

The House of a Thousand Candles

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CHAPTER V.

A Red Tam-o'-Shanter.

I looked out on the bright October morning with a renewed sense of isolation. Trees crowded about my windows, many of them still wearing their festive colors, scarlet and brown and gold, with the bright green of some walking companion standing out here and there with startling vividness. I put on an old corduroy outing suit and heavy shoes, ready for a tramp abroad, and went below.

The great library seemed larger than ever when I beheld it in the morning light. I opened one of the French windows and stepped out on a stone terrace, where I gained a fair view of the exterior of the house, which proved to be a modified Tudor, with battlements and two towers. One of the latter was only half-finished, and to it and to other parts of the house the workmen's scaffolding still clung. Heaps of stone and piles of lumber were scattered about in great disorder. The house extended partly along the edge of a ravine, through which a slender creek ran toward the lake. The terrace became a broad balcony immediately outside the library, and beneath it the water bubbled pleasantly around heavy stone pillars. Two pretty rustic bridges spanned the ravine, one near the front entrance, the other at the rear. My grandfather had begun his house on a generous plan, but buried as it was among the trees, it suffered from lack of perspective. However, on one side toward the lake was a fair meadow, broken by a water-tower, and just beyond the water dividing wall I saw a little chapel; and still farther, in the same direction, the outlines of the buildings of St. Agatha's were vaguely perceptible in another strip of woodland.

The thought of gentle nuns and school-girls as neighbors amused me. All I asked myself was they should keep to their own side of the wall.

I heard behind me the careful step of Bates. "Good morning, Mr. Glenarm. I trust you rested quite well, sir." His figure was as austere, his tone as respectful and colorless as by night. The morning light gave him a pallid cast. He suffered my examination coolly enough; his eyes were, indeed, the best thing about him.

"This is what Mr. Glenarm called the platform. I believe it's in 'Hamlet,' sir."

I laughed aloud. "Elsinore: A Platform before the castle."

"It was one of Mr. Glenarm's little fancies, you might call it, sir." "And the ghost—where does the murdered majesty of Denmark lie by day?" "I fear it wasn't provided, sir. As you see, Mr. Glenarm, the house is quite incomplete. My late master had not carried out all his plans."

Bates did not smile. I fancied he never smiled, and I wondered whether John Marshall Glenarm had played up on the man's lack of humor. My grandfather had been possessed of a certain grim, ironical gift at jesting, and quite likely he had amused himself by experimenting upon his serving man.

"You may breakfast when you like, sir"—and thus admonished, I went into the refectory.

A newspaper lay at my plate; it was the morning's issue of a Chicago daily. I was, then, not wholly out of the world. I reflected, scanning the headlines.

"Your grandfather scarcely examined the paper. Mr. Glenarm was more particularly interested in the old times. He wasn't what you might call up-to-date—if you will pardon the expression, sir."

"You are quite right about that Bates. He was a medievalist in his sympathies."

"Thank you for that word, sir; I've frequently heard him apply it to himself. The plain omelette was a great favorite with your grandfather. I hope it is to your liking, sir."

"It's excellent, Bates. And your coffee is beyond praise."

"Thank you, Mr. Glenarm. One does what one can, sir."

He had placed me so that I faced the windows, an attention to my comfort and safety which I appreciated. The broken pane told the tale of the shot that had so narrowly missed me the night before.

"I'll repair that today, sir," Bates remarked, seeing my eyes upon the window.

"You know that I'm to spend a year on this place; I assume that you understand the circumstances," I said, feeling it wise that we should understand each other.

"Quite so, Mr. Glenarm."

"I'm a student, you know, and all I want is to be left alone."

This I threw in to reassure myself rather than for his information. It was just as well, I reflected, to assert a little authority, even though the fellow undoubtedly represented Pickering and received orders from him.

"In a day or two, or as soon as I have got used to the place, I shall settle down to work in the library. You may give me breakfast at 7:30; luncheon at 1:30 and dinner at 7."

"Those were my late master's hours, sir."

"Very good. And I'll eat anything you please, except mutton broth, mutton and canned strawberries. Strawberries in tins, Bates, are not well calculated to lift the spirit of man."

"I quite agree with you, sir, if you will pardon my opinion."

"And the bill?"

"They are provided for by Mr. Pickering. He sends me an allowance for the household expenses."

"So you are to report to him, are you, as heretofore?"

I blew out a match with which I had lighted a cigar and watched the smoking intently.

"I believe that's the idea, sir."

