

Visiting Nurse

by Kathleen Harris

Chapter 5
It was true that Hildred was not impressed with material things. She lived much too close to stark reality — poverty, sickness and misery — in her daily work. But she would not have been human had she not found herself a trifle awed when she was ushered into the enormous reception hall of the great house in which Lucien Lanier lived.

The interior was like a movie script; the floors black and white marble, walls hung with priceless tapestries, the swinging chandeliers, glittering dazlingly with crystal pendants. The furnishings and ornaments were museum pieces and collectors' items.

She saw Mr. Lanier coming to greet her, as she silently handed the hovering butler the wrap she had removed. "Well, here you are!" Her host's manner was more cordial than she had remembered. His dark eyes were coolly polite, but his smile was almost friendly. "I wondered if you would come, Miss McNaughten. I trust you are feeling entirely recovered from your accident?"

Hildred murmured that she was feeling very well, though, at the moment, she was not. "Will you come this way?" he was saying cooingly. "I thought we would dine in my upstairs apartment. The rest of the rooms are not all in readiness for occupancy—the house has been closed, you know, since Grandfather died, and I thought I would not trouble to use them until my mother joins me."

Then she would not have to meet the Countess; that was a relief. She followed, silently, across the marble floors, up the curving stairway. She was reaching, rapidly, a decision. She had been foolish enough to come, but she would not stay. There was an open fireplace with a few logs crackling merrily, as the autumn night was cool; before it, there was a table set for two, with beautifully appointed silver and tall, lighted candles, and a centerpiece of flowers.

"I hope you will make yourself comfortable," Lucien said, waving a hand toward a small brocade divan. With the other hand he pulled a rope cord that would summon a servant. "What would you like to drink—we must drink a toast to your speedy recovery."

Hildred said she would take a glass of sherry. She sat down on the divan. She was thinking when the servant responded so promptly, bearing a silver tray with bottles and glasses, that if she told her host she would not stay it would only add to the pictures he already had of her. He would think she expected him to take advantage of this intimate situation, as Mamie had hinted darkly, a man of his station might well do.

"To your recovery—and good health!" he said now, having presented her with a small glass holding the wine and touching it with one of his own into which he had poured Scotch and soda. "To a very beautiful young woman," he added, with a smile that held much more warmth than the others.

Hildred said, speaking quietly, "You don't mean that, Mr. Lanier. You don't mean any of this. I don't know why you asked me here. Unless it was to amuse yourself, since you must be bored and lonely in such a certain manner, may I have been behaved in such a manner as to make you believe the worst of me?"

"I did not say that," Hildred returned, her eyes not wavering behind the worst of you, at all. I fore his steady regard. "I don't mean to think you invited me on an impulse, which you may have regretted. And that it amuses you to pretend an interest you do not feel. Why should you care to know me better, Mr. Lanier? We could not possibly have anything in common, ever. You think, because of the way we met that I am some sort of cheap, shallow little fool. I've seen it in your face, your manner—it is you who think the worst of me."

"If I did—and I do not plead guilty to such harsh accusations as you agreed. And it is only a beginning, Hildred—you would mind if I call you that, now that we are friends, will you?"

So he had not forgotten that brief intimacy. She said she would not mind at all. But she was not sure about this being a beginning; though, of course, this she did not say.

Again he seemed to read her thoughts. He said, "I meant that, about a beginning—as I told you, I don't give my friendship readily, I don't believe that you do, either. You remember, too, that you said you knew I must often be lonely—so you see you must not only come again, but often!" His smile was one of the rare kind that lighted up his face so that it seemed he was that other, hidden person, seldom revealed to anyone. The person he might have been, no doubt, had he not been born to such great wealth.

Hildred had not counted on letting herself in for quite so much. But it was true she did not give friendship lightly, either. And, once more, she was touched by a sort of boyish eagerness behind his words, though it was an eagerness she knew he would not allow many people to uncover. It was almost a hunger—the sort of hunger for affection and understanding—that she often had encountered among the people with whom she worked.

That was why she held out her hand, impulsively, in saying good-night now. "Of course I shall come again, I shall be glad to, Mr. Lanier."

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Parker, Jesse, Jr., Pt. No. 64 N.T. Marsh St. \$14.61
Parker, Otis, Pt. No. 11 H.T. Cedar St. \$12.51
Pasteur, John E., Pt. No. 75 N.T. Pollock St. \$5.59
Pettaway, Clarence & wife Sarah, Pt. lot No. 133 Queen St. \$8.12
Sanders, Nancy, Pt. No. 41 N.T. Live Oak St. \$4.87
Smith, Benjamin H., Pt. No. 77 N.T. Marsh St. \$5.81
Stanley, Bessie W., Pt. No. 187 O.T. Pine St. \$12.94
Stewart, Esther Jordan, pt. No. 87 N.T. Pollock St. \$11.31
Suggs, Garfield, Pt. No. 88, Pine St. \$25.25
Teel, John & Elsie, Pt. No. 63 N.T. Pollock St. \$18.45
Washington, John L. & Lucy, Pt. 123 Broad St. \$7.25
Washington, John N., Pt. 180 O.T. Queen St. \$14.11
Washington, W. H. Est., Pt. 180 O.T. Pine St. \$6.82
Williams, Fred L. No. 187 O.T. Craven St. \$10.19

