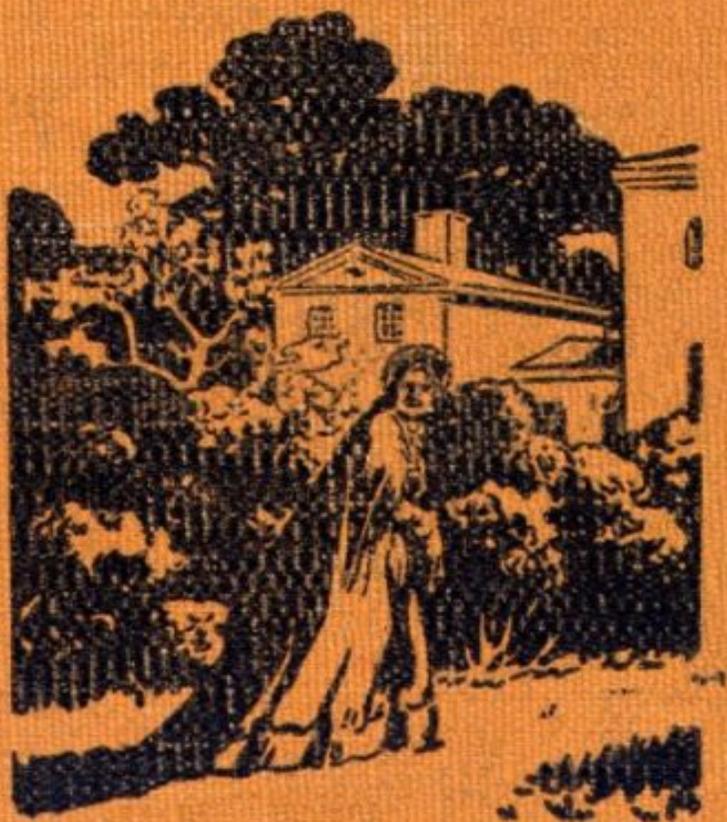


The Brass Keys of Kenwick

AUGUSTA HUIELL SEAMAN



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**THE BRASS KEYS
OF
KENWICK**

BY AUGUSTA HUIELL
SEAMAN

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N. Y. 1947

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TO

AGNES AND "BOBBIE"

WHO LENT THEIR PERSONALITIES

TO THIS BOOK

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THE BRASS KEYS OF KENWICK

CHAPTER I ENTER AUDREY

It had been a day of rain. Torrents had fallen since early morning, and the little town of Chestersmith lay drenched and sodden in the spring twilight. Just about sunset, however, the clouds had broken in the west and shafts of golden light had tipped the budding trees and set millions of pendent raindrops atwinkle.

A breath of warm, sweet-scented spring air was wafted through the window of an appallingly muddy little sedan car, as the driver lowered the glass on entering the town. And immediately on its opening, the beautiful red-brown head of an Irish setter poked itself out of the aperture and sniffed with keen appreciation. The setter occupied the space beside the girl who was driving, and a mound of miscellaneous baggage was piled in the

rear of the car.

"Here we are, Susan!" announced the girl, snapping off the windshield wiper. "Thought we'd never get here, didn't you, old dear?" The dog turned to lick her face in exuberant delight of arrival and the girl pushed her off with one hand, while she swung the car in a left turn around a street corner with the other.

"Have a heart, Susan!" she admonished. "I can't wash my face yet awhile. We've got to find the whereabouts of these two addresses first. Better ask at one of the stores, I reckon." The girl often amused herself by talking to the dog as if it were another person. Susan made as suitable a reply as possible by thumping her plumed tail on the seat. They turned into the one street that looked to be the business section of the sleepy little Maryland town, and the girl alighted and disappeared into a grocery store. When she emerged and had hopped back into the car, she chuckled:

"We're aiming straight for Miss Jenifer Kenwick's, old pal—five streets farther along

this road. It's just on the edge of the town and the Newkirks are right around the corner from it. But he remarked something that sounded rather odd—said he advised me to wait till morning before seeing the old lady. Wonder why? Well, anyway, let's go!"

They sped down the street in the deepening twilight. There was a scent of blossoming things in the air, and some forsythia bushes in a front yard had flowered into rich bloom.

"My, but it smells fine!" exclaimed the girl, sniffing luxuriously. "And it's pretty different from what we left up around chilly old Pennsylvania this morning!" The thump, thump of a plumed tail and another attempt at a slobbery kiss was Susan's reply.

"Calm yourself, my dear!" cried the girl. "We arrive at Kenwick!" and she drew to a sudden halt across the road from an odd-looking yet stately old brick mansion. The dog shifted about restlessly on the seat and made an effort to get out of the car.

"Wait a minute," half-whispered the girl, laying a soothing and detaining hand on the glossy brown coat. "Let's just look this proposition over first." They both sat quiet for several moments, the girl staring out across the road at the dim façade of the house, not a window of which showed a light in the deepening darkness. Presently she drew a long breath.

"It's worth while, all right, Susan, my love! It's a *peach*! Look at that marvelous doorway—look at those semi-octagonal wings!—look at the perfect carving of that circular window at the top!—look at the simple but beautiful lines of the whole thing! The only question is, can I do it justice? . . . But Dad was right, I couldn't have a lovelier subject. I wonder why there aren't any lights lit? Maybe 'old Miss Jenifer,' as the grocer called her, is away. He said she wasn't, but he might be mistaken. Anyhow, the place looks deserted. I suppose, according to the Book of Etiquette, we ought to call on 'old Miss Jenifer' first, but I'm going to take a chance and hunt up the Newkirks instead. Just this minute I'm more anxious to

see what our boarding place for the next few months is going to be like than anything else. It must be that house just around the corner. Let's go!"

She switched on the car lights and whirled around the corner toward the only other house near by—a small, sloping-roofed, dormer-windowed cottage down a narrower side road. In contrast to the mansion's complete darkness, this house was attractively lit, with soft-shaded lamps in several rooms. In the glare of the car's headlights, the girl could also discern a pleasant garden at the side, sloping down to the river's edge not far away.

"This must be the Newkirks'. There's no other house around," commented the girl. "Looks good to us, though—hey, Susan? Now you just remain on that seat while I go and attack the Newkirk stronghold!"

She shut the car door firmly on the impatient dog and ran up the walk to thump half-timidly at the brass knocker. Almost immediately a young girl of fifteen or sixteen opened the

door.

"Is Mrs. Newkirk at home?" asked the newcomer. "I think she is expecting me. I'm Audrey Blake."

"Oh, yes! Come right in. Mother's been expecting you all afternoon. She'll be down in a minute." And then, a little shyly: "I'm Camilla Newkirk, but I'm always called 'Cam.' You—you're quite different from what I—expected." She did not confess that she had been watching with concentrated though secret eagerness all afternoon for the newcomer's arrival.

"Yes, I'm used to being a great disappointment," half-chuckled Audrey. "But just how was it this time? D'you mind telling me what you expected?"

"Why, I—thought," stammered Cam, a little embarrassed, "that you'd be quite grown-up—a grown woman, probably—and horribly dignified—and all that. And you're just a girl—only a little older than I am. I—I'm terribly

glad!"

"Well, I'm glad too, if you are," admitted Audrey. "I can't claim to being exactly 'grown-up'—I won't be nineteen till November. And as to being 'dignified'—I've given that up for life—as hopeless!" She grinned cheerfully at Cam, and they both stood for a silent moment surveying each other while waiting for Mrs. Newkirk's appearance.

What Camilla saw was a rather tall, thin girl in a well-cut though mud-bespattered sport suit, a blue beret covering the thick, wavy dark hair brushed back boyishly—dark grey eyes in which lurked a friendly, confiding look—a row of white, even teeth, and a mouth whose almost impish grin betokened a keen and well-developed sense of humor.

While Audrey saw a girl only a trifle shorter than herself, dark-haired and slight whose chief claim to attractiveness lay in a pair of lovely and wistful blue eyes. And Audrey, who was training herself to read faces, traced loneliness and boredom and eagerness to be

understood in those eyes, and was drawn the more to Camilla because of it. But the moment of mutual scrutiny passed as Mrs. Newkirk descended the stairs to greet the guest.

"So you're Audrey Blake," she said cordially, when her daughter had made the introduction. "We're very glad to welcome you, my dear. I hope you'll be happy and comfortable here. Miss Kenwick has told us a little about you—what little she knew. She never has seen you, of course, but I believe she said your father was a distant cousin of hers. But let me show you to your room. And where, by the way, did you leave your luggage?"

Audrey explained that she had driven down from her home in Pennsylvania in her car, which was now standing out in the road. And she added doubtfully:

"I'll have to confess—I've brought my dog Susan along. I'm terribly fond of her and we're never parted for very long. She's well-trained and won't be any trouble, and I'll feed her and

all that myself. I do hope you won't mind!" She looked appealingly at Mrs. Newkirk, across whose face a troubled expression had flitted at the mention of the dog.

"I don't mind a dog a bit—rather fond of them myself," admitted that lady, "but I'm wondering how the creature will get along with Lorry's cat. Lorry's my little seven-year-old son, Loring," she added in explanation. "And the cat is a dreadful, fighting old tomcat, but Lorry adores it, and we all put up with the old pest as well as we can, for his sake. But I'm doubtful how your dog is going to get along with old 'Battle-Axe', as we call the cat!"

She laughed, and Audrey thought she had never encountered a more attractive personality than this tall, beautiful, stately, yet utterly simple and friendly Southern lady. "She's *beautiful*," she thought, "with that prematurely grey hair and lovely eyes! I'd like to make a portrait of her." But what she said aloud was:

"Oh, I think it will be all right, Mrs. Newkirk, if you really don't mind. Susan is very obedient, and I'll keep her with me most of the time. Dogs and cats generally get used to one another after a while, anyway, don't they? And now I'll go and fetch in Susan and my luggage, if it's all right."

"And I'll come and help you," chimed in Cam. "We've only old Mandy, our cook, to help, and she's busy with dinner now. If there's anything heavy to carry up, she can help with it this evening."

The two girls ran down the path to the car, where Susan and Camilla made immediate and demonstrative acquaintance.

Audrey thought she had never enjoyed a meal more than her first dinner that evening with the Newkirk family. They gave her at once the feeling of being, not a stranger, but a family member with her own folks. Mrs. Newkirk had the rare and delightful faculty of

putting one instantly at ease. She seemed unruffled by any circumstance, even when her seven-year-old son Lorry came in late, tousled and grimy, after they had sat down to dinner, and had resented loudly being sent up to wash and brush his hair. When later he suddenly produced a hop-toad from his pocket, in no wise embarrassed, she had laughingly but firmly removed him and his unwelcome pet from the scene and returned, serene and smiling, to serve dessert. While they were still sitting comfortably and idly over after-dinner coffee, she turned to Audrey:

"Tell us, won't you, about what you're going to do at old Miss Jenifer's, as we always call her. We're all awfully curious about it and she has given us only the vaguest notion. You know, she's a very eccentric old lady, and quite touchy about having her affairs 'pried into,' as she calls it. So we're always very careful never to ask personal questions. Do enlighten us, if you care to. She was quite mysterious about it all."

"Why, there isn't anything mysterious about it

in the least!" smiled Audrey. "The whole thing's just this: I've been for a couple of years an art student at the National Arts School in New York. I intend to specialize on portrait work in the end, but I'm dabbling in several other branches, just to try 'em out— caricatures, clay-modeling, water-colors, and that sort of thing. But there's one thing I've been fairly successful with, and that's making models of houses.

"I copy every detail, you know, on a tiny scale. It seems to be quite a fad for wealthy people who have very attractive houses, especially if they're restored Colonial or that kind of thing, to have a model made. And they pay quite a lot for it, too. I made two models for two different society women last year, and what I got for it helped a lot with my art course.

"Then I heard, just recently, of a wonderful prize that's being offered by the National Historical Society in Washington for the best model of a pre-Revolutionary house, to be completed by next November. It seemed too

good a chance to miss. The prize is five thousand dollars, and if I won it, I could take a two-years' course abroad—and I'd give my head for *that!*" She grinned her charming, boyish grin.

"My work at the Art School was just about over for the season, so there seemed no reason why I shouldn't go in for this. Then came the question of what house I was to model. And it was a mighty important question, too! I knew two or three others who were going in for it, but they had chosen to make models of sort of obvious and well-known places like Mount Vernon or the House of the Seven Gables or Washington's Headquarters at Valley Forge, or some such thing. But I wanted something different—something less well-known but perhaps more beautiful and unusual. I'd thought of several places, but it isn't easy—it's almost impossible, really—to get permission to do a thing like that, especially if the house is privately owned. You have to be allowed to *live* in it, almost—at least, you have to go about inside and poke around and take the most accurate measurements and make

sketches, and all that, because it has to be done to scale, both inside and out. And very few private house owners would allow that.

"I'd begun to feel sort of discouraged about the whole thing, when Dad suddenly thought of that place called Kenwick. The reason he remembered it was that Miss Kenwick is a sort of distant cousin on his mother's side. He remembered being taken there to visit several times when he was a boy. He said Miss Kenwick was quite fond of him and always made a fuss over him when he was brought there. He'd always remembered the old house as being very lovely and unusual. And when he described it to me, I felt it would be just the thing I wanted.

"So he wrote to Miss Kenwick and told her about me and what I wanted to do. She and his mother had always been friends and he counted on that, too, to help along with my case. He even said he thought she might possibly invite me to stay there with her while I was making the model, as he'd heard she was living all alone in that big old house now and

might be glad of company." At this point Audrey noticed Camilla and her mother exchange a swift glance. But as they made no comment she continued:

"Well, we got a reply from her at last, written in queer, cramped handwriting and on paper that looked as if it had been torn out of a blank book. She was very kind about allowing me to do the house, which she seemed awfully fond of, and said I could use the old office-wing for my work-shop—'studio' she called it! But we thought it rather strange when she said she was sorry she couldn't invite me to stay there, as she didn't entertain any company nowadays and kept very quietly to herself. But she said she could recommend a very pleasant house near by where I could board with friends of hers and spoke of you folks. So that's how it all came about. I guess she must have fixed it up with you right away, for she wrote us again soon after and said it was all settled and would I please come not later than the twelfth. So here I am!"

"That's all tremendously interesting,"

commented Mrs. Newkirk. "I think it's quite wonderful that you can do an unusual thing of this kind. And we're delighted to have you with us. We're a rather quiet family, and you'll find this a rather dead little town. So your advent is all the more thrilling to us. And I'm especially glad for Camilla that anyone so interesting and so near her age is going to be with us. I hope you'll get to be good friends. But, by the way, I take it that you haven't seen Miss Jenifer Kenwick yet."

Audrey said no, and explained that she'd been so late getting into town. "We had two punctured tires on the way down," she grinned, "and I seem to be a scandalously poor car mechanic! I stopped at the Kenwick house, though, but it was all dark and I thought she must be away."

"Oh, no, she wasn't out. She's *never* out at this time of night!" exclaimed Camilla. And Mrs. Newkirk's handsome face assumed a slightly troubled expression as she added:

"My dear, we suspect you're going to have a

bit of a difficult time with old Miss Jenifer, and perhaps it's only right to warn you to be prepared. She's very eccentric, you know. She's liable to make things rather difficult for you, I'm afraid."

"Why, how do you mean?" asked Audrey, looking considerably disturbed. "She seemed awfully nice in her letter—very glad to have me do the house. Why should she make it hard for me?"

"I have an idea," explained Mrs. Newkirk, "that she thinks of your work as being done in quite a different way from what you've described—like simply painting a picture from what you see on the outside, or something like that. What you say about going around inside and taking all sorts of measurements and poking about, as you *must*, to be able to get things accurately, is going to disturb her mightily.

"You see, poor old Miss Jenifer is really our town 'character.' She used to be perfectly all right and normal, I suppose, but she's quite old

now, and as long as I can remember she's been queer, and growing queerer all the time. No one knows definitely what started her off that way—it's all quite a mystery—but she gets worse as the years go on. We're all used to her now and don't think much about it, but I imagine she'd strike a stranger as most surprising. Wait till you see her with the *brass keys*! She——"

But the rest of the tale Audrey was not to hear at that time, for, interrupting Mrs. Newkirk, there arose the most frightful bedlam from the region of the kitchen—the keen, alarmed howling of a dog, the hissing, spitting, and yowling of a surprised cat, the shrill scolding of old black Mandy, and the furious shouting of Lorry, leaning over the banisters in the upper hall, whither he had been banished from the table.

Audrey guessed in a moment what had happened. Susan, who had been lying obediently in a corner of the dining room all through the meal, had doubtless become weary of waiting and slipped unnoticed into the

kitchen while they were talking so earnestly. There she must have surprised the redoubtable tomcat, who had become properly enraged and had flown at her with disastrous results!

They all rushed into the kitchen and the ensuing half-hour was spent in separating the combatants and smoothing over the situation with grumbling Mandy and excited Lorry, who had joined the scene in his pajamas. The remainder of the evening passed for Audrey in unpacking and getting settled in her pleasant little room and in writing a note to her mother. Camilla hovered about shyly, offering what assistance she could render and commenting to Audrey on the exceeding dullness of the town and how glad she was to have a new friend.

It was not till Audrey, quite healthily tired out, had slipped into bed near midnight, with Susan on a rug close by on the floor, that a sudden thought popped into her weary brain:

"Singular—about old Miss Jenifer! What was that about the *brass keys*, I wonder? I never got a chance to ask."

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST MORNING AT KENWICK

But there was no opportunity to investigate the matter of the brass keys next morning, for when Audrey came down to breakfast she found the Newkirk household much occupied in getting started on its daily routine. Camilla was drifting about, collecting her books for departure for high school and groaning that she'd be late for the school bus. Mrs. Newkirk was distractedly endeavoring to get Lorry off to primary school in the village, and Lorry was complaining loudly to the world at large about the conduct of Battle-Axe, who had appeared that morning with his ear half chewed off, after some midnight *mêlée* with other feline friends. Mrs. Newkirk saw them both off with a sigh of relief, but turned a smiling face to Audrey, who was waiting

about a little uncertainly.

"Do you suppose it would be all right for me to call up Miss Jenifer and ask when she would care to see me to-day?" Audrey asked. Mrs. Newkirk stopped on her way upstairs and chuckled.

"My dear child, do you suppose old Miss Jenifer has anything so modern as a *telephone* in that house of hers? Why, she hasn't even a gas stove or a bathroom or an electric light! You don't realize the situation at all, I'm afraid, and I can't think whether it's wiser to tell you all about it or let you go and see for yourself. Perhaps I ought to tell you, so that you'll be prepared and won't be too much bowled over when you come in contact with the situation there." She turned into the living room and beckoned Audrey to follow her.

"I'll be darning some stockings while I talk," she added, "and so won't be losing any time. I have a rather busy day ahead of me. You see, it's this way about poor old Miss Jenifer:

"She is very eccentric, as I've said before. She has this beautiful old Colonial mansion, which, by the way, contains some marvelous specimens of antique furniture besides, and she possesses quite a number of pieces of rare and valuable jewelry also. Yet she's absolutely impoverished as far as money is concerned. Sometimes we suspect that she actually doesn't have enough to eat. But she's so proud that she'd never acknowledge the fact, nor will she part with a single thing she owns to get ready cash. We worry about her quite a lot in town here, and we even try to invite her to lunch or dinner every once in a while, to be sure she has a square meal occasionally. But we'd never dare let her suspect the reason or she wouldn't come. And I'll admit it's something of a trial to have her, as she's so peculiar in her ways.

"But what I'm thinking most about in connection with your problem is whether she's going to allow you the freedom you'll need to go about the house. I don't mind telling you that we think there must be some mystery about that house. She's always guarded it rather

carefully, never allowing anyone to roam through it freely or see some parts of it. But of late years no one who goes there is ever admitted to any but one of the two front reception rooms each side of the central hall. She makes the excuse that the others are not in order, that she keeps the furniture draped to preserve it, and all that sort of thing, but we think there must surely be some other reason. That is why I think you are going to find things a bit difficult."

Audrey's expression had been growing more and more worried as Mrs. Newkirk's explanation went on. At this point she asked:

"This does all sound rather serious for me. What would you advise me to do, Mrs. Newkirk?"

Her companion sat silent, thinking it over for two or three moments. At last she said:

"There's just one hopeful feature in the situation, I think. Poor old Miss Jenifer has rather a soft spot in her heart for young people.

I don't mean small children, but girls and boys nearly grown—like yourself. It's rather pathetic, too, because the young people around here are all afraid of her or have rather a dislike for her peculiarities and won't go near her. Camilla can't bear the sight of her and usually manages to be out when I ask her to meals. The only one who's willing to bother with her is my son Wade. He's at St. John's College, in Annapolis, but whenever he's home here he always makes it a point to run in and see her and have a chat, and she fairly adores him.

"But what I'm getting at about you is this: If you are nice and friendly to the old lady and try not to notice her oddities too much and don't seem to want to explore all over the house just at first, but let it come gradually, there's a possibility that she may let down the bars for you later. Otherwise I'm afraid you _____"

At this point, a grey woolly head crowned with a white turban was poked into the doorway, and the querulous voice of old

Mandy interrupted:

"'Scuse me, Mis' Newkirk, but how yo' gwine hab de chicken to-night? Ah done got it picked and Ah been waitin' roun' to fin' out."

Mrs. Newkirk rose and excused herself to Audrey with a smile. "I'll have to go and pay some attention to Mandy now, but I think I've given you enough of a hint to work on. You might as well run around right away to see Miss Jenifer. She's probably expecting you any time. There was no use to tell her last night, as she usually goes to bed about dark to save lamps and candles, I imagine. Good luck to you!"

Accompanied by Susan (who had spent an uninteresting morning thus far, incarcerated in the bedroom), Audrey set out a few moments later, her heart a bit heavy with misgivings. She had never counted on encountering any obstacles to her work and resented having to give the time to placating a cranky and obstinate old lady.

"What possesses her to act that way?" she demanded indignantly of Susan (whose only reply was to caper the more wildly about her feet in the renewed joy of freedom). "I see where I'm going to have my hands full! And at that, I never thought to ask again about the *brass keys*! Well, here we are."

She turned the corner and the old mansion stood before her, the golden morning sunlight on the rich mellow brick façade, the exquisite carvings of window and doorway standing out in clear relief. High, glossy green magnolia trees shaded the front entrance, and in the rear, as she had rounded the corner, she had caught a glimpse of a garden enclosed by a low brick wall sloping down to the river where enormous old box bushes had been planted in a curious design. Audrey heaved a big sigh in sheer appreciation of it all, gathered her courage together, and ascended the front steps. Before she raised the tarnished old brass knocker, she whispered a few admonitory commands to Susan.

"You're not to go in with me—you

understand? The old lady probably doesn't like dogs, especially on first acquaintance. Sit right here on the steps till I come out—and don't you dare chase a cat or a chicken or another dog! You hear me?" Susan looked at her mistress with great, reproachful brown eyes and sat down resignedly, as Audrey thumped twice with the old knocker.

It seemed a long, long time before there was any reply. Then light uncertain footsteps were heard inside, and after a great wrestling with the huge brass lock, the door opened.

In thinking it over afterward, Audrey wondered how she had managed to maintain as much calmness as she mustered during that first encounter. Nothing that Mrs. Newkirk had told her had quite prepared her for the astounding appearance of old Miss Jenifer Kenwick. She had expected something rather quaint and curious and out-of-date in the eccentric old lady, but she was utterly taken aback at what now met her gaze. The little, wizened creature, with brown, deeply wrinkled skin, and thin, straggling white hair,

stood before her in the doorway, at ten o'clock in the morning, arrayed in what appeared to be an elaborate *evening gown* from far back in the 'eighties or 'nineties. The crushed and wrinkled tulle and silk and lace bore evidence of little wear but much long repose packed away in some ancient trunk. Around this strange little creature's withered neck hung a lustrous and lovely pearl necklace which, if genuine, Audrey judged to be worth several thousand dollars. Two large diamond rings twinkled on the clawlike hands, and twin eardrops, heavily encrusted with pearls in ancient settings, were visible below the straggling white hair. And, offsetting this untimely display of finery, there peered out a pair of large and mournful brown eyes, so pathetic in their expression that Audrey forgot everything else as she stood looking down into them.

"Good-morning! I—I'm Audrey Blake," she managed to stammer.

The strange old lady's face brightened in an unexpectedly winning smile. She shook

Audrey's outstretched hand, said "How do you do, my dear! I've been expecting you," and drew her into the hallway, gazing doubtfully at Susan the while.

"My dog will stay outside," Audrey hastened to explain, "if you're afraid of her or don't care to have her in the house. But she's very gentle and always stays close by me."

"Oh, no! Let her come in then. I—I'm rather fond of dogs myself, though I don't keep any," exclaimed the little old lady, laying one of her clawlike hands timidly on Susan's brown head. And so Susan gained her entrée into Kenwick.

Miss Jenifer led the way into the room to the left of the central hall and Susan followed meekly and seated herself beside Audrey's chair. An embarrassed moment followed, while Audrey was searching anxiously for the best way to open the conference. Miss Jenifer herself made the opening by inquiring about Audrey's trip down, when she had got there, and whether she was comfortable at the

Newkirks'. And these questions having been duly settled, another silence fell. At last Audrey said:

"You have a very beautiful home here, Miss Kenwick. I know it's going to be a wonderful pleasure to me to make a model of this charming old house. It's awfully good of you to let me do it." It was evident that she had struck the right note, for the old lady immediately appeared filled with excited interest.

"Tell me what you do," she demanded. "How do you go about it? Do you paint it—with a canvas and easel—as I've seen many artists do?"

"Now here's where I have to *watch my step!*" thought Audrey. But aloud she explained:

"No, it's not like that—though I may make several sketches first to help me in the later work. You see, I want to make a model of the house—on a very reduced scale—and reproduce it all as accurately as I can. I'll have

to make tiny plaster-of-Paris bricks and try to copy those wonderful moldings and cornices in the same material, too. It will be like a doll house, almost—only it will be an exact copy of this real house, in miniature." Miss Jenifer looked considerably startled at this explanation and murmured rather doubtfully:

"That—that sounds quite extraordinary—quite different from what I thought—but very interesting. I—I had thought you were to paint it—in oils, perhaps. I used to do a little of that myself in my younger days, so I thought you might want to use one of the out-of-the way rooms here as a studio, since your room at the Newkirks' is probably rather small. The old office wing of the mansion—the one they used in Colonial days—is over on the right. You could work there any time you wish and not disturb me at all."

"That's awfully good of you, Miss Kenwick. I surely need a place like that for my work even more than if I were just painting a picture. And I couldn't possibly do the work at the Newkirks'. When would you care to have

me begin? I could bring my materials over any time, but I'll probably be doing quite a little sketching outside before I begin the model."

"You come over any time, my dear. You ought to begin as soon as possible, especially while this spring weather is so lovely," declared Miss Jenifer, and she added, "You are very like your father. He was a dear little boy, I remember. I have always been very fond of children."

There was another uneasy pause, while Audrey glanced about the quaint and beautiful old room. Secretly she was bursting with admiration for the wonderful woodcarving and paneling, the exquisite molding of the ceiling cornices, the age and dignity of its antique furnishings.

"This is a very lovely room, Miss Kenwick," she ventured at last. "Are all of them as beautiful?" And as soon as she had said it, she knew she had made a mistake. Miss Jenifer promptly retired into her shell. Her manner became uneasy and evasive, and

she looked away out of one of the windows toward the towering bulk of the glossy old magnolia.

"Yes—er—this *is* a fine old room," she hesitated. "The one across the hall is quite—er—the same. But the rest of the house except the old kitchen, I—er—have been compelled to—er—make a few—er—changes in and—er—I do not ask anyone to see them now." She was plainly so uncomfortable that Audrey, already sufficiently warned on this matter, made haste to change the subject and rose hurriedly.

"Well, I mustn't keep you, Miss Kenwick. I'll run back to the Newkirks' and get my working materials and bring them round here in the car sometime to-day. Then I can begin making the little plaster bricks, and sketching in between times, and I'll try not to disturb you a bit."

She took her leave of the odd little old lady, who sped her on her way with a complete return of her former cordiality, and she found herself with Susan out in the morning sun once

more.

But she had scarcely arrived at the corner when she was astonished to see Camilla wandering along toward her, her big eyes alight with a smile of greeting.

"Why, how-come you're here at this time of day?" cried Audrey. "Thought you stayed at high school till late afternoon."

"Oh, I do—usually!" replied Camilla gayly. "But something has happened. They had a couple of cases of scarlet fever break out among the pupils and they've closed school temporarily, so that it won't spread. We're to have a three-weeks' holiday. Isn't that luck? We were all sent home at once. So I was just prowling around to see if I could get a glimpse of you. How *did* you get on with old Miss Jenifer?"

Audrey gave her an account of the interview and ended with an account of the old lady's astonishing get-up. "Does she always dress like that—at this hour of the day?" she

demanded.

"Oh, no! Usually she wears some drab-looking old black things. But those clothes she had on to-day are her dress-up things—the only ones she has, I reckon. She must have put them on in honor of your coming. She wears them whenever she's asked out to a meal. It always gives me the shivers to look at her rigged up that way. I usually get out and go somewhere else."

"Somehow I think it's rather pathetic, though," remarked Audrey, "the idea of her having dressed in her best—whatever it was—to welcome me. I sort of appreciate it in her. Poor little old thing! I believe I'm going to like her."

Camilla's manner grew suddenly mysterious and she drew an arm through Audrey's and murmured in a lower voice:

"Come and take a walk with me, can't you, Audrey? There are some awfully pretty places around here I'd like to show you, and you don't

need to get to work right away. Take the rest of the morning off. I've got some queer things to tell you about that old place and Miss Jenifer —things that even Mother doesn't know."

The lure was too enticing. Audrey decided that she didn't feel like work anyhow, that the day was too beautiful to waste indoors, and lastly that she *ought* to know every phase of this strange situation in which she found herself. If there was a mystery connected with it, that made it all the more provocative. So they rambled off along the road that led out of town, and finally came to a halt in a delightful nook by the river, Camilla talking "sixteen to the dozen" all the time.

"You know, they say in town that that old Kenwick place is *haunted!*" she began breathlessly. "Of course there's nothing in that," she made haste to add, seeing Audrey's smile, "but just the same, I know myself that there are things happening there every once in a while that you just can't explain. *I know it!* ——" She stopped impressively.

"Oh, *do* go on!" cried Audrey, snuggling down in a seat made by the gnarled old roots of a tree. "If there's anything I *adore*, it's a haunted house or an obliging ghost trailing around, rattling and moaning!"

"You do?" breathed Camilla, opening her eyes wide. "Then you must be awfully brave!"