It is not pleasant to be under compulsion to feel your freedom curtailed, to be conscious of espionage. I rose without a word and went into the hall.

"You may like to have the keys," said Bates, following me. "There's two for the gates in the outer wall and one for the St. Agatha's gate; they're marked, as you see. And here's the hall-door key and the boat-house key that you asked for last night."

After an hour spent in unpacking I went out into the grounds. I had thought it well to wire Pickering of my arrival, and I set out for Annandale to send him a telegram. My spirit lightened under the influence of the crisp air and cheering sunshine. What had seemed strange and shadowy at night was clear enough by day.

I found the gate through which we had entered the grounds the night before without difficulty. The stone wall was assuredly no flimsy thing. It was built in a thoroughly workmanlike manner, and I mentally computed its probable cost with amazement. There were, I reflected, much more satisfactory ways of spending money than in building walls around Indiana forests. But the house was mine, or as good as mine, and there was no man of use in quarreling with the whims of my dead grandfather. At the expiration of a year I could tear down the wall if I pleased; and as to the incomplete house, that I should sell or remodel to my liking.

On the whole, I settled into an amiable state of mind; my perplexity over the shot of the night before was passing away under the benign influences of blue sky and warm sunshine. A few farm-folk passed me in the highway and gave me good morning in the fashionable country, inspecting my knickerbockers at the same time with frank disapproval. I reached the lake and gazed out upon its quiet waters with satisfaction. At the foot of Annandale's main street was a dock where several small steam-craft and a number of catboats were being dismantled for the winter. One of the latter, a man approached the dock, a man in a light-colored suit, and he started toward the village at a quick pace, but turned and eyed me with rustic directness.

"Good morning!" I said. "Any ducks about?"

Bates, nodded and fell into step with me.

"No—not enough to pay for the trouble."

"I'm sorry for that. I'd hoped to pick up a few."

"I guess you're a stranger in these parts," he remarked, eyeing me again as an alien.

"Quite so. My name is Glenarm, and I've just come."

"I thought you might be him. We've rather been expecting you here in the village. I'm John Morgan, caretaker of the resorters' houses up the lake."

"Well, yes; you might say as we did, or you might say as we didn't. He wasn't just the sort that you got next to in a hurry. He kept pretty much to himself. He built a wall there to keep people out, but he didn't have troubled himself. We're not the kind around here to meddle, and you may be sure the summer people never bothered him."

There was a tone of resentment in his voice, and I hastened to say:

"I'm sure you're mistaken about the purpose of that wall. My grandfather was a student of architecture. It was a hobby of his. The house and wall were in the line of his experiments, and to please his whims. I hope the people of the village won't hold any hard feelings against his memory or against me. Why, the labor there must have been a good thing for the people hereabouts."

"It ought to have been," said the man gruffly; "but that's where the trouble comes in. He brought a lot of foreign fellows here under contract to work for him—Italians, or Greeks, or some sort of foreigners. They built the wall, and he had them at work inside for half a year. He didn't even let them out for air, and when they finished his job he loaded 'em on to a train one day and hauled 'em away."

"That was quite like him, I'm sure," I said, remembering with amusement my grandfather's secretive ways.

"I guess he was a crank all right," said the man conclusively.

It was evident that he did not care to establish friendly relations with the resident of Glenarm. He was about 40, light, with a yellow beard and pale blue eyes. He was dressed roughly and wore a shabby soft hat.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to assume responsibility for him and his acts," I remarked, plucked by the fellow's surlyness.

We had reached the center of the village, and he left me abruptly, crossing the street to one of the shops. I continued on to the railway station, where I wrote and paid for my message. The station master inspected me carefully as I searched my pockets for change.

"You want your telegrams delivered at the house?" he asked.

"Yes, please," I answered, and he turned away to his desk of clicking instruments without looking at me again.

It seemed wise to establish relations with the postoffice, so I made myself known to the girl who stood at the delivery window.

"You already have a box," she advised me. "There's a boy carries the mail to your house; Mr. Bates hires him."

Bates had himself given me this information, but the girl seemed to find pleasure in imparting it with a certain severity. I then bought a cake of soap and a package of smoke tobacco, which I did not need, at a grocery.

News of my arrival had evidently reached the villagers; I was consoled enough to imagine that my presence was probably of interest to them; but the station master, the girl at the post-office and the clerks in the shops treated me with an unmistakable cold reserve. There was a certain evenness of the chill which they visited upon

me, as though a particular degree of frigidity had been determined in advance.

