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# 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 river. All the types of the period are present and the floating saloon is distinguished by meriment, dancing and gaiety. There are the customary drinking and gambling also. Virgil, 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 change. They form a singular compact.

CHAPTER II—Drace gets his mind off his mission by entering into deck sports in which he exhibits 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, consents to him that his mission is to find a certain ex-guerrilla, Stepha la Vitte, who had murdered Drace's father. It is his determination to announce to his new chum, to name 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 carpetbag 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 assents and Drace unexpectedly meets the girl who had fired his heart about 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 Stepha la Vitte, now an admitted outlaw. Now, more than ever, he is resolved to find where the girl lives and to find Stepha. 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 carpetbag 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 the scene, he catches a glimpse of one he is sure is Nadine.

(Continued from last week.)  
Not many shots were fired. The authorities made a criminal of the citizen who carried a gun or concealed it in his house. It was a hand-to-hand strife, the breaking of heads, the cutting of throats. A big, red-shirted negro with razor glenning in the smoky light made a grab at Drace, who had just room enough to leap back and strike with his saber; but the agile negro dodged, the blow was caught by a brick wall and the blade was broken off at the handle. But with the hit, a boxing glove of steel, Drace knocked the negro down and then passed over his body, striking right and left, pushing onward to the front, where the jagged ranks saw-toothed one into the other.

The struggle now was to save the hanging man, who, without fall enough to break his neck, was strung up to strangle. Drace was the first man to fight his way to him. He dropped his steel boxing glove, grabbed out his knife, leaped up, caught hold of the limb of the tree with one hand and cut the man down.

Catching up his weapon, he was about to mix in the fight again when the sharp scream of a woman caught and held him for a moment. He glanced hurriedly about; at various windows were lights and silhouetted figures of onlookers. But as if drawn by some lodestone instinct his eyes went to a second-story window just beyond the tree; and there, in the strong light of a lamp just behind her, he saw again the face of the barbaric rose maid, Nadine la Vitte.

Instantly he whirled and strove to fight his way to a gate which he saw in the wall before the house. But now came a new cry and a scramble for safety. A troop of United States cavalry came sweeping the thoroughfare from curb to curb, their drawn sabers flashing, the aroused anger of Uncle Sam rebuking a riot. Not to run was to be trampled to death, but Drace stood an instant to look about for Shottle. He could not find him, however, and he had to seek his own safety, for the cavalry were near, spreading out upon the sidewalk.

With divers others, he stood not upon the order of his going but ran, back down the street and then hurried down a side street out of the path of the troopers. There he waited until the tumult had subsided—perhaps an hour. Then he made his way back to the scene of the riot.

The house at the window of which he thought he had glimpsed the face of Nadine la Vitte was now dark. But in spite of the curious glances of sundry letterers, Drace took a careful survey of it and of the three oak trees in front—even felt their bark to familiarize himself with them. At the corner he sought the name of the street, on the lamp, but the glass had been broken, leaving only a red "L" and the fragments and "e." But no matter—he would know where to turn, would know the house when abreast of it.

Now Drace hastened toward the St. Charles. The streets were quiet. But a wagon rattled by, and he saw that

wine do about it?  
"Yassuh," he said, when Drace had warmed him with a greenback. "I reckon dey done moved away. There was er kind of rumpus last night. And I reckon they'll thought it wasn't no place for den no mo'; dey lef' mighty sudden-like, uhly dis mawnin'."

And that was all Drace could learn; no one in the vicinity would admit that they knew them or their destination. Disliking to call too much attention to himself, Drace walked away heavy-hearted. For a long time he wandered the streets. He came to the levee, and the French market. He went into the old St. Louis cemetery, and looked upon the novel sight of bodies sepulchered in a wall with doors like a furnace. These compartments, he learned, were rented by the month to the poor; and a short tenantry it was for many a son and daughter of penury answering Eternity's call, for when the grim agent failed to collect the pittance promised by sorrow, the shrouded renter was evicted—an old Spanish custom, Drace was told.

Recalled by these grim surroundings to the purpose that had brought him to the South, Drace now determined to give himself wholly to his quest for Stepha la Vitte. He returned to the hotel, and found Shottle nervous in a cloud of smoke. The floor was covered with burned matches and the stobs of cigars.