"On the contrary, I'm about as courageous as a chicken," grinned Audrey. "I've anything but a fearless nature. But I do enjoy the thrill of being scared silly by that sort of thing. And I'm only brave when someone else is along to stand as a buffer between me and the ghosts! Hurry up and tell us what you know!" Camilla settled down to her revelations:

"Well, to begin with, no one knows much about Miss Jenifer's early life, but the story goes that she was disappointed in some love affair when she was a young girl. Her sweetheart was a young ship's captain or something like that, and he died or was killed at sea, and it upset her so that she never married and was always sort of queer after it.

I think the story goes that he didn't die, but just disappeared and never came back. For years and years she always hoped he would.

Another thing is that she would never have a clock or a mirror in the house, because, since she hoped he'd come back and marry her, she didn't like to think of the time passing and her growing older, so she wouldn't have a clock. And she didn't want to see how much older she was getting to look, so she wouldn't have a mirror. Isn't that curious?"

"Sure is!" agreed Audrey. "But go ahead. What about the haunted part?"

"I'm coming to that. But I forgot to tell you, also, that all this is the reason she's so fond of young people and doesn't care much about older ones. Because the young ones remind her of the time when she and her sweetheart were young, we think. Well, as I say, she's always had these queer notions, but in the last few years she's changed very much. She used to keep her house open and allow people to come in and out, and entertained quite a bit and had an old cook, Mammy Prissy, who was

devoted to her. Then, about ten or fifteen years ago, she suddenly changed. She dismissed Mammy Prissy and insisted on living all by herself and shutting everyone out of the house except in those two front rooms. Part of the reason may have been that she didn't have any more money to spare. But she began doing so many other strange things that Wade and I have another theory.

"Wade's my big brother, you know," she explained. "He's such a nice, thoughtful boy, and he's so sorry for poor old Miss Jenifer that he always calls to see her when he's home, and tries to cheer her up with all sorts of foolish conversation about college and the crazy things he and his friends do there. She just loves it. And once she told him he reminded her of someone she had lost long ago. 'Dead, dead, dead now!' That was how she expressed it. But that made us think she knows her sweetheart is dead at last.

"But old Prissy told our Mandy once that Miss Jenifer thinks he comes back as a ghost to see her every once in a while. Prissy still

lives in a tumbledown hut outside the town and goes to see her old mistress quite often. Once, when Miss Jenifer was really ill, she let Prissy come and take care of her, because she was so ill she couldn't leave her bed. She wouldn't let anyone else in. Old Prissy never would tell much about how things were there except that Miss Jenifer had turned one of the rear drawing rooms into a kitchen—boarded up all the beautiful old fireplace and had a cooking range there—and that she slept, not in one of the upstairs bedrooms, but in the great *ballroom* that takes up nearly all the back of the second floor! Can you beat that?"

"But *why*?" demanded Audrey. "There are plenty of bedrooms, aren't there? I never heard of such a queer thing!"

"But that isn't the queerest," went on Camilla in a hushed tone. "Wait till you hear what I'm telling you next! Wade and I were coming home one night from a little party at the house of one of my school friends in the village. Wade's car was out of order, so we were walking. It was real late, and we thought we'd

just cut across Miss Jenifer's garden because it was shorter. So we stole through and had just passed close to the house in the back when we heard the strangest sound. It seemed to come from the open windows on the second floor, which we knew were in the ballroom. It was someone playing a tune on some kind of a musical instrument!——" She stopped impressively.

"Well, I don't see anything so unusual in *that*," commented Audrey.

"You will when I tell you this," went on Camilla. "It's a positive fact that Miss Jenifer hasn't *any* kind of a musical instrument in the house—never did have! And this was some instrument we'd never heard the like of in our lives. It was thin and sweet and penetratingly clear, and yet it was sort of wild and weird, too. It wasn't like a harp or piano or violin or any other stringed instrument, and it wasn't like any wind instrument either. If Wade hadn't heard it, too, I'd have been sure I was dreaming. We never even told Mother about it. Wade accidentally kicked an old flower pot on

the walk and made a noise. And then the music stopped and didn't go on again."

Audrey's eyes were wide with wonder now, and she asked breathlessly, "Did you ever hear it again? Did you ever see anything else?"

"Yes, I've heard it once since. It was a hot summer night, awfully late, and I couldn't sleep because my bedroom was almost stifling. I put on a wrapper and slippers and stole downstairs and out into the garden in the bright moonlight. I'd been sitting there on the garden bench quite a while when suddenly I heard the far-away sound of that same queer music coming from the direction of Kenwick. It was the weirdest thing you ever heard, in the middle of the night like that, and I got so sort of scared and upset that I just had to give it up and run indoors. That was last summer. I haven't heard it since, because I haven't bothered about listening. But maybe *you'll* hear it sometime when you're there."

"Golly! I wish I could," sighed Audrey. "But I suppose I'd be scared to death if I *did* hear or

see anything unusual. You're upsetting my well-known poise considerably, Cam, with all these ghostly revelations!—But, oh, that reminds me. Your mother spoke about something connected with Miss Jenifer and some *brass keys*. She didn't have a chance to explain and I haven't had a minute to ask her about it since. I'm dying to hear about it, so do explain!"

Camilla laughed. "You can *see* that for yourself, just about every day! Whenever Miss Jenifer goes out of her house into town to see anyone or do any errands, she always locks both the back and the front doors to her house. They have enormous brass locks on them _____"

"Yes, I saw the front one when I was there a while ago," interrupted Audrey.

"—and the biggest old brass keys you ever saw that lock and double-lock them. Well, she locks both those doors every time she goes out, though the rest of us in town hardly ever think of locking any door the year round,

there's so little ever disturbed, and she carries both those enormous keys around with her—not in a bag or anything like that, but clutched together in one hand as if she expected every minute they were going to be snatched from her! She's the oddest-looking sight with them!"

"Worse and more of it!" exclaimed Audrey. "But I'm wondering how this little peculiarity of hers is going to affect me. Do I get locked in—or out—whenever she takes it into her head to go to town?"

"Oh, no!" Camilla reassured her. "She's going to let you work in that wing called the office. It's quite disconnected from the main house—at least it's part of the building. But there's no door leading into the house as there is from the kitchen wing. There's a door from it out into the garden and she'll probably give you a key to that and you can come and go as you please. No matter what you do, you can't get into the main house from there."

"Well, that's *something* to be thankful for!" said Audrey. "But hadn't we better be getting

back to your house now? Your mother said lunch would be at 12:15, and it's half-past eleven already."

Camilla reluctantly agreed and they turned back in the direction of the town. They were but a few hundred yards from the much-discussed old Kenwick, when they suddenly beheld Miss Jenifer emerging from her front door and descending mincingly to the brick walk. She was no longer dressed in the array of the earlier morning, but wore an antiquated black dress and hat and carried a market basket on one arm. But in her left hand she bore the keys, tightly gripped and prominent, as if she defied the world to take them from her. She did not see the girls approaching, but turned in the opposite direction and hurried away down the street.

"What did I tell you!" whispered Camilla.

CHAPTER III

AUDREY GETS TO WORK—AND MEETS WITH A SURPRISE

A week passed. And in that week Audrey got her work under way and learned some curious things about Miss Jenifer and the strange old mansion she lived in. During her first afternoon, with the help of Camilla, she gathered all her working materials together, packed them in the car, and took them around to Kenwick. Camilla had begged to be allowed to assist.

"I love to be with you, Audrey, and see how it's all done. And then, too, I'm wild to get inside old Kenwick and see what it's like. Do you know, I've actually never been inside the house! I've often taken messages there for Mother, but I never went farther than the doorstep. Old Miss Jenifer always scared me to pieces as a small kid, and since then I somehow couldn't bear the sight of her. But all this is so thrilling that I shan't mind a bit if I'm with you." And Audrey had been frankly glad

of her company.

When they drove round to the front door that afternoon and had knocked, Miss Jenifer came out and led them around to the garden door in the link connecting the office wing with the main house. And for this she produced a somewhat large and cumbersome brass key, but its size was moderate compared with that of the two she always carried around with her. When she had unlocked the door, she presented the key to Audrey, remarking:

"You may keep this key, my dear, while you are using this place. Then you can always go and come as you please without disturbing me. This office wing has no connection with the house—the two doors in the passageway open only into the street and garden, and the rooms upstairs are empty. Come with me and I'll show you which one you may use as your workroom."

She led them into the passageway, up a short flight of steps, and through another door to a quite spacious room whose four windows

looking toward the road formed a part of the semi-octagonal front. Opposite the windows there was a generous open fireplace containing old brass fender, andirons, and the remnants of half-burned logs. An ancient and decrepit secretary-desk stood in one corner, a few hard chairs were ranged around the walls, and a sturdy old kitchen table occupied the center of the room. Miss Jenifer glanced about uncertainly.

"I'm not sure if this is all you will need," she remarked. "For—er—your particular kind of work—er—you may desire something quite different."

"No indeed, Miss Kenwick," exclaimed Audrey, looking about with great interest. "This is just exactly what I want—if you won't mind my using this big old table to put my model on. I'll cover it first so that nothing will hurt it. This room will be great to work in!"

The old lady looked immensely relieved. "Certainly you may use the table. You can't do it any damage, I imagine. I am very pleased

that it is all you wish. If you need anything else, do not fail to ask me. I could very likely find what you'd want in the main house. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll go back to my own quarters. Camilla, I am glad to see you are here to help this young lady get settled."

Miss Jenifer took her departure, and the two girls were very busy during the next hour in carrying in Audrey's boxes and bundles and turning the room into a workshop. When they had most of the things in order, Camilla suggested that they run up to the second floor and see what the rooms above were like. But Audrey demurred:

"I'm not sure Miss Jenifer would want us to do that, would she? I sort of feel in honor bound not to do any prying about, since she's been so nice about letting me come and do this house."

"Oh, applesauce!" snorted Camilla airily. "She didn't *forbid* it, did she? And you can bet she would have, if she'd wanted you not to. She'd have put a chain across the stairway—or

something! Certainly she won't mind. And, besides that, here's your chance to get the inside measurements and lay of the land in *this* part of the house, anyway!"

The last item of Camilla's argument was triumphant. Audrey could not deny that here was excellent opportunity for inside measurements, so she grinned and exclaimed, "All right then, let's go!"

They hurried out into the little passageway and up a winding stair. There were two rooms on the second floor, one over the office in front and exactly the same size and shape, the other and smaller one at the back. They were rather dark, as their shutters were closed, the only light coming through the chinks. Both contained open fireplaces, brass andirons, and fenders, but very little furniture. And what there was of that was evidently broken or cast-off pieces that had been discarded from the main house. The girls did not stop long to examine it. What interested them most was the two windows in the back room that looked out on the garden. The heavy wooden inside

shutters to these were shut, but they pulled them open and let in the warm sun. Later, with great effort, they opened the windows and a breath of balmy air from the garden drifted in.

The garden itself stretched down to the river's brink, an unkempt tangle of weeds, mingled with starved but still blossoming shrubs and vines. But all its central space was taken up by a rare old box border of great age, planted in the form of an enormous heart, the point extending down toward the river.

"What an unusual garden!" sighed Audrey. "I like it. I wish I could clear it up and get it to look as it once must have. I wonder——"

"*Hush!*" whispered Camilla, suddenly laying a hand on her arm. "Did you hear that?"

"No—what?" asked Audrey in an undertone. "Wait!" commanded Camilla, and they both stood breathless, listening to the murmuring of bees in the garden. Presently there came a sound from below as if someone had opened a door or shut it. "That's what I heard before!"

breathed Camilla. Simultaneously they both made for the stairs. But when they reached the lower floor, all was as they had left it in the workroom.

"What could it have been?" cried Audrey. "Someone either came in or out. The door didn't open and shut of its own accord. It's too heavy and closes too solidly."

"Perhaps it was Miss Jenifer," suggested Camilla. "Maybe she came to say something and, not seeing us here, thought we'd gone, and went right out again."

"Well, it might have been, but just about the time it happened, I noticed a dustcloth or something like it being shaken out of one of the lower windows in the main house. It must have been Miss Jenifer doing that, so she couldn't possibly have been coming in through the door here at the same time. Besides that, we'd have seen her coming in anyway, because that door is just below where we were looking out, a little to the right."

"There's that other door that opens into the street on the opposite side!" exclaimed Camilla. "Let's look at that." They made a dive for it, but found it securely locked, nor would the key Audrey had make any impression on it. Plainly it had not been opened for a number of years at least. They went back to the workroom. Suddenly Audrey had an idea.

"There *must* be another room on this floor!" she cried. "This front room doesn't take up the whole space. What's at the back, I wonder?" They ran out of the room and looked about.

"Of course! There's another door just to the rear of this one!" exclaimed Audrey, impatient with herself for not having remembered it. "I *knew* there must be another room on this floor at the back." She walked over to the door handle and turned it this way and that, but she made no impression on the door, which remained obdurately shut.

"Try your key on it," commanded Camilla. "Perhaps it will fit." Then, noticing Audrey's hesitation, "Oh, I know what you're going to

say—that if it's locked, you won't go in and all that. But I'm only curious to see whether the key fits. We needn't go in if you think best not to!" She seized the key out of Audrey's hesitating hand and tried it in the lock. But the key would not fit, so they were not to have to resist further temptation to explore.

"Well, this certainly doesn't explain the mystery of that sound we heard," commented Audrey. "I won't bother taking any measurements upstairs to-day because it's evident I can go and come there as I please. So suppose we go out and look over the garden. I don't imagine Miss Jenifer will mind that. I'm through for the time in here. And the longer we stay the more mysteries we seem to unearth! I foresee I'm going to have rather an exciting time working here—and I don't know as I just like it, either!" And in this respect Audrey prophesied more truly than she knew!

They wandered around the garden for a while and Audrey had a chance to admire the rear view of the house, which was almost equally as beautiful as the front. Then, as it

was growing late, they climbed into the car and took a short drive before arriving back at the Newkirk home for dinner.

The ensuing few days were uneventful, being mainly occupied by Audrey in getting ready for her work. This consisted in preparing the foundation for her house on the old kitchen table in the office, and in seizing every sunny hour to make outdoor sketches and photographs from all available angles. Camilla spent much time with her, helping and talking over the plans. And Audrey discovered incidentally that the girl had a rather pretty artistic talent herself, which seemed to run to the line of water-color sketches and decorative effects. Camilla, however, was inclined to make light of her gift, and it was not till she heard Audrey's encouragement that she began to experience any enthusiasm for developing it. When Audrey was not working, they roamed the woods together, accompanied by Susan, or took long drives into the surrounding country in Audrey's sedan. And for a time Miss Jenifer and her peculiarities and the mysteries surrounding beautiful old

Kenwick were forgotten.

Audrey had been in the Newkirk home just one week, when a curious thing happened. It had been a rainy day and she and Camilla had spent it in the office of the old house, Audrey working on plans and measurements, Camilla busy with a bit of pottery she was decorating, under Audrey's supervision, for her mother's birthday. Miss Jenifer had come in during the morning to chat, in her mincing little fashion, about the progress of the work on the model and had offered the girls some soft old cushions for the hard chairs they were using, for which they were duly grateful. Then she had retired, in her mouselike, mysterious fashion, to be seen no more that day.

In the evening they had played three-handed bridge with Mrs. Newkirk till bedtime, when Audrey in her room noticed that the weather had cleared and that it was a bright starlight night. She sat by the window a long time enjoying the warm, sweet darkness and the setting of a crescent moon across the river. One interesting thing she had noted from the

first was that her windows looked out toward Kenwick and Miss Jenifer's garden. And she often occupied herself by watching the old house after dark, to see whether there were ever any signs of life in it. Up to that night it had always remained a mass of impenetrable blackness.

There was no sound save the lapping of the river at the foot of the garden and the baying of a dog far off in the town. Audrey found herself almost asleep, and was just about to get into bed when something startled her wide awake. She stood up and watched in the darkness for several minutes, and then turned and opened her door, slipping across the hall to Camilla's room. Shaking the sleeping girl gently awake, she whispered:

"Come across to my room—quick! There's something queer I want you to see!" Camilla lost no time in sliding into her bathrobe and slippers, and they were both shortly standing at Audrey's window watching, in the darkness, a curious thing that was taking place at Kenwick.

The old mansion stood across the road from the Newkirk house and considerably farther back from the river, so that they had a clear view of the windows that faced on the garden. And in those windows on the second floor, usually so dark after nightfall, there appeared successively a light—faint but unmistakable—as if someone with a lamp or candle were walking from one to the other holding the light for an appreciable period near each window.

"What do you make of it?" questioned Audrey. "This is the first time I've noticed anything like that. It's been going on quite a while now."

"I never saw anything like it there before," whispered Cam. "But then I don't sleep on this side of the house. What *can* it be? Tell you what!—Let's dress and slip out over there to the garden. There's *something* going on—I just know it!"

"Perhaps the old lady is sick or in trouble and is signaling for help," suggested Audrey. "Maybe we ought to go and see if we *could*

help. Shall we call your mother?" But Camilla vetoed this, saying they could run back and get her if necessary. And five minutes later they had slipped noiselessly out of the back door and across the road to the old garden of Kenwick. The mysterious light was still passing from window to window in the rooms on the second floor.

"Let's stay fairly well back in the garden," whispered Audrey, as they stepped over the low brick wall. "Then we'll have a better chance of seeing into those windows than if we're close up to the house." They stationed themselves accordingly, near the tip of the heart-shaped box border. And then, with hands clasped and hearts beating almost audibly, they watched the flickering light passing from window to window, but never coming near enough to be clearly distinguished. For the light was evidently held so far back from the windows that only the glow from it could be traced and never the light itself or the person carrying it. There was not a sound, though they noticed that one of the windows was open.

"That's the ballroom," breathed Camilla, "but it's where Miss Jenifer sleeps. What do you think we ought to do?"

"I don't think we can do anything," Audrey whispered back. "We can't take it for granted something's wrong just because she has a light lit and is walking around. If there were, she'd surely call out the window or make some noise. Listen, though—*what's that?*"

The light had become stationary, somewhere far back in the room, and suddenly the thin, sweet eerie notes of a tune played on some unknown instrument penetrated into the darkness of the garden. The air was halting, uncertain and wavering, as if created by unearthly hands on some medium or instrument not of this world. And the effect was indescribably weird and uncanny. Audrey felt the prickle of nerves all along her spine and her hands went cold and her knees trembled. Camilla openly clung to her and shuddered, "*There it is—the thing I told you about!*"

They could not move from where they stood.

Something tied their limbs and held them fast, though they both longed wildly to get back to the safety of the Newkirk house. As long as the unearthly music lasted they continued to stand clutching at each other, nor could they muster enough courage to exchange so much as a whispered remark. Then suddenly, without warning and in the midst of a note, there was a long-drawn, muffled cry—the music stopped, the light was extinguished, and there was silence and darkness once more in Kenwick.

Released from the uncanny spell, the two girls, with never so much as a word, but with absolutely united accord, fled back through the darkness of the sweet-scented garden to the safety and welcome commonplace security of their own house!

CHAPTER IV

WADE NEWKIRK ENTERS THE

MYSTERY

It was long before the girls got to sleep that night. Camilla crept into Audrey's bed and they whispered about their latest adventure till the wee hours of the morning. But no amount of conjecture served to solve the riddle of the wild, mysterious music they had heard, or the problem of the light that had been carried from window to window. At last Camilla slipped away to her own room and Audrey sank into troubled sleep.

They had decided to say nothing of their curious escapade to Mrs. Newkirk till something more definite had developed. But for several days afterward there was no further happening of any importance, and life carried on in its usual routine. Then one morning Mrs. Newkirk announced that she was driving over to Salisbury for the day to do some shopping and was taking Camilla with her. She also invited Audrey to accompany them if she cared for the jaunt. But Audrey explained that she was just beginning on the important part of her work and felt that she

ought not to lose a whole day. Mrs. Newkirk remarked that Mandy would be there to provide luncheon as usual and that they expected to be home by five o'clock. Then she and Camilla drove away.

That morning, for the first time, Audrey left Susan in the kitchen with Mandy. The dog and the old colored woman had struck up a firm friendship, due in part to the many luscious bones and tidbits surreptitiously provided by Mandy; and Susan seemed lately to prefer the kitchen to the dreary performance of lying quietly in the uninteresting office at Kenwick. Audrey too was rather relieved not to have to watch her pet constantly to see that she behaved and did not try to get outdoors where she was not wanted. The day promised to be unseasonably hot, and before the morning was half over, Audrey began to suffer from continued thirst that the tepid water from a pump out at the back of the house failed to quench. Suddenly the idea that some ice cream would be a welcome relief popped into her head, so she promptly left the workroom, ran around and got her car, dashed away to the

village drugstore and invested in a quart of it. Then she dashed back to Kenwick and got out two saucers and spoons from the old secretary-desk. The ice cream treat was a not unusual one for Camilla and herself, and they always kept handy the materials to eat it with. Then, having spread the cool repast on the broad old window sill, she went outdoors and around to the front entrance.

Miss Jenifer answered her knock after a time with the slightly startled and bewildered air she always had when Audrey came to the front door. But she replied with alacrity to Audrey's invitation to come and share the ice cream, her mournful brown eyes lighting with an almost happy expression.

"Why, of course, my dear. I shall be delighted to. How sweet of you to think of it!" she declared in her curious, mincing fashion. "The day *is* growing terribly hot. The cream will certainly cool us off. Will you excuse me if I go around by way of the door into the garden?" She shut the front door, and by the time Audrey had run back to her own entrance,

Miss Jenifer was emerging from the door that opened on the garden. Audrey had noticed that this garden door was a rather odd one, the upper two thirds being really a window with panes matching those of the other windows, and a sash that could be raised; the lower third was composed of two small half-doors folding outward when fully open, as the hinges on the outside indicated. She watched Miss Jenifer fold the two parts of the lower door together, evidently bolting them on the inside. The lower part of the window sash she left raised, no doubt because the day was hot. And for once the heavy inner shutters were not closed as they usually were in all the windows on the lower floor on the garden side of the house. Then Miss Jenifer came over to the door of the office and entered with her.

It was a curious conversation they had over the quart of ice cream. Audrey felt that for once she had come closer to Miss Jenifer than at any time previously. This was perhaps due to the absence of Camilla. The old lady no doubt sensed the fact that Camilla did not care for her presence. For Audrey had noticed that

when Camilla was at hand, Miss Jenifer was always polite but never communicative. But to-day her manner seemed quite different. In fact, she was almost confiding as she ate, with most apparent relish, the cooling and nourishing cream. Suddenly Audrey found herself telling her companion all her hopes and plans, her desire to perfect herself in her art, her great longing to get to Europe and study in some of the famous studios abroad, her hopes to visit the great picture galleries and study the masters at first hand.

Miss Jenifer listened with absorbed interest till Audrey reached this point, and then her manner underwent a curious change. She put down the spoonful of ice cream that had been halfway to her mouth, reached for a handkerchief in some obscure pocket of her dingy black skirt, coughed to cover an evident embarrassment, and wiped away the beads of perspiration that had suddenly appeared on her lip and forehead. Then, to Audrey's utter bewilderment, she changed the subject abruptly and began to talk about the garden, which she declared she was planning to rid of

weeds as soon as she could get time to go outdoors and begin on the work.

This change of front struck Audrey as inexplicable, and so deep was her astonishment that she found herself quite unable to answer with coherence Miss Jenifer's queries about whether she knew anything of gardening. But while the old lady was still talking along on this new subject, they were both stunned into silence by an astounding clatter that arose from the main part of the old house. And with one accord they jumped to their feet and hurried out of doors.

But no sooner had they reached the steps to the main entrance than Audrey realized what had happened. For the sounds from within the house developed into hissing and spitting, interspersed with short impatient yaps of a dog, followed by one long pained howl of rage. And she could figure almost exactly what had happened without even being told. Lorry's old tomcat, Battle-Axe, had doubtless returned from some prolonged absence and found Susan ensconced in the kitchen, feeding on toothsome

bones and otherwise poaching on his prerogatives. A scrap had ensued, during which Susan had for once assumed the upper hand and chased old Battle-Axe outdoors. The cat had probably made a bee-line for the Kenwick garden, and, seeing the half-open door to the house, had jumped inside for refuge. But Susan, not to be balked, had leaped in after him, and they were now fighting it out inside!

Audrey tried to explain this to the old lady, and proposed that she go in and rescue the combatants. But this offer Miss Jenifer sturdily refused, saying she was quite capable of ousting them both with her own hands. And she went in, closing the lower half-doors behind her.

That she was not at first being entirely successful soon became evident, for the cat appeared to have retreated to another part of the house with Susan in pursuit. Audrey, however, felt that Miss Jenifer's wish not to have her enter must be respected, but she ran up the steps and stood calling in at the open

upper part of the door to Susan. And in so standing, she had her first glimpse into the great dining room of Kenwick.

She told Camilla afterward that the glimpse almost took her breath away, so lovely was that dining room of state, even in the dim light afforded by the open half-door. For all the other deep windows were darkened by the closed inner wooden shutters.

"I never saw anything lovelier than those wonderful Adam carvings and moldings on the cornices and ceilings," she told Camilla. "And the most marvelous old Chippendale and Sheraton furniture——"

But Camilla was not interested in Sheraton furniture or Adam cornices. "That's all right," she interrupted, "but did you see anything that was weird or queer or would explain any of the mystery about the place? That's what *I* want to know!" Audrey thought it over a moment. In the excitement of all that had happened, she really did not remember. Then she suddenly recalled something that perhaps

only her subconscious mind had noted at the moment.

"Yes, now that you speak of it, there *was* one rather curious thing. The whole thing happened so quickly that I couldn't take in much, and I was terribly interested in just the sheer beauty of that room—what I could see of it. I kept calling to Susan as loud as I could all the time, and listening to the yapping and spitting going on somewhere in the front of the house, and Miss Jenifer trying to shoo them out. Susan must have heard me at last, for all of a sudden she came dashing into the room and leaped over the half-door into my arms, almost knocking me down the steps. But just before she came, I do remember seeing something that must have registered on my mind as singular. It was this:

"While I was calling to Susan I tried to take in as much of the room as I could, I suppose. And I remember now looking particularly hard at the doorway in which I was standing, probably because it had such a peculiar arrangement—part door, part window. The

carved wooden shutters that folded back from the upper part were lovely and I remember thinking they were the same in pattern as the front room. Then I must unconsciously have craned my head in a little farther to see the inside of the lower part, for I can remember now *exactly* how it looked. And, Cam, there was *no big brass lock on it at all*—only a heavy, carved brass bolt that held the two parts of the lower door together. Do you see what that means?"

Camilla plainly didn't and said as much. "Why," Audrey explained, "don't you understand? If there was no big *lock* on that door as there is on the front one—only a bolt—then what's that second key for that she carries around?" And then Camilla saw.

"Of course, it might be the key to some of the other doors—in the wings, for instance," Cam countered, "though everyone has always taken it for granted it was that main rear door. Perhaps it's the key to that locked room in the office wing."

"No, I don't think it's any of those—I'm *sure* of it, in fact," declared Audrey. "Because that second key she carries is fully as large as the other and couldn't possibly fit any of the wing locks. I've noticed that they're all on a smaller scale. And that's a brand-new mystery, I guess we'll have to admit!"

This was the account Audrey had given Camilla later. But at the time she was too overcome with embarrassment at the misdemeanors of her pet to do anything but apologize abjectly to Miss Jenifer, who followed Susan out of the garden door a moment after the dog's hasty exit. The old lady said she had just shooed the cat out of the street door, near which Battle-Axe had taken refuge under a chair. Miss Jenifer seemed breathless and blown, but she was very gracious about accepting Audrey's apologies for Susan and declared that no harm had been done. And, as it was near lunchtime and Audrey felt too upset to continue her work, she bade Miss Jenifer good-bye and dragged Susan back to the Newkirk home, never releasing her hold on the abject animal's

collar. That afternoon she locked Susan securely in her own bedroom, as a punishment, before going back to her work. And the rest of the afternoon passed uneventfully.

But that same evening, when they were all at dinner, the Newkirk family were treated to a surprise. A battered old Ford car drew up at the front entrance, there was the sound of someone coming up the steps, and Susan barked tentatively. And in another instant the front door was pulled open and a boyish figure limped into the room calling, "Hello, everybody!"

"*Wade!*" cried everyone but Audrey, and sprang up to greet the newcomer.

"But what's the matter, son?" demanded Mrs. Newkirk anxiously. "You're limping! Have you been hurt?"

"Oh, nothing to get all hot and bothered about!" the young fellow laughed, hugging his mother impulsively. "I tried to do too much of a stunt pole-vaulting the other day and landed

on one knee, spraining it a bit. Doc Westcott wanted me to give it pretty much of a rest for a week or so and got me a home-leave. Doesn't hurt to drive, so I hustled here to give you all a surprise. I'm famished for dinner. Is there anything new?"

"Yes, something quite new!" smiled Mrs. Newkirk, and presented him to Audrey, adding, "You know, I wrote you something about her in my last letter."

Audrey liked Wade on sight, and as the evening progressed, her liking grew. They lingered long around the dinner table discussing family matters and listening to Wade's account of all his college interests, and later adjourned to the living room to play bridge for an hour or two. Then, as the night was still warm, Wade and the two girls strolled out into the garden, where a full moon was lighting the river with an almost spectacular brilliance. Mrs. Newkirk had excused herself and gone to see that Wade's room was prepared for the night. The three young people settled themselves on a bench at

the foot of the garden and Camilla found a big old flower pot, which she upturned for Wade to rest his foot on and ease his injured knee.

"And now tell me," he queried, turning to Audrey, "about this interesting thing you're doing. I think it's great! But how do you get on with Miss Jenifer? How *is* the old girl anyway? I'm rather fond of her. She's somehow so darned pathetic!"

And so Audrey and Camilla found themselves launched into a full account of all the recent strange doings over at Kenwick. Wade listened to it all without interruption, but with a concentrated attention that betokened his deep interest. That was one of the things that Audrey liked about this rather unusual young fellow—his quiet but intense absorption in whatever was the subject of the moment.

"Well, what do you think of it all, Wade?" demanded Camilla when Audrey had ended with an account of her morning's misadventure.

"Singular!" exclaimed the young fellow. "And darned interesting." And after that he sat very quiet for several moments, chewing on a leaf he had plucked from a near-by bush, his brows knit in absent thought, till Camilla grew impatient and muttered:

"Well, haven't you anything else to say? You know her better than any of us and have been in there a lot, and she's talked to you. I should think you'd have seen and heard some queer things too."

"As it happens, you're right!" Wade unexpectedly conceded. "I *have* seen and heard some unexplainable things, and Miss Jenifer has two or three times let slip a remark that gave me a good deal of food for speculation. More or less, I've figured out quite a bit about that old ranch that I've never let on to anyone because it seemed like letting the poor old lady down, somehow. Doesn't seem quite square to her, do you see?"

