

## The House of a Thousand Candles

BY MEREDITH NICHOLSON.

"I believe that is so. The bishop addressed us once as the flower of the Middle West, and made us really wish he'd come again."

We were approaching the gate. Her indifference to the storm delighted me. Here, I thought in my admiration, is a real product of the western world. I felt that we had made strides toward such a comradeship as it is proper should exist between a school-girl in her teens and a male neighbor of twenty-seven. I was going back to English fiction—the young squire walking home with the curate's pretty young daughter and conversing with due condescension.

"We girls all wish we could come over and help hunt the lost treasure. It must be simply splendid to live in a house where there's a mystery—secret passages and chests of doubloons and all that sort of thing! My! Squire Glenarm, I suppose you spend all your nights exploring secret passages."

The free expression of opinion startled me, though she seemed wholly innocent of impertinence.

"Who says there's any secret about the house?" I demanded.

"Oh, Ferguson, the gardener, and all the girls."

"I fear Ferguson is drawing on his imagination."

"Well, all the people in the village think so. I've heard the candy shop woman speak of it often."

"She'd better attend to her taffy," I retorted.

"Oh, you mustn't be sensitive about it! All us girls think it ever so romantic, and we call you sometimes the lord of the realm, and when we see you walking through the darkling wood at eventide we say, 'My lord is brooding upon the treasure chests.'"

This delivered in the stilted tone of one who is half-quoting and half-improvising, was irresistibly funny, and I laughed with goodwill.

"I hope you've forgiven me—" I began, kicking the gate to knock off the snow and taking the key from my pocket.

"But I haven't, Mr. Glenarm. Your assumption is, to say the least, unwarranted—I got that from a book!"

"It isn't fair for you to know my name and for me not to know yours."

I said, pleadingly.

"You are perfectly right. You are Mr. John Glenarm—the gardener told me—and I am just Olivia. They don't allow me to be called 'Miss' yet. I'm very young, sir."

"You've only told me half"—and I kept my hand on the closed gate. The snow still fell steadily and the short afternoon was nearing its close. I did

not like to lose her—the life, the youth, the mirth for which she stood. The thought of Glenarm House amid the snow-hung wood and of the long winter evening that I must spend alone moved me to delay. Lighter already gleamed in the school buildings straight before us, and the slight of them smote me with loneliness.

"Olivia Gladys Armstrong," she said, laughing; brushed past me through the gate, and ran lightly over the snow toward St. Agatha's.

### CHAPTER X.

An Affair with the Caretaker.

I read in the library until late, hearing the howl of the wind outside with satisfaction in the warmth and comfort of the great room. Bates brought in some sandwiches and a bottle of ale at midnight.

"If there's nothing more, sir—"

"That is all, Bates." And he went sedately to his own quarters.

I was restless and in no mood for the quietude of the library. I moved about from shelf to shelf, taking down one book after another, and while thus engaged came upon a series of large volumes extra-illustrated in water-colors of unusual beauty. They occupied a lower shelf, and I sprang on the floor, like a boy with a new picture book, in my absorption, piling the great volumes about me. They were on related subjects pertaining to the French chateau.

In the last volume I found a sheet of white note-paper no larger than my hand, a forgotten book mark, I assumed, and half-crumpled it in my fingers before I noticed the lines of a pencil sketch on one side of it. I carried it to the table and spread it out.

It was not the bit of idle pencilling it had appeared to be at first sight. A scale had evidently been followed and the lines drawn with a ruler. With such trifles my grandfather had no doubt amused himself. There was a long corridor indicated, but of this I could make nothing. I studied it for several minutes, thinking it might have been a tentative sketch of some part of the house. In turning it about under the candle-lamp I saw that in several places the glaze had been rubbed from the paper by an eraser, and this piqued my curiosity. I brought a magnifying glass to bear upon the sketch. The drawing had been made with a hard pencil and the eraser had removed the lead, but a well-defined imprint remained.

I was able to make out the letters N. W. 3/4 to C. a reference, clearly enough to points of the compass and a distance. The word "raving" was scrawled over a rough outline of a doorway or opening of some sort, and then the phrase:

THE DOOR OF BEWILDERMENT.

