

# Periwinkle House

By Opie Read

Illustrated by R. H. Livingstone

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"My dear one, we must go now. The sun was jealous that we so happy and will go into the dark to pout. . . . I will show you the near way for you to come again, the way I came when there was the fire. You can leave the canoe in the rushes and you will need it only to cross over to the cane. But we must hurry now."

In the rushes opposite the island he hid his canoe, and then she conducted him along a narrow and sometimes treacherous trail. Coming to the foot-log, she halted.

"I must leave you here. But I stand for two minutes. The sun he will wink a few more times. . . . I am so glad now to know that I will be your wife. And I am strong and can work."

"Lord bless you, but you won't have to work."

His arms were about her, her cheek against his, and with happiness the world was glowing.

"Till Thursday!" he cried as he dipped his paddle.

"Till Thursday!" she echoed as she watched him go.

"Till Thursday!" muttered the sinister voice of old Steppo, who had approached softly through the undergrowth at the sound of voices, and had overheard their parting. But when he came to Periwinkle house, he gave no sign to Nadine that he had overheard—only talked of Monsieur Boyce and the fine dresses he would buy for her when she was his wife.

It was long past noon when Drace reached the river.

The General had gone over into another parish to attend a stock sale. Tycie said; and when she had looked at Drace more closely, at his torn clothes, his muddy shoes, she sighed and sat down beside him where on the rustic bench he had dropped to rest before going to his room.

"Virgil," she said, "there is something troubling you. Now, you needn't tell me that it is business. I know what business is. I know all of its tricks; but I also know love and all of its tricks. Virgil, you are in love. Let me hope that it is not that Nina Spence. She isn't worthy of you; and besides, she doesn't belong to us. She is not of our world. Virgil, I am so sorry."

She put her hand on his arm, and he took it and affectionately kissed it.

"Aunt Tycie, I never saw the girl you speak of. I am in the—the throes, you might say, and have been—was before I got here, but not with her."

"But is it with anyone I know?"

"You have seen her, I have heard."

"Oh, you must tell me. It shall be sacred with me. If you only knew how people tell me their affairs of the heart. Even old Colonel Josh has told me. Now, why won't you?"

"I shall tell you, but I must put you on your honor. I said that you have seen her. You have; you spoke of her. Nadine—"

"Oh, Virgil! But her father!"

"Yes, I know. But let me tell you my story."

He told of his love, not of his father's death—told her nothing of his oath; she listened enraptured; and when he had finished, she mothered him with her arms about his neck.

About ten o'clock next day, while the family sat in the shade, up to the gate drew a resplendent carriage, drawn by two black horses and driven by a negro in livery. Out stepped a man as tall as Lincoln and wearing a hat as high as his. His raiment flashed like the varnish of his equipage. Drace recognized him as he came through the gate, taking off his gloves, and the General cried out:

"Tycie, I wish I may die dead if it isn't Liberty Shottle!"

"Colonel Shottle, at your service," replied Liberty, bowing and gesturing with his gloves in his hand.

"Well, Liberty?" cried his aunt, giving him a hug of welcome.

The General and Drace grasped him, stroked his velvety raiment, urging him to a seat.

"Why all this, Colonel Shottle?"—from the General. "You don't mean to tell me that you have sold your Jute-stock?"

"Uncle Howard, sir, first issue orders to have my carriage stored, my horses stabled and my driver quartered, please."

The order was issued, and they sat waiting for Shottle to explain his transformation.

"A simple story," he began, stretching out his legs. "But do not forget me. Poker, dice, roulette, faro, hazard—all of them failed."

inary schools. He was appreciative, generous, and gave me a bonus of five dollars. I went to a hotel, not of the first class, and it was there that I made my investment. The weather was warm and—"

"For gracious sake, Liberty, tell us!" his aunt urged him.

"That is my aim, but let us not be impetuous. . . . I was eating a Spanish stew out on the sidewalk, the weather being warm, when along came an agent—not a man in distress, but a regular agent—and I invested with him. I bought a ticket in the Havana lottery. . . . Wait, now. Nothing ever happens until it does, you know. The drawing came off two days later, and my number, 356,792, won the first prize, twenty thousand in gold."