"Oh, Wade," wheedled Camilla, "you can surely tell *us*, can't you? You see, we're all

mixed up in it, in a way. Audrey's *got* to finish her model and try for the prize, and I'm helping her, and she can't get the thing finished unless Miss Jenifer lets her into the main house, and she won't do that as long as things go on as they are!"

"I can't see how my telling you what I know would help the situation any," Wade very reasonably commented. "And anyhow, there's Mother calling us to come in and go to bed—and believe me I won't be sorry to hit the hay after that long drive with this pesky knee of mine! Doc told me to lie on a couch for a day or two after I got here, and I'm sure going to do it!"

And not another word would he say on the subject of Miss Jenifer.

CHAPTER V

A NEW ASPECT OF THE AFFAIR

As things transpired, however, it was Audrey herself who got a new glimpse into the strange situation at Kenwick. Wade proved as good as his word and kept to the couch for the ensuing two days. But so bored was he with even the prospect of this inactive existence that he begged Camilla to stay with him and help him pass the interminable hours. So, instead of spending her time with Audrey, she read to him, played chess, and did jig-saw puzzles, and Audrey saw little of her during the day, for the next forty-eight hours.

Thus Audrey went alone to her work at Kenwick. While she was making some measurements along the foundation of the main house, next morning, Miss Jenifer came to the garden door, and Audrey told her the news of Wade's home-coming and the reason for it. The old lady seemed greatly excited and interested, and said she hoped he would call as soon as he felt like getting about. "A fine young fellow!" she exclaimed. "So kind and thoughtful and considerate! He reminds me of ——" But here she stopped precipitately and made an excuse to change the subject. Later,

when Audrey was working in the office at her plaster-of-Paris molds, Miss Jenifer came wandering in and sat down, clearly prepared for a chat. Audrey felt that her loneliness must be extreme, and was glad that the old lady found her company at all entertaining.

"I've changed my plans a little about making the outside of the house," she explained. "At first I thought I'd make the individual bricks and put them together. But this place is so big that that job would be interminable. I can get the same effect by making entire plaster outer walls and indicating the separate bricks on them. I may do the chimneys differently." Miss Jenifer seemed tremendously interested in every phase of her work and often made very apt comments on it. Audrey hoped that some day the old lady would be inspired to ask her what she intended to do about the *inside* of the house, and so lead up to that very important question. Thus far, however, Miss Jenifer seemed to take it for granted that nothing was to be done with the inside. Audrey dreaded the time when she might have to suggest the subject herself.

"I love working on this house, Miss Kenwick!" she exclaimed. "I never had any subject that seemed so worth while. It's a marvelous old place. It must have an interesting history. It's pre-Revolutionary, I understand." Miss Jenifer's manner suddenly became very animated.

"You're quite right, my dear!" she cried. "It *has* a history that is more interesting and important than that of any house in the vicinity for miles—and there are many that are as old or older, on this Eastern Shore of Maryland. In fact"—she became mysterious and edged closer to Audrey's work-table—"there was something that happened here that had a direct influence on all the future history of a certain country." Miss Jenifer sunk her voice to a whisper as she added, "*And no one knows about it now—except myself!*"

Mentally Audrey gave a whoop of exultation. Was the old lady really going to disclose some of the mystery at last? But outwardly she preserved an interested attitude that was sufficient, but not unduly so, as that

might have frightened Miss Jenifer away from further revelations.

"That's awfully interesting, Miss Kenwick," she murmured, deeply concerned meanwhile with the consistency of a new batch of plaster she was concocting. "It looks like just the kind of a place where Washington and Jefferson and all the rest of them had spent some of their time. I suppose Washington must have slept here. He seems to have slept in every house of any size from Maine to Georgia! I've often wondered when he ever had any time to stay at home!" She laughed at her own feeble little joke, but Miss Jenifer did not laugh. Her manner became, on the contrary, quite serious and mysterious.

"No, Washington never slept here," she said, "though he did spend several important hours here at one time, just toward the end of the Revolution, in conference with a number of others in command. It was right in that lower front room where we sat the first day you were here. But the circumstance I refer to was of wider importance—it might have affected the

fate of several nations. All who were concerned in it are long dead. And the secret of it is now known—*only by me!*"

She stopped suddenly, as if again she felt she had said too much. And Audrey, almost bursting with suppressed excitement, waited for her to go on. She dared not make any comment herself, lest she scare Miss Jenifer away from the subject. But the old lady sat silent, and at last Audrey ventured:

"How perfectly thrilling, Miss Kenwick! How did you come to discover it—or did you always know?"

Miss Jenifer hesitated perceptibly before replying, but she was evidently in an expansive mood:

"I wish I could tell you the whole history of it, my dear. I know you would appreciate it. The story is as thrilling as any novel. But unfortunately the affair is all involved with personal matters of my own which I do not feel justified in disclosing. Life has been a sad

business for me—and a most perplexing one. I shall never burden anyone with its history." She rose and moved toward the door, adding more cheerfully, "Now I must try to get in some work in my garden. The weeds are far ahead of me—and I'm probably interfering with your work."

"No, indeed you're not!" cried Audrey eagerly. "I love to have you come in and chat. It helps me and I always look forward to seeing you." There must have been something very genuine in Audrey's manner, for Miss Jenifer appeared quite touched, and did something extremely unexpected to the girl. For in passing where she stood at work by the table, the old lady put her arm round Audrey's shoulder in an impulsive squeeze and murmured:

"You are the only person I have met in years, outside of Wade Newkirk, who I feel is truly understanding and sympathetic. I thank you, my dear!" And she went back to her own quarters, leaving Audrey with a new feeling of loyalty and almost affection for the queer little

mistress of Kenwick.

That night as they sat once more in the moonlit garden, to which Wade had migrated after dinner because he was thoroughly weary of his couch, Audrey told them of her curious interview with Miss Jenifer that day. Mrs. Newkirk, having retired to bed immediately after the meal with a severe headache, the three young people were alone. Camilla was tremendously excited over the latest disclosure and immediately began conjecturing what the great historical "secret" could be, but Wade sat silent, his elbow on the arm of the garden bench, his chin cupped in his hands. His thoughts might have been on a mocking-bird that was still piping persistently in the dark, or on the intermittent "slap-slap" of the water on the stern of an old boat moored at the foot of the garden. Presently it seemed that they had been on neither, for he spoke up unexpectedly:

"You've certainly gained the good graces of the old girl, Audrey! Presently you're going to have it all over me, in that respect. You'll

probably go even further. That's the way she began with me, and I'd nothing on earth to gain by getting on the right side of her. Just felt sorry as the dickens for the old soul. She never told me just what she told you to-day. That's news to me. But I've seen and heard things in that house that were pretty uncanny, and Miss Jenifer has made some half-confidences that, to say the least, are rather surprising. I'd like to tell you what they are, but as they're rather personal, I feel certain she looked to me to keep it all a secret. But this historical business is a new one to me. Interests me like the deuce. A lot of these old Maryland houses have the strangest traditions connected with them, and queer secret doings that were sometimes not only national but involved other nations besides. I know this because I'm rather hipped on history, particularly the history of my own state, and have made quite a study of it. I'd like to know just what went on there at Kenwick. There can't be any record of it. Well, perhaps some day we'll find out!" More he would not say, and the talk drifted to other matters.

But the next day, through an unsuspected medium, Audrey was to have new insight into the affairs of Kenwick. Again she had gone alone to her work, Camilla still devoting herself to the couch-ridden Wade. As she had come to a temporary pause in her plaster work, while she was waiting for her casts to dry, she decided to go out into the garden and make another sketch of the rear view of the house, from an angle she had not tried hitherto. While she was sitting on an old stone bench, her sketching pad in her lap, an incredibly ancient colored woman came hobbling along the side street, turned in at the garden, and stumped over to where she sat. The woman's face was deeply wrinkled, her white woolly hair was loosely covered by a bandanna, and so decrepit was she that she was bent almost double, leaning with one hand on a short cane. When she reached Audrey she peered over her shoulder through a pair of steel spectacles and inquired:

"Whar's Miss Jenifer, honey? Ah's come to see her. Ah's old Prissy. But huccome yo' sittin' hyar makin' pichyah's? Do Ol' Miss

know it, honey?"

A sudden light dawned on Audrey. So this was old Prissy, the only person who had the real entrée to Kenwick, by virtue of her long years of service. A character worth cultivating! Audrey became immediately interested.

"Oh, how do you do, Prissy. I've heard about you, and am awfully glad to know you," she answered cordially. "Yes, Miss Kenwick knows I'm here. She's letting me make a model of this house and this is just a little sketch to help me with it. I'm sure Miss Jenifer is home if you want to see her. Shall I let her know?"

"No, no, honey! Yo' ain't need to trubble. Ol' Prissy always goes right in. Lawsy, honey, Ah done rock ol' Miss on ma lap when she wuz jes' a teeny li'l baby! Ol' Miss'll let Prissy in all right."

She hobbled away toward the house. Audrey noticed that she did not go toward the main garden door or around to the front, but made

for the rear door of the extension leading to the kitchen wing and rapped on the panel. Not long after, the door was cautiously opened and Miss Jenifer looked out. But on seeing Prissy she uttered a pleased exclamation and beckoned the old colored woman inside and shut the door.

Prissy remained indoors a very long time. Audrey, who was intensely curious about her, finished her sketch and waited around quite a while to see her come out, but at last gave it up and went into the office to resume her plaster work. Some time later she heard a knock on the outer door and went to it, thinking to see Miss Jenifer, but to her astonishment it was Prissy, who asked if she could come in a moment and see what she was doing. Evidently her curiosity on the subject had been very much aroused. Audrey admitted her cordially enough and showed her the work she had accomplished thus far, trying to explain its intricacies to the old colored woman. Suddenly a new thought occurred to her.

"By the way, Prissy," she began, "you know

this house inside very well, don't you?"

"Yas'm, yas'm!" cried Prissy. "Ah sho' do know it right well. Ah wuz bawn in de slave quarters—dey wuz 'long ober dere nearer de town. De new road done tuk 'em away while ago. Ah knowed dis house inside 'n' out fo' Miss Jenifer wuz bawn. Yas'm, Ah knows it!"

"Well, then, maybe you could tell me something about how it looks inside—how the rooms are—upstairs and all," said Audrey eagerly. "You see, if I make this house right, it's awfully important for me to know just how the rooms look and where they are. The inside's just as important as the outside. Miss Jenifer of course doesn't like anyone inside and I don't think she realizes I need to know about it. But perhaps if you could tell me something about it right now, it might help me a good deal."

Old Prissy seemed highly pleased and flattered at this request for her advice and immediately launched into a long and involved description of the interior arrangement of

Kenwick. Audrey gleaned from it that there was no room on the ground floor for which she had not accounted, except another hall at the side, called the stair hall, which led to the floor above. This stair hall also opened into the extension leading to the kitchen wing. The upstairs rooms, she inferred, corresponded with the lower ones in size, the two front ones being bedrooms, the smaller one in the back the card room (or "cyard room," as Prissy called it) and the large one over the dining room, the great ballroom, where Miss Jenifer now slept.

That was all very well for the main house, but when it came to the kitchen wing Prissy seemed a little more hesitant. She averred that the rooms were very much the same in size and shape as those of the office part. The kitchen itself, however, seemed to differ in having an enormous fireplace and Dutch oven, with all the cranes, pothooks, and accoutrements of an old Colonial kitchen still intact, nothing having been disturbed there for many years.

"How about the hallway or extension into the kitchen?" asked Audrey. "Is that the same as the office one?" Prissy's manner immediately became uneasy and mysterious.

"No, dat—dat's diff'runt, honey," she declared, lowering her voice perceptibly. "De kitchen hallway—hit done hab de steps goin' down into de cellar. An', honey, dat cellar hit am a pow'ful quare place. Ah wuz always jes' done scairt to deaf o' dat place! An' sence Ol' Miss done live hyar all by herse'f, hit sho' am quarer dan evuh. Dey's a hant in dat cellar—Ah'm tellin' yo', honey. Doan yo' nebber go near hit!"

"Only wish I had the chance!" groaned Audrey inwardly, and she tried hard to get Prissy to tell her something further. But the old woman began to act restless and uneasy and plainly desirous of getting away, so Audrey let her go. But as the bent old form hobbled out of the office, Prissy looked back and muttered:

"Doan yo' nebber go near dat cellar, honey! Ah'm tellin' yo'!"

CHAPTER VI

THE UNEXPECTED STEPS IN

By the next day, Wade had read the riot act on the subject of the couch, on which he refused point-blank to stay prone any longer. He declared that he would be careful and not overdo, confining his activities mainly to driving his car. And with this ultimatum his anxious family had to be content. Mrs. Newkirk decided to ask Miss Jenifer over to dinner that evening, as she felt that the old lady would enjoy being there when Wade was present. She sent the invitation over by Audrey in the morning and it was joyfully accepted.

"I'm glad it's going to be for dinner and not during the day," Camilla had confided to Audrey. "Then that outrageous get-up she wears won't seem so out of place. It gives me the horrors to see her in it around noon!"

It had been a rather disheartening day to Audrey. She had come almost to the end of her resources with her work on the outside of the house. She was now anxious to copy the windows and doors, but could accomplish little in this line till she had accurate measurements of the thickness of the walls, and the interior aspects in the main portion and kitchen wing. All that could so far be done on the office portion, she had finished, and it was useless to make any more sketches of the exterior. For the present, therefore, she felt that she was simply marking time. In the afternoon Wade came over to make a call on Miss Jenifer, and later drifted in to inspect Audrey's work.

"Gosh, but you're clever!" he had vouchsafed. "It's going to be a knockout if you ever get a chance at the interior. Wonder if I could think up anything convincing to say to the old girl that would induce her to open the doors? I seem to swing quite a heavy pull with her! Well, let me think it over and we'll see what can be done. She rather cottons to you, I should judge from the nice things she was just

saying to me about you—and that'll help!"

Audrey was long to remember that evening. Having already seen Miss Jenifer in her dress regalia, she was not so astonished as she might have been at the bizarre effect of that ancient finery. Rather, she found it more than a little pathetic and touching. Mrs. Newkirk had provided a delicious dinner and Wade exerted himself to be his most entertaining, and Miss Jenifer, besides doing more than justice to the bountiful table, plainly enjoyed herself immensely in this charming home. Even Camilla came out of her shell and played the piano and sang duets with her brother for the old lady's entertainment after the meal was over. And at half-past nine, all three of the young folks escorted her home.

It was a singular picture Miss Jenifer made, as she stood on her front steps waving them goodnight, the two great keys clutched firmly in her left hand. Those keys had not left her possession all the evening, for even while she ate, they were reposing in her lap. When they had arrived at the front of the house Wade had

offered to go in with her and help her light the kerosene lamps, but this offer she had politely refused, saying she wished to stay outside a few minutes enjoying the moonlight. And, sensing the possibility that she preferred not to be escorted indoors, he had not pressed the subject.

"Good-night!" she called after them as they turned the corner. "It has been a beautiful evening—*beautiful!*" The words rang curiously in Audrey's memory for many a long day thereafter.

It was difficult to go back to work next morning for two reasons. To begin with, there seemed little she could accomplish, her work having arrived at an *impasse* beyond which she could make little or no progress till she could see and measure the interior rooms. And then Wade and Camilla had tried to persuade her to give up work for the day and accompany them on a drive into the country, lunching perhaps at Easton. The temptation was great, under the circumstances, to take a holiday. Even Mrs. Newkirk urged it, but something in

Audrey seemed to forbid the luxury. During the night she had suddenly determined to ask Miss Jenifer if she might at least come in and take what measurements and observations she could of the two front rooms where company was still admitted. The move might serve two purposes. It would give Audrey the data she needed for at least that part of the house, and also help to enlighten Miss Jenifer on the subject of what must be done about the interior. This, in all reason, could not be postponed any longer and Audrey had nerved herself for the plunge.

She set off, therefore, with Susan again for company, walked slowly around to Kenwick, enjoying the glory of the spring morning, and let herself into her own quarters. Here she fussed about for a considerable period, dreading to take the actual step and go around to the front to speak to Miss Jenifer. She was hoping madly that the old lady would herself appear in one of the little visits she occasionally made, and thus make the opening seem more natural.

But the morning wore away and there was no sign of Miss Jenifer. More than that, there seemed a vague unrest and portent in the very atmosphere. Even Susan was sensitive to it. The dog usually lay contentedly enough at Audrey's feet, napping or snapping at an occasional fly. But this morning the animal seemed uneasy, prowled about the room at intervals, and twice lifted up its voice in a startling and lugubrious howl.

"Do be quiet, Susan, and hush that racket!" Audrey had commanded irritably. "What do you *mean* by acting that way?" But Susan continued to prowl and whimper, till Audrey could stand it no longer and determined to go out and sit in the garden until there should be some sign of Miss Jenifer. Then she would pluck up her courage and get to the matter of her new request.

But there seemed no more serenity in the garden than there had been in her workshop, nor did Miss Jenifer appear, though she sat there fully three quarters of an hour. Susan continued to fidget uneasily, walking about the

house and sniffing and coming back to lie discontentedly at Audrey's feet. At length, when Susan had given voice to her restlessness in one more lugubrious howl, Audrey felt she could stand it no longer, got to her feet with a determination that caused her to grit her teeth and clench her fingers, walked round to the front entrance, and thumped the brass knocker.

There was no answer. Presently she thumped again, wondering if Miss Jenifer could possibly have gone out into the town to do her marketing, and she not have noticed it. This did not seem at all likely, as the old lady seldom went out before noontime, as she had frequently noticed. And she could not have helped but see her, besides, as she had to pass right before her windows in the office front room. But still there came no response, and Audrey was beginning to be somewhat alarmed. Added to that, Susan began sniffing and whining at the crack below the door in a manner that betokened keen excitement. The positive conviction grew in Audrey that there was something radically wrong in that eerie

old mansion. And when a third rattle of the knocker remained unheeded, she made a desperate resolve: get in or look in, she must and would, for something must be the matter with poor old Miss Jenifer.

How she was going to accomplish this she could not figure out. Undoubtedly all the doors must be locked—she took that for granted. Just to make sure, she rattled the front door where she stood and found it resistant to all her efforts. Then she ran around to the main garden door and found that also bolted and the inside shutters closed behind the glass of the window. Nothing to be done about that! There was but one other hope—the garden door into the link that connected the main house with the kitchen wing, and to this she sped.

There was by this time no question in Audrey's mind as to whether what she was doing might be an intrusion on Miss Jenifer's well-insured privacy—whether she might not be making a mistake and find the old lady tending to her own affairs quite as usual in some upper region of the house. An intuition

not to be either explained or disregarded warned her that all was not well in that house of mystery. She flew to the other garden entrance and rattled the door desperately. And—to her unbounded amazement—it gave way before her attack and swung inward, disclosing a hall somewhat similar to the one on the other side of the house. Across the left-hand side a broad flight of three steps led upward to what was probably the kitchen; and at the far side at the right a narrower flight led doubtless into the main building. But directly at her right hand near the door were the narrow, sinister steps that led downward to the darkness of the cellar she had been warned against by Prissy. And lying at the top of those steps, almost at her feet as she stood in the doorway, was the inert body of old Miss Jenifer, still attired in the inappropriate ancient finery of the night before!

For a moment Audrey stood petrified, her heart pounding till it seemed as if it would burst, and Susan crouched whimpering at her feet. There was not a doubt in her mind but that poor Miss Jenifer had come to her end,

fallen stricken on the cellar steps where she lay. Then, on a wild impulse, Audrey turned and fled back to the Newkirk home, without even daring to close the door or look behind.

They were all in the house as it happened when she came streaming in and panted out the terrible news. Wade and Camilla had eventually decided against their trip that day, hoping that Audrey could accompany them if they went later. And without a spoken word they all made a bolt for the door, headed by Audrey herself, and followed by old Mandy, who had heard the news from the kitchen. They all streamed back to Kenwick and once in the kitchen hallway, and facing the presence of that inert figure, it was Mrs. Newkirk, assisted by Wade, who took command.

First she bent, for what seemed an interminable interval, felt for a sign of pulse at Miss Jenifer's wrist, and listened for any token of breathing. And, still kneeling, she announced:

"I'm positive Miss Jenifer is not dead. Her

body feels warm, and, though I can find no pulse, I believe there is a very slight breathing. She must either have fallen or had a stroke of some kind. We must send for a doctor at once. Camilla, you run back to the house and call Dr. Pemberton. Ask him please to come immediately and tell him why. Bring my smelling salts back as soon as you can. Mandy, you go back also and get ready as much boiling water as you can crowd on the stove. Audrey, please see if you can find some pillows or blankets. We can't move her yet till the doctor comes, but we can make her more comfortable. And, Wade, you help me get her further away from those cellar steps. She's almost falling down them."

They all hurried to do her bidding, Audrey rushing out to the other wing to get the old cushions Miss Jenifer herself had brought there. She also remembered a steamer rug from the car that she had put away in a drawer of the old secretary-desk and snatched that up also. And before the doctor arrived, they had managed to lift poor Miss Jenifer's inert body into a more comfortable position.

On the doctor's arrival they all went outside except Mrs. Newkirk and waited around in an awed silence for his verdict. Ages seemed to elapse before it came, but in reality it was only a matter of some ten or fifteen minutes when both he and Mrs. Newkirk emerged into the garden.

"I'll be back this afternoon," Dr. Pemberton called, as he hurried back to his office. "Meantime please carry out my instructions as well as you can." It was not till then that Mrs. Newkirk turned to the waiting three, her brows knitted in a perplexed frown.

"It's very difficult and very sad," she informed them. "I really don't know just how to act or what to do—or what Miss Jenifer would want done. The doctor says she has had a stroke. It must have come on last night while she was still up and around, and overtook her right there where she had fallen. She has regained consciousness as far as it is possible now, but the poor old dear seems to be not only helpless to move, but has lost her power of speech as well. Whether she has any

consciousness of what is happening, it's hard to tell. She doesn't show much at present—pays no attention when you talk or ask her questions. The thing may pass off partially in time—or it may never. Even doctors can't predict anything about that. But meantime there arises the question of what's to be done with her.

"This is a case where she'll be confined to bed, as helpless as a baby, and will need, not necessarily expert nursing, but at least careful and constant care. She hasn't a relative in the world to undertake this, and there isn't a hospital anywhere short of Annapolis. I'd take her into our house gladly, but we're terribly crowded already. There isn't an inch more room, especially with Wade at home. Really, I can't think what to do!"

"What's the matter with her staying right here in her own house?" suddenly demanded Wade. "Couldn't we find someone to take care of her? What about old Prissy?" Mrs. Newkirk almost hugged him in her obvious relief.

"I never even considered it," she exclaimed. "I don't know why, except that it's such a queer old place and she's been so odd about it of late years. It would undoubtedly be the best place for her, especially if she realizes more than we think. She'd be horribly homesick anywhere else. The old house would be a terribly difficult place for anyone but Prissy, without any modern conveniences, but Prissy has always been used to it. If she'll consent to take charge, we could get a young, husky colored girl to come in and help with the heavy lifting and that sort of thing. Or perhaps Mandy would be willing to help. My, but that's a weight off my mind! I just couldn't bear to think of poor Miss Jenifer left to the mercy of strangers.

"And now, Wade, will you jump in your car and go right over to Prissy and explain all this to her? Bring her back with you at once, if you possibly can. And while you're gone, we'll try to get Miss Jenifer up to her bed. Mandy can come over and help. I suppose it would be a lot easier if we could fix her up on the lower floor in one of the rooms, but it might be

disturbing to her not to be upstairs where she usually sleeps. She's very light in weight—nothing but a little wisp of a thing—so we'll have to try to get her upstairs to her regular bed. Here comes Mandy now with some hot water. Girls, you'll *have* to turn in and help. This is a real emergency. Audrey, you find your way upstairs into that big back room where Miss Jenifer sleeps, and see if the bed is ready to put her in. If not, do your best to fix it up somehow. Hurry, dear! And when you get back, we'll each take a corner of the blanket and I believe we can carry her upstairs that way without much trouble. She's so very light."

And so, under the most unexpected circumstances, Audrey found herself discovering her way alone up the stairs and into the secret fastnesses of Kenwick!

CHAPTER VII

WITHIN THE FORBIDDEN PORTAL

There were a number of circumstances and incidents of that astonishing day which flowed in and stamped themselves on Audrey's memory, but which she did not consciously recall until she was talking it all over late that night with Camilla. They were supposed to be fast asleep and it was long after midnight. But in reality they were huddled in Audrey's bed, discussing every phase of the unforeseen upheaval and what it might portend for the future.

"I'll never forget how I felt when I started up that staircase," declared Audrey, "if I live to be a hundred! Imagine it!—there I was, making straight for Miss Jenifer's inmost sanctum, and she, poor soul, perfectly helpless and unconscious of it all. If it hadn't been for your mother ordering me, I never would have dared to do it. It seemed rather awful, somehow."

"Well, anyway, what did you *see*?" demanded Camilla impatiently. "It's true, I got

there too, later, when we carried her up, but I was so scared for fear I'd lose my hold on that end of the blanket and let her drop that, actually, I didn't have a chance to notice a thing. And right afterward, Mother sent me flying home for towels and things, and she took them from me at the door when I brought them, and told me to go home and get lunch, because Mandy would be busy there. So I never got in again. But *you* must have got an eyeful!"

"It's queer," admitted Audrey, "but at the time I didn't seem to take in anything much except what your mother sent me to find out. But now a whole lot of it comes back to me. I found that stair hallway all right and went up the stairs. They're very beautiful, by the way, and wind up to the next floor in such a graceful fashion. When I got to the top, there was another hall just like the lower one with three doors opening from it. I didn't know which one to try, till I remembered what Prissy had said about the old ballroom being right over the dining room. I must have rambled round till I found the one that opened into that great back

room, and then I knew I'd struck the right place—couldn't be any mistaking it. There was a big four-poster bed with a canopy over it crowded over in one corner of it. And big as it was, it looked lost in that enormous room.

"Imagine sleeping in a ballroom! Must feel something like sleeping in the middle of the Grand Central Station—or Madison Square Garden! Well, you know what it was like—you helped get her in there."

"I only remember that it seemed awfully cluttered," supplemented Camilla. "Boxes and bundles and old papers and goodness knows what in every corner. The only thing I did look for was anything like a musical instrument to explain that queer music. But I didn't see a thing."

"Neither did I," added Audrey. "Neither then nor the second time I went up. Well, your mother had asked me to see if Miss Jenifer's bed was ready to put her right in, so I walked over to it and found it made up. But oh, the poor, pathetic sheets and pillow-slips!—old

and worn so ragged that there was no further use to try mending them, evidently. No doubt the poor thing hasn't had any money to spare for such things for ages. I turned down the covers and then I ran back downstairs, and we got her up. Your mother said not to mind about the bed linen—she'd send over some spare things later. Then Prissy came, and she and Mandy turned us out while they bathed Miss Jenifer and got her more comfortable. It was then that we came back to lunch. And you know none of us went back again except your mother. She said it wasn't necessary and we were too busy, anyway, running errands all afternoon. I'm so glad Prissy is going to stay with her. She seemed delighted to, didn't she? But she's so old I can't see how she's going to get on with all that hard work—nursing Miss Jenifer and doing the housekeeping. Your mother says she's abnormally strong, though, for anyone so old and bent, and she refused to have any younger woman from the village to help her out. She declared Miss Jenifer wouldn't like it, and said she'd be all right if Mandy would go over once a day and help her do the lifting."

"But, look here, Audrey," suddenly interrupted Camilla, "there are two things I'm simply dying to know. A whole lot of things, in fact. To begin with, do you think Miss Jenifer is going to get over this or die quite soon—or what?"

"How can *I* tell?" countered Audrey. "I only know what the doctor said when he saw her again this afternoon. He thinks she may be conscious now, though she can't speak or move, and may realize what's going on around her. He says the thing may pass off in time, at least partially, and she may even be able to move her hands and feet and be able to communicate with us in some way, even if she can't speak. He says he wished he knew what caused it—whether it came on in just the natural course of things or whether she had some kind of a shock. If it were natural, he hadn't much hopes of her ever coming out of it. But if it came from a shock, she might 'snap out of it,' as he said, in time. We told him what a pleasant evening she'd had with us, and how happy she'd been, and that there didn't seem any reason why she should have been shocked

by anything. But he said you never could tell
——"

"See here, Audrey," suddenly interrupted Camilla, "I've just thought of something. Why was she lying there at the head of those *cellar steps*—of all places!—and at that time of night? You know she couldn't have gone to bed—she was fully dressed just as she was when we left her. And that garden door was unlocked—you said so, because you got in that way. Suppose someone got in and tried to rob her—that would certainly be a shock! Where are her jewels? Did she still have them on?"

"Can't be that," declared Audrey, "because they were all there. I remember seeing them when I first got in, and your mother took them off and put them carefully away. No, it wasn't that. But just the same, now that I think of it, there might have been some other kind of shock. As you say, why *should* she be lying at the head of the cellar steps at that time of night? You'd have thought she'd be going straight to bed. Perhaps she saw something that frightened her. It must be horrible, living

in a place like that all alone!"

"Well, we don't seem to be getting anywhere on that track," said Camilla. "But here's another question that's been bothering me. What's going to happen now about *your* affairs? Now that you can come and go in that place as you please, won't you have a fine chance to go on with your work and get all your measurements and inside details? You'll never have a better. If she recovers, she'll surely shut you out again!"

"I've been thinking of that, too," admitted Audrey, "and I can't make up my mind what to do. Somehow it doesn't seem to me fair to take advantage of the poor old thing's illness and helplessness to go poking around her house where she never intended me to go. If I'd only had a chance to speak to her about it first, I wouldn't mind so much. Queer!—I was going to do it this very day—ask her to let me do at least the two lower front rooms. If she doesn't ever recover, I suppose it's silly not to take the opportunity. But if she does, and then should find that I'd gone on with it without her

permission, I'd somehow feel awfully ashamed of it. It certainly is a puzzle. I'll have to talk it over with your mother."

Camilla yawned and stretched and made ready to depart to her own quarters. Suddenly, however, she halted, at the edge of the bed, and whispered tensely in Audrey's ear:

"Oh, I just thought of another thing—what became of those *brass keys*? Were they anywhere around her or had she laid them down somewhere, I wonder? Have you thought of that? Did you see them?"

"No, I didn't," admitted Audrey. "And that's rather strange, too. For I believe whatever happened to her must have been soon after we left her. Otherwise, don't you think she'd have gone right upstairs and to bed? I saw those keys in her hand the last thing when we left her. And I'm certain there wasn't a sign of them about when I found her there this morning. And I can't remember seeing them lying around in the house or her bedroom to-day either. *Where* can they be?"