Now, I am rather an imaginative person; that is why engineering captured my fancy. It was through his trying to make an architect (a person who quarrels with women about their kitchen sinks) of a boy who wanted to be an engineer that my grandfather and I fell to hit it off. From boyhood I have never seen a great bridge or watched a locomotive climb a difficult hillside without a thrill; and a lighthouse still seems to me quite the finest monument a man can build for himself. My grandfather's devotion to old churches and medieval houses always struck me as trifling and unworthy of a grown man. And fate was busy with my affairs that night, for instead of lighting my pipe with the little sketch, I was strangely impelled to study it seriously.

I drew for myself outlines of the interior of Glenarm House as it had appeared to me, and then I tried to reconcile the little sketch with every part of it.

"The Door of Bewilderment" was the phrase that held me. The phrase was in itself a lure. The man who had built a preposterous house in the woods of Indiana and called it "The House of a Thousand Candles," was quite capable of other whims; and as I bent over my scrap of paper in the candle-lighted library it occurred to me that possibly I had not done justice to my grandfather's genius. My curiosity was thoroughly aroused as to the hidden corners of the queer old house, round which the wind shrieked tormentingly.

I went to my room put on my corduroy coat for its greater warmth in going through the cold halls, took a candle and went below. One o'clock in the morning is not the most cheering hour for exploring the dark recesses of a strange house, but I had resolved to have a look at the raving opening and determine, if possible, whether it bore any relation to "The Door of Bewilderment."

All was quiet in the great cellar; only here and there an area window rattled dolorously. I carried a tape-line with me and made measurements of the length and depth of the corridor and of the chambers that were set off from it. These figures I entered in my note-book for further use, and sat down on an empty nail-keg to reflect. The place was certainly substantial; the candle at my feet burned steadily with no hint of a draft; but I saw no solution of my problem. All the doors along the corridor were open, or yielded readily to my hand. I was losing sleep for nothing; my grandfather's sketch was meaningless and I rose and picked up my candle, yawning.

Then a curious thing happened. The candle, whose thin flame had risen unwaveringly, sputtered and went out as a sudden gust of wind swept the corridor.

I had left nothing open behind me. I had locked the doors of the house were locked and barred. But someone had gained ingress to the cellar by an opening of which I knew nothing.

I faced the stairway that led up to the back hall of the house, when, to my astonishment, steps sounded behind me, and turning, I saw, coming toward me, a man carrying a lantern. I marked his careless step; he was undoubtedly on familiar ground. As I watched him he paused, lifted the lantern to a level with his eyes, and then began sounding the wall with a hammer.

Here, undoubtedly, was my friend Morgan—again! There was the same

periodicity in the beat on the wall that I had heard in my own room. He began at the top and went methodically to the floor. I leaned against the wall where I stood and watched the lantern slowly coming toward me. The small revolver with which I had fired at his flying figure in the wood was in my pocket. It was just as well to have it out with the fellow now. My chances were as good as his, though I confess I did not relish the thought of being "Jun" dead the next morning in the cellar of my house. It pleased my humor to let him approach in this way, unconscious that he was watched, until I should thrust my pistol into his face. His arms grew tired when he was about ten feet from me and he dropped the lantern and hammer to his side, and swore under his breath impatiently.

Then he began again, with greater zeal. As he came near, I studied his face in the lantern's light, with interest. His hat was thrust back, and I could see his jaw hard-set under his blond beard.

He took a step nearer, ran his eyes over the wall and resumed his tapping. The ceiling was something less than eight feet and he began at the top. In settling himself for the new series of strokes he swayed toward me slightly, and I could hear his hard breathing. I was deliberating how best to throw myself upon him, but as I waved he stepped back, swore at his ill-luck and flung the hammer to the ground.

"Thanks!" I shouted, leaping forward and snatching the lantern. "Stand just where you are!"

With the revolver in my right hand and the lantern held high in my left, I enjoyed his utter consternation, as my voice roared in the corridor.

"It's too bad we meet under such strange circumstances, Morgan," I said. "I'd begun to miss you; but I suppose you've been sleeping in the daytime to gather strength for your night prowling."

