

Periwinkle House

By Opie Read

Illustrated by R. H. Livingstone

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—The time is the late '60s or early '70s and the scene a steamboat on the Mississippi. Drace is the type of the period as present and the floating palace is distinguished by merriment, dancing and gaiety. There are the customary drinking and gambling also. Virgil Drace, a young northern man, is on his way south on a mission of revenge. He meets an eccentric character in the person of one Liberty Shottle, who is constantly tempting the goddess of chance. They form a singular compact.

CHAPTER II—Drace gets his mission on his mind by an unusual athletic prowess. Liberty Shottle is again unlucky at cards and attempts a financial negotiation with Drace. The latter, seeing an opportunity to use Shottle, confides to him that his mission is to find a certain ex-guerrilla, Stepho la Vitte, who had murdered Drace's father. It is his determination announced to his new chum, to hang La Vitte as high as Haman. Drace has become enamored of a mysterious beauty aboard the boat.

CHAPTER III—The steamer reaches New Orleans, at that time in the somewhat turbulent throes of carpebag government. Shottle becomes possessed of two tickets for the French ball, a great society event, and proposes that Drace accompany him to the affair. The young man attend and Drace unexpectedly meets the girl who had fired his heart aboard the steamer. She is accompanied by one Boyce, whose proprietary interest indicates that he is her fiance. Through stratagem Shottle learns that the name of the girl is Nadine la Vitte and that her companion of the evening is the man who is seeking to marry her.

CHAPTER IV—Drace passes an uneasy night torn by the suspicion that Nadine is the daughter of old Stepho la Vitte, now an admitted outlaw. Now, more than ever, he is resolved to find where the girl lives and to find Stepho. Drace and Shottle begin a search of the city. In one of their nocturnal pilgrimages they come upon a mob intent upon hanging a poor wretch from the limb of a tree. It is a typical carpebag execution and aroused the resentment of an opposing mob of citizens. Drace takes a hand in the fight which starts and is instrumental in preventing the execution. From a window opposite he sees the wretch a glimpse of one he is sure is Nadine.

CHAPTER V—The escape, the fight, the interference of the Frenchman, Drace and Shottle into bad standing with the authorities, but instead of punishment are given a reprieve. The next day to board a steamer bound north. Returning to the house where he thought he had glimpsed the girl, Drace finds the place abandoned. Through Colonel Job, an emissary employed at the suggestion of Shottle, he gets a false lead in the discovery that a certain Frenchman, a wine dealer, is reported to be an intimate of Stepho la Vitte. There is only a short time before the departure of the steamer when Drace and Shottle go to call on the Frenchman. The latter is too keen to be inveigled into giving up any information, but Shottle, spying around among the crates and boxes, especially the articles made up for shipment, makes an important discovery. So as not to arouse the suspicions of the Frenchman, he casually draws Drace away from the place and onto the steamer. On board he informs Drace that one of the cases was addressed to Stepho la Vitte at Farnum's Landing, Mississippi. It is the next stop below Bethpage's Landing and Colonel Bethpage is Liberty Shottle's uncle.

CHAPTER VI

About four o'clock in the afternoon the Bumblebee passed Farnum's Landing, and later touched at Bethpage Landing. From the crest of the high embankment was an endless view of spreading cane fields. The General's house stood in the midst of old trees near half a mile from the river. Leading from the landing was a road in the perpetual shade of low-branching live oaks. Along the road wild popples blazed in patches of sunlight, and in the shade glowed the color of darker blood. In clumps of feathery grasses insects sang, while from everywhere came the low and drowsy murmur of the cane.

Drace was enchanted with the scene, the sweet air. Beside him Shottle long-legged his way, his neck stretched out.

"Yonder comes Uncle Howard, the General," he said.

Toward them, with a slow but firm and emphatic step, came a tall, spare, erect old gentleman; and as he drew nearer, Drace saw that he wore a mustache and whiskers trimmed neatly down to a sharp point. The soldier within him predominated, the professional soldier, who is often gentler and more kindly than the volunteer. Shottle hailed him, and he quickened his pace.

"Well, well, Liberty Shottle! Welcome, sir, and your friend—"

"Uncle, this is Virgil Drace, my best friend."

The old man straightened, held out both his hands and made Liberty's friend welcome most hospitably.