"Of course, if one is the key to the front hall door, it would be there in the lock. And it must have been, as we came in and out of there to-day. But what about the other one?" offered Camilla.

"I'm going to examine that front hall key to-morrow," declared Audrey. "Of course it was in the lock to-day. I remember now seeing it as I went out the last time. And I remember something else. That key had an old red string or narrow ribbon in the big round part. And I'm perfectly certain neither of the keys she carried had that!"

In the course of the next few days a certain routine was developed at Kenwick, and the two girls had a chance to put some of their theories to the test. Mrs. Newkirk made it her business to be there every morning when the doctor came and take note of any changes in treatment or new form of food to be given the patient. She had also arranged that Mandy should bring over the meals every day for both

Miss Jenifer and Prissy, so that Prissy need not waste her energies in kitchen work. And she had decided that, for an hour or two every afternoon, she herself should take a turn in watching by Miss Jenifer's bed and giving Prissy a free time to rest or go out.

There had been little change in Miss Jenifer since the second day. She could roll her head from side to side, and her eyes also would move occasionally as if staring about the room. But their gaze was vacant and it was plain that she recognized little if anything of her surroundings or anyone about her. Prissy was proving a devoted and skillful nurse and was obviously delighted to have this opportunity to be useful to her former mistress. She developed, however, an unexpected peculiarity. Mrs. Newkirk had suggested that she had better take one of the rooms in the old kitchen wing to use as her own when she was off duty or wished to get some uninterrupted sleep. There also she could store her own clothes and belongings that she would need during her stay. But Prissy would have none of this. Go down into that kitchen wing she

would not for any reason or consideration, from the time of Miss Jenifer's sudden stroke. Nor would she even enter the connecting link by way of the garden door as she had always been wont. Instead she came in and out of either the front or rear entrance of the main house. And she slept on a little army cot supplied by Mrs. Newkirk, in a far corner of the great ballroom, so that she could be constantly near her charge. When she took her time off, she either sat in the garden or visited Mandy in the Newkirk kitchen or walked to and from her little hovel at the farther end of the town.

Audrey had also discussed her own problem with Mrs. Newkirk, and had received that lady's opinion as follows:

"My dear, this calamity that has befallen poor Miss Jenifer is something that may never be changed except by her death. You have not an unlimited time to finish this work, and it may be months or years that she lies there in precisely the same state. As she gave you permission to do the house in the first place,

even though she did not then know that it involved the interior as well, I think you can take it for granted that it will be all right to go ahead and finish your work. You would never, I am sure, do anything that Miss Jenifer would not wish, and in any case I'm afraid she is far beyond any such considerations now. Go ahead with your work while you can. If she were suddenly to die, I'm not sure you would be allowed legally to have any further entry into the house. I really do not know to whom she has left it, if she's made any will at all."

So Audrey returned to her work with a clearer conscience, though she determined at first to confine herself to the two front rooms where Miss Jenifer had always admitted company, as that would seem less like invading the forbidden parts of the house. And she became at once immersed in the intricate detailed work of measuring the dimensions and sketching the beautiful designs of paneling and cornices, fireplaces and chair-rails, which she was soon to discover were entirely different in every room. It was only a few days after this that a strange thing happened.

It was the evening of Wade's last day at home. His knee had improved so definitely that he felt he had no further excuse to remain away from Annapolis. And besides that he was anxious to get back to his studies and his interests there. After dinner that night and a pleasant hour of bridge in the living room, he had strolled out to take a walk and "try out my game knee," as he expressed it. Mrs. Newkirk went upstairs to lay out his clean clothes for packing, and the two girls had drifted out to the garden where they sat chatting desultorily. It was a warm, rather cloudy night and there was no moon. The darkness seemed intense. In the direction of old Kenwick, only a single light from a small oil lamp that Prissy used could be seen faintly through the upper windows.

Suddenly they were startled by hearing footsteps crunching their own garden path, and in a moment Wade came up to where they sat.

"My hat! How you made me jump!" exclaimed Camilla. "I thought you had gone for a walk." Wade disregarded her remark,

and muttered:

"Be quiet, will you! There's something peculiar going on over at Kenwick—in the kitchen wing. If you want to be in on this, you two, follow me over there. But hush up all talking and make as little sound as possible!"

CHAPTER VIII IN THE KITCHEN WING

Before they started on this expedition, however, Wade darted into the house to get an electric torch. "We may need it!" he explained, and the two girls already felt the cold chills creeping down their spines at the mere suggestion.

"O-oh!—I'm scared to death!" shuddered Camilla. "But I wouldn't miss it for anything, would you? I wonder what he's seen?"

But that he would not explain till they had crept, as silently as possible, through their own garden and across to Miss Jenifer's, in the wake of Wade. It seemed pitch dark and they stumbled over unseen obstacles, but he refused to use the electric torch, saying it might only attract attention, and they'd have to get along without it. At length they reached the entrance to the main house, but he led them past that and along to the rear door of the kitchen wing. As far as the girls could see, all was as usual in this location, but Wade stopped and whispered:

"That door was shut and locked just before dinner, for I came along and tried it. I've sort of made it a point to keep a watch on the place since Miss Jenifer was taken ill. It locks on the *inside*, where the key has been ever since that day we found her there. And Prissy never goes near that part of the house. Now it's *unlocked*, and when I came by a while ago it was standing open just a crack. I closed it. Strange, isn't it! Who can have done it?"

"Maybe Mother," suggested Camilla. "She

was over here this afternoon sitting with Miss Jenifer while Prissy got a rest."

"I *told* you I tried it just before dinner," retorted Wade impatiently, "and that was after Mother left. But there's more than that. Come around here!"

He led the way around to the garden side of the main wing and muttered to them to take up a position not far from the steps to the garden door. "Do you remember," he whispered, "that there are a couple of very small, low windows in the foundation? They let into the cellar. Well, you just crouch down here on the grass where we are and watch those windows. I saw something pretty curious there just before I came over to you. It may not come again, but we'll watch, anyhow. And, for Pete's sake, don't make a sound!"

They obeyed him without question and all of them quietly sank to the grass and so remained, their eyes fastened on the location of the two little barred windows whose outlines they could just dimly discern in the blackness of the

night. Here was adventure, they knew at last, strange and unmistakable, and they were all keyed to an intense pitch of excitement. Yet, for the exigency of the moment, they were as silent and motionless as so many statues. The girls had even foreborne to ask Wade what he had seen, though they were consumed with curiosity to know.

How long they sat thus it was impossible to calculate. There was no sound save the swaying and creaking of tree branches in a light wind, and the hooting of an owl in a distant patch of woods, intermingling with the lap of the river at the foot of the garden. Suddenly Audrey, who was sitting next to Wade, felt his hand shoot out and grasp her arm.

"Look! There it is, in that window over to the right!" he hissed. "Just where I saw it before." There was no need to command their attention. Every eye was focused on a curious, swaying light—dim and flickering, but definite—that danced and swam, appearing and disappearing somewhere back of that tiny,

barred window. Spellbound, they watched, till Camilla could bear the suspense no longer.

"What is it? Who is it?" she whispered to Wade, who only muttered back:

"How should *I* know! But I'm jolly well going to find out—and right now, at that! If you're game, follow me. If not, stay out here and watch what happens. I'm going to get to the bottom of this!"

"Oh, wait! We'll go with you. I'd be scared to death to stay here alone—wouldn't you, Audrey?" Audrey signified that of the two conditions, she would far rather they'd all be together.

"Come on then," he ordered, "and don't be scared. I'm fairly certain there isn't any real danger—for us. I stuck my old revolver in my pocket when I ran in to get the torch. It isn't loaded, but it *looks* rather deadly! Follow me and *don't* make a sound if you can help it!"

They fell into line behind him, knees

shaking, scalps prickling, hands cold with the tense excitement, and, Indian file, crept toward the door into the kitchen wing. This Wade swung open and left in that position. Once inside, he flashed on his electric torch, as they could not possibly find their way about in the pitch blackness of the unfamiliar region without it. There was nothing out-of-the-way, apparently, in the connecting link itself between the main house and kitchen. Wade ran up the flight of steps leading to the main house and tried the door into it. But that door was locked, and they all knew, without saying, that Prissy herself had locked it on the inner side to protect herself from the real or imagined terrors of the kitchen wing and cellar. Wade then descended, ran over to the opposite side of the hall, and tried the doors into the kitchen and serving pantry behind it. Standing in the doorway of the kitchen, the girls crowded close behind him and staring over his shoulder, he flashed his torch about, and they had their first glimpse of the rare old Colonial kitchen. It was cluttered with the débris and accumulation of years—old boxes, broken furniture, and every sort of cast-off refuse—

but they could still see the enormous open fireplace, the hanging cranes and pothooks, and the great Dutch oven at the side. But there was no sign of an unwelcome intruder or anything disturbed, so Wade wasted no further time over it and hurried to the other room back of it which appeared to have once been a serving pantry. Here was a further clutter of cast-off débris and decrepit furniture and a stairway to the floor above curving up in one corner. But there seemed to be nothing amiss.

"Look here," Wade whispered. "I'm going to run upstairs and take a look at those two rooms above. It won't take me a minute, and I'm practically certain there's nothing wrong up there, only I want to make sure we're not skipping anything in this direction. You two stand right here at the foot of the stairs, and if you see anything out-of-the-way while I'm gone, just yell. Otherwise keep absolutely quiet. I won't be a moment."

He left them no time to argue about the thing, but slipped up the stairway, and when he reached the top and turned about to look

through the rooms his light was cut off from them and they were left in impenetrable darkness. It was not till this moment that real fear overtook them. But in that weird and uneasy darkness anything seemed possible.

"Oh, Audrey! I don't like it!" whimpered Camilla. "I—I could just *scream*, I'm so frightened to death."

"Don't you dare!" breathed Audrey. "It would spoil everything, Cam. Wade would *never* forgive you!" This last argument served to brace up Camilla, who adored her brother and felt nothing could be worse than his disapproval. But they were spared further terrors, for the light reappeared and Wade came tiptoeing down, reporting that he had seen nothing unusual abovestairs.

"Now for the *big* time!" he warned them under his breath. "If you want to go with me, say so. If not, you'd better get out and go home right now, for I'm going down whether or no. *That's* where the queer things are going on. Hurry up and decide, for I'm not going to

wait."

For a moment the two girls were terribly tempted to forego any further adventuring and get back to the safe haven of the Newkirk house. Then sheer pride came to Audrey's rescue, augmented by a feeling that it might be disloyal all around to show the white feather. "I'm going with you, Wade," was all she said. But Camilla was not to be outdone. If Audrey dared it, she must also. So she only added, "Me too!" And then Wade turned to descend the broad flight of steps into the hall and made a bee-line for the narrow flight down into the cellar, over at the corner toward the garden door. And when he reached the top step he shut off his own torch, as there seemed to be a faint glimmer of some other light in the dark regions below.

"Look out where you step," he whispered. "Feel your way along. I'll turn this light on again if it gets too dark to see where we're going." They stumbled on down in the blackness, realizing only that there was the glow of some kind of a light from somewhere

behind a distant corner of the masonry. Suddenly, however, even as they were creeping in its direction, it died away and they were left in complete darkness.

It was then that Wade switched on the torch, and they had a glimpse of the place in which they stood. Even in their excitement they could not help but marvel at the enormous solidity of the masonry and brickwork that supported the old house. Wade told them later that it was substantial enough to support a seventeen-story building. It also appeared that the cellar conformed, to a certain extent, to the formation of the rooms above, and that they were now staring through the doorway into the space under the stair hallway in the main house, for it was in that direction the light had disappeared. Wade gave them little time to look about, but indicated that they were to follow him. And so, tiptoeing along the brick flooring, they trailed in his wake, as he turned out of this enclosure and peered into a great, vaulted space with an arched ceiling of brick, lined on each side with shelves containing dusty, cobwebby bottles and odd-looking

casks both large and small.

"The old wine cellar!" whispered Wade.
"Must have had a great collection there once.
Most of those things are empty now, I fancy.
But come along! This isn't where our quarry is
hiding—that's plain!"

The wine cellar had no opening at the far end, so they did not go through it, but turned from the entrance and ventured toward their right in the direction of a doorway opening into another enclosure. And suddenly from around a far corner of that room came the swaying glow of the uncanny light that had first attracted them. Wade immediately snapped off his torch and made in that direction. But alas for all his precautions! Before reaching that far corner he himself stumbled ignominiously over some unseen obstacle on the floor—it sounded like something of metal—made a tremendous clatter, and the swaying light was instantly extinguished.

"*Darn!*" muttered Wade, switching on his

own light and surveying the offending old iron kettle. "If that wasn't the limit!" And each of the girls secretly blest her stars that *she* hadn't happened to be the offender. "Now the fat's in the fire for sure, and there's nothing to do but hustle after that intruder, whoever it is, as fast as we can. Never mind precautions—they're useless now!"

He scuttled around the corner, the girls after him like a comet's tail. And Audrey could only recall, later, what seemed like an endless scurrying through musty vaults and passageways, wide dark rooms whose ceilings were mainly enormous beams and cross-beams, around huge masonry pillars of brick and stone, till finally they were brought up, at the farther end of the mansion, evidently, by a solid brick wall beyond which there could be no penetrating. And not till then did they realize that their quarry had escaped them.

"But how? Where?" cried Camilla, voicing the unspoken question in all their minds. "How *could* anyone have got away? Not behind us,

that's certain. And there's not another doorway to outside. What has happened?"

No one answered her question, for none was any wiser than herself. Wade swung his torch about in a helpless investigation, but Audrey suddenly made a pounce at something standing on the floor in a far corner.

"Look at this!" she cried excitedly, and brought an old brass lantern over to the group and placed it in Wade's hands. "And *feel it* too!" she added.

The lantern was still warm to the touch.

CHAPTER IX A COUNCIL OF WAR

"There's no use talking," said Wade, "*something's* got to be done about this!"

They were sitting on a bench in the Newkirk garden that same eventful night, hashing and rehashing the late affair in the kitchen wing at Kenwick.

"But what?" demanded Camilla, anxious, as always, for immediate action.

"That's just what I can't figure out," returned Wade, sitting with his head in his hands, in deep thought. After the discovery of the lantern, they had made one more frantic search through every possible corner of the great cellar, to absolutely no avail. Camilla had suggested that perhaps it had been Prissy who was exploring through the place, and that she had fled upstairs in some moment when they had not been watching in that direction, leaving the lantern behind her.

For a moment the theory seemed likely, till Audrey reminded them of Prissy's unmitigated fear of the place, which, if genuine, would certainly keep her from any such night excursion. Then Wade declared that to prove it he was going to see exactly what Prissy was

doing at that time. There was a tall old sweet-gum tree in the Kenwick garden, growing close enough to the house to afford a glimpse in at the upper windows. "I don't believe in such spying as a rule," he had muttered, "but this thing has gone beyond such considerations." And in an instant he had shinnied up the smooth lower trunk and was clambering further among the branches.

He had clambered down a few minutes later to report that all seemed perfectly normal in the ballroom. Miss Jenifer lay in the big four-poster, motionless and evidently sleeping, and Prissy was stretched on her own couch in a far corner, from which it seemed entirely unlikely that she had moved for a very long time. Then they had retired to their own garden to hold a council of war.

"For Mother's sake and all of you, as well as Miss Jenifer, this thing can't be allowed to go on without investigation," declared Wade, thinking it out as he went along. "It isn't safe. You can't tell what kind of an undesirable character may have found access to the place

and be planning a robbery or something. I'm convinced now that this must have been the same thing that alarmed Miss Jenifer that night she had the stroke."

"Yes, probably it was," agreed Audrey eagerly, "but you remember, don't you, that none of her jewels was stolen—so it couldn't be *that*. And they surely had plenty of chance."

"That's true, too," acknowledged Wade. "I hadn't thought of it. Perhaps it isn't loot they're after, then—it may be something else. At any rate, I don't like to think of you people being in and out of this house and subject to any more such intrusions. And yet, I can't somehow make up my mind to report it to the town authorities and have a lot of public excitement about the thing. The place would be overrun with curiosity seekers and goodness knows what might result from that—a lot of unpleasantness at the very least. Just let me think a moment." He buried his head in his hands and concentrated with intensity for several silent moments. Presently he raised his head and spoke:

"There's only one thing to do that I can figure. I was going back to Annapolis to-morrow, though I'm going to confess to you—and you needn't let on to Mother you knew it!—that my knee is still far from being what it ought to be. I discovered that to-night when I took that little walk and just now when I shinnied up the tree. The doctor warned me that if I didn't look out, I'd be having water on the knee, and that's pretty darned serious. I was going back to-morrow anyway because there are some rather important math. exams. coming up that I wouldn't want to miss. And I was going to lie low as far as athletics were concerned and just do some cramming. But I believe that I can change that plan without much difficulty.

"I'll go back to-morrow as per schedule and have Doc examine the knee. And I'm absolutely certain he'll advise more rest for it. Then I'll get permission to come back here again, collect my notes and math. data, and you'll see me the next day. I may miss out on the exams., but I know I can take them later. And I'm going to see this thing through if it's

the last thing I do.

"Of course this'll mean I'll have to be away over to-morrow night, but we'll have to take a chance on that. And whatever you do, don't let Mother know anything about this affair to-night. She insists on being there with Miss Jenifer every afternoon and it would make her as nervous as sin if she got to worrying over anything like that. Just stick around with her as much as you can, both of you, and I'm pretty sure everything will be all right. I'm going to leave my old revolver loaded in my bureau drawer, so you'll know where to get it in case of need, but if it comes to any such pass, you'd better run to the village for help rather than use it. As far as the night goes, we'll just have to leave that to chance. Prissy keeps the main house pretty thoroughly locked up, anyhow, so no one is likely to get into that. What's got me licked, though, is how the person we were chasing to-night got out of that cellar. I'd be ready to swear he didn't get out the ordinary way—he *couldn't* have, for we had that covered just about all of the time! Well, I'll have to investigate that matter later.

Meanwhile, it's beginning to rain and we'd better go in. I'm practically sure there will be no more intrusions on Kenwick to-night. We've given that party too much of a scare.

Remember, mum's the word about this as far as Mother is concerned. And you'd better manage a proper surprise to see me back day after to-morrow!"

There was little sleep for any of the three that night, and each one kept an uneasy watch on Kenwick at intervals all through the dark hours, as they confessed to one another next morning. The day dawned with black skies and a drenching, northeast storm, which did not raise their depressed spirits. Wade departed in the rattly little Ford soon after breakfast, and the two girls tried to bid him good-bye naturally and as if they did not expect to see him back again next day. And after that the household went about its various affairs.

Camilla and Audrey, in raincoats and

galoshes, scurried over through the wet garden to Kenwick. Before they went indoors they examined the wet, clayey soil of the paths and about the cellar windows for any footprints that might have come there since it had begun to rain, but there were none. They saw Prissy through the window of the drawing room that had been transformed into a kitchen, busy heating water and puttering about, and they called to her and exchanged the greetings of the day. Then they went into the office wing and lit a fire with some stray pieces of wood in the open fireplace, to take off the chill of the dampness.

"Does it strike you as strange," demanded Camilla, sitting perched on the corner of Audrey's worktable, "that two things have disappeared since Miss Jenifer was taken ill?"

"Just what two do you mean?" asked Audrey, busy collecting her materials for the day's work. "So much has been different since then."

"I mean this. We've never once heard that queer music since, for one thing——"

"That's not so very strange," interrupted Audrey. "You didn't hear that so very often, anyway, and Miss Jenifer's only been ill a week."

"That's so. But here's the other. We've never once got a sight of those two brass keys since that night she had dinner with us. Now I know what you're going to say—that she probably put them away safely somewhere. But if that were the case, Mother or Prissy would very likely have come across them in the bureau drawers. I asked Mother myself about that only yesterday. She says she's had to go through Miss Jenifer's bureaus and closets fairly thoroughly, much as she hated to, so that she could find the old lady's clothes and so on. And Prissy has, too. But neither of them has ever got a glimpse of anything like those keys. Do you know what I think? I believe whoever gave her the shock that night took them from her. And you'll never make me think any different!"

"Well, you may be right," agreed Audrey, "and that may be what they're trying to do—get

in the house or open something with them. But, on the other hand, Miss Jenifer may have put them away in some secret hiding place of her own, before the thing happened, and they may be there yet. *One* thing we've found out for certain, though. Neither of those keys could have been to the front door. That key is still in it, and no other outer door key is missing, so far as we know. By the way, what became of that key to the rear kitchen entrance? Wade locked it on the outside last night and took the key out because he couldn't leave it on the inside, naturally, and didn't want to leave that door unlocked. Did he take it with him?"

"No, I have it here in my sweater pocket," acknowledged Camilla. "He gave it to me this morning upstairs, just before he left. He thought we should have it with us here in case of necessity. But he advised us not to go in there before he came back. He didn't like the idea of our prowling around there all by ourselves."

"Well, he can't like it less than *I* do," laughed Audrey. "Day or night, that place is a very nice

one to avoid, as far as I'm concerned! Now I'm going around and ask Prissy to let me in so that I can go on with the sketches in the two front reception rooms. Coming along?"

Prissy let them in through the front entrance of the main house and chatted awhile before going upstairs to her charge. One thing she spoke of caused the two girls to glance at one another in not a little surprise. For she "lowed" that it had been a "quare night"—that she had not slept well but had waked at constant intervals thinking she heard "quare noises," and that Miss Jenifer too had been restless and seemed unable to sleep as soundly as she usually did. Prissy had no explanation of the matter. "Must 'a' been de rain," she ended. "Hit done come down lak de deluge ob Noah 'long 'bout midnight. Ah done shut all de winders an' hit done banged on the panes lak hit gwine bust right in!"

When she had gone upstairs, the two girls speculated on whether she could possibly have heard any of the sounds they had made in the cellar or possibly had heard something

uncanny later on. But as there seemed no answer to this, Audrey turned to her work and Camilla settled down to a book. But presently she threw the book aside and began to roam uneasily about the room and out into the hall, where she seemed to disappear and was gone a long time. Audrey decided that she must have gone out and home in sheer boredom. But as her own work of sketching the design of the beautiful paneled window shutters had begun to absorb her she forgot Camilla for a while.

It was with some astonishment, therefore, that she beheld Camilla come tiptoeing back into the room after a considerable period. She was enveloped in an air of mystery which she wasn't even trying to conceal, and she whispered excitedly to Audrey:

"I've done something I don't suppose you'll approve of at all, but frankly I can't see where there's any harm in it now. In fact, after what happened last night, I think it's absolutely necessary." And she stared at Audrey defiantly.

"Well, for goodness' sake tell me what it is!" laughed Audrey. "I certainly won't eat you for it, and probably it's no affair of mine, anyway."

"All right. I take all the responsibility myself, but here it is. I just couldn't sit still somehow, so I decided to roam around this lower floor a bit and at least peek into those back rooms and around the halls. And I've found something that looks mighty queer, believe it or not! If you want to see what I mean, you'd better tag along after me!"

CHAPTER X

ONE DAY AT KENWICK

Audrey needed no second invitation. She straightway abandoned her drawing and accompanied Camilla out into the hall between the two front rooms. This hall she was planning to get to work on directly after

she had finished with the front rooms, so she was not sorry to have an opportunity to examine it more thoroughly. The decorations in it were somewhat simpler than in the rest of the house, apparently, but the double front door with the half-circle fanlight was fascinating. There were five other doors opening out from this hallway—two into the front rooms, one directly at the back into the great dining room, one at the right-hand rear into the stair hallway, and another directly across from it into some other part of the house or possibly downstairs to the wine cellar, which she had calculated must be directly underneath. Or it might be a hall closet, though this seemed unlikely, as in a house of that type and period they did not seem to be used. Singularly enough, it was to this very door that Camilla led her.

"I know you'll think I'm awful," confessed Cam, "but I had the greatest curiosity to see where this door led. We know about all the others, but this one seemed to be a closet or something, and I just couldn't keep myself from trying it, to see if it would help us any with all

this puzzle. So I did—and this is what I saw!"

She threw open the door dramatically, and Audrey, forgetting all her scruples, stared inside. And there was nothing to be seen save a solid wall of brick, scarcely an inch from the sill of the door. Nor was there the slightest sign of any way of penetrating it, nor any other opening!

"Well, what do you make of *that*?" demanded Camilla triumphantly. And Audrey had to confess she didn't know quite what to make of it.

"But that isn't all!" went on Camilla. "Follow me and you'll get another eyeful!" Audrey followed her meekly and she led the way through the rear door into the great, semi-darkened dining room. This room also had three doors, one at the extreme right near the windows, which led into what was once another drawing room and was now altered into a kitchen. But in the middle of the wall, opposite the windows, was a fireplace, and on one side of this fireplace was the door through

which they had just entered from the hall. On the other side, however, was another door, and to this Camilla led the way, throwing it open as she had the one in the hall. A similar wall of brick directly back of the door faced them—and nothing more.

"Now can you tell me," demanded Camilla, "what is the sense in having two such doors as that—opening into nothing at all? I call it downright silly!"

"Wait a minute," exclaimed Audrey. "I believe I have it!" She was staring closely from across the room at the two doors that flanked the fireplace, and then went out to stare at the arrangement of the hall. "I think this is the reason," she explained. "The architect who planned this house was probably keen on keeping the interior proportions just right. Now, you see, if he made an entrance door to this room on one side of the chimney-place and not on the other, it would have given that part of the room a rather lopsided look. If there'd been room, he'd probably have made a closet there, and so

supplied the other door to balance the entrance one. But as there wasn't, he just put a door anyway, even if it didn't serve any other purpose. And the same way in the hall. The door on one side matched the one directly opposite. I remember, now, having heard of that device they used to employ to keep the proportion in well-designed old houses. And now that I think of it, the same device must be used upstairs in the ballroom right over here, for I remember the two doors, one each side of the beautiful great fireplace. We came in from the hall through one, so the other must be the same as this. I wish we could examine it, but I'm afraid that's hopeless at present, with Miss Jenifer ill there. Sorry to disappoint you, old dear, about this mystery. But I'm afraid we'll have to consider it solved!"

She grinned and went back to her work, and Camilla, somewhat crestfallen, curled up in a corner once more with her book. And at noon they paddled back through the rain to the Newkirk house for lunch.

Somehow the day seemed destined to be an

eventful one, for when they reached home a new situation confronted them. Mrs. Newkirk was in her room, prostrated with one of her periodical headaches, which were always so severe that there was nothing to do but give up entirely and go to bed till the pain was routed, so blindly ill did they make her.

"I'm terribly sorry, girls," she whispered, as she lay back among her pillows, her head bandaged and a bottle of smelling salts at her side, "but I shall be quite unable to get over to sit with Miss Jenifer this afternoon. I'd have Prissy stay in for once, but the poor thing wants particularly to get down to the bank on some business to-day. I think at certain times she sends money to some grandson or great-grandson down in Georgia, and it seems to be a solemn rite to get to the bank or the post office—or wherever she goes—and make out a check or a money order for him. So I don't want to disappoint her. I'm wondering if one or both of you would be willing to take my place for to-day? There's nothing to do but sit and watch Miss Jenifer and see that nothing unforeseen happens. We never know when she

may come to herself—if she ever does—and it would be too bad to have that happen when no one was about. Prissy has done everything necessary for her for the day—all you need do is keep an eye on her. I think she usually sleeps most of the time."

The girls both signified their entire willingness to relieve Mrs. Newkirk, and she warned them not to talk together or wander about the house, but just take books and read or do something very quiet during the vigil. Audrey declared that she would take her sketching pad and improve the opportunity by making a sketch of the room, if it could be done without disturbing the invalid.

"I am convinced that she realizes nothing of what is going on about her as yet, any more than a very young baby," declared Mrs. Newkirk. "But we never can tell, absolutely, so don't do anything that would upset her if she were conscious. I'm sorry this had to happen, for it's a burden I didn't intend that you should have to bother with."

It was with decidedly mixed feelings that the girls went over to Kenwick that afternoon. They confessed to each other that they were rather nervous about being alone with Miss Jenifer under these conditions, for it all seemed very weird and uncanny to their inexperience with such ailments. But the prospect of having a chance at last to see something more of that strangely used ballroom somewhat balanced this. And then there was the third consideration of the eerie doings of the night before and the possibility that some unwelcome intruder might be roaming through the cellars or interior of the old house. They had debated long over the question of whether they should smuggle Wade's revolver over with them, but finally decided against it. Camilla did not know how to use it. Audrey did, but declared that since carrying loaded weapons was against the law, she was not going to take the risk of having it about her. If anything unforeseen occurred, they would just have to trust to their wits to cope with it.

Prissy was at first loath to leave them alone

with her patient and declared she would put off her errand till another day and remain on duty herself. But when the girls had represented to her that it was Mrs. Newkirk's wish that they take her place, she reluctantly reconsidered and went. And then at last they found themselves alone in the great ballroom with the unconscious old lady in their care.

For a time they sat speechless on chairs distant from the bed, and watched Miss Jenifer furtively and uneasily. That motionless form on the bed bore little resemblance to the Miss Jenifer they had known. Perhaps it was because the formerly straggling grey locks were now smoothed tightly and drawn into a braid by Prissy. Perhaps it was the slightly drawn features and the utterly vacant expression of the face. Perhaps it was the eyes, once so alert and intelligent, now rolling aimlessly about and vacant as a baby's stare. But to the girls it was as if an entire stranger lay there. In some ways it made the vigil easier. Audrey felt that it would have been heart-rending to see a more normal-looking Miss Jenifer in this condition.

After a time, the staring eyes closed in a nap, and both girls drew a breath of relief and felt at liberty to look about them. The room had been considerably tidied up by Prissy and Mrs. Newkirk since Camilla and Audrey had last seen it. The clutter of papers and bundles and boxes that had been lying about in corners had all been removed to some other quarters, and the fine old ballroom made more livable and sanitary. This had also restored it to some of its former lovely simplicity and beauty of line and decoration, and brought out the rare old furniture in fuller relief. Audrey looked about her and drew in a sigh of sheer joy in the loveliness of the grand old room. Then she got out her sketching pad and began to try getting some of its proportions and decorations on paper. Camilla, released from the spell of Miss Jenifer's uncomprehending gaze, also began staring about the room and presently got up and began tiptoeing about, peering out of the windows and examining the furniture. One piece which seemed to attract her particularly was an odd mahogany table, oblong in shape, with a central leg branching out at the bottom into four separate feet. Under the top of the

table were two long drawers with brass knobs. The grain of the wood was very beautiful.

"What's this?" she pantomimed to Audrey, who only shook her head. And when Camilla came nearer she whispered: "A Duncan Phyfe piece, I think. Just a sort of side table they used to have. It's lovely, though."