"You're a fool," he growled. He was recovering from his fright—I knew it by the gleam of his teeth in his yellow beard. His eyes, too, were moving restlessly about. He undoubtedly knew the house better than I did, and was considering the best means of escape. I did not know what to do with him now that I had him at the point of a pistol; and in my ignorance of his motives and my vague surmise as to the agency back of him, I was filled with uncertainty.

"You needn't hold that thing quite so near," he said, staring at me coolly. "I'm glad it annoys you, Morgan."

"It may help you to answer some questions I'm going to put to you."

"So you want information, do you, Mr. Glenarm? I should think it would be beneath the dignity of a great man like you to ask a poor devil like me for help."

"We're not talking of dignity," I said. "I want you to tell me how you got in here."

He laughed.

"You're a very shrewd man, Mr. Glenarm. I came in by the kitchen window, if you must know. I got in before your solemn jack-of-all-trades locked up."

"Up," I walked down to the end of the passage there—he indicated the direction with a slight jerk of his head—"and slept until it was time to go to work. You can see how easy it was."

I laughed at the sheer assurance of the fellow.

"If you can't be better than that you needn't try again. Face about now, and march."

I put new energy into my tone, and he turned and walked before me down the corridor in the direction from which he had come. We were, I dare say, a pretty pair—he tramping doggedly before me, I following at his heels with his lantern and my pistol. The situation had played prettily into my hands, and I had every intention of wresting from him the reason for his interest in Glenarm House and my affairs.

"Not so fast," I admonished, sharply. "Excuse me," he replied, mockingly.

He was no common rogue; I felt the quality in him with a certain admiration for his scoundrelly talents—a fellow, I reflected, who was best studied at the point of a pistol and poked the muzzle of the revolver against his back from time to time to keep him assured of my presence—a device that I was to regret a second later.

We were about ten yards from the end of the corridor, when he flung his arms backward upon me, threw his hands over his head and seized me about the neck, turning himself lithely until his fingers clasped my throat.

I fired blindly once, and felt the smoke of the revolver hot in my own nostrils. The lantern fell from my hand, and one or the other of us smashed it with our feet.

A wrestling match in that dark hole was not to my liking. I still held on to the revolver, waiting for a chance to use it, and meanwhile he tried to throw me, forcing me back against one side and then the other of the passage.

With a quick rush he flung me away, and in the same second I fired. The roar of the shot in the narrow corridor seemed interminable. I flung myself on the floor, expecting a return shot, and quickly enough a flash broke upon the darkness dead ahead, and I rose to my feet, fired again, and leaped to the opposite side of the corridor and crouched there. We had adopted the same tactics, firing and dodging to avoid the target made by the flash of our pistols, and watching and listening after the roar of the explosions. It was a very pretty game, but I loathed it not to last long. He was slowly retreating toward the end of the passage, where there was, I remembered, a dead wall. His only chance was to crawl through an area window I knew to be there, and this would, I felt sure, give him time to my hands.

After five shots apiece there was a truce. The pungent smoke of the powder caused me to cough, and he laughed.

"Have you swallowed a bullet, Mr. Glenarm?" he called.

I could hear his feet scraping on the cement floor; he was moving away from me, doubtless intending to fire when he reached the area window and escape before I could reach him. I crept warily after him, ready to fire on the instant, but not wishing to throw away my last cartridge. That I really intended to keep for close quarters at the window.

He was very near the end of the corridor; I heard his feet strike some boards that I remembered lay on the floor there, and I was served for a short and a hand-to-hand struggle if it came to that.

I was sure that he sought the window; I heard his hands on the wall as

he felt for it. Then a breath of cold air swept the passage, and I knew he must be drawing himself up to the opening. I fired and dropped to the floor. With the roar of the explosion I heard him yell, but the expected shot did not follow.

The pounding of my heart seemed to mark the passing of hours. I feared that my foe was playing some trick, creeping toward me, perhaps, to fire at close range, or to grapple with me in the dark. The cold air still whistled into the corridor, and I began to feel disagreeable enough, but waiting in the dark for the shot was worse.

I rose and walked toward the end of the passage.

Then his revolver flashed and roared directly ahead, the flame of it so near that it blinded me. I fell forward, confused and stunned, but shook myself together in a moment and got up on my feet. The draft of air no longer blew into the passage. Morgan had taken himself off through the window and closed it after him. I made sure of this by going to the window and feeling of it with my hands.

