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Elizabeth Kittredge Parker

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*Panama Canal*  
*Bride*

A STORY OF CONSTRUCTION DAYS



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EXPOSITION PRESS • NEW YORK

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## ***Panama Canal Bríde***



TO MY DEAR HUSBAND  
WHO IS INDIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE  
FOR THIS BOOK

FIRST EDITION

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Published by the Exposition Press Inc.  
386 Fourth Avenue, New York 16, N.Y.  
Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress catalog card number: 55-11388



# Foreword

THIS IS A STORY OF THE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES of one who went to the Canal Zone as a bride, and of her adjustment to living not only in the tropics but under the aegis of Uncle Sam, who furnished everything from living quarters and food, which was brought two thousands miles from the States, to mouse traps and "ant men" to ferret out the pests.

This is not a story, primarily, of the actual construction problems in connection with the building of that wonderful waterway. That is another story and should be told by an engineer. It would be a story bristling with statistics and technical information. This deals with construction problems only as they affected the daily living of men engaged on the job—and their wives.

I wish to express my appreciation for the help and inspiration given me by my daughter Betty. Thanks are also due to Nan for her material aid, to Dr. "Win" for her encouragement. I am grateful, too, for the interest shown by the Panama Canal Library staff and for their help in finding for me valuable material on the subject during my research in the library.

To Mr. Lombard, Executive Secretary of the Panama Canal, I am also deeply grateful for making such research possible and for his many other courtesies.

E.K.P.





## CHAPTER

# 1

I LEANED OVER THE RAILING OF THE SHIP AND watched the blue water churn beneath its prow. Overhead the sky was clear—not a cloud anywhere. The ship entered the harbor. I looked ahead. I had a feeling of anticipation, a dream was suddenly coming to life. I was coming to my new home—to Charlie.

A voice brought me out of my reverie, "Here we are!"

I turned. Mrs. Wood, my chaperone, was standing beside me. "You'd better go down and close your bags, Elizabeth," she said. "We'll be docking in a few minutes."

But I lingered. I stared at the new horizon before me—palm trees, red-tiled roofs—and the blue, blue Caribbean around me. This was my first glimpse of Panama—of the Canal Zone—and I would soon be a part of that wonderful organization that was to construct the historic waterway that for so many centuries had been the dream of man. Little prickles of excitement chased up and down my back. I thought of my bitter disappointment two years ago when I had received that depressing letter from Charlie, the letter which had made this day seem so far away—or even impossible. I had read it many times with tears in my eyes and a heavy heart.

DEAREST,

Forget what I said in my last letter. I can't bring you down to this pest hole. Yellow Fever, Malaria, even Bubonic Plague have broken out in Panama. Last week, one of the officials returned from vacation

bringing his bride. Now he's a widower! She died of Yellow Fever within three days. We've been fumigating wholesale. Sulphur fumes permeate everything. They even found mosquitoes in the Holy Water! The Sanitary Department had quite a run-in with the Bishop. I'm sorry, sweetheart, but I wouldn't have the heart to bring a yellow cur here.

Now it was February, 1907, and I was here! The fight against the fever-carrying mosquitoes, waged by Colonel Gorgas and his department, had been successful beyond the most sanguine hopes and now the Isthmus was a healthful spot.

Six days ago, I had boarded the ship in the bitter cold. Trains had been delayed by a crippling blizzard and I had almost missed the sailing. A cold wind blew down the harbor as we went on board. Docks, rails, and rigging looked as if made of ice. But there was no chill in my heart—only a warm thrill. And now the tropic warmth seeped through my body.

The boat pulled up to the dock. I strained my eyes for a glimpse of Charlie. The pier was crowded with people in summer clothes and black men grinning and jabbering, running here and there to catch the hawsers as they were thrown to the dock. Subconsciously, I took this all in, but I was anxiously searching for Charlie. I began to get panicky. Perhaps he hadn't received my cable! What would I do if he didn't meet me—so far from home with only my chaperones, whom I had met only six days ago! My eyes wandered again over the sea of smiling faces. Friendly greetings were shouted back and forth as returning vacationists were recognized.

Mr. Wood held his little son high in his arms as someone called, "Hey, Wood, where did you pick that up?"

I felt terribly alone. There was a big lump in my throat. I turned and ran down the narrow passageway to my stateroom, trembling and frightened. I determined I would stay right there until Charlie came for me. Perhaps, I thought, I shouldn't have come. Perhaps Charlie would have preferred my waiting until he could come to the States for me.

Ah, a knock at the door! My heart leaped only to fall again with a dull sickening thud as I opened the door to find Mrs. Wood standing there. "Aren't you ready, Elizabeth?" she asked. "We have to go down and check our trunks through the customs. I suppose Charlie must have been delayed but we must catch the boat train anyway."

Reluctantly, I followed Mrs. Wood down the gangway and located my luggage. As my last trunk was being stamped by the customs agent, I felt strong arms around me and I turned to see Charlie smiling at me. I looked into his blue eyes with their merry twinkle, I noted his thinning hair, his pock-marked face—vestige of his two years in China—and I knew my fears were groundless.

"I'm sorry to be late," he said, "but the train from Gorgona was delayed. Were you worried, sweetheart?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," I confessed. "I had about decided to stay on the boat and go back to New York. I thought you'd changed your mind about wanting me."

"Never!" he said with conviction. "Never think that, my dear."

He turned to greet Mr. and Mrs. Wood, dutifully admiring their little new son.

"What kind of a trip did you have?" he asked.

"Fine," we all agreed.

"And I was a good sailor," I added with pride.

"Good enough!" he exclaimed, picking up my overnight bag. "We'd better get on the train. It's due to start soon."

He led us into a long cement shedlike building opposite the dock. Here the special boat train was waiting. We hurried on board. There was no parlor car but the straw seats were not uncomfortable and the open windows through which a cool breeze was coming from the bay gave us a clear view. The train pulled out of the station. As it puffed slowly along a street, I got my first sight of Colón. I snuggled up against Charlie and breathed a satisfied sigh. All the waiting was over. We didn't talk—time for that later.

Charlie squeezed my hand as he pointed out strange scenes along the street. I was delighted with the colorful merchandise displayed in the store windows or hanging in open doorways—Chinese silks, East Indian embroideries. I caught fleeting glimpses of alien faces—slanting eyes, brown-skinned Aryan features, smiling black kinky-haired people.

Suddenly, the single-track railroad started to wind through lush jungle. I exclaimed over the tall palm trees, the hardwood giants topped with bright bloom, the thick lianas.

As I turned from the car window, I realized that a thin young man was standing by the seat. Charlie self-consciously removed his arm from around me and greeted the man with a friendly nod. Turning to me, he introduced Mr. Foley as a reporter of the Panama daily paper.

Mr. Foley bowed formally, remarking, "It's a pleasure to meet Charlie's fiancée." Then, with a mischievous smile at Charlie, he added, "This man of yours has kept his secret well. But I've always maintained that he could keep quiet in more languages than anyone I've ever known before."

"Yes," I laughed, "I've noticed that myself." And I thought of his welcome on the dock. But I understood Charlie. He hated any public display of emotion as much as I did. I knew that he, like myself, loved even more intensely because unexpressed. As these thoughts flitted through my mind, I realized that Mr. Foley was still talking.

"If I had to depend on him for news, I'd be out of a job."

"You seem to know everything that's going on without my help," grumbled Charlie.

Mr. Foley laughed. "Anyhow, may I be one of the first to welcome you to the Isthmus and to wish you both much happiness. I'm sure you'll find life here interesting, to say the least."

"Thanks, Mr. Foley," I said as he started down the aisle.

The train stopped at a little town with a quaint name—Bohio. I looked with wonder at my first sight of a palm-thatched cane hut. Then the train started on. We stopped at other little towns—Frijoles, San Pablo, Tabernilla, Gorgona. The train slowed down again.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Charlie. He stood up and shook hands with Mr. and Mrs. Wood. "Thanks for bringing Elizabeth down."

"Yes, Mrs. Wood and Mr. Wood, too," I added, "thanks for everything. Will we see you at the wedding tomorrow?"

"I wish we could come, Elizabeth. But it would mean a whole day away from home and I don't like to leave the baby so long. We'll be thinking of you, though, and see you another time."

We hurried off the train. I looked around. A tall man was smiling at me.

"This is Mr. Manning, Elizabeth."

I shook hands with him, feeling that I had met a friend. Charlie had told me in his letters how much he depended on Mr. Manning, supervisor of labor, quarters, and subsistence at Gorgona.

We located the luggage.

"Hey, you George." Mr. Manning turned to a husky, bare-footed, black man, the blackest I'd ever seen. "Get your gang and bring those trunks up to my house."

"Yassuh." The black man grinned. "They'll be there in a flash, suh."

"But I'll need only the small trunk tomorrow," I protested.

"You might as well have them all," answered Mr. Manning. "The boys have nothing else to do right now."

I watched with interest as each man hoisted a trunk onto his woolly head, with apparently no effort at all, and started up the hill. We trudged after them, up the narrow dirt road, on either side of which were square wooden houses, built high up on stilts.

"Do you mind walking, sweetheart?" Charlie asked, anxiously. "I'm sorry we have no other transportation. Fortunately, it's not far."

"Oh, I don't mind at all," I answered.

In a very short time, we stopped before one of the houses, the same drab color and the same shape as all the others. Only a number on the door distinguished it. A lanky woman with

faded hair and colorless cheeks stood in the doorway, a smile on her sweet face. I knew this must be Mrs. Manning and I wondered, subconsciously, how soon the tropics would fade my shining hair and take the color from my red cheeks.

"Come in," she greeted us, cordially. "Welcome to the Isthmus."

We entered. I noted the bare floor, the walls with the beams showing—a mere shell of a building. But with the friendliness of the Mannings, I soon forgot the strangeness and began to feel at home.

That night, I was lulled to sleep by the soft breeze singing in the palm trees, and the bright tropic moon shone through my window like a benediction.

## CHAPTER

# 2

NEXT MORNING, I AWOKE TO BRILLIANT SUNLIGHT.

This was my wedding day!

I looked at the stately palm trees outside the window, the feathery fronds swishing slightly in the morning breeze with gentle sighs of contentment, in harmony with my inward joy.

I turned to look at my lace wedding gown, hanging on the bare wooden wall. How many times during the past year I had taken it from the closet and gazed at it, wondering when and where I would wear it. When I bought it, I was expecting Charlie to come to the States any time. I thought of my disappointment as week after week brought the same news: "Sorry, dearest, I can't get away yet. The Canal has to be dug, you know, and I can't leave my job. Maybe soon."

Finally, I suggested that I go to the Isthmus by myself but Charlie didn't want it that way. At last, however, after he had received his last promotion to be superintendent of labor, quarters, and subsistence, with its increased responsibilities, he realized it might be a long time before he could get away, so he relented, especially as his friend Mr. Wood, who was going north for his wife and new baby, urged Charlie to let them chaperone me down.

As I looked at my wedding dress again, I sighed a happy sigh and I whispered, "At last, little dress, we're here and we're going to be married today."

I heard a train pull into the station down the hill; then Mrs. Manning's voice, "May I help you? It's nearly ten o'clock. The

train from Panama City is in and the guests will soon be here."

"Thanks, Mrs. Manning," I answered. "I'm almost ready." I looked into the mirror and saw my eager unsophisticated self reflected, my blue eyes wide with excitement, my thick hair piled high on my head like a two-layer chocolate cake. "Come in and tell me if I look all right."

Mrs. Manning came and stood looking at me. "You look like a young sixteen-year-old, dressed for her first party." She laughed. "I'll call you when all is ready."

My heart pitapatted. Then I heard her voice again and the door was opened.

As I went into the room where the guests were waiting, I saw only Charlie in his starched whites and the rotund missionary who was to marry us. I gave no thought to the lack of music, bridesmaids, and bridal bouquet.

In a daze I heard the timeworn words. I felt the gold band slipped on my finger and I realized that, after all the waiting, at last Charlie and I were man and wife.

Charlie kissed me and we turned to greet our guests. They were Charlie's friends, all of them, but in a few minutes I knew they were mine, too.

"Hell!" exclaimed Sam Klauber, laughing jovially. "She's not big enough to do a day's washing! Aren't you afraid the S.P.C.C. will get after you, Charlie?"

I blushed but, after all, I was used to remarks like this. My height—or lack of it—had long been the butt of such comments, but, fortunately, my sense of humor kept me from resenting them. Before I could remind Sam of that old adage about small packages, a big man with a long red beard pushed Sam aside, took my hand with Continental gallantry, and I was introduced to Taffy. Immediately, I recognized him as the Frenchman Charlie had written me about. He had come to the Isthmus with M. Bunau-Varilla, the French engineer, and had stayed on when the Americans took over. In contrast with Taffy and Sam was little Mac from South Carolina, immaculate and formal. They were all the best of pals, although from such different backgrounds.



As we sat down to our wedding breakfast, I was aware of more contrasts—the long table on the narrow screened porch, thick white china, plated silver, *pâté de fois gras*, champagne, roast turkey—all served awkwardly by a little Jamaican maid in a gingham dress.

After breakfast, we moved out to the front porch, which overlooked the town. The conversation drifted away from what was of most importance to me—my wedding and my impressions of my new life. After all, I was only one of the many brides who had come to the Isthmus. The overshadowing interest of each person present was the Canal. That, I soon realized, was the dominant subject. That was why each of us was here. Personal problems, as such, were not of importance.

I listened for a while. The name Cucaracha was mentioned with mounting excitement. Finally, I asked Taffy, who seemed to be speaking with authority, "What is Cucaracha?"

"Cucaracha, my dear lady, is one of the baffling problems we have to meet. It began away back in the days of the old French company and has been causing trouble ever so often ever since. It's a slide—a movement of dirt into Culebra Cut. As soon as the shovels start digging at this location or nearby, the hills start sliding down, filling up the ditch. It has been quiescent for a long time but when the Americans began to dig here in 1905, it began to give trouble again, and only this month it has started once more. In my opinion, this will be one of the most serious problems to be met."

"Couldn't they solve it by removing some of the weight at the top of the hill?" asked Mac.

"Perhaps so," answered Taffy, "but it is also possible that when a certain depth has been reached, the problem will solve itself."

