

Periwinkle House



By
OPIE READ

ILLUSTRATED BY
R. H. LIVINGSTONE

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Supposing you were a young man who had served in a war and escaped its perils and that the future were rosy with promise, excepting that fate had called upon you to execute a grim and terrible purpose; the circumstances being that during the conflict, an outlaw operating under the semi-sanction of guerrilla warfare had raided your home and murdered your father, and then, hanging his body to a tree, had insolently pinned a card to it bearing the outlaw's name! Would not you likely do as Virgil Drace did—swear a solemn vow to find that outlaw, hang him as high as Haman, and decorate his corpse with your own card? Then, while you were setting about to execute that vow, suppose you met a fascinating girl with whom you fell in love and had the satisfaction of finding your affection sincerely reciprocated. Then, supposing it developed that the girl were the daughter of the man upon whom you had sworn to wreak vengeance. What would you do? Is it not a satisfactory web upon which to weave an intensely interesting story of romance, especially when the incidents occurred in the South following the Civil war, the young man a northern officer, the girl a beautiful, fiery southerner, and all the characters and episodes of the South and that turbulent period which marked the days of reconstruction? Would it not be more absorbing if, as in this case, the author were one of the greatest of American novelists? You will find this stirring romance worked out in the most charming way in "Periwinkle House," by Opie Read.



Opie Read

No man in the United States has written as many stories as Opie Read, and no author has had a larger number of readers. He was born in a small town in Tennessee in 1852, followed newspaper work for awhile in Kentucky, and then moved to Little Rock, Ark., where he edited the Arkansas Gazette from 1880 to 1881. He was next on the staff of the Cleveland (O.) Leader and then returned to Little Rock, where he established the Arkansas Traveler, a humorous paper which attracted the attention of the entire English-speaking world. Mr. Read furnished most of the material that went into the publication. He conducted it from 1883 to 1891 and then moved to Chicago, where he has since resided, engaged in literary work. It is doubtful if Opie Read himself could recall the titles of all the books he has written, without referring to a list. One or more of them is in nearly every home where fiction is indulged in throughout the land. They form a conspicuous part of the fiction section of every public library, and are carried in stock by every enterprising book dealer. During late years he has been less prolific, due to the fact that he has not had the leisure for writing, for he has become one of the most sought after lecturers, and his time is practically filled with Chautauqua, Lyceum and special platform engagements. In this work he has covered practically the entire nation and has visited some sections several times, for there always is a demand for his return.

CHAPTER I

Out upon the sheen of the mighty river the pine-torch flames fell in rippling streams, and the full moon, peeping over the tall timber, made mouths at herself in the wrinkled mirror of flood. On the steamboat Leona the negro deck-hands were chanting the buoyant anthem of the June rise. In the gilt, enameled saloon, a sweet-strunged waltz, centuries removed from the melodic bellow of the black bucks below, swelled out upon a breeze that seemed eager to mingle with it, while sentiment smiled and gallantry bowed in the studied graces of a floating ballroom on the Mississippi. All ceremony was precise with the inherited observance of precedent, save when some hair-greased and less refined dandy of the woods, having lingered too long at the bar, let liquor fly to his heels to cut a rebellious pigeon-wing.

The boundless ranch of the West was unknown, and along the lower Mississippi lay the great plantations of America. Except for the toil of the slaves, industrial life had been only a sort of happy idleness; but society held many a thrilling charm, and with its libraries from Europe, intellectual life indulged the luxury of ceremonious romanticism. This atmosphere was still breathed on the big Mississippi steamboats, for fantasies which render poetic the condition of us all linger on the water after having been driven from the land.

In the ballroom of the Leona the dress of the men and the women was variegated with the odd ends of different periods of style. Old chests, hidden during the Civil war, only a few years past, had been opened to give up the faintly scented fluffs and gourd-flowered vests of Andrew Jackson's day; and the brigadier in ruffled shirt poured gallantry's extravagant figures of speech upon the graceful young dame arrayed in the silk that

had adorned the form of her grandmother when in the village of Washington she waited with Lafayette. During a tulle in the music-measured capering a tall, handsome young man, garbed in the fashion of the day, passed with long and careless strides from one end of the saloon and out toward the upper deck.

Admiring eyes were bent upon him; and one lady turned to her partner and said:

"Oh, please, Colonel, tell me who he is."

The Colonel placed his right hand on the bosom of his ruffled shirt and bowed. "Miss Lucy," he said, "it would be one of the satisfactions of my life to gratify your more than natural curiosity, but that pleasure is denied me. I can't tell you who he is."

