

THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES

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"COURTESY," "THE HOUSE OF A THOUSAND CANDLES"

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XII.
Explore a Passage.
"Bates!" I found him busy replenishing the candlesticks in the library.—It seemed to me that he was always poking about with an armful of candles.—There are a good many queer things in this world, but I guess you're one of the queerest. I don't mind telling you that there are times when I think you a thoroughly bad lot, and then again I question my judgment and don't give you credit for being much more than a doddering fool."

He was standing under a ladder beneath the great crystal chandelier and looked down upon me with that patient inquiry that is so appealing in a dog—in, say, the eyes of an Irish setter, when you accidentally step on his tail.

"Yes, Mr. Glenarm," he replied humbly.
"Now, I want you to grasp this idea that I'm going to dig into this old shell top and bottom: I'm going to blow it up with dynamite. If I please, and if I catch you spying on me or reporting my doings to my enemies, or engaging in any questionable performance whatever, I'll hang you between the posts out there in the school wall—do you understand?—so that the sweet Sisters of St. Agatha and the dear little school girls and the chaplain and all the rest will shudder through all their lives at the very thought of you."

"Certainly, Mr. Glenarm,"—and his tone was the same he would have used if I had asked him to pass me the matches, and under my breath I considered him to the hardest tortures of the fiery pit.

"Now, as to Morgan!"
"Yes, sir."

"What possible business do you suppose he has with Mr. Pickering?" I demanded.

"Why, sir, that's clear enough. Mr. Pickering owns a house up the lake,—he got it through your grandfather. Morgan has the care of it, sir."

"Very plausible, indeed!"—and I sent him off to his work.

After luncheon I went to the end of the corridor, and began to sound the walls. They were as solid as rock, and responded dully to the strokes of the hammer. I sounded them on both sides, retracing my steps to the stairway, becoming more and more impatient at my ill-luck or stupidity. There was every reason why I should know my own house, and yet a stranger and an outlaw ran through it with amazing daring.

After an hour's idle search I returned to the end of the corridor, repeated all my previous soundings, and, I fear, indulged in language unbecoming a gentleman. Then, in my blind anger, I found what patient search had not disclosed.

I threw the hammer from me in a fit of temper and it struck one of the square blocks in the cement floor which gave forth a hollow sound. I was on my knees in an instant, my fingers searching the cracks, and drawing down close I could feel a current of air, slight but unmistakable, against my face.

The cement square, though exactly like the others in the cellar floor, was evidently only an imitation, with an opening beneath.

The block was fitted into its place with a nicety that testified to the skill of the hand that had adjusted it. I broke a blade of my pocket-knife trying to pry it up, but, in a moment, I succeeded, and found it to be in reality a trap door, hinged to the substantial part of the floor.

A current of cool, fresh air, the same that had surprised me in the night, struck my face as I lay flat and peered into the opening. The lower passage was as black as pitch, and I lighted a lantern I had brought with me, found that wooden steps gave safe conduct below and went down.

I stood erect in the passage and had several inches to spare. It extended both ways, running back under the foundations of the house, and cut squarely under the park before the house and toward the school wall. The air grew steadily fresher, until, after I had gone about two hundred yards, I reached a point where the wind seemed to beat down on me from above. I put up my hands and found two openings about three yards apart, through which the air sucked steadily. I moved out of the current with a chuckle in my throat and a grin on my face. I had passed under the gate in the school wall, and I knew now why the piers that held it had been built so high,—they were hollow and were the means of sending fresh air into the tunnel.

When I had traveled about twenty yards more I felt a slight vibration accompanied by a muffled roar, and almost immediately came to a rough wooden stair that marked the end of the passage. I had no means of judging directions, but I assumed that I was well within the school park.

I climbed the steps and in a moment stood blinking, my lantern in hand, in a small, floored room. Overhead the tumult and thunder of an organ explained the tremor and roar I had heard below. I was in the crypt of St. Agatha's chapel. The inside of the door by which I had entered was a part of the wainscoting of the room, and the opening was wholly covered with a map of the Holy Land.

It was all very strange and interesting. I looked at my watch and found that it was five o'clock, but I resolved to go into the chapel before going home.