And so the afternoon passed. Many baffling questions of construction were discussed, each man having his own ideas. Was the decision to build a lock-type canal wise or should it be a sea-level canal? Could a sufficient number of laborers be brought to the Isthmus? Were the West Indians capable of that class of work? Could sufficient food be brought from the

States in satisfactory condition? I learned that some of the problems had been solved, others were under consideration. I was amazed at the overwhelming mass of detail in connection with the job.

As the sun was nearing the western horizon, the guests from Panama left to catch the evening train. With a sense of having been initiated into the organization of "Canal diggers," I bade our friends good-by and turned to Charlie with a smile.

Thanking the Mannings for their hospitality, we started on our unique wedding journey. Down the dirt road the utility gang preceded us, each with a trunk or suitcase on his head. Across the railroad track we walked, hand in hand, the Big Dipper low in the northern sky behind us, the Southern Cross just above the horizon toward which we faced.

Soon, we stopped in front of a little bungalow. Charlie carried me over the threshold in time-approved fashion. With his arm around me, he led me through the little cottage—two rooms, two enclosed porches, a tiny bath, and a tiny kitchen.

In the soft glow of the kerosene lamps, we unpacked our wedding gifts, hung our clothes in the crude wardrobe—and the little house became our home.

## CHAPTER

# 3

WITH THE WELCOME AROMA OF COFFEE, I opened my eyes. Charlie was already dressed. I jumped up guiltily.

"Why didn't you wake me?" I asked. "Did you make the coffee, dear?"

"No, sweetheart," he said, kissing me. "There's a girl in the kitchen. I engaged her last week. Lizzie, Mrs. Manning's maid, has been teaching her. Why don't you stay in bed, dear? I wish I could stay with you but I have to get on the job."

"But I want to have breakfast with you, Charlie—our very first meal in our new home! I intend to pour your coffee every morning. That's the least a wife can do."

"Well, I can't think of a better way to start the day."

"Tell me about the maid, dear. I think it was most thoughtful of you to have one already for me. What's her name?"

"Her name is Sarah. She's a Jamaican. You can talk with her after breakfast and, if she doesn't suit you, we can find another."

Arm in arm, we entered the cheerful little dining room, screened on the far side. A youthful black girl was standing in the kitchen doorway, her kinky hair neatly braided in tiny pigtails all over her head. Her stiffly starched cotten dress was partly covered with a clean white apron, the corner of which she was nervously twisting in her strong black hands.

"Good morning, Sarah," said Charlie. "This is your new mistress."

"Good marning, marster. Good marning, mistress." She grinned, showing big white teeth.

Charlie held my chair as I sat down. The soft morning sunshine was filtered through the screen, and a gentle breeze, like the fluttering of my heart, came through the open door. Charlie smiled at me across the table and the memory of those cold lonesome days of waiting melted away like new-fallen snow on a sunny spring day.

"I wish I didn't have to leave you today, darling," he said. "But we're expecting a hundred and fifty men from Jamaica this morning. We have to see that they have a hot meal—probably the first since leaving the island—and we must also get them located in their barracks. Never mind, sweetheart," he added as he finished his breakfast and came around the table to kiss me. "Never mind. Someday we'll have a proper honeymoon, even if we have to wait until the Canal is completed."

I went to the door with him and watched him disappear down the hill. Then I returned to the dining room. I went to the far side of the room and looked out from the screened porch down the hill to the Chagres River, on the banks of which were rows upon rows of old rusty locomotives, which I realized must have been left there by the French. I watched some native women washing their clothes in the river, pounding them on the rocks while they gossiped and laughed, oblivious to the part the river had played in history and equally oblivious to the part it was to play in years to come as the Canal came nearer and nearer to completion.

A native *cayuco* passed, poled upstream, as four centuries ago, and, in imagination, instead of the Panamanian in his blue trousers, loose shirt, and straw hat, I saw swarthy Indians, sweating and toiling as they were urged on by plume-helmeted Spanish conquistadors, impatient to reach the gold they believed awaited them.

Then I saw Henry Morgan, that ruthless buccaneer, and his desperate army, eager for the conquest of fabulously rich old Panama with its treasure brought up the Pacific Coast from the Inca country, which had been so cruelly conquered by Pizarro.

I saw the forty-niners, hurrying across the fever-infested Isthmus, two hundred years later, to board ships in Panama on their way to California with its beckoning promise of yellow gold, still the greed for gold urging them on.

The picture changed. In my mind's eye, I saw the French engineers and their hordes of laborers, enthusiastic, at first, in their attempt to construct a waterway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, only to become disheartened and discouraged by the tremendous loss of life because they didn't know that it was the little mosquito that carried the yellow-fever and malaria germs.

My reverie was interrupted by the rumbling of a long dirt train as it went thundering through the town, and I contrasted the French attempt to build the Canal with our own and I had faith that our efforts would be successful.

I turned from the screened view and my dreams to face the present and unfamiliar problems of my own adjustment to tropical living. Sarah was washing dishes in the little kitchen. I squared my shoulders and went to interview her.

"So you're going to work for us, Sarah?"

"Yas, mistress." She spoke with a strange accent.

"Mr. Parker tells me that Lizzie has been showing you what has to be done."

"Yas, mistress," she giggled.

"Well, Sarah, I'm sure we'll get along fine. Now the first thing is lunch. What shall we have?"

"But, mistress, de hoven don' 'ot."

"The what doesn't what?" I asked, puzzled.

"De hoven, mum—de hoven in de stove. She don' 'ot."

"Oh, the oven!" I exclaimed, beginning to understand.

"Yas'm de hoven."

I looked at the ugly black iron stove. Then Sarah showed me two wooden boxes just outside the kitchen door.

"De utility mon keeps dem filled wid kindlin' han black coal, mum."

I looked at the big lumps of soft coal.

"But the lumps are so big, Sarah, how do you manage?"

"Yas, mistress, we mus' marsh de coal wid de 'ammer, han ef yer marshes too 'ard, yer makes power and yer has ter be kerful not to hout de fire wid it."

As I stood talking with Sarah, I could see through the screen door behind her a neatly dressed black boy coming toward the house. Sarah saw my gaze wander from her face and turned.

"Dat's Philip, mistress," she advised, looking at him with inviting eyes.

"Good morning, mistress," said Philip as he reached the door. "I've come to take your order." He spoke in the precise English of the better-educated Jamaican.

"My order?" I repeated stupidly. "My order for what?"

"Your order for cold-storage supplies," he explained, patiently. "Meat, fresh vegetables—all these come down from New York every week and are kept in refrigeration in the Cristobal plant. They are sent out to the towns along the line every morning on the ice train. I think we will have facilities here soon for caring for such items, but for the present, we must order from Cristobal."

"Oh, then . . . let's see . . . I believe for today I'll have lamb chops . . . four . . . and green peas . . ."

As I hesitated, Philip interrupted. "But, mistress, you can't order for today. You must order for tomorrow. Then, on Fridays, you must order for Sunday and Monday. Here is the list. Only these things are available. You will note some of the items are crossed out. That means they are already exhausted."

I glanced down the list with lines drawn through many of the items and made a careful selection.

"Next week," encouraged Philip, "you can get an order in before so many things are finished. The boat arrives on Tuesdays, you see, and already three days have passed so supplies are getting low."

As Philip turned to go, I noticed a picturesque woman approaching. She was tall and stately. Her stiffly starched skirt was long and full. The train was daintily tucked up at her

waist, showing an immaculate white petticoat with a wide ruffle of embroidery and high-button shoes with pointed toes. The basque was tight fitting and around her neck she wore a gay kerchief. Another was perched on her proud head, intricately folded—its ends standing up like two little birds about to fly from their nest. She carried a basket on her arm and, on her head, she nonchalantly balanced a set of rusty scales.

“Bonjour, Madame,” she greeted me.

“Bonjour,” I answered in amazement. Then, as my French was exhausted, I continued in English, which she seemed to understand:

“You have fish to sell? Are they fresh?”

“Oui, madame, d’aujourd’hui,” she replied.

“Where do they come from?” I asked.

“From de riber be’ind de ’ouse, mistress,” Sarah helpfully answered.

“How much?” I asked.

Gracefully, the woman reached up and easily removed the scales from her head and proceeded to weigh one of the fish. Sarah picked it up as I paid for it and the woman turned away.

“Au revoir,” she said.

“Au revoir,” I answered. Entering the house, I asked Sarah who the woman was.

“Dat’s Marie from Martinique, mistress.”

When it was time for Charlie to come home, I went out to the porch to watch for him. Soon he appeared, perspiring but smiling.

“Well, sweetheart, how goes it? You don’t look homesick. What have you been doing?”

“Oh, Charlie, I’ve been having such fun. First, Philip came to take my commissary order. Then, a French woman with fish. By the way, I didn’t have to pay Philip. How does it work? Do we have an account?”

“It’s a payroll deduction,” he said. “Soon, we will have coupon books. That will save bookkeeping.”

“And the Martinique woman—what’s she doing here?”

"Oh, she probably has a husband working on the Canal. You'll find women from most of the West Indies—Martinique, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad, and many others."

After lunch, Charlie had to hurry off. The train from Colón had been delayed and the laborers would be arriving early in the afternoon, a tired, hungry lot of men.

As I sat on the porch that lazy tropic afternoon, I thought of cold New England as I had left it less than two weeks ago and I reveled in the warmth and sunshine around me.

Half asleep, I heard a soft voice. "*Patrona, patrona. Naranjas! Guineos!*"

I looked up to see a pathetic-looking, undernourished brown man leading an equally skinny and sad-looking pony with huge hampers on either side of his bony back. In the baskets were juicy green oranges, bright yellow bananas, thick-skinned mangoes.

He had barely disappeared down the hill when another scrawny man and a little boy, both barefoot, wearing blue shirts over rumpled trousers, came to the door.

"*Buenos tardes, patrona,*" he greeted me politely.

He was carrying a rusty kerosene tin with a rope handle. Long green leaves drooped over the top. I got up to see better as the man pulled a stalk out of the container. Almost hidden by the leaves was a fragile stem topped with exquisite white blooms. They were shaped like oversized lilies of the valley. Inside the waxlike blossom was a perfectly formed pure white dove with a yellow bill.

"*El Espiritu Santo,*" he said.

I bought some and, when Charlie came home, I showed them to him.

"Oh, yes," he explained. "That's the orchid of the Holy Ghost. It grows only in Panama and is sometimes called the Panama orchid."

Then I told him about the man with the fruit.

"They are both native Panamanians who live in the jungle. When we took over the Canal concession, we made an agreement with the new Republic of Panama to give preference to



the natives in the construction work. It hasn't worked out, however, since they have never done any manual labor and are too lazy. They are undernourished and often *con fiebre*. As soon as they earn a few pesos they want to go back to the jungle. That is why we are importing labor. Jackson Smith, head of our department, has sent agents to the various West Indian islands to recruit men. We have even sent to Spain and Italy. We are now importing laborers at the rate of a thousand a month. We have quite a number of Gallegos from the north of Spain. I have a camp for them just below Gorgona. They are excellent workers but a bit difficult to handle. The West Indians were not so good at first. They were undernourished, living on plantain and bacalao."

"Bacalao?" I repeated, puzzled.

"A very odoriferous codfish, my dear," he explained, smiling. "Sometime I'll show you how we feed the different groups."

Suddenly a tall brown man with clear-cut Aryan features appeared at the screen door. A snowy white turban added to his height and alien aspect. Charlie got up to open the door.

"Why, Panga Singh!" he exclaimed. "Why aren't you on the job?"

"Oh, boss," he replied, "one of my countrymen is doing my work tonight. He good watchman. I take time off to come to your house. I bring a little gift to the missis." And he offered me the package he was carrying.

"But," objected Charlie, "I told you the other day that I can't accept presents from you. It's against regulations."

"This isn't a present for you, boss. This is for the missis. And don't you worry, boss. It didn't cost me nothing. I have a countryman in Colón who has a store. He give it to me."

I hesitated a moment, then took the proffered parcel and opened it. It was a lovely silk shawl. Panga Singh smiled as he noted the admiration in my eyes.

"Oh, how beautiful!" I exclaimed as I draped it over my shoulders. "But won't you let us pay for it?" I began, then paused as I saw his hurt pride. "Oh, thank you—thank you, Panga Singh. It's beautiful!"

"I'm glad it pleases you, missis. Mr. Parker is my God. He take care of me. I respect him."

Turning to Charlie, he pulled a thick roll of bills from his pocket. "Boss, will you take care of my money, please? I save it for a trip back to India. I'm afraid to leave it in my room. My countrymen steal."

"Why don't you put it in the Bank, Panga Singh? That's the best place for it."

"No, sir, I don't trust the bank. I trust you, boss."

"Well," said Charlie, "I'd prefer that you put it in the bank, but, if you wish, I can lock it in the safe in my office. I'll give you a receipt and when you want your money, bring this paper to me."

Panga Singh was content. So Charlie wrote a receipt and gave it to him.

"Thanks, boss."

Then, bowing low, he turned to go. We watched him, tall, proud, erect, disappear in the distance. I thought of my procession of visitors that day, people from the far ends of the earth, from the West Indies to the Far East. The realization came to me that these people were the precursors of what was to come when the Canal would be finally completed and ships from all over the world, bringing people from strange lands, would converge here and the Isthmus would become, indeed, the crossroads of the world.

## CHAPTER

# 4

A FEW DAYS LATER, WHILE I WAS READING ON the porch, a jolly-looking plumpish girl came up the steps. Her short curly hair hung damply around her face and beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead.

"Whew!" she exclaimed. "The sun sure is hot! You're Elizabeth Parker, aren't you? I'm Kay Jackson. I live across the track near Mrs. Manning's and I thought I'd come over to see how you're getting on. You look cool as a cucumber. How do you like the tropics so far?"

I blinked. Sure enough, I was Elizabeth Parker, but it was the first time I'd been called by that name.

"Come in," I answered. "So far I must say I love it. But I can't understand Jamaican. Can you? It's not only the *h's* in the wrong places, it's the inflection, also."

"No," said Kay. "I've been here six months and I still can't understand what my maid, Jane, wants when I go to the commissary. I've had two girls already," she continued. "They seem so stupid, but when I tried to do without one, I decided they weren't so dumb after all. We have to realize they've never seen the inside of a civilized home before. They've always cooked on charcoal braziers, washed their clothes in the river, and used gourds for dishes. My first maid, Mary, was doing fairly well. Then she came to me one day and said she couldn't work any more because she was 'making a baby.' I asked her if her husband had a job and she said, 'Usban! 'uh! Hi don' 'as no truck wid 'usban's.'"