And then—because the Colonel had sighed his own sentimental distress in the presence of Miss Lucy and because her curiosity concerning the young stranger stirred a jealous qualm—he added: "He looks like a Yankee to me."

The young man was a Yankee. And because he was journeying to the South upon a grim and terrible mission, the gayeties of the ballroom had grated upon him and he had sought the solitude of the upper deck. Yet it was this moment that Fate chose to bring him face to face with one who was to change the whole course of his life.

For as he turned into a long passageway, aflame with light but deserted, there suddenly entered at the far end a girl thrilling in liveness and almost barbaric in dress. In swift unconsciousness of him she approached, a great handful of roses in red glare hiding her features. She lowered her hand; he caught full view of her face; and it seemed to him that his heart ceased to beat, like a pendulum caught and halted, then thrown again into motion. She did not look at him as he slowly passed her. He gazed into her eyes as she bent them upon the roses held out in front of her; and then he wheeled about to follow her. She turned into a cross-passage, was gone; he ran to the entrance, but she had vanished.

In the young man's heart was a struggle to call her, but there was no appropriate word; and then sobered, the Yankee smiled at himself. But the smile did not balm his delicious wounds, and he continued his search into the ballroom. There were many handsome women, belles of proud villages, but to none did he give a second glance. Again he passed out toward the upper deck.

For a time he stood gazing down upon the never-solved mystery of night on the Mississippi. The fiddles were going again, and he heard slithered feet whispering over the floor, but it seemed to him that this scene of gaiety was forced, like a melancholy laugh; it reminded him of a book of poems in tatters, of a love-letter in faded ink.

Built about one of the smokestacks was a shanty of boards called the "dog house." Turning a corner of the shanty, the young man stumbled against some one; a man growled in resentment.

"I beg your pardon!"

"I should say you do!" A young fellow of unusual height and of humorous slenderness came forth out of the shadow. The boat was landing, and a turpentine-torch on the shore revealed him, pale and long of face, with collar cut low and chin standing high.

"Yes, sir," he added, "and although it may not be necessary on this occasion, yet if you knew who I am, you would apologize some more."

"Ah, you don't say!" replied the Yankee, smiling. "And as you seem to be fond of the music of apology, will you please tell me who you are?"

"I can do that as easy enough, but I don't wish to frighten you."

"You are considerable. But the fact is I rather enjoy the sensation of fright."

"Then tremble; I am Liberty Shottle."

"What, you don't mean that you are really Liberty Shottle?"

"I swear it."

"Well, well! And now will you please enlighten me as to who Liberty Shottle is? And why do you suppose that people who have heard of you, tremble in your presence? What have you done?"

"Sir, modesty puts a clamp on me. . . . And now would you mind telling me your name?"

"Not at all. My name is Virgil Drace."

"You don't say? Well, well! But I never heard of you, either." Now they laughed, the joyous and unsuspecting mirth of youth. They stood looking

down upon the deck-hands, loading freight, listening to the stream of the second mate's profanity, who swore his emotion by the stars, the moon, the river, the universe; and when the Leona was on her way again, the fiddles going, the muddy rouabouts singing, Liberty Shottle and Drace seated themselves on campstools, eagerly toward swift acquaintance, the friendship of two natures far apart in aim and principle.

"If you've got two cigars, I'll join you in a smoke," said Shottle. "Thank you. You see, my people, what few of them are left, say that I don't exist. They haven't cast me off, or anything of that sort, but being of staid habits themselves, they swear that I am too unreal to exist. Lord, what is the world but queer? What's your game?"

"I haven't any—any game," parried the Northerner. "But what are you doing on this boat yourself?"

"I'm going down to New Orleans," replied Liberty. "To see how long I can stay there. I had a pretty fair job a couple of months ago teaching a school near Memphis. They liked me, too. I've got a sheep's hide from Chapel Hill university, North Caro-



"Then Tremble; I Am Liberty Shottle."

lina, with all the wool singed off and the board acknowledged my qualifications, but they caught me shaking dice with the boys and told me that as there were some branches of learning they didn't care to have instilled, I'd better get a professorship in some higher institution. Have you been in there?"

Liberty Shottle waved his hand; and Drace, thinking he meant the ballroom, answered him:

"Only passed through. I've been rather worn with that sort of thing."

"Oh, you think I meant the ball! I meant the poker-room."

"Yes, I sat in there for a time."

"How did you come out?"

"Not very well. Lost two hundred."