I shrugged my shoulders and turned toward Glenarm. My grandfather had left me a cheerful legacy of distrust among my neighbors, the result, probably, of importing foreign labor to work on his house. The surly Morgan had intimidated as much; but it did not greatly matter. I had not come to Glenarm to cultivate the rustics, but to fulfill certain obligations laid down in my grandfather's will. I was, so to speak, on duty, and I much preferred that the villagers should let me alone. Comforting myself with these reflections I reached the wharf, where I saw Morgan sitting with his feet dangling over the water, smoking a pipe.

I nodded in his direction, but he feigned not to see me. A moment later he jumped into his boat and rowed out into the lake.

When I returned to the house Bates was at work in the kitchen. This was a large square room with heavy timbering showing in the walls and low ceiling. There was a great fireplace having an enormous chimney and fitted with a crane and bobs, but for practical purposes a small range was provided.

Bates received me placidly.

"Yes; it's an unusual kitchen, sir. Mr. Glenarm copied it from an old kitchen in England. He took quite a pride in it. It's a pleasant place to sit in the evening, sir."

He showed me the way below, where I found that the cellar extended under every part of the house, and was divided into large chambers. The door of one of them was of heavy oak, bound in iron, with a heavy padlock and a keyhole. A great iron hasp with a heavy padlock and a keyhole was fastened to the door. I opened the door and found a large room with a heavy padlock and a keyhole. I opened the door and found a large room with a heavy padlock and a keyhole.

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ers I had expected to find. The students were not the charity children I had carelessly pictured; they were not so young, for one thing, and they seemed to be appreciated decently enough.

I smiled to find myself adjusting my scarf and straightening my collar as I beheld my neighbors for the first time. As I sat thus on the wall I heard the sound of angry voices back of me on the Glenarm side, and a crash of underbrush marked a flight and pursuit. I crouched down on the wall and waited. In a moment a man plunged through the wood and stumbled over a low-hanging vine and fell, not ten yards from where I lay. To my great surprise it was Morgan, my acquaintance of the morning. He rose, cursed his ill luck and, hugging the wall close, ran toward the lake. Instantly the pursuer broke into view. It was Bates, evidently much excited and with an ugly cut across his forehead. He carried a heavy club, and, after listening for a moment for sounds of the enemy, he hurried after the caretaker.

I looked off toward the little church I found two other actors appearing on the scene. A girl stood in the little opening of the wood, talking to a man. Her hands were thrust into the pockets of her covert coat; she wore a red tam-o'-shanter, that made a bright blot of color in the wood. They were not more than twenty feet away, but by nature an eavesdropper, but the girl was clearly making a plea of some kind, and the chaplain's staid face awoke in me an antagonism that held me to the wall.

"If he comes here I shall go away, so you may as well understand it and tell me once that I'm not under any circumstances, and I'm not going to Florida or California or anywhere else in a private car, no matter who chaperones it."

"Certainly not, unless you want to," said the chaplain. "You understand that I'm only giving you the message. He thought it best to 'Not to write to me or to Sister Theresa.' Interrupted the girl contemptuously. 'What a clever man he is!'"

"And how unclean I am!" said the chaplain, laughing. "Well, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to present his message."

She smiled, nodded and turned swiftly toward the school. The chaplain looked after her for a few moments, then walked away soberly toward the lake. He was a young fellow, clean-shaven and dark, and with a pair of shoulders that gave me a twinge of envy. I could not guess how great a factor that vigorous figure was to be in my own affairs. As I swung down from the wall and walked toward Glenarm house, my thoughts were not with the athletic chaplain, but with the girl whose short skirt, the unconcern with which she had brushed her hair into the pockets of her coat, and the irresponsible tilt of the tam-o'-shanter, there is something jaunty, a suggestion of spirit and independence in a tam-o'-shanter, particularly a red one. If the red tam-o'-shanter expressed, so to speak, the key-note of St. Agatha's, the proximity of the school was not so bad a thing after all.

In high good-humor and with a sharp appetite I went in to luncheon.

CHAPTER VI.

The Girl and the Canoe.

"The perimensions are off the place, sir. Mr. Glenarm was very fond of the fruit."

I had never seen a perimension before, but I was in a mood for experiment. The frost-broken rind was certainly forbidding, but the rich pulp brought a surprise of joy to my palate. Bates watched me with respectful satisfaction. His gravity was in no degree diminished by the presence of a neat strip of flesh-colored court-plaster over his right eye. A faint suggestion of amica hung in the air.

"This is a quiet life," I remarked, wishing to give him an opportunity to explain his encounter of the morning.

