

THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES

By Meredith Nicholson
AUTHOR OF "THE MAIN COURSE," "THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES," "THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES," "THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES"

CHAPTER XXII.

A Prowler of the Night.

Down we plunged into the cellar, through the trap and to the Door of Bewilderment.

"Don't expect too much," admonished Larry; "I can't promise you a single Spanish coin."

"Perish the ambition! We have blocked Pickering's game, and nothing else matters," I said.

We crawled through the hole in the wall and lighted candles. The room was about seven feet square. At the farther end was an oblong wooden door, close to the ceiling, and Larry tugged at the fastening until it came down, bringing with it a mass of snow and leaves.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we are at the edge of the ravine. Do you see the blue sky? And yonder, if you will twist your necks a bit, is the house."

"Well, let the scenic effects go and show us where you found those papers," I urged.

"Speaking of mysteries, that is where I throw up my hands, lads. It's quietly told. Here is a table, and here is an old despatch box, which lies just where I found it. It was closed and the key was in the lock. I took out that packet—it wasn't even sealed—saw the character of the contents, and couldn't resist the temptation to try the effect of an announcement of its discovery on your friend Pickering. Now that is nearly all. I found this piece of paper under the tape with which the envelope was tied, and I don't hesitate to say that when I read it I laughed until I thought I should shake down the ceiling. Read it, John Glenarm!"

He handed me a fragment of legal paper on which was written in the unmistakable handwriting of John Marshall Glenarm, these words:

HE LAUGHS BEST WHO LAUGHS LAST.

"What do you think is so funny in this?" I demanded.

"Who wrote it, do you think," asked Stoddard.

"Who wrote it, do you ask? Why Jack's grandfather wrote it! John Marshall Glenarm, the cleverest, grandest old man that ever lived, wrote it!" declared Larry, his voice booming loudly in the room. "It's all a great big game, fixed up to try you and Pickering—but principally you, you blockhead! Oh, it's grand, perfectly deliciously grand—and to think it should be my good luck to share in it!"

"Humph! I'm glad you're amused, but it doesn't strike me as being so awfully funny. Suppose those had fallen into Pickering's hands; then where would the joke have been, I should like to know!"

"On you, my lad, to be sure! The old gentleman wanted you to study architecture; he wanted you to study his house; he even lent a little pointer in an old book! Oh, it's too good to be true!"

"That's all clear enough," observed Stoddard, knocking upon the despatch box with his knuckles. "But why do you suppose he dug this hole here with its outlet on the ravine?"

"Oh, it was the way of him!" explained Larry. "He liked the idea of queer corners and underground passages. This is a bully hiding place for man or treasure, and that outlet into the ravine makes it possible to get out of the house with nobody the wiser. It's in keeping with the rest of his scheme. He says, comrades! Tomorrow will likely find us with plenty of business on hands. At present we hold the fort, and let us have a care lest we lose it."

We closed the ravine door, restored the wall as best we could, and returned to the library. We made a list of the Pickering notes and spent an hour discussing this new feature of the situation and speculating as to the hiding place of the remainder of my grandfather's fortune. Larry and Stoddard both declared their intention of remaining until my troubles were ended in spite of my protests. Stoddard stayed for dinner, and afterward we began again our eternal quest for the treasure, our hopes high from Larry's lucky strike of the afternoon, and with a new eagerness born of the knowledge that the morrow would certainly bring us face to face with the real crises. We ranged the house from tower to cellar; we overhauled the tunnel, for, it seemed to me, the hundredth time.

It was my watch, and at midnight, after Stoddard and Larry had reconnoitered the grounds and Bates and I had made sure of all the interior fastenings, I sent them off to bed and made myself comfortable with a pipe in the library.

I was glad of the respite, glad to be alone—to consider my talk with Marian Devereux at St. Agatha's, and her return with Pickering. Why could she not always have been Olivia, ranging the woodland, or the girl in gray, or that woman, so sweet in her dignity, who came down the stairs at the Armstrongs? Her own attitude toward me was so full of contradictions; she had appeared to me in so many moods and moods, that my spirit ranged the spectrum of feeling as I thought of her. It was the recollection of her infamous conduct that

oreed all my doubts of her. Pickering had always been in my way, and here, but for the chance by which Larry had found the notes, I should have had no weapon to use against him.

