Kee took it into his silly head to get married, and to a girl who cares nothing about fishing.

So from that you can see how things are.

But this time Kee seemed really excited about his prospects of fishing through the summer months.

"We're going to Wisconsin," he told me, with a note of joyousness in his voice, "and, Gray, do you know, there are more than two thousand lakes in one county out in that foolish old state?"

"I'd like to fish in all of 'em," I said, with my usual lack of moderation.

"You can't do that, but you can fish in a few, if you like. Lora sends you, and I back it up, an invitation to come out there as soon as we get settled and stay as long as you can."

"That's a tempting bid," I told him, "but I can't impose on newlyweds like that. I'll go to the inn or lodge or whatever they have out there, and see you every day."

"No, we want you with us. We've taken a fairly good-sized house for the season, and you must be our guest. Lora's asking a few of her friends and I want you."

Well, he had little trouble in persuading me, once I felt convinced that his wife's invitation was in good faith, and I planned to go out there early in August.

They were going in July, which left them time enough to get settled and get their home in running order.

So I went to Wisconsin in August, glad enough to get away from the city's heat and noise and dirt.

Deep Lake, the choice of the Moores, was in Oneida County, which is designated among the Scenic Sections of Wisconsin as North Woods—Eastern.

And scenic it surely was. The last part of the train ride had shown me that, and when we were motoring from the railroad station to the Moore bungalow, I was impressed with the weird beauty all about.

It was dusk, and the tall trees looked black against the sky. Long shadows of hemlocks and poplars fell across the road, as the last glow of the sunset was fading, and the reflection in the lakes of surrounding scenery was clear, though dark and eerie-looking.

We passed several lakes before we reached the journey's end.

"Here we are!" Moore cried at last, as we turned in at the gates of a most attractive estate.

A short road led to the front door and Lora came out to greet us.

I liked Kee Moore's wife, though I never felt I knew her very well. She was of a reserved type and while amiable and cordial, she was not responsive and never seemed to offer or invite confidence.

But she greeted me heartily, and expressed real pleasure at having me there.

She was very good looking—a wholesome, bonny type, with an air of executive ability and absolute *savoir faire*.

Her hair was dead gold, bobbed and worn straight, I think they call it a Dutch bob. Anyway, she had a trace of Dutch effect and reminded me of that early picture of Queen Wilhelmina.

She sent me to my room to brush up but told me I needn't change as the bungalow was run informally.

The place rejoiced in the name of "Variable Winds," and though the Moores geyed the idea of having a name for such an unpretentious affair, they admitted it was at least appropriate.

I returned to the living room to find the group augmented by a few more people: one house guest and two or three neighbours.

Cocktails appeared and the cheery atmosphere dispelled the darksome and gloomy effects that had marked our drive from the station.

I found myself next my fellow guest, a pleasant-faced lady, who introduced herself.

"I'm Maud Merrill," she vouchsafed. "I'm staying here, so you must learn to like me."

"No trouble at all," I told her, and honestly, for I liked her at once.

She was a widow, perhaps thirty or so, with white hair and deep blue eyes. I judged her hair was prematurely grayed, for her face was young and attractive.

"I'm an old schoolmate of Lora Moore's," she disclosed further, "and I'm up here for a fortnight. Are you staying long?"

"I'm invited indefinitely," I returned. "I'll stay a month, I think, if they seem to want me."

"Oh, they will. They've both looked forward to your coming with real delight. And you'll like it here. There's no end of things to do. Fishing of course, and bathing and

boating and golf and tennis and dancing and flirting—in fact, you can have just whatever sport you want.”

“Sounds rather strenuous. I had hoped for a restful time.”

“Yes, you can have that if you really want it. Let me give you a hint of the other guests. The beautiful woman is Katherine Dallas. She’s about to be married to our next-door neighbour. He isn’t here to-night. But one of his house guests is here. That tall, thin man,—he’s Harper Ames.”

I thanked her for her hints, though I wasn’t terribly interested. But it’s good to know a little about new acquaintances, and often prevents unfortunate speeches. Especially with me. For I’ve a shocking habit of saying the wrong thing and making enemies thereby.

At the table I found myself seated at my hostess’s right hand and the beautiful Mrs. Dallas on my other side.

It was a comfortable sort of party. The conversation, while not specially brilliant, was unforced and gayly bantering. Two youngsters were present, who added their flapper slang to the general fund of amusement.