"Lib, I'm crushed," announced Drace. "So am I. But how does it happen that the dust-cart drove over you too?" "Nadine is gone. The place is nailed up."  
"That's tough, all right. But what are you going to do about it? Are you going to come to your puritanic senses and give the whole thing up, or do you expect—"

"I expect to fulfill my sacred mission. I must find Stepha la Vitte."  
Shottle got up and shook hands with his friend. He swore that he would make the search the aim of his life. "Suppose you hire me by the day," he suggested. "A man does better work by the day. He always has fresh stimulus every time the sun rises."  
"Very well—ten dollars a day."  
"That's liberal, Virgil, and I'll take it. And let's get Old Josh to help us. He is more or less acquainted with Stepha's habits."

**CHAPTER V**  
An hour later Drace and Shottle returned to their hotel after a ceremonious visit with Colonel Josh. The Colonel knew of Stepha, had indeed met him once, and he promised to make discreet inquiries that should without fail disclose the creole's whereabouts.

Hardly had Drace reached his room, however, before a visitor was shown in—a visitor who introduced himself as an agent of the New Orleans police department and who had a most distressing communication to make: It was known that Mr. Drace and his friend had taken part in a recent riot. Mr. Drace was one of the leaders, had severely wounded more than one man, and without cause, being from the North, just arrived, and having no possible interest in the city. However, he was to be treated with more of lenity than would rhyme with his crime, for instead of punishment he was only to be banished, along with his friend. A steambot, the Bumblebee, bound northward, would leave next morning. The chief of police would give if Mr. Drace and his friend failed to register among the passengers.

With scarcely twelve hours left in which to find Stepha la Vitte, Drace paced the streets in an agony of anxiety, making a hundred plans to find Stepha or to outwit the New Orleans officials and prolong his stay, but all in vain.

Colonel Josh did not appear, but he seemed to have embarked upon the quest, for when the distracted Drace called at his quarters about midnight the old fellow was still absent. Dawn brought Drace back again, for all his other endeavors had been unsuccessful, and but two hours remained before the Bumblebee's departure.

Routed out of bed, the Colonel kept Drace waiting a full half hour before he put in an appearance. Then, however, he offered a faint ray of hope. He had discovered that a certain Frenchman, a wine dealer, living at an address he produced scrawled on

paper, was reported to be an intimate of Stepha. Possibly from him Mr. Drace might—  
Drace hurriedly explained the decree which had banished him; then he "presented" the Colonel with a check on account, asked him to convey his respects to Miss Lucy and took his departure.

On his way to the Frenchman's he stopped at the hotel, where he found Shottle strapping up their baggage—and a police official paying an informal but suggestive call. An hour's grace remained. Drace paid his score at the desk, sent his baggage to the boat and then, summoning a cab, drove off with Shottle to the house of the Frenchman. It proved to be a man alone, both winoship and dwelling, Drace knocked eagerly. A small man, his mustache dyed, came to the door, blinking.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I am a friend of Mr. la Vitte, and—"  
"Pardon, monsieur, but you do not look like him, ze friend."

"But I am. And I came with word that will be of advantage to him. The police are after him—"  
"Aw, he know zat. Monsieur would trouble himself for nothing. Good morning."  
"Just a moment, please. You have no need to look on me with suspicion. I am his friend—and—"  
"If you his friend," interrupted the man, "you know he gone—to Europe, on steamer to France."

Drace was about to abandon the man in despair when Shottle, who had been staring at a case of wine which stood by the door ticketed and sealed for shipment, suddenly interrupted.

"Ah," he cried, "can this be the famous Chateau Yquem?" And brushing past the Frenchman, he leaned over as if to examine the bottle. With a cry, the wine merchant shoved him rudely away. "Zat is ze private stock," he snarled. "He is not for sale. I am not yet open for business, sirs. Good morning."

Shottle grasped Drace's arm and drew him away. A cart had halted outside, and as they entered their cab they saw the carter shouldering the case of wine and bearing toward his vehicle.

As they turned the corner, a deep-throated blast from the Bumblebee sounded a warning. Shottle turned upon the disappointed Drace with a gleeful countenance. "Master," he said, "I'll thank you for that money again. I've found him."  
"Found him?" exclaimed Drace. "How?"  
(Continued Next Week.)

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