We laughed and I realized I had a lot of adjustments to make.

"I had my first experience putting in a cold-storage order, the other day," I said. "It takes some planning, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it certainly does." Kay smiled. "I thought I could do it the easy way. I had a standing order—chops on Monday, steak on Tuesday, and so on. It worked fine at first. Then, one day, Neil forgot Monday was chop day and brought three hungry men home for lunch. I had a time trying to divide four small chops among five people! Now, I keep a supply of canned food in the house. Butter, too. I keep tinned butter on hand for emergencies. It's not too bad and you really can't keep much fresh food in our small iceboxes."

I excused myself and went to ask Sarah if she could make lemonade. She said she could make it with limes so I went back to the porch. Soon, she came shuffling out with a cool glass in either hand—no tray, no napkins. However, it was a very refreshing drink. The fragrant fresh limes were so much more tangy than the lemons we got in the States.

"Another thing," Kay continued. "If you're going to give a dinner party, consult your commissary list first. You may think you'd like a roast but there'll be no beef. Perhaps you'll plan on turkey but Philip will 'advise' you that the turkey is just 'finished.' It's a great game but don't let it get you down. Some of the wives are so disgusted they want to go back home."

"Oh, I think it's fun!" I exclaimed. "It's all a part of such an interesting experience. I believe those girls must lack a sense of humor."

"Well, if you can hang on to that, you'll get on all right."

Kay got up to go.

"Thanks so much for coming over. Do it often."

"Yes, I certainly will. And I hope you'll be neighborly, too. Good-by for now."

"Good-by," I answered.

As Kay disappeared down the hill, I picked up the glasses and took them out to Sarah. When I returned to the porch, I noticed a scholarly looking man approaching. He wore spectacles and had a rather stern expression. He was dressed in a

well-pressed blue serge suit and wore a fine Panama hat. He came up the steps.

"Mrs. Parker, I presume." His smile belied his sternness. For the second time I blinked as I heard my new name.

"Yes," I stammered. "Won't you come in?"

With my New England prudishness, I hesitated a moment but I felt he must be one of Charlie's friends and therefore perfectly proper. He entered and sat down.

"I'm Jackson Smith. Perhaps Charlie has mentioned me," he said with a mischievous smile.

"Oh," I gasped, "of course."

Jackson Smith! Head of Labor, Quarters, and Subsistence! Member of the Isthmian Canal Commission! I was indeed honored.

"I was sorry I couldn't get out to the wedding," he continued. "I happened to be in Gorgona today so I thought I'd call to pay my respects to the bride. How do you like your new home so far?"

"Oh, I'm thrilled with everything, Mr. Smith. It's the most exciting experience I've ever had. I love everything about it."

"Even the house?" he asked quizzically.

"Oh, yes, indeed. The house is darling. I think it's marvelous how comfortable the quarters are—away down here in the jungle."

"Well, I must say that's a refreshing viewpoint. We usually hear nothing but complaints."

We chatted a while and then he left. I was all agog. Jackson Smith, I thought, a man so maligned, a man about whom so many fantastic stories of his exploits in South America have been told, a man who is supposed to be so unapproachable! Why, I found him charming!

As I sat there thinking about my distinguished visitor, a big, brown bug went scuttling across the floor. I screamed.

Sarah laughed. "Dat's a cockroach, mum. You'll get used ter dem. Dey come in from houtside, mistress."

And so began the Battle of the Insects, which I soon realized was but a petty side skirmish. The real battle front was the Canal.

## CHAPTER

# 5

THE FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANT ROUND OF THE Battle of the Insects had been won, and won gloriously, by Colonel Gorgas and his department. Instead of a pest hole, Panama had become a very healthful place in which to live. Charlie had written me about the days in 1905, when employees were coming down with yellow fever and dying overnight, when malaria was at its height and ships returning to the States were overcrowded with frightened men. Colonel Gorgas had recognized the stegomyia and anopheles mosquitoes as deadly enemies and had conquered them. Even now, however, a constant watch was necessary. Ditches had been dug to drain the swamps, and the sanitary laborer, a tank of oil on his back with a long hose attached, was a common sight as he made his rounds to spray possible breeding places of the prolific pest. As a matter of fact, I had yet to see my first mosquito, so well was the constant patrol maintained.

Ants were something else. They were omnipresent—big black ants and little red ones. We learned to keep sugar in the icebox and the table legs in oil. We could never leave candy in a dish. It would be overrun before we could turn around. When we had friends in to tea, we didn't even apologize if the cake or cookies were covered with them. We nonchalantly tapped the dish, which made them scurry off, or put it on the back of the stove for a minute.

With New England zeal, I decided to grow some vegetables. I planted the seeds and was delighted to see the little plants growing so fast. But, alas, one morning, I found nothing but

stems. Every single green leaf had disappeared during the night. I noticed a tiny narrow path from my garden to a clump of nearby bushes. Scurrying back and forth were black ants; each one leaving the garden was covered with a piece of green leaf.

As I stood there watching the busy little army, I heard a high falsetto voice calling, "Madam, to buy? Madam, to buy?"

I turned to see a wrinkled old Chinese. He wore a loose shirt over his pajamalike trousers. A big straw hat with a wide curved brim, like an oversized lampshade, protected him from the sun. Across his shoulders was a long bamboo pole on either end of which hung a squarish basket filled with fresh vegetables, long green beans and tiny tomatoes.

"Madam, to buy?" he repeated. "Flesh tomaties. Sling beans. Vely nice."

"Look, Johnny!" I exclaimed, pointing to the bare stems. "Look at my garden! All ruined! How do you keep the ants from your plants?"

"Yes," he grunted, "umblrella ants. Vely bad. All time kill 'em. All time vely busy."

I turned my attention to his baskets and bought a few of the tiny tomatoes and the strange long beans. I decided the umbrella ants were too much of a problem for me and I gave up trying to raise any vegetables.

It was the dry season now and my next bout was with fleas. They took possession of the entire house, especially the bed. Sleep was impossible. But these we finally conquered. After the rainy season started, we had no further trouble.

But roaches! Like the rats of Pied Piper fame, they gave us no rest. We used poison and killed them nightly, keeping them at a minimum.

However, our victory over the insects was a doubtful one. We fought them first on one front, then on another, but we never did completely conquer them.

The Battle of the Canal was a different story. This battle had been in progress ever since the French began work in 1880. The Canal had been contemplated since the time of Charles V of Spain, but the idea had been given up when Philip II argued against the project, quoting as his reason the passage from the

Bible: "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

Long before it was decided whether the Canal should be a sea-level or a lock type, it was recognized that Culebra Cut would have to be dug in any case—Culebra, where the Cordilleras of North and South America were to be severed. The French, with their inadequate equipment and fever-infected laborers, had accomplished a surprising amount of excavation before they had to admit their defeat. Now we had taken up the fight.

The big problem for us was not the health of the men, which had caused the failure of the French. The current battle was the excavation and disposition of huge amounts of soil and rock from the Cut, much of which had to be dynamited before it could be dug up and loaded onto cars and hauled away. Heart-breaking delays due to slides, which often covered the shovels and part of the track, only spurred the men on. Sometimes they would work all night extricating their shovels. Twenty-eight shovels—giants in comparison with the inadequate types used by the French—were working in the Cut at this time, some of them two hundred feet above the others, on shelves on which tracks had been laid. It was a gigantic problem in railroading, but Mr. Stevens was primarily a railroad man, as were his assistants, old construction men familiar with tropical conditions. In fact, so efficient was this part of the organization that it was estimated that a carload of dirt or rock was removed every five seconds in each working day. I became aware of the speed of this work when I arrived in Gorgona. Dirt trains whizzed through the town at regular intervals.

Charlie took me to see the unloading of these trains. It was a thrilling sight. With a sort of plow connected by a cable to a special engine attached to the rear of the train after it arrived at the dump, the dirt was plowed quickly off the open side of the flat cars. Then a spreader came along and spread the dirt, after which came a track shifter which moved the track over to receive more dirt.

This excavation at Culebra Cut was the most spectacular part of the Battle of the Canal during the first year of my life in Panama.



## CHAPTER

# 6

ON THE HOME FRONT, THE PROBLEMS OF HOUSE-keeping had to be met. They were trying or amusing depending on your point of view—your sense of humor.

Along with the Battle of the Insects came the Battle of the Maids and Houseboys. Most of the maids were definitely untrained, in fact, unfamiliar with what seemed to us the most ordinary matters pertaining to housework. This led to frustrating or comic situations. They had as much difficulty in understanding us as we had in trying to fathom their strange accent and different points of view.

Sarah came to me a few days after the wedding. "Mistress," she began, "you wants hi should wash de marster's white suit what 'e was marry hin?"

"Can you do that, Sarah?" I asked dubiously. "I thought we would send it to the laundry in Cristobal."

"Hi does hit before, mistress."

I sensed that I had hurt her feelings so I hastily added, "That's fine, Sarah, but don't we need a wash boiler?"

"Ha wash biler mum?" Sarah appeared baffled.

"Don't you need to boil the clothes?"

"No, mistress, hi don' need no biler. Hi jes' washes de clothes hin a tub and spreads dem hon de grass. De sun makes dem white. Den, hi starches and hiron dem."

"All right, Sarah. You do it your way."

She brought the suit to me in triumph the next day. A steam laundry couldn't have done a better job. After that, I let Sarah

do things her own way. I was only concerned with results. Sometimes, however, results were not so successful. Her cooking left much to be desired. She insisted on using my best Irish linen napkins for scrub cloths. She cleaned my new silver with Sapolio. She melted the bottom off my silver coffee pot, a wedding gift, by putting it on the stove to dry.

At times, it was hard to keep my equanimity.

Sarah had a little five-year-old brother, Jonas, who used to arrive every evening just before dark, ostensibly to escort his sister home, but we suspected he came principally for his dinner. Charlie thought the little fellow might as well work for it, so he decided to train him as a butler. Every evening, as soon as my husband arrived home, Jonas would appear from the kitchen, carefully balancing a glass and a bottle of beer on a tray, his baby face sober and intent on the difficult feat.

About this time, electricity was brought into the house—a single bulb hung at the end of a cord from the ceiling. Jonas was intrigued with it and his chief joy was to turn the light on at the first sign of approaching nightfall.

Then came my first dinner party. Like most young brides, I wanted to make a good impression on the boss. I suggested to Charlie that we should invite Jackson Smith to dinner the next time he came to Gorgona. Charlie reluctantly agreed and I invited Kay and Neil. I felt I needed Kay's moral support.

I had ordered a leg of lamb with as many of the fixings as I could find on the commissary list. The morning of the eventful day, I watched eagerly for the cold storage delivery. Excitedly, I opened the package and took out my order. Opposite the item "leg of lamb" was the notation "out of stock." With trembling hands, I tore open the parcel to see what had been substituted. Lamb stew meat! For a dinner party! And very little at that!

However, I prided myself on being a good sport, so I got out my cookbook to see how I could make lamb stew into a company dish. I decided to make it into a casserole, using plenty of vegetables to disguise the meager amount of lamb. Just then, I saw Marie, the Martinique woman, stately and dignified as ever,

slowly approaching. I almost ran to meet her. Much to my joy, she had a beautiful Spanish mackerel in her basket. Wonderful, I thought. At least, we can have a fish course! Sarah could fry fish beautifully. I gave a sigh of relief.

Kay came over early to help me. I told her about the non-existent leg of lamb and how Marie had saved the day with the Spanish mackerel. Then we got to work. With a centerpiece of gay cosmos—the only thing I had been able to grow in spite of the umbrella ants—my really lovely linen, my sparkling silver, my wedding china, and white tallow candles from the neighboring Chinaman's store, the table was a festive sight.

We put bright orange papaya, to be served with cocktail sauce, on the table as our guests came up the hill. Then we dashed, breathless, to the porch to greet them. Charlie went out to the kitchen to mix the Martinis and gave them to Jonas to serve. Resplendent in a stiffly starched jacket and precariously balancing the five glasses on a tray, little Jonas appeared just as Charlie was turning on the electricity. Jonas glanced up at the glittering bulb with an appreciative grin. A glass slipped off the tray. The tray tilted. Another glass fell against its neighbor and, like ninepins, one after another, they all fell to the floor. Broken glass . . . spilled Martinis . . . olives chasing each other across the porch . . . a scared small boy!

I went to comfort the child while Sarah swept up the debris. Charlie made fresh drinks and served them in teacups. Then dinner was served. The papaya appetizers were not only colorful but delicious. I began to relax. I rang for Sarah to remove the first course and bring the fish. How good it looked, delicately browned with thin slices of fresh green limes around it. Charlie served. I took a bite. Charlie took a bite.

"Hell!" he cried. "Are you trying to poison us?"

"Don't eat it, Mr. Smith." I screamed, my face red with embarrassment. "Something's wrong!"

I rang for Sarah to remove the fish while I went out to the kitchen to investigate. The first thing that caught my eye was an empty bottle of floor oil on the back of the stove. On a nearby shelf was a full bottle of cooking oil. The bottles were identical

with the exception of the labels. Then I knew that Sarah couldn't read.

She served the next course. The casserole wasn't bad—what there was of it. Kay pretended she wasn't hungry. I didn't have to pretend!

I rang for Sarah again to remove the dishes as I had taught her. When she came to my place, she informed me in a stage whisper for us all to hear, "De cake what yer don' tole me ter 'ave for dissert his hall kevered wid hants!"

So we went out to the porch and sipped coffee, discussing the problems of the Canal while little red ants played hide-and-seek in the sugar bowl.

Next day, Sarah didn't show up. I determined to give her her salary and look for another girl. I was studying Spanish, so, when a pretty little Panamanian came to the door and asked me if I needed a maid, I greeted her warmly. After a few routine questions, I engaged her.

Mercedes was a gay, vivacious child, probably about sixteen. Every morning, she would appear at the back door with shining face and dripping hair, fresh from her bath in the river. In her clean dress, her black hair in two little buns low on each side of her neck, frequently with a red hibiscus tucked coquettishly behind one ear, she would greet me with a friendly smile that showed her white teeth.

"*Buenos días, patrona.*"

"*Buenos días, Mercedes.*" Then, with a Spanish dictionary in my hand, I would search for the words necessary to convey to her what I wanted done. But I never succeeded in finishing a sentence. She seemed to anticipate my wishes. A light would flash across her face.

