

PERIWINKLE HOUSE

(Continued from page 8)

"Tell you what I'll do," persisted Shottle. "Let me have ten, and I'll make her a speech in your favor that will kink her hair."

"And I can do it. They've got my speech on the Periwinkle Age hung up right now at the university. The governor of North Carolina said to the governor of South Carolina, just after making his historic remark about its being a long time between drinks, that it was the most powerful speech he ever heard."

The Colonel scowled, and swore his refusal to enter into any financial transaction involving his heart; and Shottle, realizing that his efforts were vain, sank down into melancholy silence. Miss Lucy, meanwhile, was introducing Drace to some of her friends, not to young women, but to men and to ladies well advanced along the path. Drace soon realized that this society was far from the caricature that Shottle and Colonel Josh might reflect; for the most part it was composed of ladies of exquisite refinement, and men strong in the dignity of medicine or the law.

"You have not chosen an opportune time to visit New Orleans," an old judge remarked to Drace. "We are forced to live under the infancy of a carpetbag government, sir. Political scoundrels, who in the North could never attain to even the meanest office, come down here where we are disfranchised and elect themselves legislators, governors—representatives of parishes that they have never seen. Heavy taxes are levied, and they pocket the money. The governor was not elected, but named by a gang of freshshooters. The real citizens of the state have no vote. Their former slaves and the crooks who now manage them control the ballot-box. This is the true state of affairs. Wait till you see New Orleans, sir."

This talk was too serious for Miss Lucy. She plucked Drace away to walk with her, and she hung laughing on his arm as everywhere his eyes searched for the girl with the roses in vain! And presently he excused himself and went disconsolately to bed.

CHAPTER III

Next day the Leona reached New Orleans. To Drace his first look into the countenance of the famous old city was a disappointment; it had not the quick throbb; its pulse was slow and rhythmic. The levee was too broad and diffuse to appear active. The buildings looked mean and low. Romance and history had paled for him a picture too lively to color. But soon the charm of this half-lazy delta life

began to reveal itself to him. The town was ruled like a true French city, it sang. Paris minutely in the terror of the Revolution, and her youngest daughter in America, singed with powder, and with bloodstains on her dainty feet, danced to the music of her own improvised gait. Drace saw the carpetbag governor driving through the street, surrounded by an escort of black and mulatto cavalry. From a balcony came a gunshot, and an enormous negro in white gloves, sitting beside his political master, tumbled out upon the ground but the carriage did not halt in its speed, and the hoofs of the cavalry beat upon the murdered wretch. In a doorway an old man sat fiddling for his grandchildren to dance on the flagstones.

"Oh, you'll find drama enough here that hasn't been rehearsed," said Shottle as they turned toward the old St. Charles.

"They appear to have set the stage for us," Drace answered him, wondering if ever again he should find the girl with the torch of roses.

In connecting rooms and amidst the luxury of old French furnishings they were quartered.

Leaving Drace writing a letter, Shottle went out, but he soon returned with more of light than usually beamed from the sad stretch of his countenance.

"Well, sir," he cried with astonishing enthusiasm, "I want to tell you that life is not composed entirely of ingratitude. Last year when I was down here I saw an old fellow about to get into trouble with a Mexican roustabout on the levee. I wasn't in any particular hurry, so I stopped, took up a piece of scuffling and knocked the Mexican down. It was no particular trouble on my part, but the old man took it as a favor and urged me to eat dinner with him, which I did, being broke at the time. Now what does he do? I met him out there, and he gives me two tickets for the French ball at the St. Louis tonight."

"All right; we'll take it in."

"I should say we will! Why, there's likely to be a half dozen duels arranged for. We can see them bursting into bloom. But you'll have to live up, you know. You are just a trifle stern, it strikes me. There is too much of—of your mission showing in your face. I don't know of anything better calculated to correct it than an hour at the roulette wheel. Suppose we go over and give it a whirl."

"Hope springs infernal in the human breast," Drace paraphrased the poet. "Just as well curb yourself, old fellow. I'm not going to feed your passion."

A tap at the door and Colonel Josh announced himself from the outside. Invited to enter, he came in with a sweeping bow, his beard and moustache waxed, his hair darkened with dye,

giving to it a tinge of blue. He bore, and with ceremonious hesitancy, an invitation from Miss Lucy. She was at the delightful old home of a relative where choice guests would assemble that evening to hear Prof. L. Bannock Pettigrew read a paper on the origin and character of the ancient Scythians.