These two were Posy May and Dick Hardy, and though apparently about twenty they seemed to have world-wide knowledge and world-old wisdom.

“My canoe upset this afternoon,” Posy told the company with an air of being a heroine.

“You upset it on purpose,” declared Dick.

“Didn’t, either. I turned around too quickly——”

“Yes, and if I hadn’t been on the job you’d be turning around there yet.”

“Posy,” Keeley said, reproachfully, “you must be more careful. Deep Lake is one of the deepest and most treacherous lakes in all Wisconsin. Now, don’t cut up silly tricks in a canoe.”

“Oh, I know how to manage a canoe.”

"You managed to upset," said Lora Moore, accusingly, and pretty Posy changed the subject.

After dinner there was a little bridge, but the youngsters were going to a dance, and Mrs. Dallas seemed to want to go home early, so Ames carried her off, and our own quartet was left alone.

I was glad of it, for I like a chat with a few better than the rattle of the crowd. And it was not very long before Lora and Mrs. Merrill left us, and Keeley and I had the porch to ourselves.

"Pleasant people," I said, by way of being decently gracious.

"Good enough," he agreed. "To-morrow, Gray, we'll fish. It's open season for everything now and the limits are generous. Except muskellonge. You may bag only one per day of those. But trout, all kinds, bass, all kinds, pickerel, rock sturgeon—oh, we'll have the biggest time!"

"Sounds good to me," I returned, heartily. "I'm happy to be here, old scout, and we'll fish and all that, but don't put yourself about to entertain me."

"I sha'n't; but you must fall in with Lora's plans, won't you? I mean, seem pleased to attend her kettledrums and whatnot, even if it bores you."

"Of course I will. Your lady's word is law. She's a brick, isn't she?"

"Yes," and Moore smiled happily at my somewhat crude compliment. "She's just that. And such a help in my work."

"Your detective work?"

"What else? She's more than a Watson, she's a real helpmate. Her insight and intuition are marvellous, and she sees through a bit of evidence and gets the very gist of it quicker than I can."

"Then you surely got the right one."

"I certainly did. But I hope to Heaven there'll be no cases this summer. I want a real vacation, that's why I came 'way off here, to get away from all crime calls."

"Don't crow before you're out of the woods. Crimes can happen even in Wisconsin. And to me, this whole country round looks like a perfect setting for a first-class criminal to work in."

"Hush! I'm not superstitious, but your suggestion of such a thing might bring it about. And I don't want it!"

"You think you don't," I smiled a little, "but deep in your heart you do. You can't fish all the time, and you're even now restively hankering to be back in harness."

"Shut up!" he growled. "Talk of something pleasanter. How do you like the Dallas queen?"

"Stunning, seductive, and serpentine," I summed up the lady in question.

Moore laughed outright. "I must tell Lora that," he said. "You see, she agrees with you. Now, I think the right words are stately, gracious, and charming."

"All right," I said, "you know her better than I do, She is very beautiful, I concede."

"What do you mean, concede? Are you against her?"

"How you do snap a fellow up! No, not exactly. But I wouldn't trust her as far as I could see her,—and I'm near-sighted."

"Sometimes I think I'm no detective after all," Moore said, slowly. "Now she gives me no effect of hypocrisy or insincerity."

"But she does hint those things to Lora?"

"Y—yes, in a way."

"Then Lora's more of a detective than you are. But after I see more of the siren, I may change my mind. I didn't talk

with her alone at all. What about the grumpy Mr. Ames? Is he in love with the Dallas?"

"Not at all. In the first place, he wouldn't dare be, for she is engaged to Sampson Tracy, and Tracy is not one to take kindly to any poaching on his domain. Besides that, Ames is a woman hater, also a man hater, and I think, an animal hater."

"Pleasant man!"

"Yes. He's always in a fierce mood. I don't know, but I imagine he had an affair once...."

"Oh, crossed in love and it made him queer."

"Rather say, queered in love and it made him cross."

"Yes, he looks cross. Does he always?"

"Always. He and Samp Tracy are old friends, and Samp can manage him, but nobody else can."

"Pleasant guest for Mr. Tracy to have about."

"He doesn't mind. Pleasure Dome is usually full of guests and if any want to sulk they are at liberty to do so."

"Pleasure Dome?"

"Yes, that's the Tracy place. It's next to this, but it's some distance off. You see, Deep Lake has a most irregular boundary line. It has all sorts of coves and inlets, and there's one that juts in behind the Tracy house. It's so deep and black and so surrounded by trees that it's called the Sunless Sea."