Tycie hugged him; Drace shook his hand; and the General exclaimed his astonishment.

"Well, that beats anything I ever heard in my life. It doesn't seem possible, sir."

"No, and I was somewhat taken by surprise, Uncle Howard. But there is often success in a change of occupation, and I had tried everything else. It took me a few moments to adjust myself; then I got a draft, and in Mobile received premium enough on my gold certificate to pay my debts. And now it gives me great pleasure to perform that duty. I owe you, Uncle Howard, twelve hundred and thirty dollars, all told. Aunt Tycie, I owe you five hundred. Virgil, I owe you—"

but we'll get at that later. Worthy and patient creditors, here we are!"

He took out a roll of bank notes, counted the amount of his indebtedness to his aunt and showered her lap with greenbacks. Then he turned to the General.

"No, Liberty, I don't want the money," protested Bethpage. "If you pay me, it will be the first time you ever returned borrowed money to me, and I don't care to have you establish a precedent that might bring disappointment in the future."

After the family bedtime, Shottle came into Drace's room and requested him to report as to what progress he had made; and Drace told him all that had occurred.

"And now let me tell you a notion of mine," said Shottle then. "If you are waiting for that old sharkbone to decay, you'll perhaps wait twenty years. Attention: I'm going on a little trip tomorrow. In two days, when I come back, I'll drive down to a convenient point; you fetch the girl, into the carriage you jump, and away we go, drive over to some place where we can catch a train, and Cincinnati before old Steppo knows which way we've gone. What do you say?"

"But—what becomes of my oath?"

Oh, don't think that because I daily I have forgotten it or that in one lot I shall fail to keep it. If I should, in all after-life I'd have a contempt for myself."

### CHAPTER XI

"Till Thursday!" Drace had cried. Nadine had echoed it, and another voice, hidden in the cane, had muttered the words with how different a meaning! Now Thursday was come again; and Virgil Drace in firm of purpose, again made his way down the river and through the swamp, to his tryst with Nadine.

But Death sought to make a third at that tryst. From afar the sentinel Tony had seen Drace coming.

Sick in mind and body, Drace made his way back to Bethpage. He made himself as presentable as possible before he entered the house; fortunately, too, the attention of Tycie and the General was at that moment centered on Colonel Josh, who had stopped off to pay them a call—and who showed astonishment when asked to walk out to dinner, though he yielded with astonishing alacrity to the pressure of the General's hand upon his arm. He was busy with a helping of late mustard greens and hog's jowl, when Tycie inquired:

"And how is dear Lucy?"

"Madam," said Josh, "I am grieved to impart to you a distressful piece of news. She is soon to be married to a man named Spivan."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Colonel Josh."

"Madam, it is a calamity. Luke Spivan!"

"What's the matter with him?" the General inquired. "Isn't broke, is he?"

"General, the man has money. But do you know what his calling is? I shall enlighten you, sir. This fellow is a dealer in oysters, the—the excrement of the sea, you might say. And not only that, but he deals in crawfish as well, back-crawling crawfish, sir. I offered her my heart and my home. I told her that I would devote my life to her, and from week to week she put me off. But when this fellow Spivan asked her, I understand she accepted him at a jump, sir. And now I advise him to keep out of my way."

"Oysters and crawfish, eh?" said the General, winking at Drace.

"Those were my words, General—not only oysters but crawfish. I would not have believed it if she had not assured me with her own lips, lips that will please pardon my nearness to profanity."

Tycie's sympathy went out to old Josh, haloed him; and with her eyes she begged the General to drop the subject, but it was sweeter to him than any sugar ever grained in his mill.

After dinner they were in the parlor when they saw a vagabond equipage stop at the gate, an old carry-all drawn by a staggering horse, driven by a ragged negro. There was, one passenger in the habitation of a scarecrow, topped off with a yellow cotton hat—enough to disguise any man on earth save one, and this man was the exception.

"Tycie, what did I tell you!" cried the General. "I knew it as well as I knew my name. Now look at him!"

They looked at him, went out into the hall to meet him, Tycie in convenient tears. The visitor kissed her and shook hands with the men.

"It is not necessary for me to assert that I hold no commission, civil or military," said the vagrant.