I went back and groped about for my candle, which I found without difficulty and lighted. I then returned to the window to examine the catch. To my utter astonishment it was fastened with staples, driven deep into the sash, in such a way that it could not possibly be opened without an expenditure of time and labor.

There was no doubt whatever that Morgan knew more about Glenarm House than I did. It was possible, but not likely, that he had crept past me in the corridor and gone out through the house, or by some other cellar window. My eyes were smarting from the smoke of the last shot, and my pocket stung where the burned powder had struck my face. I was alive, but in my vexation and perplexity, not, I fear, grateful for my safety. It was, however, some consolation to feel sure I had winged the enemy.

I gathered up the fragments of Morgan's lantern and went back to the library. The lights in half the candlesticks had sputtered out. I extinguished the remainder and started to my room.

Then, in the great hall, I heard a muffled tread as of someone following me—not on the great staircase, nor in any place I could identify—yet unmistakably on steps of some sort beneath or above me. My nerves were already keyed to a breaking pitch, and the ghostlike tread in the hall angered me.

"Morgan, or his ally, Bates, I reflected, at some new trick. I ran off into my room, found a heavy walking-stick, and set off for Bates' room on the third floor. It was always easy to attribute any sort of mischief to the fellow, and undoubtedly he was crawling through the house on an errand that boded no good to me.

It was now past two o'clock, and he should have been asleep and out of the way long ago. I crept to his room and threw open the door without, I must say, the slightest idea of finding him there. But Bates, the enigma, Bates the incomparable cook, the perfect servant, sat at a table, the light of several candles falling on a book over which he was bent with that maddening gravity he had never yet in my presence thrown off.

He rose at once, stood at attention, inclining his head slightly.

"Yes, Mr. Glenarm."

"Yes, the devil!" I roared at him, astonished at finding him there. He must say that he was there. The stick fell from my hands. I did not doubt he knew perfectly well that I had some purpose in breaking in upon him. I was baffled, and in my rage floundered for words to explain myself.

"If that's all, I have someone in the house. I don't want you to be prowling about in the night, do you hear?"

"Certainly not, sir," he replied, in a pained tone.

I glanced at the book he had been reading. It was a volume of Shakespeare's comedies, open at the first scene of the last act of "The Winter's Tale."

"Quite a pretty bit of work that, I should say," he remarked. "It was one of my late master's favorites."

"Go to the devil!" I bawled at him, and went down to my room and slammed the door in rage and delirium.

To be Continued.

### SERBIA'S DIFFICULTIES

Austria Stands in Way of Progress for King Peter's Kingdom.

Belgrade, July 30.—The conclusion of a commercial treaty with Austria has always meant for Serbia a change of government and a recrudescence of internal difficulties. The present phase is more than usually full of dangerous complications, and one is forced to admit the gallant stand of a disorganized little state fighting against a powerful external enemy and with internal dissension still smouldering.

It is clear that Austria will suffer no other country to trade with Serbia; and she does not even take pains to conceal this frankly domineering attitude. Serbia's reliance on German support is doomed to disappointment, since Germany has subordinated her economical to her political interests, in so far as the Balkans are concerned. The abrupt relinquishment of German commercial aspirations in Serbia is due to Austria's attitude at the Algeiras conference, and there is small hope that Germany will protest against the obstacles placed by Austria in the way of Serbian products or live stock destined to German centers. The struggle between Austria and Roumania resulted in the bulk of Roumanian trade being transferred to Germany, but Serbia is as yet far from this desideratum.

The report that a number of English capitalists were coming to Serbia to inquire about her industrial resources raises great expectations. The government is also sanguine that advantageous treaties will soon be concluded with France, Belgium and Switzerland. The gravity of the situation now that commercial war with Austria is an accomplished fact, may be gathered from the conference between Mr. Pashitch and the late premier, who are admittedly irreconcilable opponents on all other political questions.

The departure of the principal regicides—most of whom are now in Geneva—has not restored peace to the army, which remains divided into two bitterly hostile camps. The resignation of the war minister, Gen. Putnik,

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Apron Lawn, in good width, with lace insertion, with three rows of tucks on each side of insertion. Special price ..... 22c  
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