The wind rose and drove shrilly around the house. A bit of scaffolding on the outer walls rattled loose somewhere and crashed down on the terrace. I grow restless, my mind intent upon the many chances of the morrow, and running forward to the future. Even if I won in my strife with Pickering I had yet my way to make in the world. His notes were probably worthless—I did not doubt that. I might use them to procure his removal as executor, but I did not look forward with any pleasure to a legal fight over a property that had brought me only trouble.

Something impelled me to go below, and, taking a lantern, I tramped solemnly through the cellar, glanced at the heating apparatus, and, remembering that the chapel entrance to the tunnel was unguarded, followed the corridor to the trap, and opened it. The cold air blew up sharply and I thrust my head down to listen.

A sound at once arrested me. I thought at first it must be the suction of the air, but Glenarm-House was no place for conjecture, and I put the lantern aside and jumped down into the tunnel. A gleam of light showed far away for an instant, then the darkness and silence were complete.

I ran rapidly over the smooth floor, which I had traversed so often that I knew its every line. My only weapon was a heavy hickory club. Near the Door of Bewilderment I paused and listened. The tunnel was perfectly quiet. I took a step forward and stumbled over a brick, tumbled on the wall for the opening which we had closed carefully that afternoon, and at the instant I found it a lantern flashed blindingly in my face and I drew back.

She was like Olivia now. I tell the utter futility of attempting to reason with a woman who could become a child at will. She walked up the steps and out into the church vestibule. Then before the outer door she spoke with decision.

"We part here, if you please. And I have not the slightest intention of trying to explain my errand into that passage. You have jumped to your own conclusion, which will have to serve you. I advise you not to think very much about it—to the exclusion of more important business.—Squire Glenarm."

She lifted the lantern to turn out its light, and it made a story of her face but she paused and held it toward me.

"Pardon me! You will need this to light you home."

"But you must not cross the park alone!"

"Good night! Please be sure to close the door to the passage when you go down. You are a dreadfully headless person, Squire Glenarm."

She lit up the outer chapel door and ran along the path toward St. Agatha's. I watched her in the starlight until a beam in the path hid her with another figure.

Down through the passage I hastened, her lantern lighting my way. At the Door of Bewilderment I closed the opening, setting up the line of wall as we had left it in the afternoon, and then I went back to the library, freshened the fire and brewed before it until Bates came to relieve me at dawn.

(To Be Continued.)

Home Circle Column.

A Column Dedicated To Tired Mothers as they Join the Home Circle

DON'T WHINE.

Don't be whining about having a fair chance. Throw a sensible man out of the window, and he'll fall on his feet and ask the nearest way to his work. The more you have to begin with the less you will have in the end. Money you earn yourself is much brighter than any you get out of dead men's hands. A scant breakfast in the morning of life whets the appetite for a feast later in the day. He who has tasted a sour apple will have the more relish for a sweet one. Your present want will make future prosperity all the sweeter. Eighteen pence has set up many a pedler in business, and he has kept his carriage. As for the place you are cast in, don't find fault with that; you need not be a hick because you were born in a stable.

If a ball tossed a man of metal sky high, he would drop down into a good place. A hard working man with his wits about him will make money while others will do nothing but lose it.

As to the little troubles, who expects to find cherries without thorns or roses without thorns? Who

involved win must learn to bear. Idle-

ness lies in a bed of the mill-grubs, while industry finds health and wealth. The dog in the kennel barks at fleas, and the hunting dog does not even know that they are there. Luckless waits till the river is dry, and never gets to market. Try swimming, and improve all the trades. "Can't do it" would not be the bread cut for him, but "Try" made meat out of mushrooms.

HOW TO BE MISERABLE.

Get by a window and look over the way to your neighbors'—especially that mansion, which he has recently built and sold for and fitted out, and sigh. "O, that I were a rich man!" Get angry with your neighbor and think you have not a friend in the world. Sigh a year or two and take a walk in the country and keep continually saying to yourself: "When shall I be married here?"

Sign a note for a friend and never receive your kindness, and every hour in the day whisper to yourself: "I wonder if he will ever pay that note?" I think everybody expects to cheat you. Closely examine every bill you take, and doubt its value genuine until you have got your wits about you. Try to be a miser. Never accommodate if you can possibly help (that is, if you can and screw down to the lowest cent. grind the laws and the hearts of the unfortunate. Brood over your misdeeds, your lack of talents, and believe that at no distant day you will come to woe. Let the workhouse be ever in your mind and all the horrors of distress and poverty.

Follow these recipes strictly and you will be miserable in any way you want. If you may not speak at heart and at village with the world. Nothing will cheer or encourage you, nothing will throw a beam of sunshine or a ray of warmth into your heart. You will be an isolated creature, a perfect picture of woe, discontent and despair.

