

Periwinkle House

By Opie Read

Illustrated by R. H. Livingstone

CHAPTER XI Continued

"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."

Tyler's sympathy went out to old Josh, halved 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 habiliments of a searcrow, topped off with a yellow cotton hat—enough to disguise any man on earth save one, and this man was the exception.

"Tyler, 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, Tyler 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 Tyler, "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."

"My dear relatives, I thank you for these little attentions; and as to your question, Uncle Howard, let me say, sir, that my claims as to being a human are somewhat vague. One of the first things I discovered about myself was my unreality. When do we eat?"

Tyler ran out and returned with a piece of frosted cake that looked like a corner broken off a marble mantle-piece. The General was laughing.

"Well, Liberty, we are always glad to see you, anyway. It is the unreality, if I may so speak, that splices our lives; and when you come with your gibed worries, you enliven us. Where have you been, anyhow?"

"I've been wherever there is," said Shottle, gesturing with his cake. "First I went to Memphis, to the races, and gave old Skimpy Hughes two hundred for a sure card on the entries. Lost ten thousand. Then I followed the horses to Lexington, with my bank account looking like a sprinkling cart. But why linger when nothing can be swifter than the approach of poverty? Finally I sold my clothes to a negro preacher and invested my all in lottery tickets. It seemed that I possessed myself of all the figures of the multiplication table, didn't see how I could possibly miss, but I did. It wasn't laid out for me to win again. He gets to a certain pinnacle of fortune, slips off, and spends the rest of his life struggling to get back. When do we eat?"

Long after bedtime Shottle came to Virgil's room.

"Virgil, you know I've got to hit on something of a permanent nature. So the question is, now that I've quit gambling, what am I going to do? If you'll not go to sleep, I'll tell you of a plan. Mark me: I have observed, along with thousands of others, that nothing digs deeper after rainy-day money than a circus and menagerie. It is known that the poor man of the South, and especially the negro, will sell his cookstove to buy a circus ticket. Now comes my plan, and mind you, I strive to keep it from being too sudden. Attention! You buy a circus, and I'll go along as ring-master. That is the one thing I am really fitted for. You never saw me crack a whip, did you?"

"Don't believe I ever did."

"All right, you've got something to look forward to. Yes, I'll be the ring-master, and—"

"And bet an elephant on the turn of a card," said Virgil.

"Ah, one of my own, perhaps, but not one entrusted to me. I am not an embezzler of elephants. I wouldn't bet a garter-stroke on a sure thing. Besides, I told you I'd quit gambling—that is, I'm quitting. It isn't wise to expose my constitution to the shock of a sudden change. . . . Well, good night."

CHAPTER XII

Drace was far too disturbed in mind to sleep, and before the sun was high he walked out alone in the garden, to muse upon his situation. Slowly he paced his way along the path. Someone spoke, and he turned to face the man Batoche.

"Monsieur, a note."

Drace took the paper and hastened into the summer house.

The note was brief, but full in the expression of what had befallen Nadine, something to throb with the telling of it: "As soon as you can, my love, you must come to me to take me from the man I thought my father, but who is the awful brute. Yesterday he called me a she-wolf and told me I am not his daughter; and when he told me, my heart was light, for then I have not within me the murderer's blood. Come not alone, Virgil, for Tony will be here, and both of them watch. I am locked a prisoner in my room, and tomorrow they take me to Memphis to make me marry Monsieur Boyce. But I fear not so long as I know you come."

Quickly Drace slipped up to his room, buckled on his pistol, found a rope, looped it with a hangman's noose and tucked it beneath his coat. Nadine was not Stepho's daughter; now he was free to act! Swift was he to answer the appeal, but he was set against her caution, the advice to bring someone with him. It was his fight alone, the execution of his oath, which was not dead like the autumn leaf, but fresh like the new leaf in the spring. He would shoot Tony, the dog, and then string up his master.

No one saw him, not even the watchful Tyler, and he hastened toward Willow Head, not having found a boat at the landing. Never had the river seemed so broad, the current so swift. At last his canoe touched in among the cane roots at the island's edge. He leaped ashore, but was cautious in the canoe, an Indian in stealth as he approached the house. He heard not a sound, saw no smoke issue from the chimney. Perhaps the wolves were in wait for him, to snap him, but he was now in full view, and he ran at the top of his speed. But near the house he halted, peering about, looked in at the door of the main room, found it deserted, then walked softly around to the barred window. Nadine spoke before he recognized her, standing in the twilight of her prison.