The way up was clear enough, and I was soon in the vestibule. I opened the door, expecting to find a service in progress; but the little church was empty save where, at the right of the chancel, an organist was filling the church with the notes of an agitated

march. Cap in hand I stole forward, and sank down in one of the pews.

A lamp over the organ keyboard gave the only light in the chapel, and made an aureole about her head,—about the uncovered head of Olivia Gladys Armstrong. I smiled as I recognized her and smiled, too, as I remembered her name. But the joy she brought to the music, the happiness in her face as she raised it in the minor harmonies, her isolation, marked by the little isle of light against the dark background of the choir,—these things touched and moved me, and I bent forward, my arms upon the pew in front of me, watching and listening with a kind of awed wonder.

There was no pause in the outpouring of the melody. She changed steps and manuals with swift fingers and passed from one composition to another; now it was an august hymn, now a theme from Wagner, and finally Mendelssohn's spring song won the cold, dark chapel to light and warmth with its exultant notes.

She ceased suddenly with a little sigh and struck her hands together, for the place was cold. As she reached up to put out the lights I stepped forward to the chancel steps.

"Please allow me to do that for you!"

She turned toward me, gathering a cape about her.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she asked, looking about quickly. "I don't remember that you were invited."

"I didn't know I was coming myself," I remarked truthfully, lifting my hand to the lamp.

"That is my opinion of you,—that you're a rather unexpected person. But thank you, very much."

She showed no disposition to prolong the interview, but hurried toward the door, and reached the vestibule before I came up with her.

"You can't go any farther, Mr. Glenarm," she said, and waited as though to make sure I understood. Straight before us through the wood and beyond the school buildings the sunset faded sullenly. Night was following fast upon the gray twilight and already the bolder planets were at arms in the sky. The path led straight ahead beneath the black boughs.

"I might perhaps walk to the dormitory, or whatever you call it," I said.

"Thank you, no! I'm late and haven't time to bother with you. It's against the rules, you know, for us to receive visitors."

She stepped out upon the path.

"But I'm not a caller; I'm just a neighbor! And I owe you several calls, anyhow."

She laughed but did not pause and I followed a pace behind her.

"I hope you don't think for a moment that I chased a rabbit on your side of the fence in the hope of meeting you, do you, Mr. Glenarm?"

"Be it far from me! I'm glad I came, though, for I liked your music immensely. I'm in earnest; I think it quite wonderful, Miss Armstrong."

She said no heed to me.

"And I hope I may promise myself the pleasure of hearing you often."

"You are very kind about my poor music, Mr. Glenarm; but as I'm going away—"

I felt my heart sink a trifle. She was the only amusing person I had met at Glenarm, and the thought of losing her gave a darker note to the bleak landscape.

"That's really too bad! And just when we were getting acquainted! And I was coming to church Sunday to hear you play and to pray for you, so you'd come over often to chase rabbits!"

"This, I thought, softened her heart. At any rate her tone changed. They're afraid to let me for fear I'd run comic opera tunes into the Te Deum!"

"How shocking!"

"Do you know, Mr. Glenarm,"—her tone became confidential and her pace slackened,—"we call you the squire, at St. Agatha's, and the lord of the manor, and names like that! All the girls are perfectly crazy about you. They'd be wild if they thought I talked with you, clandestinely,—is that the way you pronounce it?"

"Anything you say and any way you say it satisfies me," I replied.

"That's ever so nice of you," she said, mockingly again.

I felt foolish and guilty. She would probably get roundly scolded if the grave sisters learned of her talks with me, and very likely I should win their hearty contempt. But I did not turn back.



"Oh Yes, I'm Terribly Wicked, Squire Glenarm." They're sending me off."

"Where is your home?" I demanded. "Chicago, Louisville, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, perhaps?"

"Hush, you are dull! You ought to know from my accent that I'm not from Chicago. And I hope I haven't a Kentucky girl's air of waiting to be flattered to death. And no Indianapolis girl would talk to a strange man at the edge of a deep wood in the gray twilight of a winter day,—that's from a book; and the Cincinnati girl is without my elan, esprit,—whatever you please to call it. She has more Teutonic repose,—more Gretchen of the Rhine valley about her. Don't you adore French, Squire Glenarm?" she concluded, breathlessly, and with no pause in her quick step.