"You speak of losing two hundred as lightly as if it were a matter of breath instead of blood. Would your mind holding my hand till you say it again? Two hundred! Why, you know, a fellow would teach bullet-heads and sissies for two months for two hundred dollars. . . . Now, let me lay down a proposition: I am lucky tonight. I lost fifteen dollars, all I had, but I'd just got up to the point of winning when I lost my last dollar. Just one more ante, and it would have come my way. I saw it coming, but a blundering fool headed it off. Now, here's my scheme, and it's a good one: you want your two hundred back; you stake me to a hundred, and I'll go in there and make a cleaning. Don't refuse, now, until you have let your mind digest the situation. Most of the errors in this life come from snap judgment."

"Ah, you think you can win, because you lost?"

"My dear Virgil, there is, you might say, a psychology in everything. Who wins a fight? The man who believes he can't? No, the man who knows he can. And I know right now. Why, I'd stake my life on it. You give me the hundred and stay right here and wait. As for my honesty, I can give you references—the mayor of New Orleans and Judge Hebbins of Memphis—but he died last week. No matter—I'd jump into the river and let the paddle-wheel beat me into sausage-heat before I'd deceive you. Liberty Shottle, that's my name!"

Drace leaned back and laughed. "Liberty, a thing astonishing to me is going to happen. I'll stake you to the hundred."

No superstitious devotee ever received from the priest of the gods a libation with more of emotional strain than Liberty Shottle evinced when he closed in tight clutch on Drace's adventurous hundred. Then he bowed and disappeared.

Drace sat musing, and soon he began to wonder why he had been so weak as to give \$100 to this peculiar fellow, a stranger. Well, Liberty had amused him. Made him laugh, and in this world there is more money spent for the promotion of laughter than for the relief of tears.

Presently Shottle returned. He sat down and though physically he was light, the camp stool groaned beneath him. Drace waited. The Leona blew her great horn and all the world

seemed to tremble. When the sound had died, echoing miles away, the gambler coughed lightly and groaned. Drace wondered why he should be tickled over any one's misfortune, but he felt a merry tingling in his blood. "This boat's got a good bass voice," he remarked.

"Bass voice! Do you know what I'd like to do? I'd like to bore a ten-inch hole in her bottom and let her go down."

"You must have lost, Liberty."

"Don't call me Liberty. Call me Lib—just Lib; that's enough. But let me tell you something. Never in all my life have I ever come as near being a rich man as I was just now. I had won—by George, I had so much money stacked up in front of me that a mulatto from the North called me 'marster.' And then a cog slipped. We could have split and had a small fortune apiece."

"Blundering fool again?" Drace inquired.

"Yes, sir, and I was the fool. I wanted to be a rich man—and came within one of it. You know, sometimes Fortune hesitates as to whether she shall crown you or slap you."

"In your case, she didn't seem to hesitate long, Lib."

"No the hair-tangled hag! And then do you know what she did just as I was forced to get up from the table in as hot a fever as ever scorched a man's blood? She smiled at me. Now, I'll swear to that. But it's all over. A fellow has his little day, and then stretches out and lets the undertaker measure him."

"Yes, Lib, and I'd advise him to bring along extra tape when he comes after you."

Shottle attempted to smile, but the fever within him was still so hot that his effort ended in a grim tightening of the mouth.

"That's all right, Virgil, but you must remember that you are one out of a million. How a fellow can lose \$200 at poker and get up from the table with money still in his pocket is beyond me. However, it means that you haven't got poker in your blood, which of itself is a marvel. But I want to tell you that every man is food for some sort of desperate passion. If it isn't gambling, it may be love. How about that?"

"Hasn't caught me yet," answered Drace, stoutly, even though the picture of the girl in the passageway was at the moment floating bright before his mind's eye. "Of course," he added. "I may marry Liberty; that sort of thing runs in our family, you know. But I don't think the subject very interesting."

"I grant you. In this we walk shoulder to shoulder. But there is something of vital interest. Just now—I lost."

"Yes, and a very natural thing," Drace agreed.

"No, it wasn't natural. It was unnatural that I should lose just at that time. It was an accident. Listen to me for just a minute. Anybody can do the natural and expected thing. A dog or a cat or any other animal always does. It is doing the thing that nature didn't intend that marks the progress of civilization. Now, I have a proposition to make that may seem unnatural. Perhaps no man you ever met before would make it. But you never met such a man as I am, before. You couldn't look forward and see me. Could you?"

"I didn't," Drace cheerfully admitted.