Camilla murmured, "I'd like to look in the drawers, but I suppose we shouldn't," to which Audrey emphatically shook her head. A massive bureau, curiously tapering to smaller dimensions at the base, also attracted her, but not daring to explore it, she roamed off to inspect the two doors that were similar to those of the dining room below.

"I want to see whether that door opens on a brick wall too, like the one downstairs," she whispered to Audrey, indicating the door to the right of the fireplace. "Miss Jenifer is asleep. It can't do any harm to try." And before Audrey could frame a remonstrance, she had darted across the room and was turning the

handle. But to the astonishment of them both, *this* door would not open!

Camilla tiptoed back, wide-eyed with suppressed excitement. "What do you make of *that*? It won't budge!" she muttered. But Audrey only signaled, "*Hush!*" and pointed over toward the bed. And Camilla, glancing hastily in that direction, perceived that Miss Jenifer's eyes were wide-open again, rolling about in the same vague fashion. And after that Camilla guiltily subsided into her chair once more.

Though Mrs. Newkirk had assured them that Miss Jenifer usually slept most of the afternoon, she did not close her eyes again on this particular one. Moreover, she exhibited signs of restlessness and discomfort that were exceedingly disconcerting to the two watchers. Her inert body did not stir, it was true, but her head kept rolling from side to side, and her eyes were never still. There seemed nothing they could do to add to her comfort, for they had been warned not to try to administer food, drink, or medicine, nor attempt to move her,

but to wait for Prissy's return.

It seemed an eternal interval till they heard Prissy's knock at the front hall door, and they ran down to admit her, with unalloyed relief. And after that vigil, they felt that they could no longer remain in the house, but went out to sit in the old garden.

"Wasn't it queer about that door?" began Camilla, who had been breathlessly waiting to discuss the matter. "I couldn't make it budge. It certainly must have been locked. But why *should* it be locked when there's nothing behind it but a brick wall?"

"We don't know whether that's so or not," commented Audrey. "It seems entirely likely, but you never can tell. It *might* be a closet, but the way the house is constructed, it doesn't seem possible. Anyhow, I discovered one thing about it that I don't believe you saw. You haven't mentioned it."

"What's that?" demanded Cam. "I was sure I'd taken in everything."

"Well, it caught my eye as I sat there sketching it," admitted Audrey. "The keyhole to that door was at least twice as big as the one on the opposite side of the chimney—and you can make what you like of *that!*"

Mrs. Newkirk was no better when they got home late that afternoon and was still confined to her darkened bedroom. The girls finished a rather lonely meal which had been chiefly spent trying to make Lorry behave himself in the absence of his mother. And a little later it was Camilla's task, in her mother's absence, to see that he betook himself properly to bed. After that, she and Audrey took counsel together as to what was to be done about the night. After what had occurred at Kenwick the night before, and in Wade's absence, they felt it incumbent on themselves to keep some sort of watch on the place. It did not seem fair to Prissy and her helpless charge to leave them at the mercy of some unknown midnight intruder. Yet how they were going to do anything adequate about it unless they were both much

closer to Kenwick than their own house, was a mystery to them.

The weather had cleared and it was a bright, starlight night. Through the trees they could glimpse the faint light of Prissy's lamp, through the windows of the ballroom, but all the rest of the old house was in deep shadow. Whether they could discern, from Audrey's window, the uncertain light in the cellar windows if it came again that night, they could not tell. But at any rate, that seemed the only manifestation they could watch for. So they divided the night into watches of two hours in length, turn about. And as Audrey declared she did not feel in the least sleepy, but would like to sit up and read awhile, she proposed to take the first watch, beginning at ten o'clock.

She read till midnight, every little while snapping out the light and staring out through the darkness at Kenwick. But nothing unusual occurred, and at twelve she woke Camilla, who had been sleeping in her own room. Then, quite wearied out, she lay down on Camilla's bed and almost instantly fell into deep sleep.

She was wakened at some uncalculated time later, by Camilla shaking her gently but urgently and whispering:

"Audrey, Audrey! Wake up—quick! There's someone knocking at our front door—*and I think it's Prissy!*"

CHAPTER XI THE NEWS THAT PRISSY BROUGHT

Without waking Mrs. Newkirk, they slipped into their bathrobes and tiptoed downstairs—their minds a turmoil of horrid, unexpressed fears. Camilla switched on the hall light and Audrey opened the door a crack, whispering: "Who's there?"

"Hit's me—Prissy! Open de do', honey, fo' Ah's got sumpin' to tell Mis' Newkirk. Mis' Jenifer done been comin' to herse'f! Quick!

Ah's gotta see Mis' Newkirk 'n' git her to come ober ef she ain't too sick yit!"

Mrs. Newkirk herself came hurrying down at this point. She had not been asleep, but had heard the subdued commotion in the hall and had risen to see what it was all about. She instantly declared that she would dress and come over with Prissy—that her headache had almost passed off and she directed the girls to dress and accompany her also, in case they could be of use. In five minutes they were all hurrying through the garden and over to Kenwick.

They found Prissy's report entirely true. Something *had* happened during the night—some strange, inexplicable change had been wrought in poor old Miss Jenifer's befogged mind and helpless body. Not wholly, but to a certain extent, had she been restored to normal thought and action, and the result was that a frightened and bewildered Miss Jenifer now lay on the bed, still helpless in a number of ways and utterly in the dark as to how circumstances had come to be as they were.

They found her crying bitterly and struggling with her arms and hands to move herself—struggling futilely, because although some power had been restored to the upper part of her body and she could move her arms and hands and had been given back her consciousness and thought, the lower part of her was still bound in the awful grip of inertia and was as immovable as though fashioned of wood. In addition to that, her speech, though partially restored to her, was thick and incoherent, amounting to little more than a mouthing or mumbling that was inexpressibly painful to listen to, besides being impossible to understand. They thought it was this that was causing the pitiful weeping, because of her helpless inability to express herself—or to understand the entire situation. Mrs. Newkirk at once took command.

"Dear Miss Jenifer," she murmured, kneeling by the bed and taking one of the groping, struggling hands in her own, "if you'll only lie quiet a moment, I'll explain what this queer state of affairs is all about. Can you hear and understand me?" The effect of this was

instantaneous. Miss Jenifer lay still and nodded her head vigorously, mumbling with incoherent sounds in a painful effort to speak.

"Don't try to talk," went on Mrs. Newkirk gently. "That may be difficult for you yet awhile. You have been very ill. It was right after that evening you spent with us that we all enjoyed so much. Do you remember that evening?" Miss Jenifer appeared to grope about in her mind for a time at this question, then presently she nodded another affirmative.

"Well, you must have had a shock or something happen to you that very night, for Audrey found you next day lying in a faint near the cellar stairs. Do you remember, Miss Jenifer, what happened to you that night? Did something frighten you or did you feel faint and just fall?" Miss Jenifer looked absolutely blank at that question, appeared to ponder it for a long time, and finally shook her head in a hopeless negative. And at once the big tears began to roll down her cheeks, perhaps in sheer despair at her bafflement. Mrs. Newkirk wiped them gently away.

"Don't worry about that now, dear Miss Jenifer. It will all come back to you after a while. I'll just go on and tell you what happened after that. Of course we got you right to bed and sent for the doctor. You were very ill for over a week and lay here without being able to move or speak and did not know anyone. Prissy came to nurse you and we all watched over you very anxiously. The doctor said he thought you might become conscious at any time, and we were all waiting for that. He'll be here to see you in the morning and I know he'll be delighted. Gradually you'll get better and be about like yourself. And meantime you must let us watch over you and help you back to health. Don't worry about not being able to move much or talk plainly just now. That will right itself in time. It all came from the shock—whatever that was. Do you understand all that I say?"

Miss Jenifer nodded again, and then she did a very touching thing; she raised Mrs. Newkirk's hand to her lips and kissed it, denoting, in that one expressive action, all the appreciation and gratitude that she must have

felt but was unable to utter.

"Now you must try to go to sleep. It is very important that you get a great deal of rest. And I will give you some medicine the doctor left for you." Mrs. Newkirk turned to a side table and mixed a sleeping potion that the doctor had provided for just such an emergency as this, and administered it to Miss Jenifer. Then she beckoned to the girls to follow her, told Prissy she would stay downstairs till the sleeping powder had taken effect, and the three tiptoed from the room.

They huddled in one of the front rooms and Mrs. Newkirk lit a candle that she had carried over with her in case of emergency. And there they discussed in awed whispers the change that had come to Miss Jenifer.

"I thought it best not to send for the doctor to-night," said Mrs. Newkirk. "It would only have upset her more. She'll be quieter in the morning and things will have straightened themselves out more in her mind. It must be horrible to her to realize at last how helpless

she is. I wish she could have come out of it entirely or at least have been able to speak clearly, but I suppose we ought to be thankful she's even as much improved as this."

"But how strange that she can't remember anything about that night," marveled Camilla. "I can't understand how she can seem as normal in her mind as she does, and yet not remember a thing as important as that!"

"Some part of her mind must be still shut off, so to speak," explained Mrs. Newkirk. "I don't pretend to understand it myself. I'm anxious to have the doctor's opinion. It's a very strange case and I'm sure I don't know what the future is going to be for her if she has to lie there all the time like that. It's dreadful to think of. She'll feel it so keenly. Well, we mustn't worry about that just now."

Presently Prissy crept downstairs to say that Miss Jenifer had at last sunk into a deep, restful sleep. And Mrs. Newkirk declared that there would be no further need for them to stay around, as she would probably sleep soundly

for a number of hours. But before they left, Mrs. Newkirk asked Prissy when she had first noticed the change. The old colored woman explained that she had had great difficulty in getting Miss Jenifer settled for the night, for even before the change she seemed restless and uncomfortable, though she could only show it by constantly rolling her head about. At last, however, she had appeared to be asleep, and Prissy lay down in her own bed and dropped off, leaving the light burning, as usual. Suddenly she was awakened by what she declared seemed like the sound of a door shutting somewhere—it sounded near enough to have been in the very room. She sprang up and stared about the room, but she could see nothing unusual till she glanced toward Miss Jenifer's bed, and then she saw that a great change had come to her patient, who was sobbing and struggling about. She had wasted not a moment after that but had come hobbling over to the Newkirk house for help. And that was all she knew about it.

When they had reached their own house, Mrs. Newkirk turned out the hall light and sent

them all back to bed. "It's almost five o'clock," she said, "but you might as well get what sleep you can before breakfast. It's a queer thing about Miss Jenifer's stroke passing off in this way. But I'm certain there was nothing to that business about a door closing. Prissy just imagined that. Probably Miss Jenifer herself woke her up with her struggling and crying."

The two girls said nothing to this till they got to Audrey's room. Then Camilla demanded in an awed whisper:

"What do *you* think?"

"Oh, I don't *know*!" shuddered Audrey.

In spite of all the excitement, however, the two girls slept soundly, the deep sleep of sheer exhaustion after their night of vigil and its unexpected sequel. And Mrs. Newkirk had to wake them both at nine o'clock that morning. It was over their belated breakfast that Audrey suggested something to Mrs. Newkirk that had

been on her mind for some time.

"I have been thinking," she said, "that it is not fair, Mrs. Newkirk, that you should have to bear all the brunt of this illness of Miss Jenifer. I know that you're fond of her as a neighbor and friend, but it should be her relatives, if she has any, who should have the responsibility of the expense and so on. You told me she hadn't any, as far as you knew, but I happened to think that Father is some distant cousin—I guess it's very distant!—but anyhow probably the only one left. So I'm going to write him all about this affair and ask him what ought to be done. I'm sure he won't want you burdened with any expense about her illness and will want to do something to relieve you of all the extra trouble—perhaps have a trained nurse come, or something like that. What do you think of it?"

Mrs. Newkirk thought it over gravely and then said: "I certainly appreciate this thoughtfulness in you very much, Audrey. Of course it's no secret that our circumstances have never been too affluent since Mr.

Newkirk's death, and I should feel this additional expense quite a bit, though I should be only too happy to do it for poor Miss Jenifer, if necessary. Write your father if you like, but there is one thing that I think it would not be well to make any change in at present. Miss Jenifer is used to Prissy and Prissy's being about the house. But she would greatly resent a stranger, such as a nurse, being admitted to the house and it might retard her progress quite a bit. Let us leave things as they are for the present, with only Prissy in care of her, and I will be very glad to remain in supervision of it all, as I am now. Perhaps the greatest help would be to have someone in to give Mandy a lift with the extra meals every day. She's beginning to get a bit restive with all that extra work, I'll have to confess. That is the only thing that has bothered me. But don't let your father think it necessary to have a trained nurse, unless the doctor should advise it. I'm most anxious to see him this morning. I telephoned him early about Miss Jenifer's change and he'll be over at ten-thirty. Prissy came in at seven to say that she was still quietly sleeping."

The day passed very quietly. The doctor saw Miss Jenifer when she awoke, calmer but still bewildered and unable quite to comprehend what had happened. Later he had a long consultation with Mrs. Newkirk. It was his opinion that Miss Jenifer, apart from that memory of what had happened the night she was taken ill, was entirely conscious and normal in the working of her brain. She was still dazed and bewildered, as was natural, but this would right itself in time. And later, that shut-away memory of the night of her seizure might even return to her. As to whether she would ever regain the entire use of her body or her normal speech, he was not so certain. He gave it as his opinion that the paralysis seemed to have come from some sort of shock rather than the usual blood clot in the brain that caused such conditions. And in this case there was the possibility that great improvement might be made. He prescribed absolute rest and freedom from all excitement and no change in environment if possible.

One other thing he said caused Mrs. Newkirk not a little surprise and filled the

girls with secret alarm. He declared that in cases like Miss Jenifer's, a radical change for the better, such as she had had, was almost invariably caused by some further shock, and he spent much time in speculating what it could have been in her case, if any. And when Mrs. Newkirk asked how she could have been shocked when she was practically as unconscious as a baby of all that went on around her, he replied:

"You never can tell how unconscious they are. Though normal consciousness seems lacking, their subconscious minds may be as alert as ever and taking note of all that goes on around. Do you know of anything unusual that could have happened that night?" Mrs. Newkirk repeated what Prissy had said about waking to hear what she thought was a door closing, but added that it was probably a groundless bit of imagination. The doctor also thought such a circumstance entirely unlikely and gave up the speculation. But when Mrs. Newkirk had repeated what he had said to the girls, they were petrified with renewed suspicions. However, they did not want to

alarm her until at least they had talked it over with Wade, and they began to count the hours till his arrival. What if he should not come? What if some unforeseen combination of events should keep him away another night? How could they endure another night of uncertainty and dread?

Audrey could not concentrate her mind on her work and gave up trying for the day, devoting the hours to writing a long letter explaining the affair to her father. Camilla spent the day in giving Mandy what assistance she could, while her mother was over at Kenwick trying to help in getting Miss Jenifer quieted and adjusted to the new state of affairs. Mrs. Newkirk reported, when she came home in the late afternoon, that Miss Jenifer seemed much quieter and more resigned. They had resorted to a new mode of communication, since speech on Miss Jenifer's part was so difficult and so impossible to understand. Mrs. Newkirk would talk as usual, but she had provided Miss Jenifer with a pencil and pad of paper, and slowly—for her fingers were still very unmanageable—the old

lady found it possible to write her replies or enough of them to be understandable.

"It is a great relief, that," said Mrs. Newkirk, "but it won't work in Prissy's case, as the poor old soul never could do more than write her own name and can't even read print. Yet, fortunately enough, she seems to understand Miss Jenifer's speech when I can't make a thing of it. Intuition, I reckon! Anyway, we're going to get along quite well for the present. I told Miss Jenifer that you girls had been so worried about her and so good about sitting with her yesterday. In answer, she scrawled something on the pad that looked like 'sweet,' and I think she meant it was very sweet of you."

"Have you told her yet that I am working on the interior of the house?" asked Audrey anxiously, and Mrs. Newkirk said she had not thought it wise to disturb the old lady with any such information as yet. That would all come later and no doubt very naturally.

They sat down to dinner that night and still

Wade had not appeared. Mrs. Newkirk, suspecting nothing, was tired but more serene in mind. But the girls were frantic with suppressed anxiety and could eat almost nothing. If Wade did not come, they did not dare to think what the ensuing night might result in!

And then at last, just as dessert was being served, they heard the welcome rattle of his old Ford in the driveway, and, much to Mrs. Newkirk's amazement and alarm, Wade himself came limping in. The girls tried to assume a surprise they did not feel, and in the excitement no one would have suspected that they were making a pretty poor pretense. Wade explained his return to his mother, and laughed at her alarm over the condition of his knee by eating a tremendous meal.

"I'm going to have a grand holiday!" he chortled over his third wedge of pie. "And now, what's the news here after my prolonged absence?"

And during the recital by Mrs. Newkirk of

their unexpectedly eventful night, the girls wondered how much more he suspected, under the interested but calm exterior he had assumed.

CHAPTER XII WADE'S VIGIL

They held another solemn council of war that night—the three of them—out in the garden after Mrs. Newkirk had retired, for she was wearied with the day's happenings and had gone to bed early. The girls told Wade what they had discovered the day before in examining the curious false doors, and especially about the keyhole of the one in the ballroom, and of that door's being locked when neither of the others was. And they also discussed the possibility of Prissy's having actually heard anything when she woke to find Miss Jenifer had had the remarkable change.

"It's certainly possible," declared Wade. "After what we heard and saw the night before, it's highly possible. You can't tell—that *may* have been what caused Miss Jenifer another shock, as the doctor said—whatever the thing could have been. *Something's* going on in that house—there isn't a doubt about it. And the place will have to be watched constantly. There oughtn't to be an hour of the day or night when one of us that knows about this isn't on the job. I hate to spill the beans to Mother yet, for she's tired and nervous enough as it is, and she'd be all upset about the thing and want the town authorities let in on it and all that, and it would spoil the whole party.

"Of course, I didn't know about this new development, but all the way home I was trying to dope out some scheme by which we could do just that—keep a constant watch on the house for a while, and I think I hit on something that will work, at least for the present. It's this: I'm going to sleep over there at Kenwick for a while, nights. You needn't say anything about it to Mother—at least not just yet. But as soon as the coast is clear, I'll

take a couple of blankets and a pillow over, let myself into the old kitchen wing with that key we have, and fix up a place to sleep on one of the deep window seats or a couple of chairs. As a matter of fact, I probably won't sleep much at that, for I plan to be awake and listening or prowling around most of the time. I can do my sleeping in the daytime, at home here, when you girls are over there keeping up the good work. I'll take my gun with me for safety's sake."

"Will you let Prissy know you're there?" demanded Camilla.

"I don't know—not right at first, anyway," said Wade. "It might frighten her and make her more uneasy than is necessary. But if anything unusual turns up and she's alarmed at it, then I'll tell her what I'm doing. In that case it might be a help to her to know someone's around."

It seemed a good solution to the girls. They were wearied with having slept so little for the past two nights and having been so upset and worried all during the day. Leaving Wade

to carry out his scheme, they retired to their own rooms and with freer minds gave themselves up to a long and restful and unbroken eight hours of sleep. Next morning Wade reported that the night had been absolutely uneventful. He said that when he got over to Kenwick and had let himself into the kitchen wing, he had first made a thorough and systematic search of the kitchen and cellar portion with his electric torch. In the cellar, he had hunted particularly for any trace of an exit where the intruder of two nights before could have escaped, and had found absolutely none. There was no faintest sign of a door or exit, other than they knew, in all the brick walls and flooring of that rambling old cellar.

One thing alone had struck him as curious and significant. The lantern they had found on that first night, still warm from having been used, had completely disappeared. He had planned to use it himself in the kitchen as a dim night-light and save his torch from running down its batteries. But when he came to look for it where they had found it standing, it was no longer there. Nor was there any trace of it

throughout the cellar.

"I thought perhaps you girls might have come down while I was away and got it," he ended, "and so I didn't give it so much consideration last night. But if you haven't, I call it darned queer! Shows *somebody* must have been around, night before last, and perhaps Prissy wasn't so far wrong after all. However, nothing at all happened last night. I read and napped a bit and prowled around and listened for sounds from upstairs, but all was serene. Now I'm going to sleep all morning out in the couch-hammock to make up for lost time. Don't wake me till lunch-time."

Prissy came over early for a hot cup of coffee in the kitchen with Mandy and reported a quiet and restful night for both her charge and herself. She said Miss Jenifer seemed more like herself that morning than at any time since her seizure, had indicated that she wanted her pad and pencil, and was now engaged in trying to write something for "Mis' Newkirk." That lady herself declared that she would go over to Kenwick shortly after

breakfast, taking Camilla to run any errands that might be necessary, and Audrey prepared to go over to the office wing and commence work on the interior of one of the front rooms of her model. And so began what promised to be a peaceful and uneventful day.

At the lunch table that noon, Mrs. Newkirk remarked: "Something seems to be bothering Miss Jenifer a lot. I left Cam downstairs when I went over this morning, to dust the front rooms and the rear dining room, too, and sort of clear up and make the place look presentable. That part of the house has been sort of neglected since Miss Jenifer was taken ill. And some of the town people might call if they heard she had been sick. Though I warned the doctor and Prissy and Mandy not to say anything about it at present. From what the grocer was saying to me yesterday, they think Miss Jenifer has just taken Prissy back again to help her. It's fortunate we're such a way out of town and distant from gossip, for we can't be bothered with callers just at present.

"But, as I started to say, Miss Jenifer seems to be worrying about something. When I got there this morning, she had been trying to write something on her pad, but all I could make out was the word, '*Keys*' and a question mark after it. I asked her what keys, and she held up her closed fist and pointed at it. Then it dawned on me that she was trying to say something about those big old brass keys she always used to carry around. So I asked her what about them and she took the pencil again and spent a long time trying to write something else. Her poor old half-paralyzed fingers are very unmanageable yet and she could not seem to get any further than one word which I took to be, '*Where*.'

"I then asked her if she meant 'Where are they?' and she nodded yes, but I had to tell her that I didn't in the least know. She looked so disturbed at that, that I offered to try to hunt them up for her. But she only shook her head and mumbled something that was obviously, 'No, no, no!' and seemed so distressed that I had to quiet her down as best I could. Then I told her she had had them with her that evening

she spent with us, and took them away with her when she went. Since then no one had seen them, and I asked her if she couldn't remember what she had done with them before she fainted on the cellar steps. At that she became completely upset and began to cry. I knew that it would not do for her to get worked up like that, so I had to give her some more sleeping medicine, and she dropped off later and has been sleeping the rest of the morning. I can't imagine where those keys could have got to. Certainly they were nowhere near her when we found her next morning, and Prissy says she hasn't come across them since she's been about the house. I had always supposed they must be the keys to the front and back doors of the house, but they can't be. I found the front door key in the lock, as usual, and discovered that there's no lock except a bolt to the back one leading to the garden. What keys they are, then, I can't imagine, but I wish they could be found, or poor Miss Jenifer is going to fret herself to death over them."

The three conspirators glanced at one another guiltily, for they felt that perhaps they

knew or guessed more about those keys than it was comfortable for Mrs. Newkirk to know at present, but they went on eating without comment on the occurrence. Presently Mrs. Newkirk had a request to present.

"I wonder if you three would oblige me by taking a turn at sitting with Miss Jenifer this afternoon? Prissy wants to go and see a niece of hers in town who has just been taken very ill. And I promised long ago to attend, without fail, a bridge party that Mrs. Havens is giving in town. It's not because I'm so crazy to go to it, but I'm afraid people will begin to wonder about it if I give up all social engagements and then I'll have to explain about Miss Jenifer, and I don't want to do that just yet. So if you three could just spell each other by taking turns sitting with her for those two hours, it will help both Prissy and myself a lot. I don't think you'll be likely to strike any insurmountable complication in that time."

It was quite to everyone's surprise that Wade volunteered to take the entire time, if the girls would be around downstairs or on call in case

something came up with which he could not cope.

"I haven't seen the old girl since her partial recovery," he explained, "and it might divert her a bit if I came over and ran off a lot of nonsense to amuse her. She always used to fall for it. And then, too, perhaps I can help her straighten out about those keys. She used to confide some of her troubles to me, and perhaps she'd be willing to explain more about them and I could hunt them up for her. But you girls stick around in the garden, or some place near, so I can call you if it's necessary."

So it was agreed, and Mrs. Newkirk betook herself to her card party, first escorting Wade over to his post beside Miss Jenifer before she left. Audrey went back to her work in the office, promising to come upstairs if Wade should signal, and Camilla assumed her post in the garden with a book, well within sight and call of the ballroom windows. The afternoon passed somnolently by. Toward four, Audrey drifted out to sit with Camilla, her work over for the day, and still there was no

call or signal from Wade. At last Prissy came hobbling back from town, entered at the back garden door, and vanished upstairs. And not long after, Wade himself came out, beckoned the girls across to their own garden, and said: "I can't talk around here. Let's take the canoe and go out on the river awhile. You and I'll paddle, Cam, and Audrey can sit in the middle and take it easy. I've got something to tell you."

Full of suppressed excitement, they embarked, Audrey snuggling down in the center, her back braced, a broad hat shading her eyes from the glare of the sun. They had paddled themselves into the shady reaches of the river, far beyond the town, before Wade shipped his paddle, after beaching the canoe under the spreading green of an overhanging tree.

"Might as well rest here awhile," he said, "and have a little talk-fest. We had quite an interesting time this afternoon, the old girl and myself! I wouldn't let her talk at all for a while, just ran off a lot of nonsense, told her why I was back home again (at least the

official reason!), and kept her thinking over everything else but herself as long as I could. And I'm beginning to think I must be *some* little spell-binder, for before I knew it, the old lady was actually chuckling at some of my foolishness. And after that, I quieted down and told her how glad I was to see her so much better and more like herself. That sort of sobered her down, as I guessed it would, and she began to think of her troubles again. But before she had time to think much, I came right out and told her Mother had spoken of how worried she was about her keys and that none of you could seem to think where they were. And I said I'd be so glad to help her about finding them if she could give me the least hint where it was possible they could be.

"She lay there very quietly for a while, evidently thinking it over. And then she reached for her pad and pencil that were right beside her and made a great to-do about writing one single word.

"And that word was '*Table*'! I didn't in the least know what she meant, or what table she

was talking about. I looked all around the room, but outside of a little spindle-legged thing she had at one side of the bed for medicines and things, there was only one other table in the room, and it was the queer, single-legged one standing over near what you said was that false door at the right of the fireplace. So I asked her which table she meant, and she pointed at that one.

"Then began the oddest performance trying to make out what she wanted with it or what I was to do about it. It made me think of that game we used to play as small kids—'Find the Thimble'—guessing what you're to do or where the thimble is by being told you're hot or cold, or something like that! Miss Jenifer was evidently too excited to take time to write directions—every word takes her five or ten minutes to form. So it developed into my doing stunts with the table and her pointing or nodding her head or shaking it, till I found out what was expected of me.

"First I walked over and touched one of the table drawers—there are two, you know—and

asked her whether she wanted me to open it. She shook her head—violently—and mumbled what I supposed was, 'No, no, *no!*' So I dropped that. Then she motioned with her hand toward the bed and I left the table and walked over to her. But that didn't appear to be right, either. She pointed at the table again, so I rambled back to it, beginning to feel just a bit foolish! Then she beckoned toward the bed again, and at last it dawned on me that she wanted the table moved over to the bed. I pushed it across the room and located it at the right-hand side of her bed. That seemed to suit her exactly and she smiled.

"I expected that next she'd open the table drawers herself and look inside, probably for the keys, but she did nothing of the sort. Instead, she spent a long time trying to write something on her pad. And when she handed it to me, I was astounded to see that she had scrawled on it, '*Go out!*' And I suddenly realized that she wanted to examine that table without being watched; so I just nodded and smiled and made for the door. But before I left the room, I said to her, 'I'll be right outside in

the hall, Miss Jenifer, so when you want me, just ring that little hand-bell on your medicine table.' Then I went out and closed the door.

"I had placed the table close to her bed and within easy reach of her right hand, but I somehow doubted whether she was going to be able to pull the drawers out or not. I had noticed when I moved it over that they were either locked or stuck in very tightly. And if they were locked, where was the key to them? I waited outside a long time, walking up and down, and finally I heard the little bell tinkle. And when I came into the room, I found the poor old girl lying back on her pillow, and big tears rolling down her cheeks. The table seemed unchanged.

"I tried to get her to tell me what was the matter, but she seemed too upset to explain. Finally I said, 'Did you get the drawers open?' She shook her head from side to side and then pointed at me and afterward at the table. 'Do you want me to try?' I asked, and she nodded. I reckon the poor thing must have been rather desperate to have come to that! Anyhow, I

moved the table away from the bed a bit and tried to pull out the drawers. They wouldn't budge. I asked her if they were locked and she shook her head and pointed to some spot on the table. I couldn't make head or tail of what she meant, so finally I shoved the table back close to the bed and asked her if she could show me. She placed her finger on a tiny brass nail-head way up in a corner of the top drawer and made the motion of pushing on it. Then the whole thing dawned on me. It must be some secret spring, and the drawers weren't worked by an ordinary lock at all!

"Well, I pushed, as hard as I could (and that was where she had failed, I suppose), and suddenly I was astonished to see the whole top of the table loosen on one side, and I pulled the top up like a lid. The drawers were only a fake. You opened it by pressing the spring and raising the lid.

"And, say! I'll give you three guesses as to what was inside that table—but I don't think you'd strike it in a hundred and three!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE DUNCAN PHYFE TABLE

"*The keys!*" shouted Camilla instantly. But Wade only grinned and said, "Guess again, kid!" They both guessed wildly after that—they suggested everything from jewels and money to weapons, letters, documents, family plate, and portraits.

"You're all miles wrong," laughed Wade, at length, "and it's useless to go on in that line, for it's probably something you never even heard of. I hardly knew what it was myself when I first looked in it, for it was what appeared to be a set of quite large glass goblets—there must have been about eighteen or twenty of them. But instead of having a stem and foot, as most goblets do, the bottom of each was just a mere peg of glass that was placed down in a small round hole to hold it steady. Each glass was partially filled with

water and had a note of written music engraved on it and one of the letters of the musical scale.

"I was utterly dumbfounded when I looked at it—and then suddenly it dawned on me what the thing was. I'd seen a set something like those glasses once in a show. They are called 'musical glasses,' and a man played tunes and things on them by dipping his fingers in the water and running them lightly round the edges of the glasses. Each glass gives a different note. It sounded mighty pretty, too—a thin, sweet, wild sort of music. Does that convey anything to your minds?"