"I adore yours, Miss Armstrong," I asserted, yielding myself further to the joy of idleness, and delighting in the merry and whimsical moods of her talk. I did not make her out, indeed, I preferred not to! I was not then,—and I am not now, thank God!—of an analytical turn of mind. And as I grow older I prefer, even after many a blow, to take my fellow human beings as I find them. And as for women, old or young, I envy no man his gift of resolving them into elements. As well carry a spray of arbutus to the laboratory or subject the enchantment of moonlight upon running water to the flame and blowpipe as try to analyze the heart of a girl,—particularly a girl who paddles a canoe with a sure stroke and puts up a good race with a rabbit.

A lamp shone ahead of us at the entrance of one of the houses, and lights appeared in all the buildings.

"I knew your window I should certainly sing under it,—except that you're going home! You didn't tell me why they were departing you?"

"I'm really ashamed to! You would never—"

"Oh, yes, I would; I'm really an old friend!" insisted, feeling more like an idiot every minute.

"Well, don't tell! But they caught me flirting—with the grocery boy! Now aren't you disgusted?"

"Thoroughly! I can't believe it! Why, you'd a lot better dirt with me," I suggested boldly.

"Well, I'm to be sent away for good at Christmas. I may come back then if I can square myself. My! That's slang,—isn't it adorable?"

"The Sisters don't like slang, I suppose?"

"They loathe it! Miss Devereux,—you know who she is!—she spies on us and tells."

"You don't say so; but I'm not surprised at her! I've heard about her!" I declared bitterly.

We had reached the door, and I expected her to fly; but she lingered.

"Oh, if you know her! Perhaps you're a spy, too! It's just as well we should never meet again, Mr. Glenarm," she declared haughtily.

"The memory of these few meetings will always linger with me, Miss Armstrong," I returned in an imitation of her own tone.

"I shall scorn to remember you!"—and she folded her arms under the cloak tragically.

"Our meetings have been all to few, Miss Armstrong. Two, exactly, I believe!"

"Then you prefer to ignore the first time I ever saw you," she said, her hand on the door.

"Out there in your canoe? Never! And you've forgiven me for overhearing you and the chaplain on the wall-please!"

She grasped the knob of the door and paused an instant as though pondering.

"I make it three times, without that one, and not counting once in the road and other times when you didn't know, Squire Glenarm! I'm a foolish little girl to have remembered the first. I see now how b-i-l-l-e-d I have been. Good-by!"

She opened and closed the door softly, and I heard her running up the steps within.

I ran back to the chapel, roundly abusing myself for having neglected my more serious affairs for a bit of silly talk with a school girl, fearful lest the openings I had left at both ends of the passage should have been discovered. Near the chapel I narrowly escaped running into Stoddard, but I slipped past him, found my lantern, pulled the hidden door into place, and, traversing the tunnel without incident, soon climbed through the hatchway and slammed the false block securely into the opening.

CHAPTER XIII.
A Pair of Eavesdroppers.

When I came down after dressing for dinner, Bates called my attention to a belated mail. I pounced eagerly upon a letter in Laurence Donovan's well-known hand, bearing, to my surprise, an American stamp and post-marked New Orleans. It was dated, however, at Vera Cruz, Mexico, December 15, 1901, and gave a characteristically racy account of his efforts to dodge the British detective who was pursuing him. He hoped, he wrote, to cross the borders into Texas, but declared that he should keep clear of Indiana, as he was unacquainted with the Indian language.

Bates gave me my coffee in the library, as I wished to settle down to an evening of reflection without delay. Larry's report of himself was not reassuring, despite its cheerful tone. I knew that if he had any idea of trying to reach me he would not mention it in a letter which might fall into the hands of the authorities, and the hope that he might join me grew, and I was not, perhaps, entitled to a companion at Glenarm under the terms of my exile, but as a matter of protection in the existing condition of affairs there could be no legal or moral reason why I should not defend myself against my foes, and Larry was an ally worth having.