"*A-ah, si, senora.*" And the work would be promptly done. She learned quickly and introduced me to fried plantain, *sancocho*, and other native dishes. She flittered about the house like a dainty butterfly.

One day, she came to me with a sad look on her usually smiling face.

"*Qué pasa?*" I asked. "What's the trouble?"

"*Mi abuela,*" she answered. "She sick—*con fiebre muy lejos*—beyond the hills."

"Oh, I'm sorry your grandmother's sick. But you will be back soon?"

"*Como no, patrona,*" the little deceiver answered.

But I never saw her again—nor did I find two of my cherished silver butter spreaders.

Next morning, I awoke with the realization that I had to tackle the ugly black stove and the dirty soft coal. I lay quietly for a few minutes, hoping Charlie would suggest building the fire. However, I was soon convinced that he did not consider that a husband's duty. I resented it but I wasn't going to make an issue of it, so, with a sigh, I went in for my shower. Hastily dressing, I went out "ter marsh hup de coal." I had never built a fire before but I had a vague idea that if I could get the kindling started, all would be well. Alas, when I dumped a shovelful of coal on, the black powder smothered the blaze, as Sarah had warned. After a few trials, however, I got the thing going and prepared breakfast.

When Charlie came into the dining room and saw me, he began to laugh. "Go look in the mirror," he said.

I went into the bathroom and gazed at the black smudges on my forehead and cheeks, where little trickles of perspiration had left little irregular streaks of white. I joined in Charlie's laughter but, at the moment, it didn't seem awfully funny.

After he left for the office, I reluctantly returned to the kitchen, scolding myself roundly. What did I think I was—a Dresden figurine to be put up on a shelf? No, I was a housewife! A housewife with a college degree and, while the degree wasn't in domestic science, I was supposed to have a trained mind and even if my master's degree was in astronomy, I should certainly be able to solve mundane problems—such as building a fire, for example.

I surveyed the fast-dying blaze, then I gingerly tossed on a bit of coal. It took patience but I finally got a solid bed of coals and I figured that, if I stoked it frequently, I could keep it going all day.

Cold-storage facilities had just been installed in the local commissary so, after I had tidied up the house a bit, I took another shower and, clad in fresh clothes, went gaily down the hill. I found the store crowded and the chatter of shrill voices sounded like a flock of parakeets settling themselves for the night in the big ceiba tree outside our cottage. I caught bits of conversation as I tried to make my way to the meat counter.

"I was the first one here . . ."

"I told her . . ."

"She said to me . . ."

All I could think of was—

*Tall girls to right of me,*

*Tall girls to left of me,*

*Gossiped and grumbled.*

I just didn't stand a chance. I waited patiently, hoping to gradually edge my way through the crowd and get the attention of the butcher.

Suddenly, a big fat woman, perspiring freely, pushed me aside and thundered, "'Tain't no use trying ter be a lady round here! Hey, you man behind that counter, give me a pound of round steak!" And she waved a mighty arm over my head as she reached for her purchase.

Eventually, I got the attention of the butcher. "Good morning," I said. "Please give me a good thick Porterhouse steak."

"Sorry, Miss, the steaks are all finished. I can give you sausage or stew meat. That's all that's left."

Ugh, I thought, sausage on a hot day? No, thanks. Then I said aloud, "I'll take a pound of stew meat, then."

I handed him my commissary book and he tore out the requisite number of coupons. Then, with my package under my arm, I trudged up the hill, hoping that my fire would be still going.

Tired and hungry, Charlie came home late for dinner. He looked at the stew with a quizzical expression on his face.

"How did you happen to buy stew?" he asked. "Commissary book finished?"

"Oh, Charlieboy, I'm sorry," I answered, feeling a strong desire to weep. "This is what happened."

I told him about my experience at the commissary, about the fat woman, and little me being pushed around.

Soon we were laughing and I continued, "Do you know, Charlie, I heard more gossip this morning. You'd be surprised! And one thing, young man, you'd better watch out. Mrs. Potter is very angry. You sent her next-door neighbor a rocking chair and you didn't send one to Mrs. Potter. She says she can't imagine why. Her husband gets the same salary as Mrs. Jones's. She says she's going to take it up with Jackson Smith."

Charlie smiled. "That doesn't worry me at all. We're always having complaints like that."

When we finished dinner, Charlie lit a cigarette and sauntered out on to the porch. I started to clear the table.

"Can't you leave those things?" he asked. "Come out here with me. I haven't seen you all day."

So I left the dirty dishes for the ants and roaches. After all, I thought, if Charlie wants my company, I have no intention of letting those little pests keep me away.

In the morning, fortunately, another little native girl came looking for a job. I eagerly took her on. But, after a few weeks, when Rafaela had earned several pesos, she came to me as Mercedes had done and told me she couldn't work any more because her mother was *con fiebre*.

So, I lost two more of my little butter spreaders!

Charlie then suggested that perhaps a boy would be more dependable and we engaged big, black Donald. He was a giant of a fellow with the neck of a prize fighter. Temperamental, he sang in the kitchen, dreaming of a stage career. One Sunday morning, he was banging pots and pans around, making a horrible noise. I rushed out and closed the door.

"Don't you dare wake the master. Don't you dare!" I exclaimed, stamping my foot. Then, with all the dignity my four feet eleven inches could muster, I marched out of the kitchen, shutting a contrite Donald up in the tiny room.

Later on, he sobbed an apology. He stayed with us for a long

time, finally leaving to go to the States, as he longed to do.

Then came Julius.

Julius was a slight, black boy with features whose ancestry was hard to determine. He was from British Guiana and had been trained as a houseboy by a British family. Our silver sparkled in the sunlight and our bathroom fixtures gleamed. Julius exhausted box after box of metal polish in his zeal. Our white linen tablecloths reflected the light from shimmering candles. Hot rolls peeped out from snowy napkins. Every evening brought some pleasant surprise, some special delicacy.

But Julius had one fault. He was too fond of *aguardiente*. Charlie's Sunday morning sleep was often disturbed by a message that Julius was in jail and would like to be bailed out. Charlie would patiently trudge downtown and, after a disgusting interview, pay the necessary fine and send him to his room for a bath and clean clothes. He was such a good cook, however, we couldn't bear to fire him. He followed us from one town to another as we were transferred and became almost a fixture.

So, gradually, our home life became more settled. I was beginning to understand the natives better and to have more sympathy for their points of view. They became human beings to me--no longer the strange unfathomable creatures they had at first seemed.



## CHAPTER

# 7

I WAS BEGINNING ALSO TO APPRECIATE THE MANY problems that had to be solved before the Canal could be successfully completed.

The sanitation problem had been recognized and had been solved. We had cleaned up the cities of Colón and Panama; sewers had been constructed; running water installed; the breeding places of mosquitoes ferreted out. Everybody on the Isthmus had been taught not to allow water to remain in old tin cans or other containers where mosquitoes could deposit their eggs. A case of malaria was becoming a rare occurrence.

The housing problem was being met. Four-family apartments, two-family quarters, and single cottages had been built and were assigned, rent free, to the American employees. Clean barracks had been supplied for the laborers and even apartments for those with families.

Supplies from the States, two thousand miles away, were arriving regularly and were being distributed to the commissaries in all the little towns. Cold-storage facilities were becoming available. In Cristobal, an ice plant, a bakery, and a laundry were doing a thriving trade. In fact, the Canal Zone was fast becoming a bit of the United States, transplanted.

The labor problem had been met. Laborers from the West Indies and from Spain and Italy were arriving regularly to join the concourse of nationalities.

The disposal of dirt from the Cut was well under control. Miles of track had been laid and the dirt trains whizzed in and

out of the Cut on schedule and were loaded rhythmically as the huge steam shovels, like dinosaurs, spewed the spoil ceaselessly out onto the waiting flat cars. Then the trains went rumbly on their way to fill the valleys and swamps or on to Gatun to make their contribution to the massive dam. We were meeting Washington's frantic demand: "Make the dirt fly."

I was proud to be a part of this efficient organization, as was every man and woman on the job, even the lowliest. I became aware of this the first time Charlie took me with him on a tour of inspection.

We visited a West Indian kitchen—a long shedlike building on one open side of which was a long counter. The West Indians were lined up, each with a plate, a cup, and a spoon. The line moved in orderly fashion, the men laughing and joking. Each man gave the boy at the end of the counter a brightly colored ticket before he passed down the counter to have his plate and cup filled.

"What are those?" I asked.

"De tickets, mistress. Heverybody mus' present one before 'e can get 'e dinner. Hif a mon don' work, 'e can't heat 'ere onless de doctor mon give 'e a special dispensation."

"Bnt why are they of different colors?"

"Yas, mistress, hevery department 'as hits own color. De mechanical division 'as red; de medical, yellow; han' hour department . . ." He drew himself up, speaking with an air of pride, "Hour department 'as green. Yas, mistress, hit's a very fine arrangement."

This spirit of pride in the job was brought to my attention a few days later when I was sitting on my porch while a gang of laborers were working outside. The straw boss—a big black Bajan—was shouting to the men with great gusto.

One of the laborers protested, "Don' yer cuss me, mon!"

"Chut, mon," the Bajan replied. "Mr. Manning don' dere ter cuss yer like yer hought ter be cussed. Hi'se only doin de bes' I kin."

These laborers from the West Indies, especially those who came in the early construction days, working cheerfully in the

drenching rain of the wet season or under the sweltering tropic sun, gave faithful service, never failing to be respectful, even under dire stress—like poor George, who fell into the river where they were dredging and was sucked through the huge pipe.

When he emerged at the other end, dripping and covered with mud, the astonished foreman exclaimed, "Where in hell did you come from?"

"From Jamaica, suh," George politely replied.

Whether we came from Jamaica or from a cultured Boston Back Bay home, there was a friendly bond between us all.

About this time, *The Canal Record* was started, edited by Joseph Bucklin Bishop, secretary to the Canal Commission, who had recently come to the Isthmus. The first edition of this eagerly read publication appeared on September 4, 1907, and stated: "The primary purpose of *The Canal Record* is the publication of accurate information based on official records concerning all branches of the work of Canal construction. . . . In addition there will be published such information in regard to the social life of the Zone, its amusements, sports, and other activities, as is thought to be of general interest."

The *Record* was issued weekly, free to all American employees, and proved very popular. We eagerly read about how much dirt had been removed from the Cut that week, which shovel made the best record; how the slides were behaving; how schools were being started in all the line towns, both for the white and for the colored children; how Miss Boswell had arrived from the States to organize women's clubs, affiliated with that organization in the States. We read, with approval, of their activities and especially endorsed the resolution which was adopted: "Be it resolved that every club woman in the Canal Zone constitute herself a committee of one to foster favorable criticism of the conditions of the Zone and of the Isthmus of Panama."

And so we worked together—men and women, black and white—all intent on the successful completion of the Canal.

## CHAPTER

# 8

CHARLIE WAS WORKING LONG HOURS. EVERY BOAT from the States, arriving weekly, brought new employees. Quarters had to be ready and supplies available. The white bachelors were crowded into screened barracklike buildings but the rooms were large and airy. Sometimes would be found in one room a city boy from New York, a western cowboy who had never before been east of the Mississippi, a Scotsman; and perhaps an Irishman. Efforts were made, of course, to house men of congenial backgrounds together but many strong friendships were developed among strange bedfellows.

The married men were probably more comfortable in their rent-free houses. Most of these were of the four-family or two-family type. A few were old French cottages or the new bungalow style. They all, however, were painted the same drab gray on the outside; the same greenish blue inside; and they all had the same allowance of furniture—except, of course, the official houses. It was interesting to observe how each house took on its own individuality with gay curtains, different pictures on the walls, bright spreads on the beds, the same furniture arranged differently.

The bachelors ate at the so-called hotels, where, under the aegis of Labor, Quarters, and Subsistence, nutritious meals were served at thirty cents each. But home cooking was naturally preferable and many a bachelor, after a dinner at a married friend's home, would think longingly of Lucy or Jane, whom he had left behind in the States. The list for assignment to mar-

ried quarters grew longer and longer and it was eagerly checked as names crept slowly to the top.

Tom Jones came down on the boat with me. I met him on the street one day soon after I was married.

"Hello, Tom," I said. "How are you getting along?"

"Oh, all right, I guess but I'm lonesome. I have applied for married quarters and I'm pretty near the top of the list. I think that by next week I can cable Louise to come down."

"How exciting!" I exclaimed, remembering how long I had waited for a similar cable from Charlie.

Next week, I met him again.

"Hello, Tom," I said. "Seems to me you don't look as happy as a prospective bridegroom should. What's happened?"

"Everything," he replied, gloomily. "Here I've been watching that list for married quarters for months while my name slowly reached the top. Day before yesterday, I received my assignment and cabled Louise. Today I got her reply, 'Sorry. Got tired waiting. Married Jack yesterday!'"

"Oh," I exclaimed sympathetically, "what a shame! But, after all, Tom, if she felt that way about it, perhaps you're better off. However, I don't blame you for feeling low."

"But I'll tell you one thing." He smiled mischievously. "I'm not going to give up my assignment! I'm on my way to Marian Kelly's now. I'm going to propose to her. She may be a little young but, if the old man will agree, I'll marry her and keep my quarters."

I wished him good luck.

Next week they were married.

When the West Indians began working on the Canal, each man was supplying his own food—his customary yams and bacalao. Jackson Smith and his advisers decided that the efficiency of these laborers would be increased if they had more nourishing meals, so arrangements were made. Kitchens like the one I visited were set up at convenient locations and hot stews in addition to their beloved yams were served. The experiment was an unqualified success, even though, at times, they encountered grumblers, such as the old Bajan whom we noticed

muttering away to himself as he walked away from the counter. In one hand was a plate piled high, in the other a cup of steaming coffee.

"What's wrong?" Charlie asked.

"No salt, suh, no salt in de coffee."

"But there's salt," said Charlie, pointing to a bowl of salt on the counter.

"Huh, suh," the Bajan pouted, "I'se not de cook."

Separate messes were also run for the Italian and Spanish men. These were in long barracklike sheds, each nationality having its own camp. The day we visited the Italian mess, Charlie introduced me to Count Lomonaço, the Italian consul from Colón, who made periodic visits to see that the Italian subjects were properly treated.

"Won't you come back to Gorgona with us and have lunch?" I asked.

"Thanks, dear lady," he replied, "but I enjoy eating here. The food is so good and, besides, it gives me an opportunity to talk with the men and understand their problems better."

