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The week of prayer begins Sunday, Jan. 7, instead of Dec. 31.

The Gate In The Hedge

Why It Was Closed and How Opened

By CLARISSA MACKIE

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Pauline hummed a tune under her breath as she tied the ribbons of her little white shoes and reached for her tennis racket. With a swing of snowy linen skirts she tripped down the stairs and out into the golden California sunshine.

Playing tennis by oneself is never an entertaining pastime, but it is good exercise, and when one lives with a beautiful but melancholy maiden aunt on a retired country estate even daily gymnastics can border on the wildest excitement.

Pauline's method consisted in serving one or more balls across the net and then dashing around into the opposite court and returning the service with lightning rapidity and again darting back to return the stroke.

Pauline flitted back and forth with pink cheeks and shining eyes. Her loosened hair fell in two long braids below her slender waist, and under her breath she hummed the happy little tune broken by panting breath.

Once her strong young arm sent the ball sailing high over the tall hedge of Cherokee roses into the grounds of the adjoining estate, and it was returned to her with such surprising swiftness that involuntarily she sent it back again with a cry of triumph.

Again it returned, and once more Pauline sent it flying over the hedge.

There was a sharp exclamation, soft steps on the turf, and then over the dividing wall of roses appeared a shock of sun bleached hair, a pair of good gray eyes and a handsome tanned countenance.

"Knocked me out there, little girl," grinned the young man, holding out the ball.

Pauline's hands flew to her long braids and wound them in their accustomed coronet. Even then she did not look a day over fifteen, while she was really twenty-two.

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger, his grin fading away. "I thought you were a little girl, don't you know?"

"I'm not," explained Pauline with dignity. "Thank you for returning the ball," holding out her hand. "Why, it's not mine," she added, with a puzzled glance at him, "although it has my initials on it."

"P. G.?" laughed the man. "Those are mine too. I'm Paul Graham—I live in the stone house yonder," he explained. "Your ball disappeared, and I substituted this one."

"I know," said Pauline, with a shy smile. "I've peeped at the house through the trees. It looks very lonely and mysterious with its shuttered windows."

"They are all wide open now, and if you care for neighbors—here we are!" He smiled ingratiatingly. "I've heard there used to be a gate in this Cherokee hedge. I wonder where it is."

Pauline flushed delicately and looked away with embarrassed eyes. "I believe the gate was down in the rose garden. It is nalled up now and overgrown with roses."

"Why was it nalled up? Do you know?" he asked bluntly.

She shook her head slightly. "I have often wondered. Once I asked my aunt, Miss Greye, but she never answered my question. A gate between two gardens always seems so friendly. Don't you think so?"

He nodded. "This used to be our home, you know—the stone house, I mean—but it is many years since we lived here. Since I was a little boy I distinctly recollect that gate in the hedge, and I have always retained a vision of a stately young woman with jet black hair and a coldly beautiful face, who walked in a wilderness of roses on the other side of the gate."

"That must have been Aunt Ruth," said Pauline. "Only her hair is like snow. But she is still beautiful and so cold. I wish she were not."

"I'm taking a holiday. I wish your aunt would invite me over to play tennis. Perhaps she remembers me," suggested Graham.

"I'm sure she would invite you if she knew you were here," said Pauline

politely. "I must run in now. She would scold if she knew I had talked so long with a stranger. But it's awfully dull here. That is my only excuse." She moved slowly away and nodded a friendly farewell.

The door of the library was ajar, and Pauline pushed it gently open and peeped inside.

Seated at a flat desk was Ruth Greye. In the subdued light of the dimly lighted room she looked like a marble statue. Her gown was white, and above it her white throat arose in a stately column to support her beautiful head. Her face was lovely in spite of its pallor and crowned with soft masses of prematurely whitened hair. Her brows formed straight black lines, and the dark lashes and brown eyes were drooped over the desk. One white hand glided smoothly across the paper as she wrote.

Pauline watched her with admiration in her eyes. What could have been the sorrow that had taken all the light from her aunt's face and left it a beautiful mask of woe?

Miss Greye looked up and caught the girl's admiring gaze. A faint pink tinge her cheek and then faded. She wiped her pen and placed it on the tray, thrust her papers in a velvet portfolio and arose to her stately height.

"Pauline," she said in her slow contralto. "I have instructed James to lay out a new court on the north side of the house. In the meantime please do not play tennis."