COLORED
Baxter, Charles Herman, Pt. No. 183 O.T. Craven St. \$10.50
Bean, Wallace, Lt. No. 203 Craven St. \$5.55
Becton, Alonzo & wife, Pt. No. 89 Pine St. between Marsh and Live Oak St. \$7.64
Bell, Martha, Pt. No. 215 Mulberry St. \$6.13
Brown, Florence, Pt. No. 33 O.T. Queen St. \$9.08
Brown, William R., Pt. No. 133 Queen St. \$10.03
Carter, James F., Pt. No. 140 Queen St. \$8.85
Chadwick, Hattie Est., Pt. No. 182 O.T. Pine St. \$4.11
Chadwick, James M., Pt. No. 86, N.T. Pine St. \$7.32
Chadwick, Leo, Pt. No. 85 & 86 N.T. Pine St. \$8.03
Collins, Eddie Lee, Pt. No. 73 & 74 N.T. Cedar St. \$10.65
Copes, Janie, Pt. No. 41 N.T. Live Oak St. \$7.42
Copes, LaFayette, Pt. No. 215 O.T. Mulberry St. \$6.64
Crooms, Romeo, No. 94 N.T. Marsh St. \$3.91
Davis, David W. Est., Pt. No. 196, O.T. Pine St. house at rear of lot; No. 69 Cor. Marsh & Cedar Sts.; improvements 3 houses; new dwelling \$87.82
Davis, Francis Est., Pt. No. 167 O.T. Craven St. \$7.04
Davis, Nancy Est., Pt. No. 31 N.T. Live Oak St. \$6.99
Davis, Sederick, Pt. No. 80 N.T. Marsh St. \$10.48
Ellison, James Garfield, Pt. No. 85 O.T. Pine St. \$7.07
Improvements \$55.81
Ellison, John R., Sr., Pt. No. 92 N.T. Marsh St. \$12.07
Ellison, Stephen, hrs., No. 131 N.T. Front St. \$4.20
Fisher, Dr. H. W., Pt. No. 134 Craven St. \$7.01
Fulford, Annie J., Pt. No. 208 Pollock St. \$12.06
Fulford, Annie Maria, Pt. No. 80 N.T. Pollock St. \$12.10
Garris, Roscoe, Pt. No. 155 Cedar St. \$12.26
Godette, Artis, Pt. 73 O.T. Cedar St. \$9.60
Godette, Lucinda, Pt. No. 71 N.T. Pollock St. \$17.17
Godette, Matthew, Pt. 157 O.T. Cor. Cedar & Queen \$12.89
Gordon, Frank N., 1/2 O.T. Pollock St. \$4.99
Gorum, Charlie, No. 215 O.T. Mulberry St. \$10.24
Green, Henry Est., Pt. H.T. & Pt. 81 N.T. Marsh St. \$23.13
Green, Leona, house 7 lot on Queen St. \$2.86
Green, Sam, Pt. 199 Pine St. \$9.75
Hardesty, Enoch, Pt. 198 & bldg. O.T. Pine St. \$5.49
Hardesty, James, Pt. No. 141 O.T. Queen St. \$6.50
Harris, Jas. O., Sr., Pt. No. 180 O.T. Queen St. \$7.63
Hartley, Freddie R., Pt. No. 141 O.T. back lot & dwelling \$3.92
Hawkins, Chas. C., No. 206 Queen St. \$15.87
Hazel, B. G., Pt. 200 O.T. Pollock St. \$5.19
Henry, Alex, Pt. No. 22 H.T. \$4.77
Henry, Dave, Est., Pt. No. 82 O.T. Craven St. \$9.25
Henry, Luther M., Pt. No. 72 N.T. Queen St. \$12.88
Hill, Floyd, Pt. 156 O.T. Cedar St. \$10.25
Johnson, Carrie J., Pt. No. 211 Craven St. \$15.26
Johnson, Clinton Est., Pt. 67 Cedar St. \$7.01
Johnson, W. J., 182 Pine St. & store bldg. \$18.95
Jones, Millard Wright & wife, Pt. No. 89 O.T., 2 dwellings \$21.92
Nolan, Wm. J., Pt. No. 200 O.T. Pollock St. \$7.29
Parker, Jesse, Jr., Pt. No. 64 N.T. Marsh St. \$14.61
Parker, Otis, Pt. No. 11 H.T. Cedar St. \$12.51
Pasteur, John E., Pt. No. 75 N.T. Pollock St. \$5.59
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Smith, Benjamin H., Pt. No.