"My heart was loud to tell me you would come, Virgil. And you brought no one with you. But of that there was no need now."

He stood in silence looking at her, his strength exerted against a bar at the window, to tear it loose, but the wrought-iron nails were too long, and he could not budge them.

"The ax, Virgil! Is it lying there?"

Acting upon her suggestion, and with no caution now against making a noise, he cut the bars away and helped her through the window.

"Nadine, he said, 'my oath must now be kept.'"

His arms about her, he stood pressing her close, and never had he felt so strong, and surely never so determined. Her eyes half closed, her head on his arm, she did not speak. She looked as if she were at rest, and dreaming. He kissed her, and her eyes flashed wide.

"I have come to hang the monster that called you a she-wolf."

"When I have told you, yes. And now you will listen. Early I thought I heard Tony and my—I mean Stepho in a Vite, go out. But Stepho was not walking with Tony, the strong man, but was dragged out in the rocking chair; for some time in the night come the strange stroke, and Stepho was paralyzed."

"Nadine! What are you saying?"

"I am saying that you must listen. Tony came to the window and told me what happened. I ask him to let me out, but he would not, for he wants to please Stepho till the last, on account of the money that may be somewhere hid. He went for the doctor, and he came but has gone away again. For I hear him say he can do no good. The old man was out in his chair where he so often sits; and we will go see him, for it will not be for long. Let us forget all and be kind when death was come, Virgil."

"Yes, but where is Tony now?"

"I think he is looking for the money. Let us go now to the poor old man."

"You forgive easily, Nadine."

She looked at him in wonderment.

"How can we not forgive when the heart says we must, Virgil? He use me for the trap, which I will explain all to you, but he give me the chance to be with you, and for that I thank him—aid for not being my sure-enough father. . . . Come with me."

Old Stepho sat in his chair asleep, but as they approached him, he opened his eyes, looked at Nadine, then at Drace.

"Monsieur was ver' strong. An' I kill you if I be not struck down like the beef. An' Tony kill you if he here, but I send him off for something. Ah, the leetle gel, she hate me now!"

"Monsieur," she said, "I cannot find it in my heart to hate. It is the poison. Many times you were kind, and I remember them."

He bowed his head, and through his tangled lashes looked up at Drace, fire gleaming through brushwood. But he spoke to Nadine, turning upon her a less malignant glance.

"The paralyze. It begin down here an' creep up. When it touch the heart, I was go. I say just now that Tony, he would kill the strong monsieur. Re-

would not. He be scared when I was done."

"Your name, leetle gel," pursued Stepho, "was Walton—the daughter of a northern man who live in the same town with Mr. Drace's father near Cincinnati. You an' your mother were carried off by my men; but your mother, she fall from the horse just as we come to our camp and she die. About her neck was a purse with money and papers—one that tell where more money is buried. After the war I go back and dig up this money, but I keep it for you, for your dowry. It is here—buried under the hearthstone."

Now—now I beg you to go for Father Taban. You know where he live. Quick, for it creep up."

"Yes, I will go. Virgil will stay to keep you company."

"Let me go with you," Drace pleaded, fearful that some harm might befall her.

"No, my love, one," she gently opposed him. "You must stay here for no harm can come to me now. Stay here and be kind to him, for kindness is the will of the One above. You will, yes?"

She kissed him fondly, and the old wolf-eyes closed, that they might not see. Now she was ready to go, Virgil staidied the canoe for her and gently shoved it off. She threw him a kiss, and rounding a green cape, raised her paddle into the sunlight and flashed him adieu.

Drace returned to Stepho's chair, the old man shagging his brows at him.

Then thinking of the rope still buttoned tightly beneath his coat, he tore it out and threw it away. Nature, he reflected, had usurped his task, and he could safely turn over to her his claims. A slight noise behind him; he looked quickly about, and there a few feet behind him at the edge of the cane stood Tony. Upon him the vision of Drace's countenance came, it seemed, with a startling flash. Instantly he fell back, through the cane fringe, into the bayou. Loudly he cried for help.

"Oh, monsieur," implored the old man, "please he's been queer. He can no swim. An' he die befo' hees sins they was forgive. He's the poor wretch, monsieur. Queek, monsieur."

Virgil threw off his coat and his pistol-belt, and leaped into the water. A moment before, he would have shot the beast; now he would save him.