The Spaniards were given stews of fresh beef with *garbanzos*. In the corner of both the Italian and Spanish messes, where the men entered, was a keg of red wine, fortified with liquid quinine. The men had refused the daily requirement of quinine, necessary at that time to ward off malaria, until it had been offered in this manner. Since wine was usually a part of their meal, they drank this concoction with appreciation, in spite of the bitterness. Undoubtedly it prevented many an attack of malaria.

The well-being of the Spaniards, who were a bit difficult at times, was in the hands of a priest. Father Collins was fat and jolly. He would go striding along, fussing at his long, black gown.

"Yes," he said. "I've asked for a special dispensation. In the heat and the rough country, a gown is a nuisance. But I get around, anyhow." He laughed a jolly laugh and tossed an orange into the air, hitting it as it came down.

The laborers had great respect for the priest and Charlie

always sent for him at the first sign of trouble. He often came to the house for lunch or dinner and was an entertaining guest. He loved to pick up Charlie's mandolin and he played rollicking native tunes or beautiful classical music with the same gusto. He was a versatile man—an artist, an architect, and an engineer, as well as a priest. His ambition was to build a church on the banks of the Canal, high up on a hill at Culebra. He had designed it, drawn the plans, and started construction, but, alas, the slides were beginning to come dangerously near.

The commission was now building clubhouses in all the little towns along the line. These proved a blessing, especially for the bachelors. Here in comfortable chairs they could read home newspapers, even if five or more days old. Here were magazines and popular books in a growing library. The clubhouses also had facilities for games—cards, checkers, and bowling.

Social life, however, was not emphasized. We women went to the commissary in the morning and exchanged choice bits of local gossip. In the afternoon we took long naps and had tea with a neighbor. In the evening we entertained informally or played cards. The strenuous work of the early construction days was not conducive to frivolity and late hours.

President Roosevelt, on his historic inspection trip to the Isthmus a few months before my arrival, had been impressed with the enthusiasm and interest of the men in their jobs and he had promised some badge or medal in recognition for faithful service. Now, it seemed, he had not forgotten. Tons of brass, tin, and copper from the old French machinery were being collected and sent to the mint in Philadelphia. Bronze medals were to be made, with the head of the President on one side, Culebra Cut on the other. These were distributed to men with two years of construction service; a bar was to be added for each additional two-year period.

## CHAPTER

# 9

MEANWHILE, THE JUNGLE BECKONED. ONE DAY, Kay and I turned into a path worn hard by the bare feet of natives who came and went, bringing their bananas and oranges to market and taking back with them bright pieces of calico for clothes or, perhaps, a bottle or two of *aguardiente* to ward off *febre*.

We walked along in silence for a bit, marveling at the wealth of palms, the tall hardwood trees, the thick lianas. We noted beautiful iridescent blue butterflies, their wings sparkling like jewels when they caught a glint of sunlight through the dense foliage. Every now and then, we would see exotic orchids high above the lianas or a flock of parakeets scolding each other. Lizards raced across the path and, suddenly, a bright green creature, like a miniature dragon, scuttled away in front of us.

"An iguana," Kay informed me. "They are harmless. That was a young one. The old fellows are dark green or an ugly brown. Mary tells me they are good to eat, that they taste like chicken. She says the eggs are a great delicacy."

By this time, we had come to the top of a low hill. Below us, half hidden behind the trees, was a cane hut, thatched with palm fronds. It was set in a clearing shaded by banana plants and fragrant lime trees. A hedge of red hibiscus edged the path leading to it. A vine with a profusion of small pink blossoms nearly covered one side of it.

As we approached nearer, we saw a red *tinaja*—a large olla—



hanging from the eaves, covered with drops of cool water. A *pilón*—a length of tree trunk hollowed out like an outsized mortar—and a crude pestle stood at one corner of the hut. We looked into it, curiously, and saw rice, half husked. The place seemed deserted so we peeked inside the open door. It was cool and dark. There was only one window, high up on one side. There was no furniture except a couple of wooden benches. A woven hammock was slung from one corner of the room to the other. The hard dirt floor was swept clean.

We heard the crackling of twigs and the sound of bare feet approaching. We started guiltily as an old woman came up the path, a wooden tray filled with dripping clothes on her head. Evidently, she had been washing them in a nearby stream.

"*Buenos días*," I greeted her in my best Spanish.

"*Buenos días, patrona*." She grinned in reply, showing toothless gums.

"*Como se llama?*" I inquired.

"*Bernicia del Rio*," she replied. "*Americanas?*"

"*Sí, Senora*," I answered.

I looked around the peaceful scene.

"*Bonita!*" I exclaimed, making a sweeping gesture to indicate the surrounding beauty.

"*Muchas gracias*." She grinned again and tossed her dripping head, evidently thinking I was referring to her personally. Then removing the tray and placing it on the ground, she walked over to one of the lime trees and, after picking some of the fruit, she returned and thrust them into our hands. Then she selected some bananas from a bunch hanging under the thatched roof and gave them to us. She whistled at a little yellow bird in a cage cleverly constructed of thin cane.

"*Bim, bim*," she said, breaking off a piece of ripe banana and offering it to the little bird. Then she picked some flowers, calling each by its native name as she gave them to us—*cadena de amor, jasmin*.

We thanked her as well as we could in our broken Spanish and started for home. At the top of the hill from which we had

our first view of the little *finca*, we turned to wave to Bernicia, who was standing under the lime trees watching us.

We retraced our steps, following the jungle path back to town and the rumbling dirt trains.

## CHAPTER

# 10

CHARLIE CAME HOME ONE FORENOON RATHER EARLY.

"What's going on?" I asked as he kissed me.

"Payday, sweetheart." He grinned, jingling some coins in his pocket.

"Fine," I answered.

He pulled out a handful of twenty-dollar gold pieces and offered them to me. I looked at them in surprise. The only gold coins I had ever seen had been an occasional five- or ten-dollar piece as a birthday present or to celebrate some special event.

"What's the occasion?" I asked, my mouth open in astonishment.

"That's my salary," he replied. "We always get it in gold. You see, those of us who signed our contracts in the States are paid in gold—literally. Those hired outside of the country are on a silver basis, that is, they are paid in Panamanian silver—value two to one. The pay car is on a sidetrack down by the station now. I want you to see it. At one end is the sign Gold Employees; at the other, Silver Employees. This designation—gold and silver—which had its origin, I think, in the method of payment, has come into common use. We speak of gold quarters for the Americans and silver quarters for the colored and European laborers. On the trains, instead of first and second class, we have gold and silver. The fare in the silver cars is half that in the gold. But come on, let's go to Panama. I want to get this gold in the bank."

So we hustled and caught the noon train for the city. On

arrival, we took a *coche* for downtown—a sort of victoria drawn by a tiny pony.

“Oh,” I exclaimed as I sat down, “I can’t see the horse!”

“Never mind,” said Charlie. “These little ponies, though so small, are very sturdy and can pull a coach filled with passengers. To be sure, they sometimes fall down going up hills but they never seem to hurt themselves. They get up again and trot along as fast as ever.

“Banco Nacional,” said Charlie to the black man sitting proudly on the driver’s perch, high up in front. The *cochero* promptly cracked his whip and we went clattering down crowded Avenida Central. I held my breath when *coches* going in the opposite direction almost ran into us.

“Don’t get excited,” cautioned Charlie. “The good Lord or something takes care of these drivers. Why they don’t have a dozen accidents a day, I don’t know. Sometimes, the wheels do get locked together but it causes only a slight delay. The *cocheros* swear at each other and drive blithely on as if nothing had happened.”

After Charlie had made his deposit at the bank, we walked across the plaza to Hotel Central, where we had lunch. Then we started to explore the city. A walk of a block and a half brought us to the bay. Turniug left, we were in front of the presidential palace. Police armed with formidable-looking guns marched back and forth before the entrance. Charlie stopped.

“Look inside,” he said. “Notice the patio with the palms around the fountain in the center.”

“Oh,” I exclaimed, “what beautiful birds!”

“Those are egrets,” said Charlie. “They are quite tame.”

We continued our walk, strolling down some steps beside the steep street and came to a *playa* where boats were drawn up on the sand.

“That’s the fishing fleet,” said Charlie. “The natives go out in the bay early in the morning and bring the fish to market—that building beyond the *playa*.”

“What kind of fish do they catch?”

"Spanish mackerel, corbina, red snapper—those are the best, I believe. You know Panama is supposed to mean 'many fish.' They also get big shrimps in season and native lobsters, which are not really lobsters but crayfish. They are delicious."

"Can we go into the market?"

"It's closed now. Everybody's taking a siesta. The fishermen are lying in the shade of their boats; the traders from the market have gone home. They'll be back before dawn tomorrow. Let's cross the street," Charlie continued.

He took me across and into a large two-story house. It was like all the other houses in the neighborhood, with an overhanging balcony, a store on the ground floor, and living quarters above.

"Mr. Pinel, who lives here, has the pearl-fishing concession at Pearl Islands down the coast. He also has quite a collection of old Panamanian jewelry."

"Is the boss in?" Charlie asked a young boy who stood behind the counter.

The boy disappeared and Mr. Pinel came from the back room.

"Mr. Pinel," said Charlie, "I want you to meet my wife. I think she would be interested in seeing some of your pearls."

Mr. Pinel acknowledged the introduction, then turned to open a safe against the wall.

"Here are some of the unset pearls," he said, taking a package of crumpled tissue paper and laying it on the counter. "Isn't this a beauty?" He picked up a large pear-shaped stone. "It came in just yesterday. It would make a handsome scarf pin."

While we were admiring the pearls, Mr. Pinel went to the safe and brought out another parcel.

"Here are some gold trinkets I bought from people who were hard up. Most of them are heirlooms from Colonial times." He held up a crude gold chain made of thin discs with two fishlike ornaments at the center. "That's the *chata*," he explained, "hammered out of native gold by local craftsmen. It is worn at carnival time with the native dress—the *pollera*."

A string of tiny pearls attracted my attention. "Look, Charlie, look at this string of pearls!" I held them up. Charlie took them and clasped them around my neck. "Do you like them?" he asked.

"I think they are lovely," I said, starting to unclasp them.

"Don't take them off, if you like them. I haven't been able to get you a wedding present before. Wear these in remembrance of February thirteenth."

"Oh, thank you, Charlie. I love them, especially because they are real Panamanian pearls."

Charlie paid for them and we turned to go.

Charlie took my arm. "Are you tired, dear?" he asked.

"Oh, no, of course not. I'm very happy with my darling necklace. I haven't even thought of being tired."

We climbed the steps again and kept on until we came to Avenida Central. There was a church on the corner.

"This is the Church of La Merced," Charlie told me. "They say that the painting of the Virgin in this chapel has healing powers. It was originally in a church of the same name in old Panama. In bringing it to the new city, after the sack of the old by Morgan, the men carrying it became so tired when they had reached this spot that they stopped to rest, so the church was built right here."

"Are there many other legends in connection with the old city?"

"Oh, yes. There's the golden altar about a block away. Come on, it's worth seeing."

We soon came to the Church of San José. Standing in the doorway, we looked inside. A gorgeous altar, reaching almost to the ceiling, dominated the opposite wall. It was elaborately carved and covered entirely with gold.

"There are various stories about this," Charlie explained. "Probably the best known is that when Morgan and his army were approaching the old city, the priests were in a quandary about how to save this valuable altar. They had hidden most of the other precious articles but this was too big to hide. So finally, they whitewashed it, and Morgan, not realizing its value,

passed it by. After the sacking of the city, the altar disappeared. Later on it was found on the Island of Taboga and brought to the new city."

We continued down the avenue. Soon Charlie paused before the ruins of another church.

"Notice that flat arch," he said. "There's an interesting story about this, too. When they were building it, it kept tumbling down, for they were unfamiliar with the principle of construction of the arch. At last, the priest in charge knelt under the arch, which had been built again, and prayed, 'Dear Lord, if this arch is unacceptable to Thee, let it fall on Thy unworthy servant.' But it didn't fall and has been standing ever since. That's one reason it was decided to build the Canal in Panama. Evidently, this is outside the earthquake zone."

We resumed our walk and came to the bay at the tip of the peninsula on which the city lies. Along the shore were more ruins.

"That's the old prison—Chiriqui. There are tales of dungeons and horrible torture. Lean over the wall, dear, and look down near the water level. The tide is low now and you can see the rings in the lower part of the sea wall. Here, the unruly prisoners were tied and left to be slowly engulfed by the rising tide."

I looked down and shivered.

"Well," said Charlie as he motioned for a passing *coche* to stop, "it's almost train time. We'd better be on our way."

Just as he was about to help me into the carriage, we heard a woman's voice behind us. "*Suerte?*" she called.

"*Como no?*" Charlie turned toward an old woman with a satchel on her arm and a bunch of lottery tickets in her hand. She was dressed in the full skirt and loose blouse of the native countrywomen, with a flat-brimmed straw hat on her head. She extended the tickets toward us and Charlie rifled through them.

"I think thirteen should be our lucky number, dear, don't you?"

"It certainly should be," I agreed.

Handing the tickets back to the old woman, Charlie asked

for number thirteen. She searched for a few minutes, then pulled from the clip that held them securely several sheets beginning or ending with our number. We made a selection, paid her, and got into the waiting *coche*.

"*Que Dios te bendiga,*" she called after us.

I leaned back beside Charlie as I put my hand up to my necklace. Somehow I felt that God had already blessed me.



## CHAPTER

# 11

"HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO TO GATUN WITH me today?" Charlie asked me a few months later.

"You mean where they are going to build the dam?"

"Yes. I have to go on business and you can come along if you like. I'll take you to the division engineer's office. I'm sure Mr. Gerig will be glad to explain it all to you."

We left on the early morning train and arrived in Gatun at about the hottest part of the day. I trudged up the hill in the warm sun, dragging my long skirt in the dust. My long-sleeved shirtwaist was wringing wet before I had gone far. My wide-brimmed hat, more suitable for a garden party, was top heavy with its wreath of gay flowers but that didn't bother me.

Mr. Gerig greeted us cordially.

"Are you too busy to explain the plans for the work here to us?" asked Charlie, after he introduced us.

Mr. Gerig, small in stature but great in ability, smiled as he said, "You know, Charlie, I can talk about little else. I find this job here at Gatun one of the most interesting I've ever been associated with. We're ready to go to work in earnest now that the type of canal has been decided on."