Now they walked toward the house, the General with his hand on Drace's arm. Over the yard fence poured a stream of hounds, and an old "possum-dog" barked up. Shottle as if he had treed. The double hallway doors stood open. The General conducted Drace into the library, a room that looked big enough for a tennis court. Then he hastily withdrew, and Shottle spoke:

"Gone to find Aunt Tyle. You'll like her. No hickory tree sap is any sweeter than her disposition. She was a Shottle, my father's young elster. She's young, as I told you. And she looks younger now than when she married. Did you ever notice that

When a young woman marries an old fellow, she always tries to look younger? Here they are!"

Presently the great plantation bell on a tower in the yard rang time for the evening meal. The General arose, and bowing to his wife, gracefully offered her his arm. To Drace it was a pretty ceremonial, and he contrasted it with the more brusque customs of everyday life in the North.

When an opportunity offered, Drace inquired of the General, as casually as possible, if he knew anything of an old fellow named Stepho la Vitte, who was reputed to live somewhere in the vicinity.

The General seemed somewhat surprised at the inquiry. "Yes," he said, "I know something of him. And I believe there are rumors that he is sometimes seen across the River near here. During the war he was a guerrilla and cast much blame on the Confederacy. I met him once, after the war—near your father's house, my dear. My mules were tired, and I had halted in the shade to let them rest, when up came two men; one put his hand on the wheel of my buggy and said that my mules were his—that they had been stolen from him. I laughed, but meantime I had the muzzle of a pistol between his eyes. He didn't flinch nor wink. He looked at me and said that he may have made a mistake. I told him I thought he had. Then, taking his hand off my wheel, he bowed himself back and said that he would see me again, to apologize. But I haven't seen him since."

In the evening how still and sweet was the air! From the quarters came the weird drone of the negro's chant, for the habit of the slave had not fallen with his chain. In the parlor Aunt Tyle sang, in this house a custom to be dreaded by the learned ear; but Drace's ear was not learned; Shottle's was as an oyster-shell clapped to his head; and in music the General could not distinguish intention from accomplishment. It was a song of love, "Hast Thou No Feeling to See Me Kneeling?" and when its last note had found a dark corner where to cling, Drace requested her to sing it again. She gave him a grateful look; the General smiled at him; and as the song began again to mourn its way, Shottle said to himself:

"If Providence will lend virtue to a scheme, that will cost you money, Virgil. Came here to rest after going through more than Stonewall Jackson could stand, and this is what I get! Oh, it's respectable and ought to be endured, and so is a casket lined with satin, but it doesn't suit me. Lord, but this atmosphere is unsympathetic!"

If you have patience to wait, bedtime always comes; history is strewn with bedtime. It came slow-footed for Shottle, but quickly enough for Drace, with his nerves of steel wire. And how delighted he was with his room, a museum of antiquity, a great four-poster bedstead with a canopy heavy enough to have served as deadfall to some medieval giant. A chair that looked like the oak throne of an ancient Briton, a wardrobe wherein blue-beard might have hanged his wives, a rough-hewn mantelpiece reminding of a beetling cliff—these were featured in the light of a hanging lamp big enough to turn the ashes of a cremated dragon.

The night was warm, and through the windows the air came cool and lulling from the Gulf; but Drace lay until daybreak before he slept, and when he awoke the noontime bell was ringing. A negro knocked to tell him that dinner was ready. The General and Tyle were seated, but Shottle was not at the table with them; and following Drace's look of inquiry, came explanation from the General:

"I gave him the five hundred dollars that he was to put in with the five hundred furnished by you to be invested intently in that cotton-bagging factory at Vicksburg, and he took an early boat for that city. I think it is a fortunate thing for the South that they discovered a wild plant, a sort of jute, really better for making ropes and bagging than either flax or hemp. I had seen nothing about the discovery, but I am not a very close reader of the newspapers. But Shottle assures me that this wild jute can be grown on the poorest land and that it needs no tending. I am naturally cautious, Virgil, and I did not myself invest, but backing your judgment in the matter, I loaned Liberty five hundred. When do you expect active operations toward building the factory?"

Tyle forestalled Drace's answer: "Oh, I am sure it will succeed, and it will be a great thing, especially for Liberty. He has tried so hard, but somehow his energies haven't been properly directed. And he is so capable!"

She was so confident, and so hopeful for her luckless kinsman, that Drace played protecting villain to Shottle's purposes.