My neighbor, the chaplain, had inadvertently given me a bit of important news; and my mind kept reverting to the fact that Morgan was reporting his injury to the executor of my grandfather's estate in New York. Everything else that had happened was tame and unimportant compared with this. Why had John Marshall Glenarm made Arthur Pickering the executor of his estate? He knew that I detested him, that Pickering's noble

aims and high ambitions had been praised by my family until his very name sickened me; and yet my own grandfather had thought it wise to intrust his fortune and my future to the man of all men who was most repugnant to me. I rose and paced the floor in anger.

My rage must fasten upon some one, and Bates was the nearest target for it. I went to the kitchen, where he usually spent his evenings, to vent my feelings upon him, only to find him gone. I climbed to his room and found it empty. Very likely he was off conducting with his friend and fellow conspirator, the caretaker, and I fumed with rage and disappointment. I was thoroughly tired,—as tired as on days when I had beaten my way through tropical jungles without food or water; but I wished, in my impotent anger against I knew not what agencies, to punish myself,—to induce an utter weariness that would send me exhausted to bed.

The snow in the highway was well beaten down and I swung off country-ward past St. Agatha's. A gray mist hung over the fields in whirling clouds, breaking away occasionally and showing the throbbing winter stars. The walk and my interest in the alternation of star-light and mist-wrapped landscape won me to a better state of mind, and after tramping a couple of miles, I set out for home. Several times on my tramp I had caught myself whistling the air of a majestic young hymn, and smiled, remembering my young friend Olivia, and her playing in the chapel. She was an amusing child; the thought of her further lifted my spirit; and I turned into the school park when I reached the outer gate with a half-realized wish to pass near the barracks where she spent her days.

At the school gate the lamps of a carriage suddenly blurred in the mist. Carriages are not common in this region, and I was not surprised to find that this was the familiar village hack that met trains day and night at Annandale. Some parent, I conjectured, paying a visit to St. Agatha's; possibly—and the thought gave me pleasure—perhaps the father of Miss Olivia Gladys Armstrong had come to carry her home for a stricter discipline than Sister Theresa's school afforded.

The driver sat asleep on his box, and I passed him and went on into the grounds. A whim seized me to visit the crypt of the chapel and examine the opening to the tunnel. As I passed the little group of school buildings a man came hurriedly from one of them and turned toward the chapel.

I first thought it was Stoddard, but I could not make him out in the mist and in my uncertainty waited for him to put 20 paces between us before I followed.

He strode into the chapel porch with an air of assurance and I heard him address some one who had been waiting. The mist was now so heavy that I could not see my hand before my face, and I stole forward until I heard the voices of two men distinctly.

"Bates!"

"Yes, sir."

I heard feet scraping on the stone floor of the porch.

"This is a devil of a place to talk in, but it's the best we can do. Did the young man know I sent for you?"

"No, sir. I kept him quite busy with his books and papers."

"Humph! We can never be sure of him."

"I suppose that is correct, sir."

"Well, you and Morgan are a fine pair, I must say! I thought he had some sense and that you'd see to it that he didn't make a mess of this whole thing. He's in bed now with a hole in his arm and you've got to go on alone."

"I'll do my best, Mr. Pickering."

"Don't call me by name, you idiot. We're not advertising our business from the housetops."

"Certainly not," replied Bates humbly.

The blood was roaring through my head, and my hands clenched as I stood there listening to this colloquy. Pickering's voice was—and is—unmistakable. There was always a purring softness in it. He used to remind me at school of a sleek, complacent cat, and I hate cats with particular loathing.

"Is Morgan lying or not when he says he shot himself accidentally?" demanded Pickering petulantly.

"I only know what I heard from the gardener here at the school. You'll understand, I hope, that I can't be seen going to Morgan's house."

"Of course not. But he says you haven't played fair with him, that you even attacked him a few days after Glenarm came."

"Yes, and he hit me over the head with a club. It was his indiscretion, sir. He wanted to go through the library in broad daylight, and it wasn't any use, anyhow. There's nothing there."

"But I don't like the looks of this shooting. Morgan's sick and out of his head. But a fellow like Morgan isn't likely to shoot himself accidentally, and now that it's done the work's stopped and the time is running on. What do you think Glenarm suspects?"