"You are quite right, sir. As your grandfather used to say, it's a place of peace."

"When nobody shoots at you through a window," I suggested.

"Such a thing is likely to happen to any gentleman," he replied, "but not likely to happen more than once, if you'll allow the philosophy."

He did not refer to his encounter with the caretaker, and I resolved to keep my knowledge of it to myself. I always prefer to let a reason hang in the air, and here was a case, I reasoned, where Bates were disloyal to the duties Pickering had imposed upon him, the fact of his perfidy was bound to disclose itself eventually. Glancing around at him when he was out of guard I surprised a look of utter dejection upon his face as he stood with folded arms behind my chair.

He flushed and started, then put his hand to his forehead.

"I met with a slight accident this morning, sir. The hickory's very tough, sir. A piece of wood flew up and struck me."

"Too bad!" I said with sympathy. "You'd better rest a bit this afternoon."

"Thank you, sir; but it's a small matter—only, you might think it a trifle disagreeing."

He struck a match for my cigarette, and I left without looking at him again. But as I crossed the threshold of the library I formulated this note: "Bates ed."

is a liar, for one thing, and a person with active enemies for another; watch him."

All things considered, the day was passing well enough. I picked up a book and threw myself on a comfortable divan to smoke and reflect before continuing my explorations. As I lay there, Bates brought me a telegram, a reply to my message to Pickering. It read:

"Yours announcing arrival received of Mr. Glenarm, and filed."

There was certainly a queer business, I reflected, in my having a couple of hours dreaming, and counted the candles in the great crystal chandelier until my eyes ached. Then I rose, took my cap, and was soon tramping off toward the lake.

There were several small boats and a naphtha launch in the boat-house. I dropped the canoe into the water, and paddled off toward the summer colony, whose gables and chimneys were plainly visible from the Glenarm shore.

I landed and roamed idly over leaf-strewn walks past nearly a hundred cottages, to whose windows and verandas the blinds gave a dreary and inhospitable air. There was, at one point, a casino, whose broad veranda hung over the edge of the lake, while beneath, on the water-side, was a boat-house. I had from this point a fine view of the lake, and I took advantage of it to fix in my mind the topography of the region. I could see the bold outlines of the Glenarm House and its red-tile roof; and the gray tower of the little chapel beyond the wall rose above the wood with a placid dignity. Above the trees everywhere hung the shadowy smoke of autumn.

I walked back to the wharf, where I had left my canoe, and was about to step into it when I saw, rocking at a similar landing-place near by, another slight craft of the same type, as my own, but painted dark maroon. I was sure the canoe had not been there when I landed. Possibly it belonged to Morgan, the caretaker. I walked over and examined it. I even lifted it slightly in the water to test its weight. The paddle lay on the dock beside me and it, too, I weighed critically, deciding that it was a trifle light for my own taste.

"Leave—if you don't mind—"

I turned to stand face to face with the girl in the red tam-o'-shanter.

"I beg your pardon," I said, stepping away from the canoe.

She did not wear the covert coat of the morning, but a red knit jacket, buttoned tight about her throat. She was young, with eyes of emphasis of youth. A pair of blue eyes examined me with good-humored curiosity. She was on the brown of her cheeks, so eloquent of companionship with the out-door world—a certificate indeed of the favor of Heaven. Show me, in October, a girl with a face of tan, whose hands have

gast a fly beneath the blue arches of summer, and I will suffer her scorn.

She may vote me dull and refuse my wisest word with laughter, for here are the privileges of the sisters of Diana; and that soft bronze, those daring fugitive freckles beneath her eyes, look her to times when Pan whistled under his reed and all the days were one.

She had approached silently and was enjoying, I felt sure, my discomfort at being taken unawares.

I had snatched off my cap and stood waiting beside the canoe, feeling, I must admit, a trifle guilty at being caught in an unwarrantable inspection of another person's property—particularly a person so wholly pleasing to the eye.

"Really, if you don't need that paddle any more—"

I looked down and found to my annoyance that I held it in my hand—was in fact leaning upon it with a cool air of proprietorship.

"Again, I beg your pardon," I said. "I hadn't expected—"

She eyed me calmly with the stare of a child that arrives at a drawing-room door by mistake and scrutinizes the guests without awe. I didn't know what I had expected or had not expected, and she manifested no intention of helping me to explain. Her short skirt suggested fifteen or sixteen—not more—and such being the case there was no reason why I should not be master of the situation. As I fumbled my pipe flashed once into the hall and disappeared. I heard now a sound as of a hammer tapping upon wood-work.