"Well, I don't know exactly when they are to begin work, but soon, I trust."

She gave him a grateful look for his trust, now perfectly assured of Shottle's useful future. But the General did not appear to be easy in his mind, and a little later when he and Drace were walking about the yard, beneath the trees, he referred again to the investment. Drace would have shuffled away from it, but the old gentleman cornered him with a question:

"I want the truth. Did Liberty lie to me?"

"Yes, sir, he did."

"I began to think so the moment he left me. Well, it is a singular thing."



"I Want the Truth. Did Liberty Lie to Me?"

that when he is with me, I believe in him, but the moment he is gone my faith has gone with him. I have had much experience with men, Mr. Drace, in the army and elsewhere, but my wife's nephew is the most—I don't know how to define him. Let me thank you for protecting him in the presence of my wife, and I regret that I may have seemed in doubt. But Drace, that fellow makes me angry with myself. Confound him, he almost convinces me at times that I have no stability of character. And yet I am fond of him. I am always glad to see him come. And let me say that he illustrates one truth very clearly—that ability consists mostly in the fervor with which we go to a thing. I suppose he has cost you considerable."

"Oh, not very much. I am fond of him too, and I believe he is going to be of much help to me."

"Well, I've lost five hundred this morning, but I can stand it. I have ordered the mules hitched up, and am going to drive with you about the plantation. I am going to show you a government here in the delta."

During the drive the old gentleman was talkative, sometimes with the school man's hesitating precision, but more often as the free companion, agreeable rather than discursive. Drace evinced in everything a keen interest, but it was not real. His heart was hot with him. It was in New Orleans, in a narrow street where boards were nailed across a door.

From what he had been able to gather from the General and by talking in seeming idleness to boatmen and to men along the River, Drace confirmed the information snatched by Shottle from the label on the Frenchman's wine case—namely, that old Stepho had a haunt somewhere in the neighborhood. A shrewd old negro had said that the outlaw lived in the swamp, in a house built of periwinkle shells. On the opposite shore, and several miles below the General's home, there lay a great wood of cypress and a thick tangle of salt cedar, a sort of everglade, a marsh with hundreds of knoll-islands here and there rising among the bayous. Here was indeed an outlaw's paradise, for Drace was told that not nearly all its lanes and crooked byways of brown water had been explored. Herein he began his search for old Stepho, day after day penetrating farther and farther into this moss-hanging wild. He did not confide in General Bethpage, for his mission was sacred unto himself alone, and by himself alone must it be accomplished.

At his feet in the canoe lay a rope, one end of it a hangman's noose, and he smiled at it, grim and firm of faith. Sometimes his canoe would stall in the carpet of scum. But he forced his way through into a narrow and unobstructed channel. Now he paddled swiftly. In front of him a great alligator arose and sank, the canoe grazing his scaly back. With a shriek great birds flew, flapping low, their long legs stretched out behind them. Drace was armed with a revolver, but did not wish to fire it, caution warning him. When he ceased for a time to paddle, how still everything was!

The adventurer liked to feel that no one had ever been there before. But now suddenly something caught his eye. In the green tangle on a low bank he saw a pole with wires strung to it, a sort of gate. The wires were covered with vines, trained about them. But for what purpose, here in this brushy tangle? He caught hold of a weed and pulled the canoe up closer, took hold of the pole and now he found a lower slat to which the wires were also attached. Farther along he discovered a sort of hinge attached to a snag almost hidden by briars.

"I'll open this gate and see what lies beyond," he mused, drawing the canoe back to the other end. He pulled at the pole, and it yielded. The gate opened, and through the weeds that appeared to have been bent by the passing of a boat, he saw a narrow channel.

It was easy enough to shove through the weeds and to enter the new canal. Soon it broadened, winding about among the enormous cypress trees. Now he came upon a widening that looked like a millpond, except that in the midst of it arose an island of tall cane. It was an attractive sight, and he ceased paddling to look. Slowly

he drifted toward the island's shore. He took hold of a cane root and pulled the nose of the canoe hard into the bank. Then he got out, parting the stuff and stubborn cane in a shade as dense as night. But now through this parting hallway he could see sunlight beyond, and knew that he was about to come into an open space. And out into it he looked with a start; for there, a few feet from the edge of the fringe of cane, stood a small house made of minute shells cemented—periwinkles. Its roof was of thatch, the long rushes gathered from the swamp; and about the door was a cypress vine, its red blooms dazzling in the sun. And then a banded cane Drace held was crushed in his hand, for through

(Continued on page 10)

LOWER HIGHLAND

Mrs. Dan Fellows

Edward Stuart spent several days last week in Portland.