"I can't tell, sir, but mighty little I should say. The shot through the window the first night he was here seemed to shake him a trifle, but he's quite settled down now, I should say, sir. That shot of Morgan's was a great mistake. The young gentleman isn't to be frightened away as easily as that."

"Morgan's a fool. But what is Glenarm doing? He probably doesn't spend much time on this side of the fence—doesn't haunt the chapel, I fancy?"

"Lord, no! I hardly suspect the young gentleman of being a praying man."

"You haven't seen him prowling about the house analyzing the architecture?"

"Not a bit of it, sir! He hasn't. I should say, what his revered grandfather called the analytical mind."

Pickering stamped his feet upon the paved porch floor in a way that I remembered of old. It marked a conclusion, and preluded serious mistakes.

"Now, Bates," he said with a ring of authority and speaking in a louder key than he had yet used, "it's your duty under all circumstances to help discover the hidden assets of the estate. We've got to pluck the mystery from that architectural monster over there, and the time for doing it is short enough. Mr. Glenarm was a rich man. To my own knowledge he had a couple of millions, and he couldn't have spent it all on that house. He reduced his bank account to a few thousand dollars and swept out his safety deposit boxes with a broom before his last trip to Vermont. He didn't die with the stuff in his clothes, did he?"

"Lord bless me, no, sir! There was little enough cash to bury him, with you out of the country and me alone with him."

"He was a crank and I suppose he got a lot of satisfaction out of burying his money. But this hunt for it isn't funny. I supposed of course we'd dig it up before Glenarm got here or I shouldn't have been in such a hurry to send for him. But it's over there somewhere in the grounds. There must be a plan of the house that would help. I'll give you a thousand dollars the day you wire me you have found any sort of clue."

"Thank you, sir."

"I don't want thanks, I want the money or securities, or whatever it is. I've got to go back to my car now, and you'd better skip home. You needn't tell your young master that I've been here."

I was trying hard to remember, as I stood there with clenched hands outside the chapel porch, that Arthur Pickering's name was written in the list of directors of one of the largest trust companies in America and that he belonged to the most exclusive clubs in New York. I had come out for my walk with only an innershoe over my dinner jacket, and I was thoroughly chilled by the cold mist. I was experiencing, too, an inner cold as I reflected upon the greed and perfidy of man.

"Keep an eye on Morgan," said Pickering.

"Certainly, sir."

"And be careful what you write or wire."

"I'll mind those points, sir. But I'd suggest, if you please, sir—"

"Well!" demanded Pickering impatiently.

"That you should call at the house. It would look rather strange to the young gentleman if you'd come to St. Agatha's and not see him."

"I haven't the slightest errand with him. And besides I haven't time. If he learns that I've been here you may say that my business was with Sister Theresa and that I regretted very much not having the opportunity to call on him."

The irony of this was not lost on Bates, who chuckled softly. He came out into the open and turned away toward the Glenarm gate. Pickering passed me, so near that I might have put out my hand and touched him, and in a moment I heard the carriage drive off rapidly toward the village.

I heard Bates running home over the snow and listened to the clatter of the village hack as it bore Pickering back to Annandale.

Then out of the depths of the chapel porch—out of the depths of time and space, it seemed, so dated I stood—some one came swiftly toward me, some one light of foot like a woman, ran down the walk a little way into the fog and paused.

An exclamation broke from me.

"Eavesdropping for two!"—it was the voice of Olivia. "I'd take pretty



"I'd Take Pretty Good Care of Myself if I Were You, Squire Glenarm."

good care of myself if I were you, Squire Glenarm! Good night!"

"Good-by!" I faltered, as she sped away in the mist toward St. Agatha's.

CHAPTER XIV.
The Girl in Gray.

My first thought was to find the crypt door and return through the tunnel before Bates could reach the house. The chapel was open, and by lighting matches I found my way to the map and panel. I slipped through and closed the opening; then ran through the passage with gratitude to the generous builder who had given it a clear floor and an ample roof. In my haste I miscalculated its length, pitching headlong into the steps under the trap beneath Glenarm House at a gait that sent me sprawling. In a moment more I had jammed the trap into place and was running up the cellar steps, breathless, with my cap smashed down over my eyes.