Then it ceased, and a voice whispered from the dock into the water:

"Too bad," she said, her eyes upon it, try again tomorrow. I swear to God I'll help you, but no more now—"

Then the sound of a scuffle and again the tapping of a hammer. After several minutes more of this, there was a whispered dialogue which I could not hear.

Whatever was occurring, two or three points struck me on the instant. One of the conspirators was an unwilling party to an act as yet unknown; second, they had been unsuccessful and must wait for another opportunity; and third, the business, whatever it was, was clearly of some importance to my grandfather's strange house had been chosen for the investigation.

Clearly, I was not prepared to close the incident, but the idea of frightening my visitors appealed to my sense of humor. I tiptoed to the front stairs, ran lightly down, found the front door, and from the inside, opened and slammed it. I heard instantly a hurried scamper above, and the heavy fall of one who had stumbled in the dark. I grinned with real pleasure at the sound of this mishap, hurried into the great library, which was as dark as a well, and, opening one of the long windows, I stepped out on the balcony. At once the girl in the red tam-o'-shanter appeared on the rear of the house came the sound of a stealthy step, which I traced to a run at the ravine bridge. I listened to the flight of the fugitive through the wood until the sound died away toward the lake.

Then, turning to the library windows,

She bent down—I was aware that the sleeve of her jacket brushed my shoulder—selected an end that I had ignored, gave it a sharp tug with a slim brown hand and pulled the knot free.

"There!" she exclaimed with a little laugh; "I might have saved you all the bother."

"How dull of me! But I didn't have the combination," I said, staidly the canoe carefully to mitigate the ignominy of my failure.

She scorned the hand I extended, but took the paddle. It was growing late. The shadows in the wady water deepened; a chill crept over the water, and, beyond the tower of the chapel, the sky was bright with the splendor of sunset.

With a few skillful strokes she brought her little craft beside my pipe, and I tossed it to the wharf. "Perhaps you can pipe a tune on it," she said, dipping the paddle tentatively.

"You put me under great obligations," I declared. "Are all the girls at St. Agatha's as amiable?"

"I should say not! I'm a grumpy exception—and I really shouldn't be talking to you at all! It's against the rules! And we don't encourage smoking."

"The chaplain doesn't smoke, I suppose?"

"Not in chapel; I believe it isn't done! And we rarely see him elsewhere."

She had tilted with the paddle so far, but now lifted her eyes and drew back the paddle for a long stroke.

"But in the wood—this morning—by the wall!"

I hate myself to this day for having so startled her. The poised blade dropped into the water with a splash; she brought the canoe a trifle nearer the wharf with an almost imperceptible stroke, and turned toward me with wonder and dismay in her eyes.

"So you are an eavesdropper and detective, are you? I beg you will give your master my compliments! I really owe you an explanation. I've been a gentleman!" she exclaimed with withering emphasis, and dipped her blade deep in flight.

I called, stammering incoherently, after her, but her light argosy skimmed the water steadily. The paddle rose and fell with trained precision, making scarcely a ripple as she sailed so softly away toward the fairy towers of sunset. I stood looking after her, goaded with self-contempt. A glory of yellow and red filled the west. Suddenly the wind moaned in the wood behind the cottages, swept over me and rippled the surface of the lake. I watched its flight until it caught her canoe and I marked the flimsy craft's quick response, as the shaken waters bore her alert figure on the swell, her blade still maintaining its regular dip, locked. The game was deeper than I had imagined; I had scratched the crust without result, and my wits were busy with speculations as I changed my clothes, pausing frequently to examine the furniture, even the bricks on the hearth.

One thing only I found—the slight scar of a hammer-head on the oak paneling that ran around the bedroom, the wood had been struck near the base and at the top of every panel, for though the mark was not perceptible on all, a test had evidently been made systematically. With this as a beginning, I found a moment later a spot of talow under a heavy table in one corner. Evidently the furniture had been moved out to permit of the closest scrutiny of the paneling. My heart behind I found the same impression on the hammer-head; the test had undoubtedly been thorough, for a pretty smart tap on oak is necessary to leave an impression. My visitors had undoubtedly been making a probe in search of a recess of some kind in the wall, and as they had failed of their purpose they were likely, I assumed, to pursue their researches further.

I pondered these things with a thoroughly-awakened interest in life. Glenarm House really promised to prove exciting. I took from a drawer a small revolver, filled its chambers with cartridges, and thrust it into my hip-pocket, whistling meanwhile.