Tony was not in sight. But soon he arose, swimming, and Drace saw a knife in his hand. In the water Tony was as much at home as a beaver! He dived, and Virgil knew now that it was his aim to dart beneath him and with the knife to rip him as a skillful swimmer rips a crocodile. But in the water the strong man, young Drace, was at home, too, and turning about with a quick swirl, he waited. Tony came up; and now they came toward each other, like rival otters—grappled and struggled, treading water, shoulders up. Virgil caught Tony's left wrist, wrenched his arm limp and helpless, seized him by the throat, his left hand steel-gripped about the murderous right wrist, the knife hand.

No mercy now! Fire and water, their game! Down, gasping, down!

Virgil swam ashore and came dripping out of the cane. The old man spoke: "Tony! What he?"

"I have drowned him."

"Monsieur was ver' strong!"

"If I had brought him to the shore, he would have sneaked a chance to murder me."

"He was the bad man, yes. He ought be dead, yes. I was to keel him myself. He keel the man here not long go. Twice he go keel you, an' once he snap the pistol. I set the trap for you to be stabbed if the water. Then there be no blood to tell the tale. Now I am so sor'. Will monsieur pull me into the house?"

"No. You would reach for a pistol to shoot me. Stay where you are."

"Monsieur have still suspicion. We wait."

Virgil put on his coat, his belt, and

sat down on the grass. The old man was silent, his eyes closed. He might be dead, but no matter. More than an hour dragged by, the breeze moaning in the cane. Virgil arose and stood near the chair. Stepho opened his eyes, but was silent. Virgil sat down again and waited, the wind tangling the tops of the cane.

He heard the canoe coming. Father Taban was kindly and soft of voice. For many a despairing wretch he had held the Cross. At sight of him old Stepho's eyes were still hard. Time wears granite away, but does not melt it. Not yet had he granted mercy, and for no pity could he hope.

"Father, this is the man I would keel. I hate heem, the carpetbagger."

"It is not true," said Virgil, standing near. "I fought against the carpet-baggers in June, in New Orleans, when they were hanging a man. I cut him down."

How great can be an instant change! The old wolf-eyes dewed soft.

"Oh, monsieur, I was that man!" They hang me, I hear of the brave man, but I not know it was you. Please forgive me. . . . Tek the leetle gel, an' I know you be kind to her. She love you. For you she would die. Monsieur, I beg you not to think so hard of me. . . . No, my leetle gel, you must not cry."

"I did not know you," said Drace. "A cloth was about your features. Think not of it now. Listen to the one who has come with a message of peace and forgiveness."

The priest devoted himself to his sacred offices. The wind moaned softly in the cane.

The priest spoke presently to Virgil. "She must not stay here. Take her away, and I will see that everything shall be done."

Nadine stood with Virgil's coat pulled close about her face. And into his heart she spoke:

"The sun is low, Virgil. But you leave me now no more."

[THE END.]

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 203

To Whom It May Concern: The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows:

Commencing at the northwest corner of section 7, township 13, range 31, thence north on section line or as near as practicable between section 6, township 13, range 31, and section 1, township 13, range 31, to the northwest corner of section 1, township 13, range 31, road to be 66 feet wide, has reported in favor thereof, anyone having objections thereto or claims for damages by the reason of the establishing of the above described road must file same in the office of the County Clerk of Lincoln County, Nebraska, on or before 12 o'clock noon of the 10th day of November, 1922, or such road will be allowed without reference thereto.

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September, 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 206

To Whom It May Concern: The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows:

Commencing at the northeast corner of section 7, township 13, range 31, thence north on section line or as near as practicable between section 6, township 13, range 31, and section 1, township 13, range 31, to the northwest corner of section 1, township 13, range 31, road to be 66 feet wide, has reported in favor thereof, anyone having objections thereto or claims for damages by the reason of the establishing of the above described road must file same in the office of the County Clerk of Lincoln County, Nebraska, on or before 12 o'clock noon of the 10th day of November, 1922, or such road will be allowed without reference thereto.