I heard Bates entering at the rear by a scratch. There was but a moment in which to throw my coat and cap under the divan in the library, slap the dust from my clothes and seat my self at the great table where the candles blazed tranquilly.

Bates' step was as steady as ever—there was not the slightest hint of excitement in it—as he came and stood within the door.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Glenarm, did you wish anything, sir?"

"Oh, no, thank you, Bates."

"That's right, Bates." I folded my arms to hide my hands, which were black from contact with the passage, and faced my man servant. My respect for his rascally powers had increased immensely since he gave me my coffee. A contest with so clever a rogue was worth while.

"I'm grateful for your care of me, Bates. I had expected to perish of discomfort out here, but you are treating me like a lord."

"Thank you, Mr. Glenarm. I do what I can, sir."

He brought fresh candles for the table candelabra, going about with his accustomed noiseless step. I felt a cold chill creep down my spine as he passed behind me on these errands. His transition from the role of conspirator to that of my flawless servant was almost too abrupt.

I dismissed him as quickly as possible, and listened to his step through the halls as he went about locking the doors. The locking-up process had rather bored me before; to-night I listened with interest for every sound.

When I heard Bates clumping to his own quarters I quietly went the rounds of my own account and found everything as tight as a drum.

I was tired enough to sleep when I went to my room, and after an eventless night woke to a clear day and keener air.

"I'm going to take a little run into the village, Bates," I remarked at breakfast.

"Very good, sir."

"If any good call I'll be back in an hour or so."

"Yes, sir."

I really had an errand in the village. I wished to visit the hardware store and buy some cartridges, but Pickering's presence in the community was a disturbing factor in my mind. I had resolved to get sight of him—to meet him, if possible, and see how a man whose schemes were so deep looked in the light of day.

As I left the grounds and gained the highway Stoddard fell in with me.

"Well, Mr. Glenarm, I'm glad to see you abroad so early. With that library of yours the temptation must be strong to stay within doors. But a man's got to subject himself to the sun and wind. Even a good wetting now and then is salutary."

"I try to get out every day," I answered. "But I've chiefly limited myself to my own grounds."

An ancient omnibus, filled with young women, passed at a gallop, bound for the station, and we took our hair.

"Christmas holidays," explained the chaplain, "practically all the students go home."

"Lucky kids, to have homes with Christmas trees. I envy them."

"I suppose, Mr. Pickering got away last night?" he observed, and my pulse quickened at the name.

"I haven't seen him yet," I answered.

"Then of course he hasn't gone!" and these words, uttered in the big clergyman's deep tones, seemed wholly plausible. There was, to be sure, nothing so unlikely as that Arthur Pickering, executor of my grandfather's estate, would come to Glenarm without seeing me.

"Sister Theresa told me this morning he was there. He called on her and Miss Devereux last night. I haven't seen him myself. I thought possibly I might run into him in the village. It's car's very likely on the station walk."

"No doubt we shall find him there," I answered easily.

The Annandale station presented an appearance of unusual gaiety when we reached the main street of the village. There, to be sure, lay the private car in the siding, and on the platform was a group of 20 or more girls, with several of the brown-habited Sisters of St. Agatha. There was something a little foreign in the picture; the girls in their bright colors talking gaily, the Sisters in their somber garb hovering about, suggesting Francesco Italy rather than Indiana.

We stepped upon the platform. The private car lay on the opposite side of the station, having been switched into a siding of the east and west road. Pickering was certainly getting on. There is something wholly regal in a private car. Any one may board a carboat and call it a yacht; but there is no known substitution for a private car. As I lounged across the platform with Stoddard, Pickering came out into the vestibule of his car, followed by two ladies and an elderly gentleman. They all descended and began a promenade on the plank walk.

Pickering saw me an instant later and hurried up with outstretched hand.

"This is indeed good fortune! We dropped off here last night rather unexpectedly to rest a hot box and should have been picked up by the early express for Chicago; but there was a miscarriage of orders somewhere and we now have to wait for the nine o'clock, and it's late. If I'd known how much behind it was I should have run out to see you. How are things going?"

"As smooth as a whistle! It really isn't so bad when you face it