"In very sorry, Colonel," Drace cheerfully lied, "but we have another engagement."

The Colonel gleefully replied that he was put into a position of deep regret. He knew that Captain Drace would so much enjoy the professor; his paper would not take up more than three hours of the evening. He would impart to Miss Lucy that Captain Drace found it impossible to come. The Captain assured him that such was the true situation and brightening, the Colonel gladdened himself out of the room.

The ballroom which Drace entered that night was as fantastic as a gypsy's vision. It seemed that all civilization had lifted the lids of its worn-out chests to array in whimsical reminders of its former self. There was evident poverty making itself neat in old linen, and war victims proud in threadbare coats. In rags there is history, but no ancestry attached to cloth fresh from the mill. No unfriendly eye was supposed to look upon this gathering, no antagonistic politics permitted to view it. The walls were draped in the colors of France, and enshrined in a corner was a Confederate banner, its staff splintered, its folds darkened with sacred blood.

As Shottle no longer held the hope of raising a speculative table-stake, he bent himself to the less interesting life of the dance. But not without mishap! The floor was smooth with wax from the ends of marriage-altar candles; and Liberty's feet, more accustomed to the rough matting, and ragged carpets of the gambling-room, flew from under him. Catching right and left in his fall, he came down with a bit of lace in one hand and a comb in the other, while women shrieked at the devastations he had wrought, grouping about the severest sufferer to screen her into a retiring-room.

"That's what comes to a horse that wanders from his stable-lot out on the frozen pond," said Shottle as Drace came up to laugh at him.

"You've made a rip in the skirt of the ball sure enough," Drace replied, talking him by the arm. And then suddenly he halted, for he caught sight of a girl coming toward him. A moment before, there had been numerous young women in the room, but now there was only one—the barbaric rose maid, the girl who had touched his heart with a torch.

With her walked a tall, handsome and well-dressed young man. Her hand rested upon his arm, and she seemed

to listen with pleasure to his evidently ardent wooing. She looked at Drace, one glance, and then turned her eyes back to her cavalier and passed on. And a flame of jealousy was added to the turmoil that already held possession of him.

"Who is she, Shottle?" demanded Drace.

"I don't know, but I'll find out. Lord, but she is a fetcher."

He moved off, dodging the dancers here and there, while Drace sat alone in a window, waiting.

The orchestra struck up the supper-march, and Shottle, stalking his prey, saw the lady who had so excited Drace's interest seated with her cavalier in an alcove and supping daintily.

Possessing Himself of a Plate and a Goody Portion of Chicken, Shottle Returned and Brazenly Seated Himself Near Them.

"Nadine," the cavalier was saying, "you wrong me in thinking I seek to influence you through my friendship with your father. It is true he owes me much; and it is true that if I were to become a member of his family I would forget that. But I want to make you care for me for myself. If—"

"Hush, Mr. Boyce," said the girl. "There are people near—this is no place to discuss such things."

The young man lowered his voice, and Shottle could hear no more. He calmly finished his chicken and then

sought out Drace, whom he found packing up and down impatiently.

"Well?" demanded Drace.

"His name," announced Shottle, "is Boyce. Frederick Boyce, probably—or maybe John. It would be John, I'd think."

"Nadine's name!" exclaimed Drace. "Did you find out hers?"

"Nadine," replied Shottle with a triumphant air.

"Nadine," repeated Drace, and caressed the name with his lips. "But what's her last name?"

"Brown probably, or maybe Jones. Or it might even be Smith."

Drace scowled his wrath at such flippancy. "Look here, Lib," he said.

"I'll give you twenty-five dollars to find out her full name and where she lives. I'll give you a hundred if you'll find somebody who'll introduce me to her."

"It's a bet," said Shottle. "But I must warn you're late. Boyce wants her to marry him, and he's got a hold on her father. But she stood

flattered," she said. "The name is Nadine in Vitte, and the address—"

She broke off, and flushed a little. Shottle's jaw had dropped; then he gulped with an extraordinary contortion of his face in the endeavor to mask his astonishment. "And the address?" he pursued.

The girl and Boyce exchanged a troubled look. "I think," interposed Boyce, "it would be better to take the fowl home tonight. Perhaps you would be good enough to deliver it to our carriage. It is ordered for one o'clock—Number 227." Bowing with peacock grace, Shottle departed, but he delayed some ten minutes in dark thought before he sought Drace again. For Shottle wanted the hundred dollars, and if he were to tell Drace that her name was La Vitte! Could it be possible that she was Stepho's daughter?

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