It apparently did, for Audrey cried out: "Oh, the music we heard that night, of course! How perfectly fascinating! That accounts for our ghostly tunes, so at least we've *one* thing to be thankful for. We've solved one of the riddles. I suppose it's Miss Jenifer who plays on it."

"Oh, undoubtedly," agreed Wade. "She confided to me once that she adored music and would have loved to own a piano or a violin,

but that she couldn't afford to. I never knew she had this thing, though. I wonder where she ever got it? Or how she came to learn to play on it? I've understood it takes quite a little skill. Yes, we seem to have unraveled one mystery, but I haven't told you about how she acted after I opened the table top. She tried to raise herself to look inside, but couldn't, and then she tried to grope around among the glasses with her hand. I was afraid she'd knock some of them off and break them that way, so I asked her if she was looking for the keys in there and she nodded violently.

"I said they didn't seem to be there and was I to take out the glasses and lift the board with the holes in, to see whether they could be under that? She shook her head then and began to cry sort of pitifully. I asked her if she had thought they were in that table and if that was the place she usually kept them and she nodded yes. I asked her if she always put them there, or if there was some other place where she might have hidden them that night she was taken ill. And again she shook her head. Before I had time to say any more, we heard

Prissy coming in downstairs and Miss Jenifer motioned me to close up the table. I did so and got it back to its usual place just before Prissy came in. Then I left. I leave you to figure out what to make of it all!"

"Well," said Audrey, "while we've been talking, I've been doing a little thinking and trying to figure out a few things after the most approved Sherlock Holmes methods! We know now that Miss Jenifer was accustomed to hide those keys, when she wasn't carrying them around, in the musical-glasses table. Now don't you think that she either put them there that night and someone got in and took them, or else she didn't have time to put them there and they were taken from her when she first got in the house? Possibly she heard someone or something down in the kitchen wing—perhaps there was a knock at that garden door and she went to it with the keys in her hand, and someone snatched them from her and ran off and then she fainted. And since she doesn't remember what happened that night, she still thinks she put the keys in the usual place. How's that theory? Does it hold water?"

"It's as good as any," Wade acknowledged. "Only I discount the possibility that she had time to put them away first in the table and then come downstairs again. The very fact that she was still dressed in her dinner regalia when we found her next day shows it wasn't likely that she'd had time to get upstairs before it all happened. Here's a queer thing, though— if anyone took those keys, it couldn't have been robbery that was planned, otherwise they'd have taken her jewelry too. It must have been someone who wanted those keys for a particular reason and had no interest in her other valuables. Here are two questions I'd give a lot to know the answers to: what was that reason, and what do those keys unlock? Don't suppose either of you can oblige me with the proper solutions?" He had asked the latter question in jest, but Audrey answered him quite seriously:

"You know what I told you about my discovery of the locks of those two doors beside the mantel in the ballroom—that the one going into the hall has a much smaller one than that of the false door the other side of the

fireplace. Isn't that rather important? Both those keyholes are surrounded by a sort of fancy metal design, the same as all the keyholes throughout the main part of the house. But I noticed that the keyhole itself to the false door was about twice as long up and down as the other one. And another thing—I noticed that the keyholes to the two other false doors, in the hall and dining room, were just plainly fakes—you could see the wood of the door through them. But the one to the door in the ballroom had the deep hole behind it that shows it is really in use—a lock back of it. I feel perfectly certain that one of those keys fitted that door."

"Dog-goned if I don't think you're right!" muttered Wade, jabbing at the weeds on the bank with his paddle. "You sure are an observant person, Audrey—I give you credit for it."

"Oh, that's just what I'm trained to be in my work," she deprecated. "It's no special credit to me. You've got to account for every little variation when you're making an accurate

model."

"Wade," burst in Camilla suddenly, "you told us a while ago that Miss Jenifer had confided in you a lot and told you things she hadn't told anyone else. You wouldn't tell us what they were at the time. But don't you think after all that's happened, and when we're trying so hard to unravel this thing, that you might let us in on it now? Some of it might help a lot if we knew. And I'm not asking just out of idle curiosity, either!"

Wade appeared to consider the point.

"I don't think it would be of any special help," he said at last—"what she's told me. It's all rather pathetic and mainly about that love affair she had many years ago when she was hardly more than nineteen or twenty. It's not so very different, in general lines, from what you already know, only more accurate in detail. Her sweetheart was a seafaring man—not really a sea captain with his own vessel, as the story goes, but only a young first mate whose prospects were not too good, and her

family didn't approve of him for her. She had a father and older sister alive at that time and they wanted her to marry into another of the old Maryland families and keep up the family tradition. But her heart was given unalterably to this young fellow, and if she couldn't have him she wasn't going to have anybody.

"Finally she said good-bye to him at one of those windows in the ballroom and he went away on that last voyage, promising to come back in a year or two, and then perhaps the family's attitude toward their affair would have changed. But year after year passed and he didn't come back, and she learned from the captain of his ship later that he had left the ship on that first voyage at some French Mediterranean port and had not been seen since. He never wrote, either, and so for a while she thought he must be dead. But she somehow couldn't convince herself that he was dead and always felt he might sometime return to her.

"Her father and sister both died, after a number of years, and left her alone. She never

married, because she always hoped he would return and she kept watching for him. So far the story is all clear. But something happened about ten or fifteen years ago, evidently, that threw a new light on the subject for her. She would never tell me what it was, but has hinted that at that time she learned definitely that her lover was dead. I don't know how she knew—whether by news from abroad, or hearing it from someone who knew him, or what. But I gathered that somehow that did not end matters for her. In fact it seemed to involve her with something else that was all mixed up with some family secret or mystery connected with this house. She either couldn't or wouldn't explain all that, and of course I never asked her to. But it seemed to date the beginning of her acting so oddly and peculiarly about this place.

"The only remark she made about it that was at all enlightening was that there was a sacred and secret trust in her family and that she was guarding it throughout her life. And as she had no direct heirs, when she died the secret would die with her, or something like that.

That's all she told me that could have any direct bearing on this situation. I wouldn't have told it under ordinary circumstances, as I think she wished me not to, though she didn't exact any promise. But since things have happened as they have, it may help us all a bit to know what little facts there are."

They considered his revelations in silence for a few moments. "It's queer," said Audrey at length, "but I always seem to be putting two and two together, as they say. I guess I've missed my vocation and was born to be a detective instead! Anyway, I instantly connected what you've just said with that historical secret she once hinted at to me. Do you think I'm right?"

"By the great horn spoon!" cried Wade, leaping around in his seat and almost upsetting the canoe. "You've struck it again, Audrey. You're right about your vocation—you've certainly missed it! Why don't you apply at once to Pinkerton's or Scotland Yard? They need you, my girl! Seriously, though, I believe you have hit the right trail this time. Though

what some past historical mix-up could have to do with any present-day affair, I can't fathom. But the thing has gone too far for us to be squeamish any longer about snooping into Miss Jenifer's affairs. I wonder how we could get any dope on what historical affairs have gone on in this house in the past. With the old lady in the state she's in, and something sinister threatening her while she's so helpless, I believe it's time to move heaven and earth to get matters run down—and I'm going to do it!"

"Well, you'd better begin by moving this canoe in the direction of home," warned Camilla practically. "It's six o'clock and Mother will be calling out the reserves to search for us if we don't show up right soon."

They took up their paddles and began the homeward journey.

"There's one thing I'm going to prophesy," remarked Wade, apropos of nothing special, after they had paddled quite a while, "and that is just this: unless I'm 'way off the track,

something pretty definite is going to happen to settle this whole affair, and that right soon!"

CHAPTER XIV

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE OFFICE WING

It seemed next morning as if Wade's prophecy had not fallen very far short of the mark. There had been another quiet and uneventful night. Wade had again spent it over at Kenwick, and reported to the girls next morning that absolutely nothing unusual had happened so far as he was aware, and he had been awake and about the place practically all of the time. He was tired and drowsy after breakfast, and gladly turned his vigil over to the girls, and rambled off to the couch-hammock in the garden.

It was shortly after the two girls had gone

over to Kenwick as usual, Audrey to work and Camilla to sit with her, that they came flying back, wild-eyed and breathless, to rouse him by shaking him from his nap and whispering fiercely:

"Come over to the office wing this minute —*something has happened there!*" He stared at them dazedly and demanded, "What's up?" But they would not explain, saying he could see better for himself. So he shook off his lethargy, struggled to his feet, and accompanied them. And when he saw what they had to show him, his manner became suddenly alert, and he pursed his lips in a prolonged, low whistle.

"Well, I'll say something has happened!" he ejaculated, surveying the ruins of Audrey's precious model, that had been somehow pushed off its table and lay sidewise on the brick floor, cracked and fallen apart and apparently all but a complete ruin. "How do you account for this?"

"We don't account for it," murmured Audrey,

tears of disappointment in her eyes, as she stooped to pick up some of the remnants of her weeks of painstaking toil. "I locked the outer door as usual yesterday afternoon before we went out on the river. I haven't been here since till now. I can't imagine how anyone could have got in."

"Well, I can!" exclaimed Camilla, who had been roaming distractedly about the room. "Look here!" She pointed at one of the windows off to one side, and about which, on the outside, a thick high old box bush grew close, completely screening the lower half from the road. One of the small panes of glass had been broken near the upper part of the sash, close to where the safety catch was located. It took no great amount of conjecture to realize that a hand inserted through that broken pane could unfasten the catch. After that, entrance was easy. The window in its lower half was so screened by the high box bush that the broken pane could not be seen from the outside.

"Oh, if I'd only closed and locked the

wooden shutters inside, this couldn't have happened!" groaned Audrey. "But I never thought of it. Why *should* anyone want to get in and throw my model off the table?"

Why, indeed? They couldn't imagine. But Wade offered it as his theory that the model's destruction was not what the intruder was really after, probably. It had either been an accident, or had been in the way and been brushed off its table in haste and without thought of its value.

"Let's see if anything else in the place has been disturbed," he suggested. "Surely no one would have got in here just to smash your model, Audrey." They followed him out into the passageway and looked about. And in an instant something had caught the eye of every one of them. The door to the other room on that floor, which had always been locked since Audrey had first come to work there, was no longer so. It was standing open just an inch or two, and on examining it Wade found traces on the woodwork which clearly indicated that it had been forced open with some instrument—

possibly a chisel. The lock was sprung and so damaged that it would not work, even if a key were found for it. Wade pushed open the door and the two girls peered over his shoulder into the darkened room.

From what they could make out in the light that came from the doorway, it was a room used as a storage place for old and unwanted furniture. Ranged about the walls were partially decrepit wooden bed-heads and footboards, rolled-up feather mattresses tied in bundles, washstands and bureaus of no particular make or value, chairs minus one leg or a couple of rungs, and piles of ancient, moth-eaten blankets and patchwork quilts. One could see at a glance that Miss Jenifer had doubtless stored there all the useless and cast-off furniture of many years, and had shut and locked the door on it for no special reason except to keep it out of sight.

But what had once been an orderly room, as she had doubtless left it, was now turned helter-skelter—bureau-drawers ripped open and left that way, old mattresses slashed and

spilling feathers all about, piles of blankets tossed hither and yon, in what must have been some breathless, savage, and ruthless search. And whether the object of that search had been attained, they could only guess. But Wade's guess was that it had not.

"Let's look upstairs," he commanded, and they all streaked up the winding stairs after him. These rooms also exhibited signs of having been ransacked—the drawers of tables and one old bureau standing open and closet doors left ajar. They returned to the main floor and entered the office to stand looking disconsolately at Audrey's broken model.

"Is it hopelessly done for?" Wade asked gently, for it was evident that Audrey was sorely upset over this mishap.

"No, fortunately, quite a little of it has only to be set back in place, and of course I can duplicate what's hopelessly smashed. But it will take me a couple of weeks at least to repair the damage. I can't understand how anyone could have been so ruthless as to do

such a thing!" she declared.

"I think this much was an accident," Wade still insisted. "And I've been trying to figure out when it all could have happened. I'm certain it couldn't have been last night, because I was in the other wing or prowling around the grounds all night long. This thing tumbling down would have made a racket that I couldn't help but hear. Do you know what I've figured it out?—that whoever did it has been desperate to get in here when no one was around—ourselves, I mean. Prissy wouldn't count, as she's upstairs and away from it more. But some one of us has been around the whole time lately, day and night. But yesterday afternoon, you remember, we did all go off for an hour or so on the river and well out of sight. That left the coast clear, and I'm just about certain that was when it happened. They crawled around that old box bush, broke the pane, climbed in the window, and began the search. Then when we came back—perhaps sooner than they expected—they were frantic not to get caught in that part of the house, rushed back through the office, and in passing

probably caught on the model or knocked it over unintentionally, and jumped through the window to hide behind that box bush.

Probably they were there when we went by through our garden. Gosh! I wish we hadn't gone off at all—then this wouldn't have happened. But I didn't dream of anything going on here for just that hour—in broad daylight."

"Look here!" exclaimed Camilla. "You say some one of us has been here every hour of the day and night—except just that time we all went off yesterday. That isn't strictly so, because we're all always home together at meals. We have to be or Mother would suspect something peculiar was going on. I think it more likely that it happened last night while we were at dinner. You remember it got sort of cloudy and dark, and a thunderstorm came up later. Wouldn't that have been a more likely time for it to happen?"

"True enough," agreed her brother, "we have left mealtime rather unguarded there. But perhaps you've noticed that for the last two nights I've cut my dinner short, omitted the

salad and taken my dessert out to eat sitting in the couch-hammock in the garden. I can get a good view of the office wing from there, and it would be a pretty silly person who would try to break in at that time, with me sitting there taking it all in. No, I still think it was yesterday afternoon while we were away. Anyone watching the place would realize that was an ideal time. Only we got back sooner than they expected.

"But however that may be, this last piece of business has gone a bit too far. Before this, though we'd seen some sort of queer doings, it was all more guesswork than anything else. Now we have positive proof that some kind of vandalism is going on, and I'm afraid it's time something more strenuous was done about it. Reckon we'll have to get the town authorities in on this, though I hate like sin to do it. Means all kinds of publicity that's going to be most unpleasant."

He wrestled silently with the problem for a few moments, standing by the broken window pane and staring at it, while Audrey and

Camilla set about the task of piecing together as much as was possible of the damaged model. There were some broken splinters of glass on the floor near the window, and presently he turned his gaze to them. Suddenly the girls heard him utter a surprised whistle and stoop down to pick something up from the floor.

"Hullo! Look at this!" he called to them, holding out a small object as they came rushing over. "Doesn't belong to either of you, does it?" The object was a small oval medallion, not more than three quarters of an inch in length. The front of it was of black onyx, set about the edge with tiny pearls. The back was of gold, unmarked in any way. But in the center of the onyx was engraved a complicated monogram, rather difficult to decipher. At the top, a tiny gold ring, by which it had evidently once been fastened to something else, was twisted and broken, as if the object had been violently wrenched from its proper fastening—whatever that might have been. Both the girls instantly disclaimed it, and all fell to conjecturing how it had come

there and what it could be.

"Looks like a locket," said Camilla, "and a rather old-fashioned one at that."

"It might be a man's watch charm," conjectured Audrey, "the kind some of them wear on a black silk ribbon fastened to their watches. My father still wears one a little on that order. He hates wrist watches for men."

"I think you're right," Wade agreed with her. "And of course it must be the property of our unwelcome visitor. And I'd like to bet he's cursing his luck this minute at having lost it. No doubt it was torn from his watch fob when he scrambled through the window that last time. Well, we've got something on him, all right, and it's about as valuable a clue as we could have. Hold on a minute! I'm going outside to look for footprints under that window. There certainly ought to be some." He rushed away, but came back later only to report that the heavy rain of the night before had turned the ground there into mush and washed away every trace.

"However, we've got something to work on with this," he continued, "and now I have another idea. I'm going into town and insert a notice on the bulletin board in the post office. It'll run something like this:—

"*Found*—a gold watch fob monogrammed and set with pearls. Owner can obtain it by applying to Wade Newkirk with proper description of it.' I won't say where I found it, but if the owner has nerve enough to come and claim it, I'll run him right around to the constable. I hardly think he will, but you never can tell. Also I'm going to snoop around Forbes's Hotel, in town, and find out whether any strangers are stopping there just now. Usually is never anyone there but traveling salesmen, and they're all pretty well known. So long! See you after a while, and keep right on here while I'm gone. Nobody'll molest the place if you're around in pretty plain sight."

He disappeared, and presently they heard his car rattling away in the direction of the town. Audrey suggested that they get the place straightened up and looking as it usually did,

shut the door outside, whose lock had been wrenched apart, close one shutter over the broken pane in the window, sweep up the glass on the floor, and restore the model as much as possible to its normal appearance.

"We mustn't let your mother suspect anything about this till Wade decides what's to be done," Audrey told Camilla. "And she's liable to come in here any time." So they rushed about at their self-appointed task, and at length no one not in the secret would have suspected the invasion and destruction of the late afternoon before. They had scarcely finished when Wade returned, rather hurried and breathless, to report his findings.

"No luck at the hotel. No one been there this last week but one grocery salesman who comes every year. They know him well and he must be perfectly O. K. But I got a hint from old Ben Hackenbury that'll take me right over to Easton. Explain to Mother, if I'm not back to lunch, that I drove over there to get some notebooks and a compass—which I *am* going to do, by the way. I'll be back as soon as I

can."

"Oh, but *Wade*, don't go without telling us what the clue is!" cried Camilla distractedly. "We're just *dying* to know!"

"Have to die then!" he called back teasingly. "For it would take too long to explain and it's absolutely important that I get there at once." And he was gone, leaving them to another interval of wild conjecture.

CHAPTER XV ANOTHER TURN OF AFFAIRS

Wade did not return in time for luncheon. The girls heard the luncheon bell being sounded by Mandy, and still he had not come. Under the circumstances, Audrey declared, she did not think it wise to leave Kenwick unguarded by some one of them, even in the broad light of mid-day.

"I'll stay here for a while," she told Camilla, "while you go over to lunch. Will you tell your mother I'm unavoidably delayed, and make my apologies to her, and say that I'll be in before the meal is over? Then you can run back here and I'll take my turn. Goodness knows, I don't feel like eating a mouthful, but I don't want Mrs. Newkirk to suspect anything's wrong!"

So Camilla hurried away and presently came back to release Audrey. And later they both took up their post again, while Mrs. Newkirk came over still later to sit with Miss Jenifer and relieve Prissy for her rest hours. And so the afternoon wore away without any sign of Wade. It was not till near dinner-time that he returned. He looked rather grave and had plainly not met with the success he had hoped for. In an interval before dinner, while they were out in the garden and keeping an eye on Kenwick, Wade told them of his quest.

"I got the idea from old Ben Hackenbury, this morning," he began. "You know he's a clerk in the grocery store, but lives well out of town and trundles in and out every morning in

his old car. It's a bit more ramshackly than mine—and that's saying a mouthful! Well, as they say, there isn't much that escapes the eye of old Bennie, so when I didn't glean anything much from the hotel, I strolled into the grocery, bought some chocolate bars (for which the world knows I have a weakness!), and stood around gossiping with Bennie for quite some time. And, sure enough, he had something meaty to tell. After discussing this and that, I idly suggested that we hadn't seen many strange cars around the town lately. Audrey here, coming from more populous centers, may not realize this, but in a tiny little community like ours every local car license is perfectly well known, and an outside one seen hereabout arouses nearly as much interest as the latest murder would up around New York and Philadelphia!

"Well, Ben agreed with me in the main, but he added something that made me prick up my ears. For he declared that for several evenings during the past ten days or so he had noticed, as he was driving back home from work, a small Ford coupé with a New York license,

parked just off the road near Bennet's Woods. It was always empty at the time. After he'd passed it several times he remembered the license number and told me what it was. He also added that he'd happened to see that same car parked in the main street of Easton when he drove over there last Sunday. Again it was empty, so he had no idea who ran it. But he said it was standing right in front of the hotel there, so he inferred that the owner was staying at that hotel. He wondered why the car came over here so often and reckoned that it must be connected with some bootlegging enterprise.

"But I thought I saw something directly concerned with our affair, so I piled right over to Easton and hung around the hotel there as unobtrusively as I could and watched every car that came by and snoopied in the hotel register for anyone coming from New York state. There were two or three but they'd all checked out several days ago and that was all of that. Nor did I catch a single glimpse of any car corresponding to the one he told me of. It may be an entirely false scent, of course, but

it's the most promising thing I've heard of. And I haven't given up hopes of that car yet. Tonight, after dinner, I'm just going to saunter out myself by way of Bennet's Woods in my car and see what's to be seen, while you girls make some excuse to hang around the garden at Kenwick and keep an eye on the place till I get back."

"But, Wade," demanded Camilla, "are you going to do anything about reporting this thing to the town constable, as you said you'd have to, or are you going to leave the place wide open for another raid to-night? I don't think it's safe to go on as we're doing."

"I've thought all that over," declared her brother, "and this business of that strange car has changed my dope a bit. I think we can safely take the chance on one more night. And this time I'm going to institute a brand-new system. I'm not going over there to Kenwick to sleep. I think I've put a crimp in our marauder's plans that way, and maybe that was the reason he took to trying it out during the day, at some time when we had left the place

unguarded, as we did yesterday. I have a very keen notion we're being pretty closely watched from some vantage point or other, and whoever's trying to get in there knows exactly what we're at just about all the time.

"To-night, after I've snooped around Bennet's Woods to see if that car's in the vicinity, I'm coming back here and am going to appear to go to bed in my own room, in the ordinary way. Then I'm going to sneak out to our own garden and slide into that enormous lilac bush close to the road. I can get a fine outlook on the whole rear of Kenwick from it, and there can't much go on in that region that I won't see. And at the same time I'll apparently be entirely out of the way. And—oh!—by the way, I thought better of that scheme of putting a notice up in the post office about the watch fob. That would only give an intruder warning that his traces had been discovered. Better let him think nothing had been noticed about it. I've been doing a bit of Sherlock-Holmes-ing myself about that room, and trying to think how anyone would have been so careless as to believe he could go through a place that way

without the traces being discovered. I think he got in, breaking the pane, it's true, but in such a way that it wasn't so very obvious. We didn't notice that, in fact, till some time after we first came in. He pried open the door of the locked room first, I figure. It's true he raised particular hob in there, but he no doubt closed the door after him carefully, calculating that since it was usually locked, no one would think to go into it for quite a while. Probably it wasn't caught well and blew open a little later on.

"Then he ran upstairs to search there. And while he was doing so, through the upper windows he saw us coming up from the river. It was then that he knew he'd have to get to cover without losing a minute, for he couldn't tell but that we'd be coming right over. So he ran down and rushed through the office to the window, brushing by your work table, Audrey, as he passed. It may have been then that he pushed or pulled that model over to the edge of the table. And here's what I figure—he probably didn't pull it off right then. Perhaps he just dragged it to the edge and partly over

it, and never even noticed what had happened before he jumped out of the window and closed it. Or maybe he realized he had pulled it over, and pushed it back, but not far enough. And the model hung there balanced for quite a while before it toppled over. The reason I think this is, that if he'd dragged it off with a sudden crash it would have been much more damaged than it was. But if it toppled over by its own weight after a while, it would have fallen more gently and so wasn't completely demolished. How's that strike you, Audrey?"

Audrey herself declared that she was rather surprised, after she got about reconstructing the model, that more damage hadn't been caused by the fall, and thought Wade's explanation altogether likely.

"Well, here's what I figure," went on Wade. "Nothing else happened last night, because after that he thought he'd better stay off the job a spell till he could figure whether his latest entry had been discovered. If it had, he probably thought we'd report it to the constable and raise hob generally around here.

But as all has seemed pretty much as usual to-day, he may try something again to-night. And I'm going to make his job easier by appearing to revert to my usual habits and go to sleep in my own bed—apparently! By the way, there's Mandy ringing the bell. Let's go in to dinner. And to-night we shall see what we shall see!"

It was at the dinner table that Mrs. Newkirk brought out another curious and disturbing incident that had occurred during the afternoon.

"I was trying to think of some way to entertain Miss Jenifer to-day," she said. "It's so dull for her, now that her mind is so much more normal, to lie there with no outside interest all day long. And of course, since she can't talk, a regular form of conversation is impossible. After I've told her all the daily little bits of news and gossip about here, there seems nothing much left to do. She doesn't sleep as much now as she did after her first shock. So to-day I took over the daily paper, and after I'd told her all our local news, I offered to read the paper to her and she

seemed rather pleased with the idea.

"I spent all of the last hour reading along to her, item after item and column after column of everything just as it came along—politics, murders, accidents, and what-not, till I got so sleepy that I just about dropped off myself. I actually found myself nodding, and still reading along mechanically, not even knowing what I read!

"Suddenly I sort of came to and looked at Miss Jenifer, and to my amazement, she was lying there, her eyes almost starting out of her head, and clutching the bedclothes in both hands with a fairly desperate grip. I thought she must have been taken with some violent pain or was feeling terribly ill. I dropped the paper and rushed over to her, begging her to try to tell me what was the matter. But she either couldn't or wouldn't—just shook her head and mumbled something that sounded like, 'Go, go go!' I gave her the pad and pencil, but she wouldn't even try to write. She seemed to relax a little after that and a drink of hot milk which I fixed for her, and later she

became very quiet and just lay there with her eyes shut. Whether she was asleep or not, I don't know, but she didn't seem like herself—I mean even what she's been lately—for the rest of the time.

"I don't know what could have upset her, but I somehow have a feeling that it wasn't any physical pain, or that sort of thing. I wondered whether it could have been anything in the paper that I read to her, but that seems hardly probable, and I've looked all through the paper since and there isn't a single thing in it that could possibly have disturbed her personally. I'm rather stumped about it."

They had no explanations to offer, so could make little comment on the newest development. But Wade, when he left the table to eat his dessert in the garden (always making the valid excuse that his knee got painful when he sat at the table too long), asked his mother if she had brought the paper back, and said he'd like to look over it himself.

When the girls came out later, he got up to go

out in his car as he had planned. But first he handed them the paper, saying:

"Take a good look over this whole paper, will you, while I'm gone? Don't skip anything, but just see if *you* can find anything in it that might have the slightest bearing on Miss Jenifer's affairs. I can't, but I haven't had a chance to do it very thoroughly. From the way Mother tells it, she must have read out *something* that gave the old lady a turn. If she hadn't been so sleepy when she was reading, and had noticed Miss Jenifer a bit while she was doing it, she might have been able to guess what particular item affected her. But as it is, we're left pretty much in the dark. And, whatever you do, don't throw that paper away or destroy it, but keep it for future reference. Now I'm going. Won't be long, probably, but watch out over there till I get back."

"Mother says she's going over herself after a while, to see how Miss Jenifer is after whatever upset her this afternoon. We'll probably go with her, so we'll be right on the spot," Camilla informed him. "There'll be too

much going on there for an hour or so for anyone to get busy snooping around, I reckon! But don't be too long. I don't feel so very courageous after dark!"

"So long! I'll be back before nine," Wade called to them, as he limped down the path toward where his car stood parked in the road.

And so, quietly, began an evening that no one of them was to forget for many a long year.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The girls divided the paper between them and sat in the couch-hammock for three quarters of an hour, going over every part of it for the slightest hint of what in its contents could possibly have upset Miss Jenifer so violently that afternoon. There seemed to be nothing in the news, either domestic or

foreign, that could have affected the old lady's affairs, so far as they could conjecture. They gave it up in despair at last, and Camilla folded the paper and took it to leave in Wade's room, as he had requested. Then Mrs. Newkirk announced that she was ready to go over to Kenwick, and the girls accompanied her.

But Prissy, who came down to the front door at their knock, reported that Miss Jenifer seemed to be sleeping soundly. She said the old lady had dropped off directly after the early supper that Mandy had sent over, and had not roused since. Prissy thought she would probably sleep through most of the night, from all appearances, so had decided not to disturb her and was getting ready to retire herself. As all seemed to have settled down quietly, Mrs. Newkirk said she would not go in, and they bade Prissy goodnight. Mrs. Newkirk remarked that she was going straight back home, to go to bed early and finish a book in which she was deeply interested. The girls announced their intention of remaining out in the garden till Wade returned, as it was still

light, and went back to the couch-hammock.

It was not long after he had promised to return that they heard his rattly car come chugging down the road. And in the soft dusk he strolled over to share the hammock.

"No luck!" he was obliged to confess. "No car was parked anywhere about Bennet's Woods, or anywhere else in the region, that I could discover. So, after scouting around a bit, I gave it up. It occurred to me, when I was nearly back here, that perhaps a car might come from the other direction, across the river on that new road by way of the bridge, and stay parked on the other side. Then they'd have to cross the bridge on foot and walk nearly a mile along the new road that joins the old one just beyond the town. I almost turned off that way to go and investigate, and then I concluded I wouldn't.

"After all, if anyone has designs on this place to-night, he might as well be allowed to try them out and get caught in the process, rather than to warn him we're on the watch by

snooping around his car. How'd Mother find Miss Jenifer to-night?"

They told him and he nodded his satisfaction. "Probably wasn't anything in that paper and Mother just imagined she was upset. Can't tell anything about people in that state anyway. Maybe something bothering them or nothing tangible at all. You didn't glean anything from the paper, did you?" And they had to tell him no.

Darkness fell at last, but they continued to sit in the garden, idly discussing it all, and keeping still in sight of Kenwick. There was no moon, and the night was cloudy but warm and soft, with a hint of possible rain in the air.

"By the way, Wade, what about that medallion, or whatever it is, that you found? Are you going to keep it or try to find the owner—or what?" asked Camilla.

"It's '*what*,' I reckon, as yet, as far as I can see," laughed her brother. "I can't seem to make up my mind just what ought to be done

about it. I've been studying that monogram off and on all day, trying to make out what it was and whether it would offer any clue. You remember how it is cut into the onyx, Old English lettering, all sort of intertwined? As near as I could figure, it was a T and an M. But that doesn't get us anywhere nearer things than if we didn't know it. The only thing I do know is that the charm or medallion is quite old style. They don't make such things nowadays, and somebody has had it a long while. But neither is that fact of any special help. We'll just keep it and see what happens next."

At last they heard a clock in the house chime ten, and Wade rose, stretched, yawned widely, and announced in a sufficiently audible voice: "Well, girls, I'm good and tired to-night. Good time to go straight to bed. And as Miss Jenifer's so much better, I won't need to sleep over there, but can crawl into my own downy couch!" And he added in a whisper, "That's for the benefit of anyone in the vicinity who might possibly be concerned!" Then, louder again, "So long! Sorry I didn't feel up to playing

bridge."