T. J. Wirtz is working for Ed. McIntyre, at present.

Mr. and Mrs. Bert Cota and Miss Toomb were Oregon City visitors last Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. Calvin Garinger and Eli Fellows visited Mrs. Laub in Portland last Sunday.

Stephen and H. Fellows made a trip to Oregon City, last Friday.

Mr. and Mrs. Holmes and daughters attended church at Oregon City, last Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. C. F. Grossmiller and family attended the stock show in Portland last week.

Mrs. Ercel Kay of Salem spent the week-end at the home of her father, Dan Fellows.

We are having some lovely fall weather and the farmers are all busy putting in crops and digging potatoes.

STAFFORD

By Anna Chapman

The basket social given by the Stafford school Friday night, November 10, was a great success. More than \$50 was taken in from the baskets. The program rendered by the students of the grammar school, was very good and showed careful and extensive preparation on the part of students and teachers. The proceeds derived from the sale of the baskets will be used to put a floor in the gymnasium and play shed.

Miss Josephine Seaman of Parkwood is visiting with Libbie Rabick this week.

The Misses Christene Elligsen, Libbie Rabick and Josephine Seaman called on Eva Seeding, Saturday evening.

Heleen Wallis of Willamette called on Lena Elligsen, Sunday afternoon.

Mrs. Lyle Tiedeman and Mrs. Otto Pamperine spent Sunday at the Chas. Tiedeman home.

Mrs. Adolph Delker and children, Lydia, Marvin and Ellen, called on the Chapman family, Sunday afternoon.

Mrs. Otto Pamperine, Ida Hafterson



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and Phyllis Tiedeman attended the church bazaar at Frogpond, Saturday, November 11. Mr. and Mrs. Shaw called on Mr. and Mrs. Albert Chapman, Sunday afternoon. Mrs. Carl Ellinger spent Sunday at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Zack Elligsen.

HAZELIA

By Hazelia School Pupils.

Lena Lehman and Everett Whitten took dinner at the Tiala home, Sunday.

Elmer Shipley of Pacific City visited the home of his sister, Mrs. F. W. Lehman, Friday.

Mr. and Mrs. Wm Boyd of Oswego, and Mr. and Mrs. Fred Lehman were callers at the Frank Whitten home one evening this week.

Margaret Papoun visited her schoolmate, Evangeline Christiansen, Sunday evening.

Mrs. George Espen of Portland spent Saturday and Sunday with her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. H. T. Duncan.

Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Zivney were callers at the Winthel Stangles home in Wilsonville, Sunday.

E. H. Cherney and family of Portland visited J. Spousta and family, Sunday.

John Wilkins of Wilsonville took dinner with his sister, Mrs. E. R. Whitten, Sunday.

Mrs. L. C. Lortz of Portland visited her parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Johnson, Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. R. J. Zivney and family visited the former's parents in Oswego, one day this week.

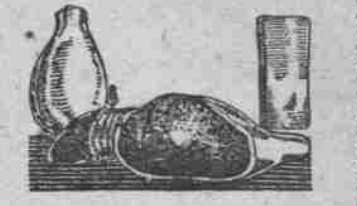
Wilbur and Donald Lehman called at the F. E. Whitten home, Sunday afternoon. Mrs. W. L. Baker, Mrs. Hugh Baker and Miss Ethel Thompson visited at the W. B. Cook home, Saturday. Miss Frances Willis took supper at the R. J. Zivney home, Tuesday evening.

The farmers of Hazelia are busy digging their potato crop. A fairly good crop is reported by the farmers are offered very low prices.

Mrs. A. J. Thompson and daughter Ethel and Mrs. Lizzie Walling were dinner guests at the J. P. Cook home, Sunday.

Several of the Hazelians are on the

sick list this week. Bad colds seem to be going the rounds. A road meeting will be held at the Hazelia school house November 25, for the purpose of voting a special road tax for this district. Mrs. Lizzie Walling of Garden Home is visiting old friends in and around Hazelia this week. She is staying with Mrs. U. F. Wanker and Mrs. C. W. Childs, at present.



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