"You agree that the decision to make it a lock type is wise?"

"Yes, by all means. A sea-level canal would be much more costly and take much longer. The Board of Engineers appointed by the president consisted of eminent men from many different countries. They turned in a majority report, as you probably know, in favor of a sea-level canal, but a minority re-

port was also submitted, recommending the lock type. This met with Mr. Stevens' approval, although originally he favored the sea level. However, after he had been on the Isthmus a while and had studied conditions firsthand, he realized a lock type would be much more practical. The twenty-foot difference in tides between the Pacific and the Atlantic would have been a big problem—Culebra Cut with its troublesome slides would have required a greater depth and more width. Mr. Stevens convinced Secretary Taft, and the result was that the president has ordered us to proceed with the lock type.”

“Then the plans are definite, now?” asked Charlie.

“Yes. A dam here at Gatun will keep back the waters of the Chagres River and form a huge lake about eighty-five feet above sea level, which will mean the Cut will not have to be so deep. The Canal channel from the Atlantic to Gatun will be sea level, as will the Pacific entrance as far as Miraflores. Then ships will be lifted by locks to the height of the lake.”

“When will you start actual construction here?”

“We hope by the first of January. There are a lot of details—some rivers and streams have to be diverted from the Canal channel. The Chagres will flow through a spillway. Come into my office and I'll show you the plans.”

He took us into his office and spread the drawings on a drafting table and explained them to us. Then we went outside and looked off over the valley while Mr. Gerig made wide gestures as he described the setup.

“You see that hill over there?” He pointed to a hill in the distance at our right.

We nodded.

“Well, we are filling in the valley with dirt from Culebra Cut. That will be the dam. The spillway will be over there. Back here,” he turned and pointed in the direction of Colón, “will be three sets of locks to raise the ships from sea level to the height of the lake—eighty-five feet.”

Mr. Gerig turned again and looked over the valley with a faraway look in his eyes.

“I suppose you can see it all in your mind's eye,” I said.

“Oh, yes, of course.”

I looked but all I could see was a river placidly flowing through the valley, a little town on the opposite side, a small white church, a few native shacks, and a half a dozen or so crude *cayucos* drawn up on the banks of the river.

We thanked Mr. Gerig for our interesting morning and went slowly down the hill to get the train for home. Our thoughts were full of the gigantic transformation of the present topography of the country and awesome admiration for the confidence and audacity with which our engineers were undertaking the formidable task of the construction of the Canal.

“You know, Charlie,” I said, “I wonder what the old conquistadors and pirates of the Spanish Main would think of the Isthmus now.”

“I guess they would scarcely recognize it—except the old forts and ruins at San Lorenzo and Porto Bello. They, too, knew how to build for the ages. It is amazing how much is left of those old places. It is said that the reason the tower at old Panama has stood all this time is that the stones were cemented together with a mixture of sand and eggs.”

“Eggs?” I exclaimed.

“Yes. You see, the priests demanded tithes of the people, who were so poor that all they could offer were eggs. The priests accumulated so many they didn’t know what to do with them so they mixed them in with the cement for the construction of their churches.”

“Oh, I’d love to see some of those old ruins!”

“Perhaps we can arrange it soon,” Charlie said with a reassuring pat.

## CHAPTER

# 12

IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE THE OPPORTUNITY came. Kay, Neil, Charlie, and I started out in great spirits. We went to Gatun again but this time we went directly to the banks of the river where a *cayuco* was waiting for us. I had never been in a *cayuco* before and was intrigued with its size and crudeness. It reminded me, by contrast, of the birch-bark Indian canoes of my native New England. This boat, however, had originally been a sturdy hardwood tree. It had been cut down, rudely shaped, and the inside burned out and scraped. We sat on the bottom, which was clean enough and not uncomfortable. It was manned by two boys with long poles, one at each end.

Silently floating down stream with the current, our polemen had only to steer the boat around the bending river, thick jungle on either side. We were watching for alligators and trying with unaccustomed eyes to distinguish the bright green iguanas from the surrounding foliage as, rigidly poised on the thick branches of tall trees, they followed us with unblinking eyes.

Suddenly, I cried out in glee, when I saw two little white-faced monkeys swinging like aerial acrobats from the topmost branches of the tallest trees—grace, freedom, and perfect co-ordination expressed in every movement.

At the next bend of the river, the boy at the bow of the boat pointed with his pole to the shore where the jungle did not quite meet the river's edge. Two dark shapes like two rough

logs lay dormant until our approach, then they quickly slid into the water and disappeared while a dozen or so small green parakeets scolded us noisily for our intrusion.

Just before we reached the Caribbean, our boatmen poled the *cayuco* toward the shore and we landed at the little village of Chagres. Walking through the town, we gazed curiously at the thatched huts. The men, women, and little naked children were as curious about us and crowded around whenever we stopped. We said *adiós* to them and began to climb the steep cliff that led to the fort, up the worn steps and past piles of heavy cannon balls to the picturesque watchtowers overlooking the Spanish Main.

As we stood there looking out to sea, we thought of the old Spanish sentinels who must have kept constant vigil from these towers. What must have been their excitement when they caught sight of their formidable enemy—Morgan, the buccaneer—sailing toward the fort. Within their strong castle, however, so high above the sea and surrounded by a moat, they must have felt almost secure. Yet old Morgan succeeded in taking the fort he must have if he were to press on to old Panama. Then up the river his army was poled to Cruces, where they began the overland trek through the jungle, fighting mosquitoes, snakes, and fever; but the greed for gold spurred them on until they reached the fabulously rich city and sacked it.

“What is left of old Panama?” I asked.

“It’s badly overgrown with jungle now, so about the only thing of interest to be seen is the cathedral tower. It’s six miles from the present city of Panama. You can reach it by *coche* or by horseback on the little native ponies. You can also go there by boat along the coast. The Panamanian government plans to clear the ruins some day. Perhaps we can go later on.”

We continued exploring the old fort, walking from room to room. We found it all very intriguing, especially the big piles of rusty cannon balls, so heavy I couldn’t even lift one.

Back we went down the slippery stone steps, back through the lonesome little town of thatched huts along a muddy lane, back to our *cayuco* waiting for us on the river bank. Our boys

had to work now, poling the heavy boat up the swift current. Sometimes we seemed to hardly move at all.

At last, however, we reached Gatun, where we stiffly crawled from the *cayuco* just as an empty dirt train went clatteringly across the trestle beyond. We climbed up the river bank to the Station a few minutes before the train for Gorgona came puffing along.

## CHAPTER

# 13

ONE EVENING, WHILE I WAS SITTING ON THE porch waiting for Charlie to come home, I glanced up and saw him plodding wearily up the hill. His shoulders were drooped, his head down. His whole aspect was one of discouragement. I met him at the door.

"Dearest," I exclaimed, "what has happened?"

"Plenty," he replied.

"Come in and tell me about it." I pulled his easy chair out for him.

"The chief has resigned!" he said in a tragic tone.

"The chief? You mean Mr. Stevens?" I asked incredulously.

"That's right. Now, what's going to happen? Half the men on the job want to leave. Mr. Stevens has this job so well organized, it could almost run itself. If someone new comes down and tries to put new ideas into effect, I don't know what a mess there'll be."

"Why did he resign, when things were going so well?"

"Oh, he's been hampered with red tape from the very beginning. It has always irked him. It was the same with Mr. Wallace. They both knew exactly what was needed for the job but everything had to be held up for bids. Sometimes requests would be questioned by congressmen who knew nothing about engineering, much less about conditions in the tropics. They both were called to Washington so often for questioning, it interfered with the job. If either had been given a free hand and proper authority, the work would have gone much faster.

John F. Stevens knows his job. Look at Culebra Cut. That's primarily a railroad problem and Mr. Stevens is a railroad man. So is Louis K. Rourke. He's directly in charge. The dirt trains are always in the right place at the right time. The whole organization in the Cut is most efficient. I believe Mr. Stevens, who promised to stay with the Canal until he had made its success certain, feels that time has come."

"How soon is Mr. Stevens leaving?"

"Very soon, I think. We're giving him a banquet at the Tivoli Hotel in Ancon next Wednesday. We'll go over on the special train and spend the night. I've engaged a room. So has Neil. You girls can have dinner together. The banquet is stag. We'll meet you at Mugsy Maguire's later on. Mrs. Maguire has invited us all there, that is, all of our department."

"Do you know who is going to be the new chief, Charlie?"

"No, but I understand he has been appointed."

We all went over on the special train, every employee who could possibly get off, for they all wanted to honor Chief Big Smoke, as he was lovingly called. It was a long night. What went on behind the closed doors of the banquet hall we girls never knew. When the boys joined us at Maguire's, they were noticeably depressed.

In the days that followed, there was a spirit of discouragement over the whole Isthmus and when it was made public that Mr. Steven's successor would be an army officer, disgust reigned supreme. This job of building the Canal was dear to the heart of each man. What would happen with the army in charge?

Colonel Goethals, however, soon dispelled the fear that the Canal Zone would be turned into an army camp. He appeared in civilian clothes. He talked with the men and gradually won their respect and approval. His motorcar, which ran on the tracks of the railroad, became a common sight, appearing unannounced—now here, now there. Since it was painted yellow, it was nicknamed the "Yellow Peril."

The Colonel apparently had respect for the work that had been accomplished and was slow in making changes in the organization. He proved to be a splendid executive; he was



sympathetic to his employees and, of course, an experienced engineer. He was in his office every Sunday morning ready to listen to any complaints or suggestions. Even the lowliest colored laborer was welcome.

It was at one of these Sunday morning conferences that Father Collins appeared, puffing and perspiring in his long black gown.

"Good morning, Father Collins," greeted the Colonel. "Have you come to register a complaint?"

"Oh, no, Colonel Goethals," replied Father Collins with a twinkle in his eye, "not exactly a complaint—rather a request. You see I need some of that compressed air you are using in the Cut. The line runs conveniently near the church I'm building. I wanted to tap the line but your men told me I would have to get your permission. I'll make you a proposition, Colonel. If you'll give me some of your compressed air, I'll give you all the hot air you want!"

Father Collins got his compressed air.

Gradually, however, and inevitably, there were changes. Army offices began to take over the top jobs. If this was galling to the faithful old-timers, little complaint was voiced. The old construction men painstakingly taught the newcomers their unfamiliar duties. There was some friction, to be sure, but for the most part, the wheels of the machinery ran smoothly, oiled by mutual respect.

One young officer, who took his responsibilities seriously, was giving advice to an old locomotive engineer, who, if he hadn't been born in the cab of an engine, had certainly spent most of his numerous years in one.

Joe listened respectfully to the young captain, then slowly climbed down from his locomotive, and with a fatherly smile, said, "Here, Captain, yon show me how."

Of course the captain had never driven an engine. He was, therefore, very much embarrassed. He muttered something and Joe lumbered back into his cab, blew his whistle, and chugged away. Later on Joe and the captain became the best of friends.

It was not long before many of these older man "folded their

tents like Arabs and as silently stole away." Jackson Smith went in 1908, and Labor, Quarters, and Subsistence became the Quartermaster's Department under Colonel Devol and the Subsistence Department under Major Wilson. Colonel Hodges replaced Mr. Smith on the Canal Commission.

A general reorganization was gradually effected.

## CHAPTER

# 14

"WELL, SWEETHEART," SAID CHARLIE, ONE evening, when he came home from the office, "how would you like to live in Culebra?"

"Oh, darling," I exclaimed, "leave this dear little cottage? Never mind," I added. "I'm ready for anything."

"As a matter of fact, I suppose we have no choice. I've been made an inspector in the new Quartermaster's Department with headquarters in Culebra."

"Is it a promotion?"

"Not exactly. It's just a different title. The only difference is that I have to live in Culebra and go out by train to inspect labor and quarters--more or less as I'm doing now."

So we packed our belongings and moved to a two-family house in Culebra. Charlie took the train every morning and returned late in the evening. If he went to the office next morning to write up his report, it meant the loss of the remainder of the day, since there was no train back before evening. So he had a big desk sent to the house from the quartermaster's storehouse and worked evenings.

As we sat there the first evening, having a glass of beer while he wrote his report, big fat cockroaches came creeping one by one from the desk. One found a beer cap, another came running.

"Well," said Charlie, "you like beer? All right have some more."

He filled the bottle cap. The roaches eagerly lapped it up,

then scuttled away to tell their friends. More roaches came. Charlie poured out more beer. They were wild about it. They pushed and shoved. Charlie filled more caps. They invited more of their friends. They had a lovely party. In the morning, I swept them out—all lying around with their toes turned up—and I realized that the Battle of the Insects was still on.

Labor, Quarters, and Subsistence was not the only department to be reorganized. Most of them, under new nomenclatures, were under the direction of an army officer.

The entire Isthmus, like all Gaul, was divided into three parts—the Pacific, the Central and the Atlantic divisions. The Pacific Division, extending from the Pacific to Pedro Miguel, was in charge of a civilian, Mr. S. B. Williamson; the Central, from Pedro Miguel to Gamboa, under Colonel Gaillard, whose name was later given to Culebra Cut. The Atlantic Division was in charge of Colonel Sibert with headquarters at Gatun.

At Culebra was the wooden Administration Building on Brain Hill overlooking the Cut. Colonel Goethal's house was not far from his office, and other official residences were nearby.

Slides on both sides of the Cut were especially discouraging. The old enemy Cucaracha had not been conquered. We watched the progress of the work every Sunday, when we would stroll to the top of Contractor's Hill and gaze across the widening chasm to Gold Hill on the opposite side. At times, we would bewail the havoc wrought by a fresh slide. At other times, we would marvel at the amount accomplished and speculate on when the Canal would be finished.

As soon as a lock type of canal had been decided on, there had been much argument and study devoted to this aspect of the problem. The original intention had been to build the locks on the Pacific side at La Boca—the entrance—but this was changed in favor of two locks at Miraflores and one at Pedro Miguel. On the Atlantic side, as Mr. Gerig had pointed out to us, three locks at Gatun were proposed, with a big dam to hold back the waters of the unpredictable Chagres, forming a large lake. Intensive study was devoted to this problem, and a miniature dam was constructed and tested before the engineers

were completely satisfied. Experts were in charge of the various problems and work was going on apace. Shovels were excavating for the locks, and more shovels were digging at the spillway location—the spillway through which the channel of the river would be diverted. Work on the relocation of the old Panama Railroad, which would be under the waters of the lake, had been begun. All this was as Mr. Gerig had described.