"Why, that's from Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan,' too."

"Yes, these are the lines:

"In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately Pleasure Dome decree;
Where Alph, the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

"You know it, of course, but that will refresh your memory. Well, old Tracy——"

"Is he old?"

"Oh, no, he's forty-five, but he seems older, somehow. Well, anyway, he's romantic and poetic and imaginative. And he has a fad for Coleridge. Collects editions of him and all that. So he built his enormous and gorgeous house and called it Pleasure Dome. And the deep arm of the lake, which is right beneath his own window, he calls the Sunless Sea. And it is. It's on the north side of the house, and so hemmed in with great firs and cypresses that the sun never gets a look-in."

"Must make a delightful sleeping room!"

"Oh, there's plenty of sunlight from the east and west. His rooms are in a wing, a long L, and you bet they have sunlight and all other modern improvements. The house is a palace."

"That all sounds nice for Mrs. Dallas."

"It is. And Samp is so drivellingly, so besottedly in love with her, that she will have everything her own way when she takes up the sceptre."

"Nobody else in the family? The Tracy family, I mean."

"No. Not now. There was. You see, Tracy's sister, Mrs. Remsen, and her daughter used to live with him. Then Mrs. Remsen died, about a year ago, or a little more, and then Mrs. Dallas came into the picture, and some think it was at her request Tracy put his niece out——"

"The brute!"

"Oh, come now, you don't know anything about it. Alma is a lovely girl, but she's a high-handed sort—all the Tracys are—and her uncle gave her a beautiful home on a near-by island——"

"On an island? A girl, alone!"

"She has with her an old family nurse, who took care of her as a baby, and old nurse's husband is her gardener and houseman, and old nurse's daughter is her waitress, and oh, Lord, Alma Remsen is fixed all right."

"But on an island!"

"But she likes being on an island. It was her own choice. She didn't want to stay with the new wife any more than the new wife wanted to have her. You always fly off half-cocked!"

"All right, all right," I soothed him. "Tell me more."

"Well, that's all about Alma. She's a general favourite, has lots of friends, and all that, but of course, when the new mistress of Pleasure Dome comes in at the door, Alma's prospects will fly out of the window."

"Cut off entirely?"

"I'm not sure, but I've heard so. I suppose her uncle will always take care of her, but she will no longer be the Tracy heiress."

"And how does Miss Alma take that?"

"Not so good. She has had several talks with the family lawyer, and she has tried to wheedle her uncle, but he's a queer dick, is Samp Tracy, and he obstinately refuses to make a new will or even consider its terms until after he's married."

"And his present will?"

"Leaves everything to Alma. She's his only living relative. But his marriage will automatically cancel that will, and his wife will be sole inheritor unless he fixes the matter up."

"Which he will doubtless do."

"Oh, I hope so. I hope the new wife will see to it that he does. But there's where Lora has her doubts. She doesn't like Katherine Dallas, somehow."

"Lora is of great perspicacity," I said. "Where does Ames come in?"

"Regarding the fortune? Nowhere, that I know of. He is an old friend of Tracy's, both socially and in a business way. They're as different as day and night. Ames is surly, sulky, and blunt. Tracy is suave, gentle, and of the pleasantest manners."

"Miss Remsen's parents both dead?"

"Oh, yes. Her father died about fifteen years ago. Her mother recently. Had her mother lived, I suppose Tracy would have put them both out of the house, just the same. But Mrs. Remsen being gone, he sent Alma and the servants to the island house."

"Then the girl is utterly alone in the world except for the suave uncle and her faithful servants."

"Just that. There was a sister. Alma had a twin. But she died as a baby, or as a small child. Her little grave is in a small God's Acre on the Pleasure Dome grounds. The mother and father are buried there too. And some other relatives."

"I didn't know they had homestead cemeteries in Wisconsin. I thought they were confined to the New England states."

"It isn't usual, I believe. But the Tracys are New England stock, and, anyway, the graves are there. And beautifully kept and tended, as everything about the place has to be."

"Sounds interesting. Shall I see the high-strung Alma?"

"I didn't say high-strung. She is a normal, lovely nature. But I did say high-handed, for she is a determined sort, and if she sets her mind to a thing it has to go through."

"She has admirers?"

"Oh, of course. But she rather flouts them. One of Tracy's secretaries is frightfully in love with her. But she scarcely

notices him.”

“Our friend has a multiplicity of secretaries, then?”