"And it would have been hard for you to believe that I exist, which I don't, according to the belief of some of my folks. Now, then, what are we getting at? Another stake? No, I am not going to ask you to risk any more of your money. But this is my proposition: You let me have \$100; if I win, I'll pay back all I owe. And if I don't, I'll belong to you—your property, body and soul—but with this understanding, I am not to perform any menial service in public. And it is further understood and agreed upon that if by any chance I can raise \$100, I am to have the privilege of buying my freedom. The first \$100, you understand, was a stake and not a loan. Before you decide, weigh the advantages of owning a man. I will be your Greek, your enslaved philosopher, be your Epictetus and turn your mill. We will revive the ethics of ancient society. Won't that prove that history really does repeat itself?"

"Yes," answered Drace, "but I don't care any more whether history repeats itself than I do that a stammering man repeats himself."

"Now my dear friend soon to be my master, I hope—I ask you; isn't it something to own a companionable slave?"

"Yes. By the way, do you know New Orleans very well?"

"What! Does a bloodhound know the scent of a darkey?"

"All right, Lib—here's \$100. And I believe that within an hour from now you'll be my property."

(To Be Continued.)

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NOTICE OF FINAL REPORT

Estate No. 1354 of Mary Facka, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.
The State of Nebraska, to all persons interested in said Estate take notice that the Administrator has filed a final account and report of his administration and a petition for final settlement and discharge as such Administrator and for declaration of heirship and distribution of proceeds which have been set for hearing before said court on October 2d, 1922, at 10 o'clock a. m. when you may appear and contest the same.
Dated September 9th, 1922.
WM. H. C. WOODHURST,
Seal County Judge.

NOTICE OF PETITION

Estate No. 1911 of August Sodocott, deceased in the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.
The State of Nebraska: To all persons interested in said Estate take notice that a petition has been filed for the probating of said estate and appointment of Christian Sodocott as Administrator of said estate, which has been set for hearing herein on October 10th, 1922 at 10 o'clock a. m.
Dated September 16th, 1922.
WM. H. C. WOODHURST,
Seal County Judge.

Wm. E. Shuman, Atty.
NOTICE TO CREDITORS.

In the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.
In the Matter of the Estate of Rose M. Knox, Deceased.
Notice is hereby given to any and all persons having claims and demands against the estate of the said Rose M. Knox, deceased, that the 17th day of January, 1923, has been set and appointed as the day for the reception, examination, adjustment and allowance of lawful claims and demands of all persons, against said estate and that the County Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska, will at said time receive, examine, adjust and allow all such claims against said estate, as provided by law, at the County Court Room in the Courthouse, in the City of North Platte, Lincoln County, Nebraska, and all persons so interested in said estate, will appear at said time and place and duly present their said claims and demands in the manner required by law, or show cause for not so doing, and in case any of said claims or demands shall not be presented on or prior to the said 17th of January, 1923, the same shall be forever barred.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have signed this notice and affixed the seal of said Court this 18th day of September, 1922.
WM. H. C. WOODHURST
(SEAL) County Judge

NOTICE!

In the District Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska.
Mearl E. Jacox, Plaintiff,
vs.
Jones, wife of Joseph T. Jones, deceased, her first, real, and true name unknown, Cora True, True, her husband, his first, real and true name unknown, Ed Miller, Miller, his wife, her first, real and true name unknown, Will Jones, Jones, his wife, her first, real and true name unknown, Ward Jones, Jones, his wife, her first, real and true name unknown, Walter Jones, Jones, his wife, her first, real and true name unknown, Joseph Jones, Jones, his wife, her first, real and true name unknown, Frank Jones, Jones, his wife, her first, real and true name unknown, Flora Stewart, Stewart, her husband, his first, real and true name unknown, their respective heirs, devisees, legatees, and personal representatives, all other persons interested in the estate of Joseph T. Jones, deceased, and all other persons claiming any interest in any kind in the following described premises, to-wit: The Southwest Quarter (SW¹/₄) of Section Nine (9), Township Eleven (11), Range Twenty-Six (26), Lincoln County, Nebraska, their real names unknown, Defendants.
The above named defendants will take notice that on the 12th day of September, 1922, Mearl E. Jacox, the plaintiff, filed his petition in the District Court of Lincoln County, Nebraska, against the above defendants, the object and prayer of which is to quiet title in the plaintiff to the following described premises to-wit: The Southwest Quarter (SW¹/₄) of Section Nine (9), Township Eleven (11), Range Twenty-Six (26), Lincoln County, Nebraska. The plaintiff prays that the defendant be required to set out their claims and that in the

event they fail to do so that they be forever barred therefrom and that the plaintiff be declared owner of said premises. You are required to answer said petition on or before the 30th day of October 1922.
Dated this 14th day of September, 1922.
Mearl E. Jacox, Plaintiff.
By D. E. Harper, His Att'y.

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