Down the Coast toward Colombia, at the historic old town of Porto Bello, suitable rock for the work at Gatun had been found. A rock crusher was installed here and a new town opposite the old had been built, a town with rows of drab houses on stilts, running water, electricity, paved streets, a commissary, and a clubhouse.

What a contrast to the lazy village across the harbor, which lived only in the glories of the past, when, from the high watch-towers of the strong forts, Spanish soldiers kept constantly alert for the pirates and buccaneers who were waiting to seize the treasure of the Spanish galleons as they carried it from the Isthmus to the mighty king of Spain. Here at Porto Bello, the gold and silver from the Inca country, which had been brought up the Pacific to old Panama, thence across the Isthmus over the paved *camino real* on the backs of plodding Indian slaves or skinny little overloaded mules, was stored in the strong treasure house until it could be loaded on the ships waiting in the sheltered harbor.

But, alas! For all the strength of the forts and the watchfulness of the soldiers, bold Francis Drake and later on the ruthless Morgan succeeded in ravaging the city. Only a dead village remained.

A little farther on down the coast was Nombre de Dios, named by Columbus. Here was found sand for the locks at Gatun, so now busy little tugs were towing barges loaded with sand and crushed rock over the choppy sea to Limon Bay and up the old French Canal, then bringing the empty barges back again for more—back and forth, back and forth, like an endless chain.

On the Pacific side, work was progressing even faster, since

the problems of transportation were simpler. Rock had to be brought only from Balboa and sand from Chamé, not far up the Pacific Coast. The lake between the lock at Pedro Miguel and those at Miraflores was smaller and therefore less of a problem than the extensive Gatun Lake.

The whole Isthmus hummed with activity. Progress was reported weekly in *The Canal Record* and eagerly noted by us all as the Cut grew deeper and deeper, the dams bigger and bigger, and the walls of the locks rose to unbelievable heights.

## CHAPTER

# 15

IN DECEMBER, 1910, CHARLIE WAS APPOINTED assistant depot quartermaster, and we moved to old Cristobal. The huge storehouse at Mt. Hope on the old French canal, a few miles from Colón, was a busy place. Here was stored all materials for the Canal construction, from little nails to big steamshovel parts. Off in the nearby jungle was a separate building for the treacherous dynamite, which was unloaded at the dock on the old canal.

We lived in one of the sturdily built French cottages on the shore of Limon Bay. On the point beyond was the large two-story house which had been built especially for Ferdinand de Lesseps and his numerous family; now used as headquarters for the Subsistence Department. Here, too, was the famous statue of Columbus, a benign old gentleman with a protective arm stretched over the head of a crouching Indian maiden—not exactly indicative of the brutal Spanish conquistadors who were to follow him.

Across the track was the Panamanian city of Colón, once notorious as an extremely filthy and wicked place, now clean and healthful. Along Front Street, paralleling the railroad, were rows of shops displaying merchandise from all parts of the world. Beyond the tracks was Limon Bay, on the shore of which were usually scores of *cayucos*.

These *cayucos* were the boats of the San Blas Indians, who lived down the coast toward the Colombian border. Squat, bowlegged, with loose shirts worn outside baggy trousers, and

rusty derby hats on their large heads, these Indians were common sights in the city. Even on windy days, when from the shore all you could see were high, white-capped waves, these intrepid sailors came to town. Far out from the shore they sailed in their tiny boats, one man standing on the gunwale trying to balance the crude sail that was often dipping at an angle of forty-five degrees or more. Their plunging *cayucos* would be piled high with tortoise shell or ivory nuts. The women never came to town. They were jealously guarded on their palm-fringed islands.

Few Americans had ever visited the country and no white man was permitted to remain overnight in their territory. Two Americans who had come to the Isthmus as adventurous boys had, however, won the respect and confidence of these interesting people. One of them, Jimmie Hyatt, had a concession for a manganese mine near the San Blas country. One evening, as he was having dinner with us, I asked about these Indians.

"How would you like to go the next time I send a ship down for ore?" he asked.

"Oh, I'd love it," I exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Yes," agreed Charlie, "if I can make arrangements to be away for a couple of days."

"Fine," said Jimmie. "We'll make up a party. The Simpkins have a guest from the States and want to take her on some trips. I'll see if they would like to go along. I think I'll have a boat going down next Tuesday."

Tuesday came bright and cool. We boarded the little freighter and made ourselves comfortable—Mr. and Mrs. Simpkins, their guest Julia Brown, Charlie, and I. The captain was a Norwegian, a sturdy, sun-tanned man with a fund of stories and a wealth of local knowledge. He pointed out places of interest and talked continuously.

We arrived at the San Blas archipelago the following morning. We paid our respects to the local governor, who lived in solitary comfort on the tiny island of El Porvenir. He was supposed to collect taxes and, in general, represent the Panamanian government, for, while the islands technically belonged to the



republic, each had its own chief, or *inapequeña*, and Panama wisely didn't interfere.

Leaving this outpost, we sailed near the island of Carti, the nearest island of the group. As we anchored, native *cayucos* filled with San Blas men came out to meet us. The native dignitaries boarded our ship and were dutifully regaled with soft drinks and biscuits. We girls stood at the rail, intrigued with the tiny boats, each only big enough to hold one, or sometimes two, little naked boys. We started throwing pennies into the water, and such a scramble! Like porpoises, the little fellows dived and swam around, shaking the water from their faces and clutching the pennies.

In the meantime, Jimmie was trying to persuade the men to allow us to visit the island. We gathered around to hear the verdict.

"Bad time," grunted one of the Indians. He had been in Colón enough to learn a little English. "Bad time." He shook his heavy head. "Feast," he added. "Chief girl hair cut. Men all drunk."

"How many days?" asked Jimmie, wise to the customs.

"Three days," the spokesman said. Then he laughed. "Guess all right now. Men asleep. You come. One hour."

We shouted, "Good," and grabbed our cameras.

"No," he said, beginning to get angry. "No pictures."

So we put away our cameras and started for the shore. The island was small. Fringed cocoanut palms bent over a beach of fine, white sand. Weather-worn *cayucos* were drawn carelessly up on the sloping shore. Thatched cane huts had only a narrow passageway between. As we followed Jimmie and the Indians, innumerable children clustered around, the girls dressed in colorful one-piece slips, the boys unencumbered by any clothes at all. Behind enclosures we heard women giggling.

As we entered the center hut, which seemed larger than those we had passed, we saw some of the women. They were dressed in the same colorful slips the girls were wearing but each had a long piece of cloth modestly tucked around the waist in lieu of a skirt, reaching to the ankles. They held gaudy

kerchiefs over their heads, nearly covering them. After a bit, their curiosity got the better of their shyness and they crowded around us.

Each woman had a brown mark down her nose and a ring through the bottom of it. I noticed that the little girls also had rings in their noses but no brown mark. Both wore strings of beads around the neck and ankles. The latter were almost embedded in the skin.

I admired the intricate handwork on their blouses and tried to make them understand that I would like to have a blouse to take home. However, they either didn't understand or wouldn't part with one until Jimmie came to the rescue and persuaded his friend to sell a few of the *molas*, as they call them. These blouses are made of layers of calico cut in different patterns, one overlapping the other, sometimes four or five layers. I learned later that these patterns were handed down from one generation to another. Usually a pattern was peculiar to one island.

Turning my attention to the interior of the hut, I noticed the walls were of bamboo, the floor of hard dirt, and the roof thatched. There were a few crude benches of beautiful hardwood, polished by use. On the walls were hung, here and there, what resembled pipes of Pan, made of different lengths of bamboo.

In one corner, there was a sort of enclosure where two old women were cutting the hair of a couple of half-grown girls. We watched, fascinated, for a bit. Suddenly, one of the younger women noticed Julia's golden curls and showed great interest. Obliging, Julia took down the thick wavy mop amid a chorus of incredulity and admiration. When one of the bolder women began to stroke the long ends, however, Julia became worried for fear they would insist on cutting it, so she hastily put it up again. I tried to divert their attention by measuring my height against that of some of the women. They were all much shorter than even I. We laughed and became good friends.

Our hour was soon over and we were rowed back to the ship, well satisfied with our visit. Jimmie told us that we were

the first women to see the island—with the possible exception of a missionary.

“Yes,” said Jimmie. “These Indians have kept their customs and mode of life exactly as it was four centuries ago, when Columbus first sailed these waters.”

“And to think,” remarked Charlie, “only a few miles away is the Canal with its modern machinery and engineering techniques. What a contrast!”

A leisurely trip back to Colón brought us to the entrance of Limon Bay just at dusk. The Toro Point lighthouse was flashing its intermittent rays, making lacy silhouettes of the waving palm fronds. We passed the place where the eastern breakwater was soon to be built and saw the spur from Toro Point with the pile driver perched on the end like a giant praying mantis. A stiff breeze was blowing, forerunner of the dreaded norther, which frequently lashed the Colón shore with intense fury. Surely, the breakwaters would be appreciated by the old sea captains who, many times in the past, had been obliged to anchor their ships in the sheltered harbor of Porto Bello until the height of the storm had passed. These breakwaters would serve as a protection to the entrance of the Canal.



trip to Toro Point, where we went to see the progress of the breakwater. From the front porch of our home, she watched, with baby wonder, the big barges bringing sand from Nombre de Dios and rock from Porto Bello for the locks at Gatun. We took her in a launch up the old French canal to the dock where everything for the Mt. Hope storehouse was unloaded.

Like all proud young fathers, Charlie wanted the best for his little daughter. Without consulting me, he ordered a beautiful English perambulator. He was home the day it arrived. It was a noble carriage—blue leather lined, to match the baby's eyes—wide springs of the finest steel—an accordion shaped hood to protect from the tropic sun. It was, indeed, a glorious spectacle. He walked around it, admiring it from every side.

"Put the baby in," he said, "and see if she likes it."

So I put her prettiest embroidered pillow in and a thin muslin shawl—an heirloom from way back. Then, I lay Anita on the soft bed. She kicked and cooed in approved fashion. Charlie smiled proudly. I gazed dubiously at the high contraption.

"Let's take her out for an airing," he said.

"All right," I said, with grim determination in my eye. "You can wheel it."

"Me?" he exclaimed in amazement. "Me—wheel a baby carriage?"

"All right," I answered, "then the baby stays home. If you think I'm going to wheel that great big thing, you're crazy! Why, I can't even see over the top!"

I stood behind the carriage to prove my point. The handle bars came up to my eyes! Charlie burst out laughing and gave me a big bear hug.

"I guess you win, little sweetheart. I'll exchange the buggy for one nearer your size."

So peace was restored once more.

When Anita was about eighteen months old, one morning, much to her joy, she found a little baby sister, Nan, asleep in her carriage, and a year or so later came Bettikins to make a happy threesome.

As the work at Gatun, Pedro, and Miraflores neared completion, slides in Culebra Cut began to give more trouble. Large cracks in the earth beneath the commission clubhouse began to develop and reconstruction was necessary to make the building safe. Father Collins reluctantly had to abandon his cherished work on his little church. Old Cucaracha woke up again. Steam shovels were covered with dirt from the sliding hills. Five tracks were rendered useless. A mass of earth was pushed up from the floor of the Cut.

After a series of setbacks, when a worse slide than ever occurred, one of the engineers in charge, discouragingly calling Colonel Goethal's attention to the havoc, bewailed, "What shall we do now, Colonel?"

"Hell, dig it out again!" was the Colonel's historic reply.

And dig it out again they did, again and again.

On May 20, 1912, two steam shovels met at the bottom of the Canal at Culebra, thus completing the first through cut. On September 6, work was started withdrawing all steam shovels and construction tracks from the Cut.

I decided, since I hadn't seen Kay for a long time, that I would go to Gorgona for a visit. Leaving the babies with their nurse, I took the early morning train from Colón. At Gatun, I was all eyes. I remembered how Mr. Gerig had described it all to us and had remarked that he could see the finished dam and spillway in his mind's eye. Now, I was seeing them in reality! The dam, like a long, low hill, stretched across the valley, even now green with tropic growth, which made it look part of the natural landscape. Beyond the dam was the slowly rising water of the lake, on which we could see native *cayucos* piled high with bananas, as if the lake had always been there.

As the train pulled out of the station, it curved to the left. We were on the relocated railroad tracks, which were now in use between Gatun and Gorgona. The old tracks had been removed before the lake began to rise. As the train began to wind through the jungle, I noticed the water around trees on whose branches colorful orchids were growing. We crossed trestles and bridges, arriving at Gorgona in due time.

I thought of my arrival in that little town five years ago, when the American part was new and when new employees were arriving weekly. Now the town would soon be at the bottom of the lake. Plans were being made to close down the machine shops, transfer the men, take down the houses, and rebuild in other places.

Kay and I talked over our early experiences and our plans for the future. They were going back to the States; we were staying on. It was with a tinge of sadness that I said good-by as I took the evening train for Colón, sadness that Gorgona was to be abandoned, sadness tinged with pride that so much had been accomplished, so many problems met and successfully solved.

## CHAPTER

# 17

THE STEAM SHOVELS IN CULEBRA CUT HAD FINISHED their work. The required depth of the channel had been reached. The tracks on which the shovels had operated and on which the long dirt trains had whizzed in and out at regular intervals were no longer needed. The locks at Miraflores, Pedro Miguel, and Gatun were completed.

Charlie and I wandered over the locks at Gatun, standing on the edges of those awesome chambers and looking down at the men below, who, from that distance, looked no bigger than ants. We investigated the gigantic tunnels in which the intricate electrical machinery had been installed. We saw the controls that would so quietly open and close the ponderous gates, would raise and lower the heavy chains that would serve as safeguards to the gates in case a ship should get out of control. I had no idea how many miles we walked through the vast tunnels, but I was glad to climb the steps and see the bright sunlight again. We looked curiously at the little towing engines, called mules, with a cab at either end. Then we went up to the control tower where, by the pushing of tiny buttons, the whole massive lock machinery was put in motion, while, on a model table, miniature gates and tiny chains moved with the same precision and at the same rate as the heavy gates and chains below. Charlie pointed out to me the tall gauges that would show the depth of the water in each lock as it rose or fell to the level of that in the adjoining lock. We came down and walked to the end of the third lock and gazed at the lake-soon-to-be. We noted the



skeletonlike emergency dams, further safeguards against unforeseen contingencies.