"Why not?" asked Pauline boldly.

"Because I desire it," returned her aunt haughtily. "That should be reason enough, Pauline, but I will add that the owners of the house next door have returned, and I forbid any one of my household having communication with them."

"I am sorry," said Pauline calmly, "but I have been talking with the son, Paul Graham."

"What do you mean? Where did you meet him?" demanded Miss Greye quickly.

In a few words Pauline related the incident which had led to her acquaintance with young Graham. "He said he used to know you when he was a little boy, Aunt Ruth, but if you don't wish me to I won't speak to him again."

Miss Greye's fine eyes blazed with anger. "I do not forbid you to, Pauline, but I hope you will not. Paul Graham's father is a detestable man. When I tell you that once upon a time I was engaged to marry him he was a widower, and Paul was a little lad in dresses then. Walter Graham is a publisher, and I showed him a poem I had written. Pauline, he laughed at it."

Pauline, startled by this sudden confidence, knew not what to say. Makers of books and publishers were remote beings who rarely strayed into her practical little world. Still, she longed to comfort the troubled woman.

"Perhaps he laughed because—was it a humorous poem, Aunt Ruth?" she asked timidly.

"Humorous!" scoffed Miss Greye. "It was called 'Love's Dirge.'"

"Oh," said Pauline faintly. "I have no doubt it was a beautiful poem."

"It was," admitted the poetess briefly. "After that, of course, everything was ended between Walter and me. I had the gate in the rose garden nalled up, and now the hedge has so overgrown it that it cannot be found. It is like the incident—it is closed for ever."

"And overgrown with the roses of memory," murmured Pauline as she left the room and went upstairs.

In the library Ruth Greye stood with down bent head, her eyes fixed on the rug at her feet. "The roses of memory," she repeated softly, and there were tears in her eyes.

At the end of six weeks the repairs on the stone house were about completed. Father and son had overseen the regeneration of the neglected estate until it verily bloomed as the roses that crowded it. Paul Graham had registered time by his encounters with Pauline Greye.

They had met many times. Four times he had passed her pony cart as his motor whizzed by. Then he had tired of the car as an unsociable means of locomotion and mounted a horse. Often he had overtaken her equipage and ridden slowly beside her as they talked, for Pauline had decided she would avail herself of Miss Greye's permission and continue her acquaintance with the most interesting young man she had ever met.

Their acquaintance ripened quickly, and one day when Pauline returned home and saw the reflection of her own happy face in the mirror she blushed as she realized she had learned the most beautiful thing in the world. After that she did not drive. She shyly kept to the northern grounds or dreamed over a book in the wide veranda.

Paul haunted the roads restlessly. His own love was an acknowledged fact to himself, yet because of Pauline's unguarded position he dared not trust himself to see much of her, and he was miserable when she, too, hid herself away.

One gloriously beautiful morning Ruth Greye arose from a sleepless couch and walked slowly among the dew drenched roses in her garden. She stopped now and then to inhale the fragrance of a Cloth of Gold rose or to break a tiny cluster of half-opened buds. Suddenly she came to the place where the hedge had overgrown the rustic gate. She stopped abruptly and looked with startled eyes.

The hedge had been carefully trimmed away, and the rustic gate, released from its fastenings, swung idly with the light breeze. Ruth moved close to the hedge and buried her face in the sweet smelling roses.

There was a firm step on the path, and she looked up quickly to meet the glance of Walter Graham on the other

side of the rustic gate. Her breath came quickly, and she summoned all her pride and fortitude to steel her heart against her former lover.

His hand was on the swinging gate. "You have opened it at last, Ruth," he said in a low tone. "Did you open it for me after all these years?"

She did not answer. She was looking through the vistas of the rose garden, for in the distance two people were walking. It was Paul and Pauline, and his arm was about her waist, and the glint of her golden hair shone against the black of his coat. So Ruth and Walter had once walked in years gone by.

"Did you open the gate for me, Ruth?" repeated Walter Graham patiently.

Ruth pointed toward the lovers. "I am too proud and obstinate to do such a gracious deed," she said slowly. "She—Pauline—must have opened the gate for your son. Walter, let me open the gate for you. Will you come back?" She laid her hand on the gate, and it swung back for the first time in many years to admit him to the garden of his love.

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