"Sit down, sir," commanded the General. And then, surveying him slowly from head to foot: "Will you please state as to whether or not you regard yourself a human being?"

"General," said Tycie, "please don't scold him, for I'm sure he must be hungry."

"My dear, I shall not scold him; but I don't see anything about him that calls for congratulations."

"Liberty," said Virgil, "tomorrow we'll go over and have the parish surveyor run you off a suit of clothes."

he or Tony would stroll up to the Bethpage plantation and make an end of the General and Drace that night.

"All right," he snarled. "He can go. But let him never come back here or—"

He drew the back of his dirk across his own throat in a significant gesture. Then with Tony he lifted Drace into his canoe; and the young man, still dazed from the blow, feebly made his way out of the swamp.

When he had passed from sight, Nadine dropped her knife and sank to the ground sobbing. Old Steppo turned savagely upon her.

"You har! You she-wolf! I would kill you, but I promise you to the man Boyce. An' now there come something that I tell you. In you there is not the blood of Steppo in Vitte. But you never shall know your name. You she-wolf!"

He thrust himself toward her, his fangs gleaming in his merciless mouth, but without flinching she now laughed in his face.

"Oh, you make me so thankful that I am not your child. You hang his father and would murder him! But he will be gone; and if you kill me, it makes no matter. And you think I will stay here and let the man come to marry me! I will—"

He seized her, and Tony ran in to help. She fought with the dirk, but they wrenched it from her hand, held her helpless, dragged her into her room; and she lay for a time on the floor while she heard them fastening her in her prison. It was now dark. She got up, went to the window and found that heavy bars had been nailed across it. She lighted her lamp and with a pencil began to write a note to Drace, praying in her heart that she might find some way to send it to him.

Little she slept and in the dawn she was at the window, the vines all of them gone. She heard footsteps near, and she tried to look out to discover who it might be, but she could gaze neither to the right nor the left, so closely was she mewed. She spoke, softly, louder and then there drew the darkened form of a man, Batoche, an old frog-bunter whom once before she had employed.

"I am here to borrow the muskrat-spear for the one day, for mine he was broke; but they are still asleep."

"Come closer, good Batoche, and listen to me. Take this note to Monsieur Drace, at General Bethpage's house—quick, with no one to see you, and I will give you a diamond when you come back."

"Give me the note, an' I be there soon."

She gave him the note, and he hastened away. She stood at the door, wondering why she had not heard her father stirring about. Once she thought she heard him call Tony. After a long time Tony came, and she heard them together as they went out. Then all was silent.

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"My dear relatives, I thank you for these little attentions; and as to your

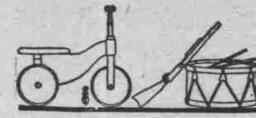
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# See Joyland

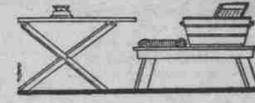
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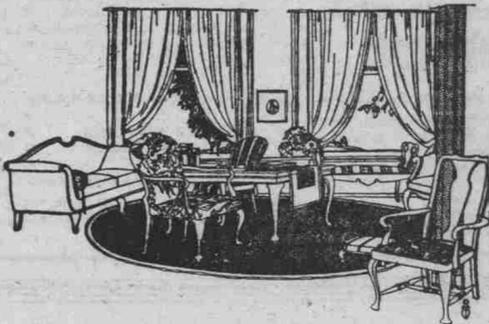
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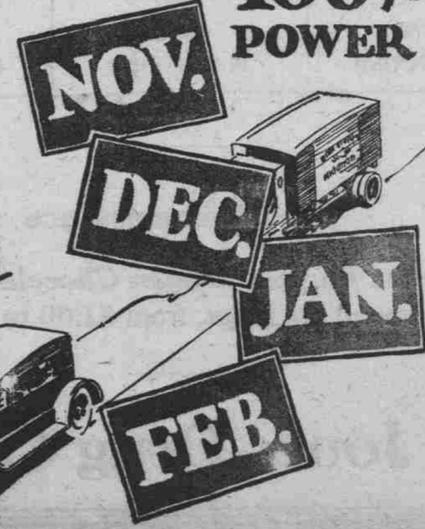
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