THE ENEMY OF THE DAY.

There is a dreadful ambition abroad for being "respectable." We keep by appearances live often at the expense of honesty, and though we may not be rich, yet we must seem to be "respectable," though only in the broadest sense—in mere outward show. We have not the courage to go patiently onward in the condition of life in which it has pleased God to call us. His most noble and noble fashionable state to which we ridiculously please to call ourselves, and all to gratify the vanity of that which we form a part. There is a constant struggle and pressure for front seats in the social amphitheatre, in the midst of which all noble self-deceiving resolve is trampled down and many fine natures are appreciably cramped to death. What waste what misery what bankruptcy, come from all this ambition to dazzle others with a glare of apparent "respectability," we need not dwell on. The trichotomous results show themselves in a thousand ways—in the rank frauds committed by men who dare to be dishonest, but do not care to seem poor; and in the desperate dashes at fortune, in which the pity is not so much for those who fail as for the hundreds of innocent families who are so often involved in their ruin.

What becomes of the home after the honeymoon is over?

Keep the house-true bright if you would have the winter of life warm and pleasant.

By all means keep the bright home-lights burning and open wide the shutters. Home should not be a darkened, narrow and exclusive place—that invites narrowness and selfishness in the individual. It should be a spot from which light and joy and good cheer radiate.

You get "down in the mouth" too easily, my friend. Cheer up; walk on the sunny side of the street. Live where you can catch the south winds. Sunshine always warms and cheers, get more of it and give it out, you have lived in the frigid zone too long already. We would like to send a gulf stream of joy into your life. Give us a chance. Read the Home Circle Department and you will always wear a smile. It is the best known tonic for the "blues."

Oh if you would gather all the tender memories, all the lights and shades of the heart, all banquetings and reunion, all filial, fraternal, paternal and conjugal affections, and you had only just four letters with which to spell out that height, and depth, and length, and breadth, and magnitude, and eternity of meaning, you would, with streaming eyes, and trembling voice, and agitated hand, write it out in those four living capitals, H-O-M-E.



"A Lantern Flashed Blindingly in My Face."

erouching involuntarily, and clenching the club ready to strike.

"Good evening, Mr. Glenarm!"

Marian Devereux's voice broke the silence, and Marian Devereux's face with the full light of the lantern upon it, was bent gravely upon me. Her voice, as I heard it there—her face, as I saw it there—were the things that I shall remember last when my world comes to go hence from this world. Her slim fingers, as they clasped the wire screen of the lantern, held my gaze for a second. The red lamplight, that I had associated with her youth and beauty was tilted rakishly on one side of her pretty head. To find her here, seeking like a thief in the night, for some means of helping Arthur Pickering, was the bitterest drop in the cup. I felt as though I had been struck with a lightning.

"I beg your pardon!" she said, and laughed. "There doesn't seem to be anything to say, does there? Well, we do certainly meet under the most unusual, not to say unconventional, circumstances. Squire Glenarm! Please go away or turn you back. I want to get out of this donjon keep."

She took my hand coolly enough and stepped down into the passage. Then I broke out stormily.

"You don't seem to understand the gravity of what you are doing! Don't you know that you are risking your life in crawling through this house at midnight—that even to serve Arthur Pickering a life is a pretty big thing to throw away? Your intuition for that blackguard seems to carry you far, Miss Devereux."

She swung the lantern at arm's length back and forth so that its rays at every forward motion struck my face like a blow.

"It isn't exactly pleasant in this cavern. Unless you wish to turn me over to the lord high executioner, I will bid you good night."

"But the infamy of this—of coming in here to spy upon me—to help my enemy—the man who is seeking plunder—doesn't seem to trouble you?"

"No. Not a particle!" she replied quietly, and then, with an impatient frown, "Oh, no!" she held up the lantern to look at the wick. "I'm really disappointed to find that you were a little ahead of me, Squire Glenarm. I didn't give you credit for so much perseverance. But if you have the notes—"

"The notes? He told you there were notes, did he? The coward sent you here to find them, after his other tools failed him?"

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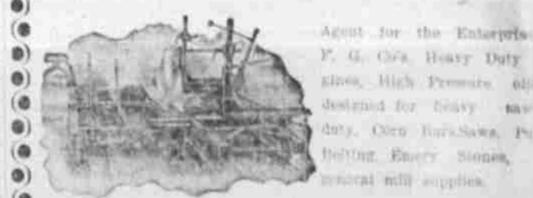
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