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September, 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 315

To Whom It May Concern: The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows:

Commencing at the termination of the laid out road which terminates on the section line between section 25-14-34 and section 30-14-33 at the Union Pacific Company's right-of-way, and extending said road from said Union Pacific Railroad Company's right-of-way on the section line between sections 19 and 30, 14-33 and between sections 24 and 25, 14-34 to the North-west corner of section 19, 14-33, terminating at public road running east and west to connect with road No. 371, said road to be 40 ft. wide, has reported in favor thereof, anyone having objections thereto or claims for damages by the reason of the establishing of the above described road must file same in the office of the County Clerk of Lincoln County, Nebraska, on or before 12 o'clock noon of the 10th day of November, 1922, or said road will be allowed without reference thereto.

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September 1922.

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Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 61

To Whom It May Concern: The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows:

Commencing at the corner of sections 13, 14, 23 and 24 township 13, N. range 30 W., running thence north on line between sections 13 and 14 one mile, thence northerly through sections 11, 10 and 9, said township and range following the south bank of the channel of the Platte river to the intersection with road No. 6 ending there. Said road to be 66 feet wide. Has reported in favor thereof, anyone having objections thereto or claims for damages by reason of the establishing of the above described road must file same in the office of the County Clerk of Lincoln County, Nebraska, on or before 12 o'clock noon of the 10th day of November, 1922, or said road will be allowed without reference thereto.

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 240

To Whom It May Concern: The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows:

Commencing at the northeast corner of section 35, township 15, range 33, running thence west on the section line between section 35 and 36, township 15, range 33 to the north west corner of said section 35 thence south along the west section line of section 35 to the southwest corner of section 35, said road to be a section line road and to be 66 feet wide, to wit 33 feet on each side of said section line. Anyone having objections thereto or claims for damages by reason of the establishing of the above described road must file the same in the office of the County Clerk of Lincoln County, Nebraska, on or before 12 o'clock noon of the 10th day of Nov. 1922, or said road will be allowed without reference thereto.

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 199

To Whom It May Concern: A consent petition, as follows:

Commencing at the northeast corner of section 35, township 15, range 33, running thence west on the section line between section 35 and 36, township 15, range 33 to the north west corner of said section 35 thence south along the west section line of section 35 to the southwest corner of section 35, said road to be a section line road and to be 66 feet wide, to wit 33 feet on each side of said section line. Anyone having objections thereto or claims for damages by reason of the establishing of the above described road must file the same in the office of the County Clerk of Lincoln County, Nebraska, on or before 12 o'clock noon of the 10th day of Nov. 1922, or said road will be allowed without reference thereto.

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 246

To Whom It May Concern: The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows:

Commencing at the termination of road No. 240 near the north line of section 36 township 12 range 28 running thence east across the canyon and continuing on east side of canyon in a southerly direction through section 36, township 12, range 28 and through sections 12-11-13-14-24-25-36, township 11, range 28. Road to follow east fork of canyon, which forks about 200 yards north of south line of section 36, township 11, range 28, in a southeasterly direction through northeast corner of section 1 township 10, range 28 and through north 1/2 section 6, township 10, range 27, crossing divide near line between

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of Sept. 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.

EXTENSION ROAD NO. 246

To Whom It May Concern: The special commissioner appointed to locate a public road as follows:

Commencing at the termination of road No. 240 near the north line of section 36 township 12 range 28 running thence east across the canyon and continuing on east side of canyon in a southerly direction through section 36, township 12, range 28 and through sections 12-11-13-14-24-25-36, township 11, range 28. Road to follow east fork of canyon, which forks about 200 yards north of south line of section 36, township 11, range 28, in a southeasterly direction through northeast corner of section 1 township 10, range 28 and through north 1/2 section 6, township 10, range 27, crossing divide near line between

Witness my hand and official seal this 28th day of September 1922.

A. S. ALLEN, County Clerk.



"No Mercy Now!"

The head beneath the surface, the hand still out, striving to stab. Slowly the hand opened; the knife dropped; the hand closed—half opened, was limp. Drace turned loose his grip. The body sank.

Virgil swam ashore and came dripping out of the cane. The old man spoke: "Tony! What he?"

"I have drowned him."

"Monsieur was ver' strong!"

"If I had brought him to the shore, he would have sneaked a chance to murder me."

"He was the bad man, yes. He ought be dead, yes. I was to keel him myself. He keel the man here not long go. Twice he go keel you, an' once he snap the pistol. I set the trap for you to be stabbed if the water. Then there be no blood to tell the tale. Now I am so sor'. Will monsieur pull me into the house?"

"No. You would reach for a pistol to shoot me. Stay where you are."

"Monsieur have still suspicion. We wait."

Virgil put on his coat, his belt, and

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