They all rose to go indoors. And before Wade ran upstairs, he whispered: "I have a feeling in my bones that something's going to break loose to-night. If you all aren't too sleepy, I advise you to kind of keep watching Kenwick off and on. I'm going out to the lilac bush directly and I'll take my electric torch with me. If there's anything unusual afoot, I'll flash it three times toward the house, and that'll be a signal for you to come out and give me a hand. Better keep mostly dressed. If things got too hot we might have to get the constable on the job after all. But I don't reckon it'll get as far as that. The worst will probably be that we'll scare the intruder off again."

The girls went up to Audrey's room prepared to maintain an all-night vigil. Though they did not at present feel in the least sleepy, but on the contrary, very much keyed-up and wide awake, they were wise enough to realize that as the hours wore by, if nothing seemed to be happening, they would inevitably be

inclined to nap and might miss something. So Camilla, before they went up, slipped into the kitchen and made some strong coffee and put it in a thermos bottle. "This'll keep us awake, if nothing else will!" she whispered, and they carried it up to the room. She gave some to Wade before he slipped out, so that he too might not become drowsy in case his vigil proved uneventful.

On his way out he whispered to them to turn out the light in Audrey's room and watch to see if his progress to the lilac bush seemed very visible. They did so, but so dense was the velvety blackness outside in the garden that they had to confess afterward that they never saw him at all, and decided that therefore his ruse must be pretty effective. Then began a vigil that, however exciting it might have been in prospect, grew exceedingly boresome as the night wore on.

At first they both sat at the window, discussing the affair in subdued whispers, reverting again and again to every mysterious and unexplained aspect of the tangle,

especially the latest developments. But as there seemed no solution to any of it, they only found themselves going round and round in a circle and getting nowhere. Then they fell silent and just gazed out of the window in the approximate direction of the lilac clump where, supposedly, Wade was also holding vigil. "I hope he isn't as sleepy as I feel this minute," whispered Camilla between two great yawns.

"Look here," suggested Audrey, "suppose we take turn about again as we did that other night when Wade was away? I'll take a good drink of coffee and sit up awhile longer, and let you get a nap on the bed. Then, when it gets too much for me, I'll wake you and you can drink coffee and take a turn watching. How about it?"

The idea appealed to Camilla strongly and she lost no time curling up on the bed. She could almost have wept when Audrey shook her awake, saying she'd have to take a turn watching now, for not even the coffee could keep herself awake any longer. So Camilla

drank her share of the coffee and took her place at the window.

It seemed but a fraction of a moment after she had dropped on the bed that Audrey roused to hear Camilla whispering frantically in her ear: "Wake up! Wake up! *Wade is signaling from the garden!*" And as Audrey struggled to a sitting position, she also heard the big grandfather's clock in the hall chime two.

"I saw three flashes just now, out in the dark—I suppose it's from the lilac clump," gasped Camilla breathlessly, "and I suppose we'd better hurry down to Wade. Oh, me! Now that the time has come, I'm just plain scared to death!"

"I'm not so keen for it myself," whispered Audrey, "but it's got to be done, so come along. I'm going to take my own electric torch. Tiptoe out, for we just mustn't wake your mother."

They crept down the dark stairs, through the

living room, and out the back entry, groping for the door handle maddeningly before they were able to locate it. Even in the house they did not dare turn on their own torch lest it give some warning to the enemy. At last they were out on the rear veranda and stumbling, as noiselessly as possible, through the garden. A dark form bumped into them before they reached the lilac clump and they almost shrieked aloud. But it was only Wade, coming to meet them.

"Glad you got here so soon," he muttered. "Something mighty peculiar's going on. Been watching it for quite a while. Now I've got to have help. Follow me and don't make a sound if you can avoid it."

"But don't you want to get the constable?" whispered Camilla. "Maybe we ought to ring him up before we leave the house."

"No time for that," declared Wade. "Besides, we don't want him about. I think we can handle this. And don't ask any more questions. We've got to get right over to Kenwick. After the

show's over, I'll explain all that happened before I signaled you."

Wade in the lead, they crept, Indian file, across their garden and the road between and approached Kenwick, stepping over the low brick wall surrounding Kenwick garden at a spot where they would be most sheltered from observation.

"Stay here a moment!" commanded Wade, pushing them down close to a great box bush. "I want to scout around first and see if anything new has happened since I left here." He hurried away and they were alone, hearts pounding so that they were almost audible. They did not dare even exchange a whispered remark, so tense were the suspense and strain. But Wade was back fairly soon, and ordered them to creep along after him to the garden entrance of the kitchen wing.

"Have you seen any more lights?" Camilla whispered, but Wade only reported, "Oh, for Pete's sake, hush! Never mind that!" And Camilla subsided, with the best grace she

could muster. At the door of the kitchen wing he paused, the others lined up back of him, got out the key of that door, and opened it.

"Now, here's where we're going to take a pretty bold step," he whispered, "but if you do as I say, you won't be in any danger. I saw someone get in here to-night. Been watching for quite a while. The intruder pried open that door to the main house, the one Prissy always keeps locked, just as the one in the office wing was pried open. I left our prowler at it when I came back to get you. Now the villain's got it open, apparently, and has gone on into the main house. We've got to follow. If the stranger should try to get into Miss Jenifer's room, the shock might kill her. We've got to prevent any chance of that. I'll have to use my torch, for I don't know the way about. Keep close to me, and whatever you do, don't make a sound!"

He turned on the torch and they entered the kitchen wing. The steps and passageway were empty but the door into the main house was slightly ajar. Wade stood at this door a long

time—or what seemed so—listening for any sounds that might guide him as to the location of the intruder. At last, apparently, he was satisfied, and beckoned them to follow.

The door opened into the stair hallway. Wade did not wait for any further explanations, but began mounting the stairs, slowly, cautiously, step by step, his light guiding the way, and the others following silently in his wake. Both girls were privately convinced that they were advancing to certain destruction, but something impelled them to go forward. Indeed, they had reached the pass where it would have been equally difficult and dangerous to go back. At the top of the steps and in the upper hall Wade paused again and cautiously threw his light about. The hall was empty, and the three doors that led from it were closed. One of these doors led to the west front bedroom. Another, directly at the head of the stairs, led into the hall over the entrance hall below, and from this upper hall, as they knew, was the usual entrance into the ballroom. It was the closest to the stairs and the one normally in use. The third door led

into the small back room called the "card room," and this room, as they also knew, had a door, well over toward the back windows, leading into the ballroom also. It was into the card room that Wade now led them, opening the door to it first with the greatest caution and flashing his light about. But the room was empty, as he had expected it would be, and they tiptoed across it, making no sound, thanks to the rubber-soled tennis shoes with which they were all shod. It was a room in little use now, and Mrs. Newkirk and Prissy, for want of a better place, had piled it full of the miscellaneous débris they had collected from the ballroom when Miss Jenifer had first been taken ill. Around and over this débris they stepped, till Wade stopped them in the corner where was the door leading into Miss Jenifer's bedroom.

Suddenly the girls sensed what it was that Wade was planning, and Camilla drew down his head close to her mouth and whispered in his ear, "There's a heavy bureau right in front of that door on the other side. You can't get in that way." But Wade only shook his head and

went right ahead. And then Audrey remembered that only this very night, while Camilla had been out of the room before dinner, Mrs. Newkirk had remarked that Prissy had asked her to help in moving the heavy bureau a little aside and nearer the window, so that they could open the door between the rooms and give Miss Jenifer more breeze, as the afternoon had been quite breathless.

Wade tiptoed close to this door, which was now shut, and listened a long time, his ear close to the crack. As far as the girls were concerned they could distinguish no sound in the ballroom save a heavy and muffled snore which undoubtedly came from Prissy's couch, somewhere in the vicinity of the door near where they stood. Then Wade, growing bolder, extinguished his own flashlight and cautiously opened the door a crack. The girls behind him could perceive nothing save a pale glow of light from Prissy's lamp which she kept always burning. The room itself was hidden from them. But Wade could evidently get a clearer view.

They were utterly confounded, about three minutes later, to have him calmly throw the door open to its fullest extent and walk into the next room, remarking in the most matter-of-fact voice:

"Stop right where you are! What are you doing in here?"

CHAPTER XVII

THE MIRACLE HAPPENS

For one single instant afterward there was not a sound in the room. Prissy, aroused from deep sleep, lay staring dumfounded at the tableau. She was too utterly nonplussed even to make an outcry. Or perhaps the sight of Wade and the two girls who had followed him into the room had stifled any such demonstration in her. Miss Jenifer still lay with her eyes closed, wrapped in sleep. And then the girls turned to gaze at the intruder.

Whatever they had expected to see, they had formulated no definite picture. Both of them confessed afterward that it would have been a man, no doubt, description lacking, but probably of the villainous or gangster type, as that seemed to fit such depredations more nearly than any other. To their undying amazement they beheld a *woman*, and one of quite striking if somewhat flashy beauty, standing crouched by the Duncan Phyfe table, clutching at one of the drawer knobs in the desperate grip of surprise and fear.

"Move away from that table," commanded Wade in tones not loud enough to disturb Miss Jenifer, "and be quick and quiet about it! Prissy, don't you make a sound. Everything's going to be all right."

"Who are you? By what right do you command me?" demanded the strange woman, in a low, burring voice with a markedly foreign accent.

"I'm a peace officer, if you're interested," retorted Wade. "Here's my badge if you care to

inspect it. And now get out of here!" he went on, moving toward her, and swiftly producing his revolver from his coat pocket as he did so. "Move out of that door as quietly as possible. I'll have something to say to you downstairs!"

The trapped and baffled intruder was just about to obey, since there was no gainsaying Wade's authority, when they were all startled by a sound from Miss Jenifer's bed. And glancing over in that direction, they were amazed to behold the old lady, awake, struggling to a sitting position and actually *attaining it*—a thing that had not been possible to her inert body since her first illness!

But that was not all. For in addition to having regained the power to move the lower part of her body, she had also regained her power of speech. And in a quavering voice she cried:

"Don't send her out! Let her speak here, please. I want to hear her!"

"Very well, Miss Jenifer," said Wade, controlling his astonishment as best he could. "We'll question her here, but I'll have to keep her covered with this gun. She can't be allowed to escape. Girls, you go and stand over there by the door she came in—and keep it shut. I'll guard this one. Now, my friend, you can go ahead and tell your story. What is it you want here?"

But the trapped woman only stared sullenly at the floor and muttered: "I shall tell nothing!"

"All right," retorted Wade. "In that case you can tell it to the judge to-morrow morning. Come on—let's get going!"

But again Miss Jenifer intervened. "If she won't tell it, I will!" quavered the old lady. "She got in here that night. I remember it all now. You had just left me after my pleasant evening with you all, Wade, and I stayed outside a little while and then went into the house. I was just about to go upstairs when I heard a distinct noise out toward the kitchen wing. Something—some instinct—told me it

was someone who had no business there. I took a lamp and went out through the west reception room by the door that goes into the stair hallway and on through the door into the connecting link. I could see no one for the moment, and I put the lamp down on the little table that stands there. In another moment this—person—this Madame d'Argéon emerged from the cellar steps. And I knew that the fear which has haunted me for many years had come true at last. I felt everything slipping from me—no power in my knees—I knew I must be going to faint. And then, after that, I knew nothing till I came to myself the other night, found myself in bed here, unable to move or speak coherently, and Prissy, strangely enough, sleeping on that couch over there with the light lit.

"I was—totally bewildered. I could not remember how the thing had come to be. It was not till Mrs. Newkirk explained it to me that I began to remember things from the past. Not all at once. They came to me gradually. But of what had happened that night here, I could recall nothing. Just now I suddenly

awoke—as if from ordinary sleep—and I remembered everything—and I could move once more—and talk."

She turned toward the intruding stranger. "But what are *you* doing here again? You haven't succeeded yet? You didn't get it?"

"You know I have not!" snarled the woman. And she muttered some angry French curses under her breath. Miss Jenifer laughed. A curious, almost soundless chuckle that shook her frail body in the great four-poster.

"No—you haven't—and you won't!" she went on. "For I'm going to see to that, here and now. The time has at last come when I am free to do so. Perhaps you'd like to know where the *keys* are, for which you must have been looking."

The woman started and glared at Miss Jenifer expectantly, and Miss Jenifer went on: "Yes, I know now that you were after those keys that night. You must have been watching long enough to learn that I usually carry them

around with me. And you would have got them, too, if I had not had the forethought to place them, before I encountered you, in a spot where you would never think to look.

Something warned me—I don't know what—that they were in danger. And I have more than one secret hiding place in this house where they are temporarily safe. Fortunately one was right at hand. Camilla and Audrey, will one of you take a light and slip downstairs to the west reception room? Go over to that big secretary near the rear door and reach up to that square bit of carved wood directly in the center near the top—it's up over the top drawer. If you put a fingernail back of it, you'll find that it pulls out quite easily. In fact, it's just a little secret drawer. Please bring up to me what you find there."

"I'll go," cried Audrey. "I have my own electric torch right here." She opened the door behind her and sped down through the dark hall and stairs to the old secretary in the west reception room. She had several times noted the beautiful old piece of furniture, with the unobtrusive square, carved medallion at the

top. In fact she had mentally taken stock of it on the day of her very first call, but never dreamed what that little wooden medallion concealed. She pried it out with her finger without difficulty and found it indeed a tiny drawer, as Miss Jenifer had said. And feeling about in it as she stood there, her fingers encountered the cold metal of two large brass keys. There was nothing else in the drawer.

When she got back to the room with them, she found all as she had left it, save that Miss Jenifer was lying back on her pillow resting, after what must have been the terrific strain of the last ten minutes. Audrey went over and laid the keys in her hands.

"Yes, here they are!" she exulted, smiling over them. "When I first recalled them, after I came out of that unconscious state, I thought they must be in that old table where I often kept them when I was in the house. I could remember nothing of hiding them in the secret drawer. But since they have come to light, we will have a little ceremony. And you, Madame d'Argéon, will be its most interested witness.

Audrey, please do me another favor, as I do not feel able to walk about much yet. Camilla, you had better stand guard at the door. Take this key, Audrey"—she indicated one of them—"and unlock that door over beside the fireplace." She pointed to the false door of so many discussions, and Audrey took the key and walked over and unlocked it, throwing it open for all to see.

And as they had surmised, there was no brick wall blocking up the opening, but something they had never imagined in any talk they had had about it. For the door opened on a tiny dark stairway, so narrow that a large-sized person could hardly squeeze through it, its brick steps winding round and round down into darkness. The stranger's eyes blazed at the sight and she muttered some unintelligible remarks in French. But Miss Jenifer paid little heed to her.

"And now, Audrey," she went on, "if you don't mind, I've a further request to make of you. Take this other key, if you please, and go down those steps, lighting your way with your

torch. Halfway down you will see a square iron plate set in the wall, and in one corner of that plate a keyhole. Use this key in it, open the vault, and bring me up the box you will find there, if you please." And Audrey obeyed her request. By this time, so many strange things had happened in that room that nothing seemed marvelous, when Audrey returned after a time, bearing in her hands a wooden box or small chest of satiny rosewood, with four claw-shaped brass feet and a carved brass handle on the lid.

But Miss Jenifer had one more surprise for them. And when Audrey had laid the box before her on the bed the old lady asked her to touch a match to the fire which was laid in the fireplace but had been unlighted, as the night was still very hot and sultry. And, finding a matchsafe on the mantel above it, Audrey started small flames in several places. Presently there was a roaring fire behind the high brass fender, and the room began to grow almost suffocatingly hot.

"Now," continued Miss Jenifer, raising the

lid of the rosewood chest, "will you kindly take this, Audrey, and place it in the hottest part of the fire?" She lifted from the box a bundle of yellowed papers or documents, tied about many times with faded ribbons and tapes, and sealed in several places with great splashes of pale sealing wax on which were the imprints of a crested device. Not one of the seals was broken.

At the sight of this document the trapped intruder uttered a sound almost like the cry of a wounded animal and made a spasmodic movement toward the bed.

"Hold hard there!" warned Wade. "I still have you covered with this gun!" And the woman fell back to her former position with a baffled groan.

"Go right ahead, Audrey, and do as I asked you!" Miss Jenifer ordered. "I feel very weak. I cannot stand this strain much longer."

Audrey walked over to the bed and took the packet, and with it walked back to the

fireplace and tossed it into the heart of the crackling flames. And in a dead silence they all watched, till the last crinkling, flaky remnant had floated away up the wide chimney flue. Then the woman broke the silence with a wild, despairing cry and buried her face in her hands.

"And now," began Wade, to break the tension, "shall I walk her out of here and over to the constable's office, Miss Jenifer?"

The old lady had slipped down on her pillow with a great sigh of relief and exhaustion.

"No," she gasped, striving to keep her calmness after the terrific strain. "No, let her go! She can do me no further harm. I have no longer any interest in her! She—she will want to get away as far—and as quickly—as possible. Let her go free!"

"Very well—just as you say, Miss Jenifer!" agreed Wade, rather astounded at this magnanimity. "But I think I'll see her well out

of the house and off the place, anyhow. She came here in a rowboat to-night, so I'll just give her the tip that I pushed that boat off and set it adrift before I came in here.

Consequently she'll have a good long walk before her till she gets to wherever she has probably left her car. Move along, lady, if you please!"

The woman sent one more malignant and baffled glance toward Miss Jenifer in the great four-poster, then turned about without a word and sullenly marched out of the room and down the stairs, followed by Wade, still covering her with the revolver. He was gone some time, and when he returned he remarked that he had started her well on the road out of town, telling her she was lucky to have been let go at all, and that if he'd had his way, she'd be on the road to the town lock-up. He had left her trudging hopelessly away, without so much as a word of comment on the affair, but muttering strange French anathemas under her breath.

He found the girls huddled in the lower front

hall waiting for his return. They said Miss Jenifer had almost had a collapse after his departure, and that it was all Prissy and themselves could do to keep her from fainting away from the strain and tension of the whole affair. But Prissy had revived her with smelling salts and aromatic ammonia, and had then given her an emergency sleeping powder and she had just fallen into a restful sleep.

It was at this point that they beheld Mrs. Newkirk, hastily arrayed in bathrobe and slippers, come stumbling through the garden and around to the front door, just as the sky was paling to a grey dawn.

"For mercy's sake, *what* is the matter?" she demanded as they opened the door. "I woke and found not a soul except Lorry in the house. Has anything happened to Miss Jenifer? Why didn't you call me? What is the explanation of it all?"

"Mother," declared Wade solemnly, "I'll be dog-goned if I know *what* the explanation of it is!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END'S BEGINNING

"There's just one thing that's certain," went on Wade to his bewildered and somewhat indignant mother, "and it's this: You can't be of any use here right now. Miss Jenifer's all right and peacefully asleep—and much more all right than you think, for the matter of that! But the rest of us have had a pretty hard night. So suppose we all go back to our kitchen and have some hot coffee and toast, and we'll explain everything—at least everything we *know*—as we go along!"

He put his arm around his mother and led her down the steps and back through the garden to their own house, the others following, and over steaming coffee and hot toast they all talked away, "sixteen to the dozen," trying to explain to Mrs. Newkirk the history of that night's strange episode and Miss Jenifer's

miraculous recovery. Each had his or her own contribution to make, and the combined result left Mrs. Newkirk still somewhat bewildered.

"But I don't understand," she commented. "You walked in there, Wade, and said you were a peace officer, and threatened to arrest her. How could you do a thing like that? It wasn't true!"

"Yes, that's what I've been wondering about ever since," chimed in Camilla. "And where did you borrow that badge?"

Wade laughed. "You're all wrong. It wasn't any fake at all. I *am* a peace officer, if you please! I was sworn in yesterday over at Easton, at my own request, and was lucky enough to get my badge right away. It isn't a difficult matter. I told them I'd noticed evidence of one or two undesirable characters around on the outskirts of the town, and that we'd all feel safer if I had some authority in my hands to deal with them. It isn't an uncommon procedure. And I did anticipate some such fracas as this, only I didn't *dream*

I'd be having a woman to deal with!"

"When did you first know it was a woman, Wade? Not till you saw her in the room?" questioned his mother.

"It was before that," he said. "I waited out in that lilac clump so long last night that I was almost asleep myself, when I heard the very faint sound of oars working in oarlocks in some boat on the river. It hardly seemed likely that any fishing boat would be out so late, so I crept down to the foot of our garden and got behind a bush where I could look over toward Kenwick garden. And sure enough, presently I heard a boat grating very softly on that shelving bit of beach there. I crept as close as I could and saw some black form all wrapped up get out of the boat and sneak along up the shore till it got to that low brick wall that surrounds the garden.

"You know that old stone fountain in the middle of the wall just near the edge of the river? Remember, it has a semicircular stone basin on the garden side, with a stone back

higher than the wall, and that old copper dolphin's head over the basin? I suppose water must once have spouted out of its mouth into the basin. Anyhow, it was right there that the figure stopped and began fussing in some way with the fountain. I couldn't see just what he did (of course I thought it was a man!) but, all of a sudden, in some inexplicable way, he seemed to *disappear*. I didn't know where he'd gone—thought he might have disappeared into the old, heart-shaped box border. But at last I took a chance and crawled over to where I'd last seen him by the fountain.

"And I'll eat my hat if that fountain wasn't completely turned around in some way—must work on a pivot or something. And there was a hole and a flight of narrow brick steps leading down into somewhere. And then the explanation of a whole lot dawned on me. That fountain covered the river end of a secret passage leading to the Kenwick cellar. I ought to have realized there was one. Half the big old Maryland mansions had 'em! And that was how the intruder got in that night we were chasing him around the cellar—and the way he

got out again.

"Anyhow, I wasn't going to risk my precious hide in any dark tunnel with an unknown marauder, so I beat it through the garden to Kenwick. I couldn't see anything unusual from the outside—there didn't even seem to be a light anywhere around the cellar. So I unlocked, very cautiously, the garden door to the kitchen wing and stood there with it open just a crack—and my eye glued to that crack. It wasn't more than two minutes before I saw a faint gleam of light coming up the cellar steps and then I saw—that *woman* (you could have knocked me down with a fountain pen!) creeping up the steps with that same old lantern. She had a chisel or some sort of burglar's jimmy in the other hand, and she set the lantern down and began prying at that door into the main house Prissy always keeps locked. I knew the job would take her some time, and I wanted you girls on the job to help me catch the dame red-handed, so I slipped back to the house and got you up. I had it figured out that she'd probably go upstairs and into Miss Jenifer's room by the usual door. I'm

pretty certain she's been all through this house at some previous time and knew the ropes.

"You know what happened after that. Of course, what she was after was those documents, and she must have known exactly where they were hidden. I have a feeling that she'd probably been in and about this house a number of times before Miss Jenifer saw her that first night, only she never could get hold of the keys, or find where Miss Jenifer kept them when she wasn't carrying them around."

Mrs. Newkirk gave a long sigh and put down her empty coffee cup. "Well, it's all been most extraordinary," she murmured, "but at least poor Miss Jenifer has come to herself again. That's a lot to be thankful for. And I hope the doctor will find her none the worse for it. The only thing I can hardly forgive you for is keeping me out of it all, though I know you did it to spare me worry. Goodness knows!—if my hair weren't white already, it *would* be by now, if I'd lived through all these thrills and horrors with you!"

"But what *I* want to know is whether we're ever going to hear the explanation of all this business," exclaimed Camilla. "I believe I'll just pass out if Miss Jenifer doesn't tell us what it was all about!"

"Prepare for an early demise then," grinned Wade, "for if I know Miss Jenifer, I don't believe she will. But, say, do you know it's broad daylight? And the first thing I do, before I crawl into my downy couch to slumber, is to run out to the garden and explore that tunnel, which if I'm not mistaken is still open. Want to tag along?"

They all did—even Mrs. Newkirk—and trailed after him through the dew-drenched garden in the gold and glory of the early dawn. Stepping across the low brick wall about Kenwick garden, they skirted the box border and came to the weed-grown path that led straight to the stone fountain by which Audrey had sat many a time, sketching the garden view of Kenwick. It looked weird and unfamiliar now, twisted entirely off its stone base, leaving a gap in the brick wall. Wade tinkered

about with it a moment, moving it back and forth, and finally declared that it was the turning of the dolphin's head in some definite manner that released the fountain so that it could be moved around.

Then he dived down the flight of brick steps that stood revealed, telling them to wait till he had explored it a bit before trying it themselves. He crawled back later to say that it was a very dank and damp brick passageway, full of crawling subterranean insects and far from pleasant to penetrate. He had not gone the entire way, but surmised that it led straight to the cellar. So he suggested that he turn the fountain around to its normal position and that they all go back to the garden entrance of Kenwick and see if they could find the cellar opening.

"She must have left it open," he declared, "as she was probably expecting to go back to her boat that way. I took the precaution to push that boat well out into the current and see it drift away before I went into the house last night, so she wouldn't find *that* means of

locomotion if she got away. I've no idea where she got it originally, but I think she came from across the river, and I'll bet she had one nice long tramp back! Now let's go to the cellar."

The cellar seemed not nearly so weird and uncanny, by the morning light that drifted through the low windows in the foundation of the house, as it had in the darkness of that wild night when they explored it. And in all the main compartments of it there was not a trace of any opening. One dark portion remained, unlit by any window or crevice. Into it they penetrated, through a low and narrow passageway, and Wade flashed his torch about the enclosure.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed. "We saw it that time before, don't you remember? That set of shelves full of old jelly glasses and preserve jars. And the lantern was left right near it. I never thought of anything being back of it. Look at it now!"

The set of shelves, which they remembered from their first visit as reaching nearly to the

low ceiling beams, and crowded with long disused glasses and jars, now stood swung clear away from the wall, the entire wooden back of it being in actuality a door that opened on the other end of the brick tunnel coming from the river. They all crowded close to it and stared within, while Wade swung his torch about just inside the entrance. And then they saw another and inexplicable feature. For while straight ahead the tunnel ran on in the dark toward the river, directly to the right of the entrance there was a rough archway of brick, and ascending into it were three steps also of brick, ending in a rude wall or barrier, roughly constructed of bricks and cement and pieces of stone, but reaching clear to the top of the archway and forming a complete and effective stop to any further progress in that direction.

"Here's a funny thing!" muttered Wade. "Unless I've missed my guess, this was a flight of steps leading up somewhere into the house—must be that one you went down last night, Audrey. And it joined this tunnel so that anyone who wanted to escape from upstairs,

and couldn't get to the cellar, could do so from the ballroom. Not a bad idea for those jumpy Colonial days when this house was built. But I wonder how-come this barrier of stones and cement and bricks here? It has a rather newer look than the masonry in the rest of the cellar."

"Oh, yes," chimed in Audrey, "I saw that last night when I went down there for Miss Jenifer. I got nearly all the way down before I found the iron plate. It was pretty well concealed and I missed it. And near the bottom, I saw this—or rather the other side of this wall—completely blocking the way. I didn't think much about it at the time, for I was too busy trying to find that little hiding place in the side. How do you suppose this got here?"

"You can search me!" said Wade, wearily, and he motioned them all out while he swung the shelf about and into place again. "All I know now is that I want to go back home and sleep for a week—after I've had some of Mandy's pancakes and sausage for breakfast. I'm that dead to the world!"

Wade was wrong, however, about his prophecy concerning Miss Jenifer—that they would never hear any more about the mystery from her. And not many days were to pass before he was compelled to acknowledge he'd been mistaken there. Miss Jenifer was very much exhausted after the ordeal she'd been through, and, by the doctor's orders, lay for two whole days quietly resting and seeing no one but Mrs. Newkirk. That lady reported that she did not talk at all about the events of that momentous night, just lay relaxed and resting, speaking only occasionally and then in a perfectly normal way, as if her illness had never amounted to more than an ordinary period of inaction in bed. And neither Prissy nor Mrs. Newkirk urged her to do anything else.

Then, one morning, she voluntarily arose, assisted by Prissy, took a few steps about the room, and requested to be dressed and allowed to sit in a huge old winged chair by one of the windows. And when the old black

woman had dressed her mistress and served her breakfast, Miss Jenifer commanded her to go across to the Newkirks and ask them all to come and make her a visit that morning—an invitation that was joyfully accepted. When they had all filed in and greeted her, congratulating her on her recovery, she bade them sit down as she wanted to have a long visit.

"You're no more crazy to hear all about this than I am to tell it!" she began gayly. "I have been lying here thinking it all over for two whole days and nights, and I have concluded that the time for secrecy is over now, and if anyone is entitled to know what this strange affair was all about, you are certainly the ones. You did me an inestimable service. Though how you came to be there at just the right time, I've still to learn. The whole thing might have gone wrong but for you all. How can I ever thank you?"

"You mustn't even try, dear Miss Jenifer," murmured Mrs. Newkirk. "And don't try to explain it if you don't feel like it, or it tires

you. We're terribly interested, of course, but all we did was for your sake alone. And we're just delighted that you're so like yourself and so happy."

"I *am* happy," declared Miss Jenifer, "and for the first time in many years. A heavy responsibility has been dropped from my shoulders, and also a menace that has threatened me for a long, long time. I *want* to tell you about it because I may now, and it is such an interesting thing also, apart from all that has lately happened. Perhaps I'd better begin at the very beginning, far back when this country was still very young.

"You all no doubt realize that this house was built by a Kenwick forbear of mine, well back in Colonial days. The time of the Revolution was approaching when the original Josiah Kenwick built it, back in the late seventen-sixties. But young Josiah Kenwick wasn't considering political affairs, for he was building this fine mansion preparatory to getting married and bringing his bride from Charleston to it. But he took the precaution to

have built into it a secret hiding place and passageway leading to the river, because one couldn't tell when such things might be needed in those unsettled times.

"At any rate, when it was finished, Josiah went to Charleston, was married, and brought his bride back here and established this home for all his future descendants. A few years later the Revolution broke out, and he went into the fighting with as great a zest as he had into building this home. He came to be of considerable importance to General Washington, and when Lafayette came over to assist us, Josiah was detailed by Washington to be one of the French general's aides and they became very firm friends. Later, when Lafayette went back to France in 1786 after his second visit here, he took leave of Josiah Kenwick in Annapolis, and exacted from him a promise that should Josiah ever come to France, he must without fail be his guest there.

"Then the French Revolution itself broke out, with Lafayette in command of the National Guards. But, though he was in sympathy with

the Revolutionists, he was so disgusted with the outrageous way in which they treated poor Louis XVI and his queen and family that he resigned from the National Guards. I cannot tell you all the complicated details of that awful period—you can read that in your histories. But it came about that later the French Jacobins unjustly suspected the patriotism of General Lafayette and he determined to leave and come to America again, but was captured, thrown into prison at Olmütz, in Austria, and kept there five horrible years. In 1797 he was released from there, and by that time Bonaparte was at the head of French affairs. I am skipping all that happened in the meantime in France, but between Lafayette and Bonaparte there was no special love lost, and the Marquis retired finally to his estates at La Grange, near Paris.