"Surely," Charlie said, "the Canal rightly deserves to be called the eighth wonder of the world."

All these things were finished, but the captive waters of the Chagres could not yet be unloosed. All the little towns along the line had, like the steam shovels, served their purpose. Soon they would be at the bottom of the lake. Many of the houses were salvaged.

The problem of the natives in their palm-thatched huts scattered here and there through the jungle had to be solved. New towns for them were built or new jungle homes above the lake level. All these stolid unimaginative people had to be convinced of the necessity for moving. I thought of Bernicia del Rio and wondered if she would be sad to leave her vine-covered home, her shady banana plants, her fragrant lime trees. I wondered if she would have the courage to start all over again.

Then came the historic day when the water was to be turned into the Canal channel. The dyke at Gamboa, built across the channel where the Chagres River entered the Canal, had kept the rising water of the lake from the Cut. Now, its job was finished, like that of the steam shovels and the little line towns. It must be destroyed. It was a bright sunny day on October, 1913. On special trains, all who could rushed to the banks of the river near the dyke. We held our breath as the clocks ticked the minutes away. At the appointed time, President Wilson in Washington touched the key, giving the signal. Then, like a sleeping giant, rudely awakened, the dyke became alive, the dirt was blown to the sky, and the unfettered waters surged into the Canal channel—into Culebra Cut.

Gradually, little trickles of water from the Atlantic met little trickles of water from the Pacific, merging and rising until the water in the Cut was of sufficient depth for dredges, which took over from the shovels the work of excavation.

As the lake rose higher and higher, a constant patrol was necessary to drive the natives back to the hills. And back to the hills fled all tropic life. The monkeys, the tapirs, the snakes,

the weird insects, even the lazy sloths, all fled to the hills, which were made islands by the oncoming waters. Only the mighty hardwood trees remained, their bare branches stretching over the blue water—ghostly reminders of a once-teeming jungle.

The lake gradually reached the required height and the spillway gates were adjusted to maintain it. It was time to test the locks. Charlie and I were among the first to reach the lock walls on that memorable day. Charlie had his camera focused on the little tug that, with flags flying, came chugging up the Canal from Cristobal. On the prow proudly stood Colonel Sibert; on the lock wall stood Colonel Goethal, chain smoking, his steel-blue eyes fixed on the tiny craft.

We all watched closely as the sturdy boat entered the lowest lock chamber. The gate behind it silently closed. Tow lines were thrown to it from the electric mules on either side of the lock. The lines secured, we watched tensely as the water came gushing from the bottom and sides. The little tug remained steady, perfectly controlled by the taut lines. Gradually she rose with the water until it was at the same level as that in the second chamber. Then the chain in front of the gate slowly dropped, the massive gates, as if in obedience to an unseen master, quietly opened, and the electric mules went into action amid our excited cheers.

Like ants crawling up the trunk of a tree, the mules smoothly climbed to the height of the second lock, towing, carefully, the brave tug. Then they came to a poised stop. The tug obediently stopped, too, while the gates behind began to close. The boat was again raised to the level of the water in the next chamber. The gates opened and the electric mules started on again and safely brought the tug into the final lock chamber. Here the process was repeated. As the last gates opened, the towing lines were cast off and, under her own power, the intrepid tiny craft entered the lake—the first to go through the locks at Gatun.

Afterward, old Cucaracha protested with one of her biggest slides. However, it was attacked by dredges from both the Atlantic and Pacific sides, as well as by hydraulic excavating

from the top of Gold Hill, which sluiced material from the top of the slide until a channel was finally cleared.

The first steam vessel through the Canal was, fittingly, the old French crane boat "La Valley," which for so many years had been giving faithful service. It was passed from the Cut through the Pedro Muguel and Miraflores locks. And another page of history was written.

## CHAPTER

# 18

THE PACIFIC SIDE OF THE ISTHMUS WAS BRISTLING with activity. Here would be needed facilities for servicing ships after long ocean voyages—a huge dry dock, mechanical shops, coaling station, storage for fuel for oil-burning ships.

Dredges were pumping day and night. The town of Balboa emerged from a muddy swamp. High on the hills overlooking the Canal where it entered the Bay of Panama, spacious residences for Colonel Goethals and other officials were built. Houses salvaged from Gorgona and Empire were reconstructed for other employees. A beautiful cement building was being constructed to house not only the administrative branches of the Canal organization but also a library and post office.

About this time, we were transferred to Balboa Heights. With three babies and a nurse, moving was not a simple matter. We arrived in Panama in a drenching downpour and drove directly to the home of friends in Ancon in the Canal Zone. After lunch, leaving the children and Mimi, the nurse, with our helpful friends, Charlie and I started for our new home. The house was halfway down a muddy hill. We drove as far as we could, then left the *coche* and proceeded down the slippery incline on foot.

We spent the afternoon unpacking the boxes of household belongings, trying to get some order out of chaos. Then Charlie went for the children and Mimi. He decided to try coming by the road that ran below the house instead of by the one above, which we had used. The rain had fortunately stopped by this time but the hill was a mass of mud. He got the family out

of the *coche* and started up the hill, but, alas, climbing up proved as difficult as slipping down. Poor Mimi! Hampered by her ponderous *avoirdupois* and her long skirts, she found the going rather rough. Besides, she was carrying the baby. She took three steps and slipped back two. She tried again.

Finally, she sat down in the mud, disgusted. "No, suh," she moaned, "I doan' go." And she refused to budge.

Charlie took the baby from her and tried to persuade her to start again, but Mimi was stubborn. "No, suh, I'se goin' back ter Jamaica, suh."

At last, however, after Charlie had promised her a bit of brandy when she reached the top, she relented and finally made the grade.

Living in Balboa had its advantages. There was an air of permanency now. Cement living quarters were being tried out. Roads were built, trees planted, grounds landscaped. Gone were the ugly black stoves, the lone electric bulb dangling from the ceiling on a cord. Electric stoves were being installed in some quarters. We even had telephones!

It was exciting, too, to be near a city. We joined the University Club, where we met friendly Panamanians at the weekly dances. There were official receptions and lawn parties. There were teas at the American Embassy, private cocktail parties, and afternoon bridge.

We often went to the Plaza Central in the city to watch the weekly lottery drawings. We always bought at least one piece of a ticket and, since there were a number of approximations, we often won at least our money back. Anyhow, it was fun.

My first carnival was also intriguing. Such confusion and merriment! Groups of singers and dancers cavorted in the crowded streets of the city. Every conceivable fancy costume was in evidence. But by far the most beautiful was the *pollera*—the national dress of the Panamanian women—a type of dress that got its inspiration from Colonial times.

Donning a *pollera* was almost a ceremony. No variation was tolerated. Two very full embroidered petticoats were the foundation. The blouse was cut low, a little off the shoulders. A

wide lace-trimmed ruffle reached to the waist. An insertion around the top was threaded with bright wool, matching the colored figures on the white material of which the dress was made. A big wool pompom graced the center of both the front and the back of the neck. The skirt was very full, made with a placket on either side, the waistband secured by tapes. A wide ruffle on the bottom of the ground-length skirt was edged with wide lace, matching, in pattern, the lace on the blouse. *Chancletas* (heel-less slippers) were worn with no stockings. These were of the same color as the other accessories. The *pollera* of the elite was more elaborate—many with beautiful hand embroidery.

Around the neck, the girls wore the *chata*. Other chains might be worn, but the *chata* was customary. The hair was twisted low behind the ears in two little buns and, stuck into the hair, almost covering it, were scores of pairs of *tembleques*, made of bright beads strung on thin wire in the form of insects or flowers. These quivered tantalizingly as the light-hearted maid coquettishly tossed her head.

At the *toldas* erected on street corners, girls in their gay *polleras* and their escorts danced the *tamborita*, the native dance, to the tune of "Mi pollera es colorada," in the traditional manner, swishing their voluminous skirts while the boys rhythmically bent and swayed to the music of drums and the clapping of an enthusiastic crowd.

The last day of the carnival was Pollera Day, when the girls and older women, in gowns handed down from generation to generation, bedecked in family jewels, rode up and down Avenida Central in endless procession.

At night, the queen of the carnival, who had been chosen from one of the oldest and most prominent families, was honored with a grand ball, while the less exalted danced in the *toldas*. At dawn, all gaiety ceased and everybody went to Mass to receive the cross of ashes on the forehead and begin to piously observe the sacred days of Lent.

Amid all this merriment and fun, the Canal was fast nearing completion.

## CHAPTER

# 19

THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE CANAL WAS SCHEDULED for August 15, 1914. Cucaracha Slide was anxiously watched and dredges continued to work feverishly to keep the channel open. The Panama Railroad steamship "Ancon" was to have the honor of making the first trip from the Atlantic to the Pacific. But another transit was planned, one of far more interest to those of us who had lived here and worked on the construction of this famous waterway.

On August 3, the "Ancon's" sister ship, "Cristobal," would sail through the Canal from Cristobal to Balboa. Colonel Goethals himself had issued the invitations, limiting them to those who had served at least eight years of the construction period, and wives were included.

When Charlie brought our invitation home, I was all excited. To think that the Canal was an accomplished fact and that we were to be on the first ocean ship to make the transit! It was the chief topic of conversation for days—in the office, at parties, at the commissary. The women whose husbands were not among the privileged two hundred were frankly envious of those who were.

The evening before the scheduled trip, Charlie and I were talking about it.

"We must go to bed early," Charlie cautioned. "The special train for Cristobal leaves the Balboa station at five o'clock."

"Oh, yes," I agreed. "But you don't need to worry about that. I doubt if I sleep a wink tonight. Isn't it thrilling? 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' Old Philip's

argument was all wrong, wasn't it? Is there any chance that Cucaracha will start sliding tonight?"

Charlie laughed. "Oh, I don't think so. Comber has his dredges on the job and he's keeping a close eye on the Cut."

Just then, we heard a *coche* stopping in front of the house. Charlie went to the door. I heard him say, "Hello, Bill, when did you get in?"

My heart sank into my shoes. I was fond of Bill. He made periodic trips to South America and always came by to see us when he was in Panama. It usually meant a gay evening. But tonight—the evening before such an important day—I just didn't want to be up late. I wanted to go to bed and I wanted Charlie to turn in early, too. However, I greeted Bill as cordially as I could.

"Come on," he said. "I've got a *coche* waiting. Let's go to the Metropole."

"Oh, Bill," I protested, "do you know what's going to happen tomorrow? We're going through the Canal—first trip for an ocean liner! We've got to take a train for Cristobal at five o'clock in the morning. We'd love to go out with you but I think we should get to bed early. You stay here and have a drink with us."

"Nonsense," replied Bill. "Come on and we'll celebrate the great event."

"Come on, dear," urged Charlie. "We'll come home early. Let's go."

So, not wanting to be a kill-joy, I relented.

We had a jolly time but, in spite of our good intentions, it was the wee small hours when we turned in. I cautioned Charlie about the alarm.

"Are you sure, dear, that the alarm is turned on? We don't want to miss the train."

"You bet we don't," agreed Charlie. "You'd better check it, although I'm sure it's set for plenty of time."

I checked it and was satisfied. Then I went to bed with a clear conscience. Next thing I knew, I woke with a start. I un-



mistakably heard a train pulling out of the station down the hill. My heart stood still.

"Charlie!" I cried, shaking him. "Charlie! The train! We've missed it! Oh, Charlie, why didn't the alarm go off?"

"It did," he grunted. "The blasted thing woke me up and I turned it off."

"You turned it off!" My voice was flat. "You turned the alarm off? Do you know what you did? Do you realize we have missed the boat through the Canal? Do you mean to say this day wasn't more important than a little sleep? Oh, Charlie!"

And I began to cry.

Charlie was wide awake now. He jumped out of bed and ran to the telephone. I listened.

"Sam," I heard him say, "has the Colonel left? . . . Oh, you're going to pick him up in Gatun? . . . Yes, we missed the train. . . . Sure, Sam, we can be there in fifteen minutes. . . . Thanks."

I didn't wait to hear more. I dashed into the shower. We caught the "Yellow Peril" with one minute to spare. I shall never forget that wild ride across the Isthmus in the little motor car, careening alarmingly from side to side as it sped swiftly over the railroad tracks, through lush jungle, through sleeping little towns, in the cool of that tropic morning. We reached Gatun as the "Cristobal" was entering the first lock. We ran to the side and watched as the boat was raised slowly until the water was level with that in the next lock.

Then friendly hands pulled a plank across and, amid laughter and good-natured banter, we scrambled aboard. With minor delays, we passed through the remaining locks. Then the towing lines were cast off and we proceeded under our own power into Gatun Lake.

The whole topography of the Isthmus seemed changed. We sailed smoothly over the old Panama Railroad, the building of which was said to have cost a life for each one of its hard cocobolo ties. We passed Bohio, where, seven years ago, I had my first glimpse of a palm-thatched hut. We saw islands that a short

while ago were hills. We sailed over the treacherous Black Swamp, which had cost the engineers so many headaches, and over Barbacoas, where the old railroad crossed the Chagres River. Unknowingly, we passed over Frijoles, Tabernilla, San Pablo. Now, the hills in the distance took on familiar outlines.

"Gorgona!" Charlie squeezed my hand.

"Look, Charlie!" I exclaimed with an answering squeeze. "Aren't those bananas on that little island the ones by our house? Remember when we planted them? I had never seen bananas growing before. Remember?"

We came to Gamboa, where the dyke had been blown up; then on to Las Cascadas and Empire, so changed, and into Culebra Cut! I looked for Father Collin's church but couldn't find it. I looked up at Contractor's Hill and across to Gold Hill.

"Strange," I murmured. "They don't seem so high."

Charlie laughed. "You forget we have thirty-seven feet of water beneath us. Of course they don't seem so high. We should have forty-five feet of water here and we will have as soon as old Cucaracha gets licked."

We reached the place where the dredges were working. Colonel Goethals, in a little launch, was watching our progress. Sam had told us that the colonel was going to follow the transit. At Pedro Miguel, we saw him again and at Miraflores, when the last lock gate was opened and we steamed triumphant into the sea-level channel, we all shouted and waved to him. He was standing on the lock wall, with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

As we approached Balboa, we stood silent on the prow of the ship. Ahead lay the calm Pacific with the Southern Cross low in the sky. Behind was the completed Canal.

A dream of centuries had come true!