“Two, that’s all. But Sampson Tracy is a man of large interests, and I fancy he keeps the two busy. Billy Dean is the one in love with Alma, but the other, Charles Everett, is his superior.”

“He’s the chap who, they tell me, craves the Dallas lady.”

“Yes, though of course Tracy doesn’t know it. Everett wouldn’t be there if he did.”

“And Mrs. Dallas? What is her attitude toward the presumptuous secretary?”

“Hard to say. I think she favours him, but she is too good a financier to throw over her millionaire for his underling.”

“Well, I think I’ve had about all the local history I can stand for one night. Let’s go in the house.”

To my surprise, Lora Moore and Mrs. Merrill were in the lounge, waiting for us.

The house was admirably arranged. The great central room, with doors back and front, was called the lounge, and served as both hall and living room. Off this were two smaller rooms: the card room and the music room. To one side of these rooms were the bedrooms, and on the other side, the dining room and kitchen quarters.

The furnishings were simple and attractive, with no “Mission” pieces or attempts at camping effects.

I sat down on a wide davenport beside Lora, and said, tentatively:

“I believe you and I agree in our estimate of the Dallas beauty.”

“Then you have real good sense,” exclaimed Lora, heartily. “Kee won’t see her as I do.”

“I won’t either,” put in Maud Merrill. “It’s disgraceful to knock a woman just because she’s going to marry a rich

man. Rich men want wives as well as poor men. I'm all for Katherine Dallas. You're jealous, Lora, because she is so beautiful."

Lora only smiled at this, and said:

"I've really nothing against her, except that I believe she had Alma turned out of her uncle's house."

"And why not?" demanded Maud Merrill. "No house is big enough for two families; and though I don't know Miss Remsen well at all, I do know that she is a girl of strong will and decided opinions. They'd never be happy if Alma stayed there."

"I can't say as to all that," I put in, determined to have my word, "but I think, with Lora, that the Dallas is a lady of deep finesse and Machiavellian cleverness."

"Yes, just that!" cried Keeley Moore's wife.

"Well, then," said Maud, "if she snared that millionaire by her cleverness, she deserves her reward. And she deserves a peaceful home, which I doubt she'd have with a young girl bossing around, too."

"Oh, you women!" and Moore wrung his hands in mock despair, "you're making up all this. You don't know a thing about it, really."

"We can see," said Lora, sagely. "And there's no use prolonging this futile discussion. Time will show you how right I am, and meantime, we'd better all go to bed."

Chapter II.

The Girl in the Canoe

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My room at Variable Winds was cheery and comfortable. Bright-hued curtains, painted furniture and bowls full of exquisitely tinted California poppies gave the place a colourful effect that pleased my aesthetic tastes. A perfectly appointed bathroom added to my content and I concluded I would stay with the Moores as long as I could keep my welcome in good working order.

Keeley Moore was one of the best if not the best known detectives of the day, and while a quiet vacation would do him good, I was certain he was already itching to get back to his problems and mysteries, with which the city always supplied him.

I threw off my coat and put on a dressing gown, for the lake breezes were chill, and sat at a window for a final smoke.

I felt at peace with the world. Some houses give you that feeling, just as some others make you unreasonably nervous and irritable.

The moon had risen, a three-quarter or nearly full moon, and its shimmering light across the lake made me turn off my room lights and gaze out at the scene before me.

My room looked out on the lake, and the house itself was not more than a dozen yards from the water. The ground sloped gently down to a tiny bit of beach, a little crescent that had been selected for the site of the house. On the

right of this placid little piece of shore was the boathouse, a large one, with canoes, rowboats and motor boats. Under the same roof was the bath house, and in front of that, out in the lake, were springboards, diving ladders and all the contrivances on which the bathers like to disport themselves.

To the left was a bit of wild, rocky shore, for the edge of the lake was greatly diversified and rocks abounded, both in and out of the water.

A line of light came across the lake, but was now and then blotted out as the swiftly drifting clouds obscured the moon.

I liked it better in the darkness, for the sight was impressive.

From my window I could see a great stretch of water, and as a background, dense black growth of trees, which came in many places down to the water's edge.

Often these trees were on a slope and rose to a height almost to be called a hill, while again the ground stretched on a low-lying level.

As I looked, the details of the landscape became clearer and I discerned a few faint lights here and there in the houses.

The big house nearest us I took to be Pleasure Dome. Not only because it was the next house, but because I could dimly distinguish a large building surmounted by a gilded dome.