"Now comes a more personal part in this story. In about the year 1805 Josiah Kenwick crossed the Atlantic and made a visit to France. And true to his promise of many years before, he became the guest, for several weeks, of the Marquis de Lafayette at La

Grange. While there, the Marquis took him aside in great secrecy one day and asked him if he would be willing to take back with him to America some private documents of an extremely important nature and keep them concealed till he (the Marquis) should communicate with him further about them. He did not tell the nature of their contents, but said that he felt it unwise to keep them in France, as they contained matters of national importance, and he wished to get them entirely out of the country.

"Of course my great-grandfather expressed himself as entirely willing to do this favor, and said he had an excellent hiding place for them right in his own house. So the documents were delivered to him, tied up and sealed many times, as you saw them last night, and Josiah brought them away with him and later concealed them just where I directed Audrey to find them. And there they remained for a number of long years without any word from the Marquis as to their further disposition.

"Then, in 1824, came the time of Lafayette's

last visit to the United States, and, as you know, he was invited to make a triumphal tour of all the principal cities from Boston to Savannah. And of course, while in Annapolis, he did not fail to make a visit of one night out to Kenwick. And while here he and Josiah, who was by then a very old man, had a long and secret conference over the documents. It was then that Lafayette confided to him the nature of their contents. And those contents, I know, will surprise you considerably, if I am not mistaken!

"For it concerned the matter of what had been the real fate of the ill-fated little son of Louis XVI, 'The Lost Dauphin' as some called him—he who should have reigned as Louis XVII if the Bourbon succession had followed its normal course. Probably you have read how the boy was taken from his mother, Marie Antoinette, and confined in the Temple Tower in Paris in the care of a frightfully cruel cobbler called Simon. Later the story was spread abroad that the child had died of disease and ill treatment and was buried in the grounds near the Tower. And you know, too,

that there were many who did not believe this, but declared that he had escaped, been smuggled out of the Temple Tower by interested friends and royalists, and another diseased child put in his place to die under his name. To this day that question has never been satisfactorily answered, though it was rumored that many in high authority in France of that day, even Napoleon himself, knew that the Dauphin had not really died in the Tower.

"Well, to go back—Lafayette revealed to Josiah Kenwick that there had come into his hands authentic papers, signed, sealed, and properly attested by a number of prominent people in France, concerning the actual fate of the Dauphin, whatever it might be, and that these papers were of such vital importance that they might alter the whole régime of the country were they to be revealed. Lafayette himself was convinced that at that time affairs throughout the entire continent of Europe were so unsettled that it might only result in creating another chaotic state of war between several of the nations were those papers to be brought to light then. France was at this period under

the rule of Charles X, having reverted again to a Bourbon ruler, a relative of the lost dauphin. And Lafayette was none too pleased with the way he was conducting his reign. There was no telling how long it would last, nor when his country might resume again a republican form of government. At any rate, he felt that the peace of Europe must not be threatened at this time, and begged Josiah to keep the documents a little longer in this safe hiding place.

"Then Lafayette went on his way, and Josiah never saw him again. But in 1830, another revolution broke out in France, led by Lafayette himself and the incompetent Charles was forced to abdicate. And in 1831, in the spring of that year, Josiah received his final message from Lafayette. In it he begged his American friend to do him one last favor. France had adopted a constitutional form of government under Louis Philippe, this being the form of government that Lafayette had always been firmly convinced would best secure peace for France. And the old Marquis felt that now, less than ever, was the time ripe to bring to the public the contents of those

documents. And furthermore he expressed himself as well pleased that at last his dream of a constitutional government for France had come to pass, aided by a most able premier, Casimir Périér. He was content.

"But the matter of these documents still troubled him, for he felt that even yet they should not be completely destroyed. However, he begged to leave this trust with my great-grandfather, to be passed on to the direct descendants of his family when the time came. If, in a hundred years from the receipt of this letter, the great experiment had worked, and France were still under a constitutional government, whether as a limited monarchy or a republic, he begged that the oldest surviving member of the Kenwick family should take these documents and, without unsealing them or learning their contents, destroy them by fire. For the knowledge they contained would no longer be of any use to his country and, if known, might only serve to create dissension and warfare anew.

"Josiah Kenwick received this letter on May

19th, in the year 1831. And that day he took his children into a solemn council—there was a grown son and grandson (my father) by then—told them the history of the documents and showed them their hiding place. And he laid it on them and their descendants as a sacred trust that this secret should be preserved in the family and the last wish of Lafayette be fulfilled to the letter. And in the course of the years the trust passed eventually into my hands.

"I now come to a very painful part of my story—painful because it concerns myself and the unhappy way in which these documents became interwoven with my own affairs. I was a very young girl when my father took my sister and myself into his confidence one day (we were his only remaining children) and disclosed to us the secret trust, showed us its hiding place, and reminded us of our own responsibility about the matter in case of his death. I was very much impressed with the importance of the charge, I remember, and could hardly sleep nights for a while, thinking of the seriousness of the responsibility. I was

much younger than my sister—ten or twelve years younger, in fact—and I calculated that it was even possible that this weighty decision might eventually depend on myself. My sister was an invalid with a very grave and incurable disease at the time, and I could not help but know that in the natural course of things I would probably outlive her. And also that, if I should attain the age of seventy-eight (as I now have) the hundred years would then be up, and I would be the one left to fulfill the commands of Lafayette. I was quite overcome by the responsibility.

"Then a new element came into my life. I met and fell in love with a young first mate of a ship that had come into the port of Annapolis. John Stewart was a fascinating young fellow and we fell in love almost at first sight. But his position and prospects were not very important and he came of a family that my father did not consider equal socially with ours. However, we became secretly engaged, and I fully expected that I could overcome my family's objections to him in time. My sister also was bitterly opposed to his attentions to

me. He remained in Annapolis three months before leaving for his next voyage, as his ship was being overhauled. And in that time we saw each other constantly.

"Then one day, shortly before he sailed on a long voyage to India and the China Sea, I did an inexcusable thing. I was so sure that eventually we would marry, and he would become a member of the family, that I confided to him the secret of Lafayette, and even showed him the passageway behind the supposedly false door in the ballroom, with its other entrance below the fountain. I wanted to think that some day we would share the responsibility together and make the final disposition of those documents.

"It was a young girl's foolish and baseless dream, and for long years I was to rue that confidence. For John Stewart sailed away a few days afterward, and I was never to see him again. We had agreed not to write to each other lest my father or sister should suspect our attachment. But I was utterly confounded to learn, when his ship returned to Annapolis

nearly a year later, that he was no longer aboard her, that he had left her at the port of Marseilles on her way to the East, and had not been heard of since. It was a terrible and bitter blow. I cannot dwell on it, for even now I can hardly bear the memory. I still, however, could not give up the hope that he might one day return to me, and I spent the ensuing years trusting him and waiting for that return. My father and sister both hoped that I would marry into one of the prominent families of Maryland, but I had no such ambition and never encouraged the attentions of any of their young men. Finally I was left alone in the world, still hoping vainly sometime to hear news, if nothing else, of my vanished sweetheart.

"It made me queer—I know it—but as the years went on, I ceased to care and settled down into spinsterhood. If I could only have had some explanation of his conduct, I would have felt more content. But never to know—it was very bitter! And then, too, the fact that I had confided to him that all-important secret worried me night and day. But I trusted him so

thoroughly, even yet, that I could not believe he would make any unlawful use of it. More likely he had completely forgotten it, as he had me. And so the years passed.

"Then came the World War. I somehow felt very remote from it, for by that time I was in rather straitened circumstances, and I could do little to help, as my few friends left here were doing. I would have sold my valuable jewelry, if I had known how to go about it, but I never went far from home and I dreaded to take the step. So I knitted for the Red Cross and hoped I was doing my bit in that way. And then, just about the time this country was going into it, a strange thing happened to me.

"It was about dusk one evening and I was sitting in the garden knitting a gray sweater, when I was astonished to have Prissy, who was then still with me, come out and say that there was a strange woman who had knocked at the front door and asked for me by name. Prissy had admitted her to the west reception room and asked if I would see her. I went into the house and she introduced herself as a

Madame d'Argéon, who had just a few days before landed in New York from France, and had a very important message for me from someone in France. I assured her that I knew no one in France, but she said to wait till I heard it and then judge. And then she told me this singular tale. She had been secretary and companion to a French lady of title in a château in a certain part of France. A few months before this time, there had been a totally unexpected German air raid on this vicinity, and though the château was practically unharmed, a bomb had completely destroyed the house of her gardener, a man of sixty or more, killing his wife and daughter and desperately injuring himself. They had taken the man into the château and she had helped to nurse him till he finally died of his injuries.

"But before he died he confided to her that the bombing and the shock had done a curious thing to him. It had suddenly restored to him the memory of a past that had been absolutely wiped out of his mind for forty years or more. He could recall it all now, though for forty-

odd years he could never remember what had happened to him before he found himself alone somewhere outside of Marseilles, desperately wounded in the head and being taken care of by a kind old French woman in whose charge he had mysteriously been left. He had no money, no trinkets, no mementos, no clothes even, from his past life, and not the slightest idea who he was or where he had hailed from. He seemed even to have forgotten the knowledge of any language and had to learn to speak French. But at last his wound had healed and the woman's husband taught him something of gardening, and he finally became an expert gardener, married a French peasant girl, and drifted into the service of the château, where he had remained ever since. When the World War came he was too old to be drafted, so he remained as a gardener at the château. And then came the air raid with its dreadful consequences, and his own return of memory.

"Dear people, he was my own sweetheart, John Stewart—it all came back to him—how he had gone off the ship at Marseilles the night before she sailed for the East, had drifted into

a café and become suddenly embroiled with some French officers in an argument and finally a hand-to-hand fight. He remembered a terrific blow on the head, and then nothing more. No others of his shipmates were with him, so his whereabouts were not known. He thinks that probably the officers or the café proprietor became alarmed lest he die and they be held responsible, and had him moved out of the town and placed in the care of the old woman, first removing everything from him that might prove telltale, in case he should die.

"All this he told Madame d'Argéon, who was then caring for him so kindly. And then he told her further about me, and how he had once promised to return to marry me, and how I had probably thought him false all these years. The past must have been with him very poignantly, those last few days that he lived, and Madame d'Argéon said he told her everything he could think of about it, and begged her to find the opportunity sometime to write, or better still, if she came over here, to find if I were still alive, and tell me the story of how he had at

least not been false to my trust in him. But his wound was hopeless and at last he became delirious and finally passed away.

"She told me she had planned to write about it at once, but just about that time the French lady whose companion she was suggested that she come to America with her to help raise funds for the French War Relief, and she decided that it would be better to come here in person to tell me all about it, instead of writing. So in a few months they came, and she had now fulfilled her trust.

"I could not help but believe her—she had all the facts, and could have learned them in no other way. I was touched to the very bottom of my heart, as you can imagine, and so happy to think that my years of trust in John Stewart had been justified. Also I was grateful to her beyond any power to express it, and I urged her to stay at the house overnight, as it was late, and I would like to talk further with her. She seemed very willing to do so, and we had what dinner Prissy could get together and talked till late. Then I lodged her in the west

front bedroom and retired to my own. I was then sleeping in the east front room.

"I did not sleep very well, as you can imagine, after the excitement of that evening, and toward morning I thought I heard an unusual sound in the ballroom, which, as you see, is directly back of what was then my bedroom. (Prissy at that time slept in one of the rooms over the kitchen wing.) I got up and crept softly into the hall and to the door of the ballroom and peered in. What was my horror to discover my visitor, a candle lighted on a table beside her, trying to pick the lock of that door into the secret passageway with some instrument evidently fitted for the purpose. But that lock would defy any burglar's tool. It double locks, as you probably discovered, Audrey, finding you had to turn your key completely around twice. It is very complicated."

Audrey said, "Yes, I remember. And the one to the strong-box or vault was the same." Miss Jenifer paused for a moment. She had been talking so long and uninterruptedly that she felt

almost exhausted. But her listeners were too spellbound with her tale to break their silence. Presently she went on:

"I was frightfully indignant. I could just gasp out, 'What are you doing there?' And then she whirled around and saw me. She laughed when she saw me, a horrible, grating, sneering laugh and said:

"Well, you have caught me and I guess you know now that *I* know a little more than I told you. It was all true, what I told you—I'll say that for your sweetheart. But when he grew delirious, he let out all about some secret passageway and the papers and Lafayette. I did not believe it at first—I thought it was just raving. But it was too near to the truth to be all the fabrication of his delirium. I decided to come and see for myself. I wish now that I had come first by the passageway from the river. Yes, I know all about that, you see. Then I could have got them without interruption from you. But it was somewhat dangerous and I hate dark, confined, and secret passageways. And then, too, I really thought you should hear what

I'd promised the dead to tell. I have a superstition against breaking promises to the dead!"

"Well, my dear friends, I was simply speechless. I did not know what to say to her, and I was more than horrified to know that she had gotten possession of the knowledge of that sacred family trust. While I was trying to collect my wits, she went on: 'But I have a proposition to make to you. You are not in the most affluent circumstances—I can see that. It is no disgrace, but you would doubtless be glad to have enough to keep you in complete comfort for the rest of your days, and I can see to it that you will have this, if you will trust to me. You do not really care about those papers—what is old Lafayette to you now? He's been dead nearly a hundred years. He might have changed his mind a dozen times about them had he lived longer.

"But there are certain parties in France who would be willing to give an immense sum for possession of those papers. I know—I have talked with them. Why not let me sell them to

these interested parties and we will divide the gold and live in comfort the rest of our lives? The war is changing everything. Why cling to those old and useless documents any longer? What do you say, my little American lady?

"Those were her very words. I shall never forget them. I was so furious that I do not remember what I did or said, but I literally drove her out of the house. I must have been like a maniac. Prissy told me later that I almost scared her to death, my eyes were blazing so.

"It was early dawn when the woman left, cursing me all the way down the steps and out of the front door. Just there she turned and said: 'My name is not really Madame d'Argéon, so you need not pursue me, for you will not find me. But I shall come again sometime, and then I shall be more successful!' I told her I hadn't any intention of pursuing her. I could exhibit at least that much gratitude for the news she had brought me, which I could not help but believe true. But I told her to spare herself the trouble of any further visits,

for she would never find or get to the documents even if she came.

"And so she vanished away down the road. I never knew or inquired how she got finally out of the town. But from that instant I became haunted by the terrible fear that she *would* sometime fulfill her threat and I immediately made a great change in my whole life. That very morning I purchased in town a number of bags of cement. I knew they might think it strange there that I had made such a purchase, but I gave the reason that I wanted some work done in the cellar and would arrange for someone to do it later. Then Prissy and I set about the business of walling up the opening in the passageway that led to the ballroom. It was a terrible piece of work for two women, but we got it done somehow. I could not trust anything so vital to outsiders.

"I do not know what Prissy thought of it all. I did not explain to her my reasons, and she had never even known that there was a secret passage. She was of the old régime of servants, however, and asked no questions,

taking everything I did as right, even though inexplicable to her. But the affair seemed to give her a permanent horror of the cellar and the whole kitchen wing. I moved her quarters to the office wing after that, and decided to abandon the old kitchen and sacrifice the rear drawing room by turning it into a kitchen. But I had a carpenter carefully board up the beautiful fireplace, so that nothing should ever injure those carvings. And I spent more than I could spare of my fast-dwindling money for a good range. Also, that I might never be far from the other entrance to the secret stairway, I turned the ballroom into my bedroom, and so could be constantly on guard near that important door. I know my friends thought I was probably going crazy. So, that I might not be subject to comment, questions, and criticism, I altered my whole mode of life, shut off the main part of the house from visitors, and encouraged few to make any more than the most formal calls in the two front rooms.

"Then the state of my finances compelled me to make one more sacrifice. I could no longer

keep Prissy and pay her any adequate wages. Neither could I even afford to feed her if she stayed without compensation, as she begged to do. It was not fair to her, for she could still earn money by laundry-work or in cleaning-work in the town. So I had to let her go. But she has always been a faithful friend, coming here every so often to do little tasks and bits of cleaning for me. And I can never thank her sufficiently for her loving care of me in this illness.

"There was one other thing that plagued me constantly—those two big keys to the false door and the safety vault. What was I to do with them—where conceal them beyond reach of any future intrusion? My father had always kept them in a drawer of his own personal desk, tied together and merely sealed in a large envelope. No one knew their use or to what locks they belonged except his two daughters, and he felt them to be entirely safe that way. And up to that time, even I had seen no reason to conceal them any more effectively. But after what had happened, they became the plague of my life!

"I tried hiding them in every secret place I knew. I even once buried them, but they were constantly on my mind—the worry about them—and I was never assured that they were still where I had put them, but must be constantly going to look at them or digging them up to see that they were still safe. Finally I made up my mind that I would carry them about with me constantly, never allowing them out of my hands when I was away from the house, or out of my sight in the house. At night I used to keep them in that musical table close to my bed, as it had a secret spring and lock. People seeing me going about with them concluded that they were my door keys (the front door has a lock on the same order, and a key about that size), so I let them think that. But when I went out and locked the front door, I would just slip *that* key into my pocket."

Miss Jenifer halted at this point and sank back in her chair, sighing, "But I have talked too long. I am growing very tired. I think I will rest now and let you folks tell *me* how you came to know so much about what was going on here, and happened to be right on the spot

at the crucial time. That has been puzzling me very much!"

So Wade took up the story, while she rested, and gave her a history as full as possible of their side of the affair. "There is no doubt in my mind," he ended, "that the woman had been hanging about here for a number of days before that first night she entered, trying to get the lay of the land. She probably saw that you carried those keys about with you, Miss Jenifer, and saw that her only hope of obtaining them was to waylay you at some time and snatch them from you. As she couldn't very well do so in broad daylight, and you were never out at night, she never had the chance till that one evening you came to dine with us. Then she saw her opportunity to slip into the house by that secret passageway (which she probably dreaded to try—or perhaps she had already tried and found the entrance to the upper secret stairway nicely blocked off by your masonry!).

"I suppose you kept the door from the main house into the kitchen wing locked also, didn't

you?"

Miss Jenifer said she did, and hadn't unlocked it before in a long time, till she heard the sounds on her return and went to investigate them.

Wade continued: "No doubt she waited till after dark that night, and then decided to try the secret passage from the river, probably thinking she could in that way get right to the vault on the stairway if she hadn't been there before, and try her hand at picking that lock, quite unmolested. I'd like to have seen her face when she discovered your blocking wall of bricks and cement! Then she tried to get in the other way, through the cellar and kitchen wing, only to find that locked also. And it was much too dangerous to try getting it open and then fussing with the other locked false door before your return.

"I imagine she figured you'd come in as usual with the keys in your hand. And if she could attract you by some noise down to the kitchen wing and then grab those keys from

you, she might be able to stun you by knocking you down, or temporarily chloroform you, or something, get what she wanted, and be away before you came to. But you were too smart for her. I figure she was rather upset when you toppled over that way, and she may have run through the house looking for the keys, or she may have thought the fright had killed you, and that she'd better get out at once. I guess she wasn't a desperate enough sort to want to have a murder laid at her door! So she unlocked the garden door and streaked it away.

"But she must have hung around many days after that, to get wind of what had happened. And perhaps she discovered that you were pretty ill and she began to have renewed hope of getting what she was after. But I imagine we drove her to distraction, hanging about all the time during the day. No doubt she was poking around that night when I went back to Annapolis and there was no one to fear. And Prissy heard the noise when she woke to find Miss Jenifer had had that change, and then came running over to our house. The afternoon we all went off on the river, she probably got

desperate and tried to get in the office wing. Maybe she thought that connected with the main house. But at any rate, she went through it pretty thoroughly, no doubt on an off chance of finding the keys, before we very nearly came back and caught her. And she pretty nearly did for Audrey's model, too!"

"Wade," suddenly interrupted Camilla, "what became of the little watch charm or whatever it was that you found there? Have you got it yet?"

"No," he acknowledged a trifle sheepishly. "I gave it back to her on the way out. *I* didn't want the thing and I didn't suppose any of the rest of us did, either. So when I left her, I took it out of my pocket and asked her if it belonged to her. She grabbed it with almost a shriek of joy and relief, saying: 'Oh, yes, yes! It is my lucky charm. I—I thank you very much!' And I left her fairly weeping over it when we parted company."

"Well, I'm glad you gave it to her, Wade," agreed Miss Jenifer. "After all it is to her I

owe having received the last words of John Stewart, which changed me from an embittered woman into a more contented and happy one. And I owe her something besides for having made his last hours easier. It was that memory which caused me to let her go free though she had broken into my house to rob me of my most sacred trust. But she must have had *some* redeeming points."

There was a momentary silence after that, each one thinking of the strange and complex events that had brought this story to its close. It was Audrey who presently ventured:

"It must have been very hard, Miss Jenifer, to resist the temptation to see what was in those documents. Weren't you ever tempted to open them and learn what really became of the lost dauphin?"

"I was tempted more times than I'd dare to tell you," confessed Miss Jenifer. "The subject has always deeply absorbed me—what became of that poor little mistreated prince—and sometimes it seemed almost intolerable to

me that I had the authentic account right under my fingers but dared not break the seals and look. I used to follow occasional accounts in the papers of pretenders or the descendants of pretenders who claimed direct lineage with 'Louis Charles Capet,' as he used to be called, and were trying to get their pretensions before the public. How I would have loved to face them with the truth—whatever it was! But, after all, perhaps Lafayette was right. After a hundred years, what good would it serve, now that France has settled into stability as a republic, to pry any further into the mystery surrounding Louis XVII? Better let the words be burned, unread even by one humble individual."

"Well, now I'm reminded of a question *I'd* like to ask," supplemented Mrs. Newkirk. "Have you any idea now, Miss Jenifer, what it was that I read from the paper to you that afternoon which caused you to seem so upset? Perhaps you don't recall anything, but we've all been very curious about it ever since. *Something* was worrying you!"

Miss Jenifer laughed. "I should say it was! I meant to speak about it. I really think it had a great deal to do with bringing about my complete recovery. Perhaps you remember that I said old Josiah Kenwick received Lafayette's last letter on May 19, 1831, and that the documents were to be destroyed one hundred years from that date. As you can well imagine, ever since the first visit of that French woman, I have been counting the years and months and weeks till that date should arrive and I could be free at last of the responsibility. Last month it began to seem very close—I could actually count the days! Then came the night of my illness and shock. And all memory of it slipped from my mind. Even when I grew a little better and my memory partially returned, I still had no association with that date. I did suddenly recall the keys, but only as something I had felt I must carry about with me without fail. I could not even remember the reason.

"But that afternoon you came to read the paper to me, Mrs. Newkirk, and just toward the last, you read about something that was to take place that day, *May 19, 1931!* It was a

date that I knew as well as my own name—that I had had in mind every day for nearly fifteen years. The very sound of it brought back all that it meant. *This was the day* and here I lay, helpless, with not even the keys to reach the documents. It gave me a feeling of absolute despair. But even then I had still no recollection of that first night's encounter, or what I had done with the keys. I lay trying to think it all out, and must have fallen soundly asleep. For the next thing I knew, I woke to find that woman in the room again, and all you young people, too. And like a flash of lightning, my befogged brain cleared at last."

It was just at this point that the tension was broken by the voice of Lorry, outside in the garden, shouting at the top of his lungs:

"Hey! Mothe-e-e-r! Mandy sent me over to tell you please to come to lunch! She's rung the bell four times and the fried chicken's all getting cold!"

"Well, that's *that!*" said Wade, as they laughingly took their departure.

CHAPTER XIX

MISS JENIFER ENTERTAINS

Miss Jenifer was giving a party! It was a night some two months later, and the beautiful ballroom of Kenwick was softly lighted with many wax candles set in lovely old brass candlesticks and silver candelabra, that Miss Jenifer had unearthed from their long repose in her attic storerooms. It was a very small and exclusive party, being confined, besides herself, to the Newkirks *en masse* (even Lorry being allowed to stay up and be present!), Audrey's parents, who had come down for a few days, and Audrey herself. The party was being given in Audrey's honor, for she was leaving the next day, her work on the model being completed at last.

The model itself, beautiful and finished in every detail, had been brought up and placed on a long table at one end of the room. It had

been wonderfully completed, even to a replica of the old garden with its heart-shaped box border, brick wall, and fountain, and Audrey could not help but be secretly proud of her work. Besides the model, Wade had brought over the Newkirk victrola, a space had been cleared in the middle of the room, and all but Miss Jenifer had danced till the older people were weary and sat down to talk and rest, while Prissy and Mandy belowstairs, in the restored kitchen wing, were excitedly preparing refreshments. Prissy had once more resumed her permanent place at Kenwick, and had even been reconciled to the kitchen wing and had forgotten her fear of the cellar. Miss Kenwick had had the rear drawing room restored to its proper function, taking away the ugly wooden screen from the mantel. And Audrey had modeled the beautiful fireplace, thanking her lucky stars that she was now able to do so, for it was one of the loveliest in the house.

While they were all resting, Wade and the two girls strolled out to the garden to watch a low-hung crescent moon setting over the river,

and talk it all over.

"Gosh, we'll miss you, Audrey!" said Wade.
"Wish you didn't have to go to-morrow."

"Well, *I* couldn't bear it," cried Camilla,
"except that I'm going with her! It was right
lovely of your mother to ask me, Audrey. I
haven't been away from this old dump of a
town in years, and I'll love that month's visit! I
reckon you'll find me a fixture there, Wade,
when you come up to fetch me home!"

"I sure do hope you get the prize for that
model, Audrey," went on Wade. "It's lovely
enough to get it, *I'll* say. They'll show pretty
poor judgment if it doesn't—and 'them's my
sentiments'!"

"Well, that's a mystery that still remains to
be solved," laughed Audrey—"whether I'll get
the prize! But I'm going to tell you something
that came about this afternoon. Dad only told
me about it just before we came over here.
You know that Mr. Cator that Dad brought out
from Annapolis this afternoon to see the

model? He's tremendously wealthy and crazy about old Maryland houses. He liked it so much that he said, if I shouldn't happen to receive the prize, he wanted to buy the model himself for nearly as much as the prize would be, and then present it to the Maryland Historical Society. So you see it'll be pretty near all right either way!"

"Lucky girl!" murmured Camilla. And, "Hot diggity dog!" shouted Wade. And they all fell to discussing it. Presently they rose to go into the house.

"Odd, how things have all turned out!" marveled Wade as they stood, loath to leave the lovely scene by the river. "I'm darned glad, Audrey, that Miss Jenifer allowed your father to take her affairs in hand and find the proper market for those old jewels of hers. They must have brought in quite a tidy sum. And he told me he had invested it for her so that she'll have a small but comfortable enough little income to last her the rest of her days. I do believe the poor old girl was nearly starving to death and too proud to let on about it, before all this

happened! You certainly have been a blessing, Audrey—I won't say exactly in disguise!"

"Oh, it wasn't my doings at all," laughed Audrey. "This is getting much too personal! Come on in and let's dance some more before we eat. I never thought I was going to dance in the famous old Kenwick ballroom. Wasn't it nice of Miss Jenifer to give this party? She's having the time of her life!"

They went in to dance a bit more, and then to eat the delicious salad and cake and ice cream prepared by Mandy, and to sit talking on, hating to break this delightful companionship and end the evening. It was young Lorry who finally became bored with the proceedings and began to roam about, investigating with boylike curiosity the odd and interesting features of the room. Without being noticed by his elders, he came at last to the Duncan Phyfe table, attempted to pull open the drawers without success, and at length accidentally hit on the spring which raised the lid. Suddenly they heard a shout from him:

"Oh, I *say*, Miss Jenifer, what's this queer thing?"

They were rather afraid the old lady would be annoyed by this intrusion into one of her secrets, and Mrs. Newkirk was about to administer a sharp reproof to her inquisitive young son. But Miss Jenifer seemed in nowise upset, and went over to explain the workings of the musical glasses to them all. It was Audrey's father who said:

"Why, *I* remember that table when I was here as a boy, only I never suspected what was in it, either. Won't you play us a tune on it, Cousin Jenifer?" They all secretly wondered if she would refuse, but to their astonishment she answered, after a slight hesitation:

"Why, if you wish. But I am not very expert. I never had a chance to learn it properly, for there are not many who know the art. I actually had to experiment with it and teach myself in my lonely years here. You know, it was Benjamin Franklin who invented this instrument, and I believe this very one must

have been made back in his own time. They have modern ones now, but they are not exactly like this. I do not know many tunes, but this is my favorite."

She filled the glasses to their proper capacity from a pitcher of water, dipped in her fingers, and sounded a few notes to test their tone. Then she bent over the table and launched into an old song, the thin, silvery notes sounding wild and sweet and touching:

*"I'm wearin' awa', Jean,
Like snow when it's thaw, Jean;
I'm wearin' awa'
To the land o' the leal.
There's nae sorrow there, Jean,
There's neither could nor care, Jean,
But all is fair, Jean,
In the land o' the leal."*

The thin, sweet notes died away, but Miss Jenifer did not play any more. Instead she walked over to one of the windows and stood

looking out into the soft, scented darkness. So long did she stand there that Audrey presently slipped to her side.

"I hope you're not feeling unhappy, dear Miss Jenifer," she murmured. The old lady turned about and, smiling a little, laid her hand on Audrey's arm, as she answered:

"No indeed, my child. On the contrary, I am exceedingly happy. I was only thinking—thinking!"

AFTERWORD

The average reader in America is apt to have a curiously inaccurate impression of the Marquis de Lafayette. We connect him vitally with our own American Revolution, when he came over here in 1776 as an enthusiastic youth of nineteen to offer his aid to Washington; vaguely with the French

Revolution at a later period; and many years after with a joyous and triumphal visit to the United States—in 1824—when he junketed about to all the important cities on the Eastern Seaboard, and revelled in speech-making celebrations in his honor.

And we look upon him as a champion of independence and a republican form of government, par excellence. It is with considerable astonishment, then, as we delve into his actual history, that we find him the greatest titled and aristocratic statesman of his time in France, the one man strong enough to decide the ultimate fate of the autocratic Napoleon (who desperately feared his influence!), and who was chiefly instrumental in restoring for some years a limited constitutional monarchy in France, which was his dearest dream for his revolution-racked country. He never forgave the Jacobins for their treatment of the captive Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, and it is surmised that he knew far more about the possible disappearance of "The Lost Dauphin" than has ever been published.

Lafayette was intimately connected with Maryland affairs and bade his last farewell to Washington in Annapolis. And while history does not vouch for the existence of the documents mentioned, the events of Lafayette's career make secret archives of that order not entirely improbable in connection with himself and the friendships he undoubtedly must have cultivated in a number of old Maryland families.

A. H. S.

[The end of *The Brass Keys of Kenwick* by
Augusta Huiell Seaman]