How could any man in his sober senses construct such a place to live in?

It seemed like a cross between the Boston State House and the Taj Mahal.

I was really anxious to go over there and see the thing at closer range. I decided to ask Moore to take me over the

next day.

Suddenly the lights all went out and the house and its dome disappeared from view. Looking at my watch I saw it was just one o'clock and concluded that the master of the house had his home darkened at that hour.

But after I again accustomed my eyes to the darkness I could see the outlines of Pleasure Dome, and it looked infinitely more attractive in the half light than it had done in the brightness of its own illumination.

As a whole, though, the lake scene was depressing. It had a melancholy, dismal air that seemed to lay a damper on my spirits. It was like a cold, clammy hand resting on my forehead. I even shook my head impatiently, as if to fling it off, and then smiled at my own foolishness. But it persisted. The lake was mournful, it even seemed menacing.

With an exclamation of disgust at my own impressionableness, I sprang up from my chair, flashed on the lights and prepared for bed.

The bright, pleasant room restored my equilibrium or equanimity or whatever it was that had been jarred, and I found myself all ready for bed, in a peaceful, happy frame of mind.

I turned off the lights, and then the lake lured me back to a last glimpse of its wild, eerie beauty.

Again I flung on my robe and sat at the window. It seemed as if I couldn't leave it. The black, sinister water, the dark shores, with deep hollows here and there, the waving, sighing trees, with thick underbrush beneath them, all seemed possessed of a spirit of evil, a frightful, uncanny spirit, that made me shiver with an unreasonable apprehension, that held me in thrall.

I have no use for premonitions, I have no faith in presentiments, but I had to admit to myself then a fear, a

foreboding of some intangible, ghastly horror. Then would come the moonlight, pale and sickly now, and lasting but a moment before the clouds again blotted it out.

Yet I liked the darkness better, for the moon cast such horrendous shadows of those black trees into the lake that it seemed to people the lake with monstrous, maleficent beings, who leered and danced like devils.

Though I knew the hobgoblins were only the waving trees, distorted in the moonlight, I was none the less weak-minded enough to see portentous spectres that made my flesh creep.

With a half laugh and a half groan at my utter imbecility, I declared to myself that I would go to bed and go to sleep.

But as I started to rise from my chair, I saw something that made me sink back again.

The moon now was behind a light, translucent cloud, that caused a faint light on the lake.

Round a jutting corner I saw a canoe come into my line of vision.

A moment's attention convinced me that it was no ghostly craft, but an ordinary canoe, propelled by a pair of human arms.

This touch of human companionship put to rout all my feelings of fear and even my forebodings of tragedy.

Normally interested now, I watched to see who might be out at that time of night, and for what purpose.

The cloud dispersed itself, and the full clear moonlight shone down on the boat and its occupant. To my surprise it was a girl, a young-appearing girl, and she was paddling softly, but with a skilled stroke that told of long practice.

Her hair seemed to be silver in the moonlight, but I realized the light was deceptive and the curly bob might be either flaxen or gold.

She wore a white sweater and a white skirt—that much I could see plainly, but I could distinguish little more. She had no hat on, and I could see white stockings and shoes as the craft passed the house.

She seemed intent on her work, and her beautiful paddling aroused my intense admiration. She did not look up at our house at all; indeed, she seemed like an enchanted princess, doomed to paddle for her life, so earnestly did she bend to her occupation. She passed the house and kept on, in the direction of Pleasure Dome.

Could she be going there? I hardly thought so, yet I watched carefully, hanging out of my window to do so.

To my surprise she did steer her little craft straight to the great house next door, and turned as if to land there.

The Tracy house was on a line with the Moore bungalow, that is, on a curving line. They were both on the same large crescent of lake shore. Pleasure Dome had a cove or inlet behind it, Moore had told me, but that was not visible from my window. The front of the house was, however, and I distinctly saw the girl beach her canoe, step lightly out and then disappear among the trees in the direction of the house.

I still sat staring at the point where she had been lost to my vision. I let the picture sink into my mind. I could see her as plainly in retrospect as I had in reality. That lissome, slender figure, that graceful springy walk—but she had limped, a very little. Not as if she were really lame, but as if she had hurt her foot or strained her ankle recently.

I speculated on who she might be. Kee had told me of no young girl living in the Tracy house now, since the niece had left there.

Ah, the niece. Could this be Sampson Tracy's niece, perhaps staying at her uncle's for a visit and coming home