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Upholstering

(From the Sunny South.)

Gwendoline Hollis;

—OR—

BY SYLVIA HOPE.

"Are you quite sure, Paul, you have comfortable rooms?"

"Very sure, Aunt Martha. They are near the parlor and open in the front of the hotel. We should feel

deviously thankful, for at such times in New Orleans beggars cannot be choosers."

Mrs. Legarden, who disowned any such weakness as *cacathia loquendi*, made no reply, but leaned back against the carriage in as dignified position as the rough jolting would allow; while Paul Vestre let his lazy, bright eyes wander out through the window over the noisy, unique, Southern streets we were passing through that damp, Saturday evening a few months ago.

Nor said I anything—not even an admiring "oh!" at the novel sight breaking on our view as street after street we left behind with their quaint, wooden houses lit up by the gaslight, and their dark-eyed passers-by chattering on the *banquette* in a bewilderment of French and English voices—said nothing, but watched the clear, cameo-like contour of Gwendoline Hollis' pale face, as forgetful of us she bent her cheek upon her little hands, and looked out, not with Paul Vestre's lazy eyes, but hungrily, yearningly, and her lips seemed to press themselves together to keep back emotion, and tremble.

I watched her face. I had watched it daily since our introduction, dating two weeks back. Yet there was no great beauty therein, save in the wondrously dark eyes, that reminded me of a description of Rachel, Queen of Tragedy, as, years ago, she first appeared on the New York stage; only Gwendoline's mouth could be designated as "mobile"—its sweet, pale curves rarely breaking into smiles and laughter.

I did not understand her, nor did Mrs. Legarden's nephew and my *france*—Paul Vestre, nor Colonel Vandever—the man who once kissed the maiden palms of Mrs. Legarden of young, romantic days, and to whom she was now striving with all her might to sell her deceased brother's step-daughter. Gwendoline Hollis, perhaps she understood her best of all, for, since mine and Paul's engagement of eight months' standing, there had been some hints of the *mesalliance* her brother had formed by marrying Gwendoline's mother; also of a dissipated son, and brother of Gwendoline, who was killed in a bar-room two years previous in some Southern city, and for whom his sister grieved unceasingly.

For "pure character," Mrs. Legarden had informed me, she kept Gwendoline; but since my visit and subsequent journey, I learned that the orphan paid down for her home. To read daily to her step-aunt, to ride daily in a close carriage, and help robe and unrobe this artificial old woman was not the most amiable lot on earth, even if she did bestow costly raiment, and had determined to settle her in life as the rich Mrs. Vandever!

Slowly we made our way through the gas-lit streets toward the hotel; and gradually Gwendoline's mouth lost something of its plaintiveness; but her eyes had caught a new light in them, so widely bright that Paul white pered.

"Gwen, did you ever visit New Orleans before?"

Gwendoline hesitated as I saw, but Mrs. Legarden answered sharply:

"What an absurd question, Paul! Certainly Gwendoline never visited this city before."

Paul, who laughed usually at his aunt's sharp rejoinders, put not another question; but instead of watching our approach to the hotel, looked earnestly at Gwendoline's pale face that was now as free from emotion as a stone statue's.

"Thank heaven, we are done jolting," said Mrs. Legarden as the carriage stopped, and she was the first to get out and shake the creases out of her traveling suit. Something had made her cross. We went up the carpeted, spiral stairway and into the elegant parlor, where bright coal fires cast a genial glow over furniture, mirrors, pictures and the crowd assembled.

Gwen going to the centre table, poured out some ice-water and drank hastily, while Mrs. Legarden and I found seats near the door, and waited Paul's return—watching at the same time the handsome dresses of the ladies, and wondering a little anxiously, if Colonel Vandever would see that our trunk came in time to dress for the theatre.

We sat in our rooms, and decided to remain at home, as a rare and wonderful week was before us in which to feast our Northern eyes on this renowned Southern city.

Gwen and I roamed together; and while I stood before the bureau and put my hair in crimping pins, she knelt before her trunk. In the glass I

saw her face reflected, and knew of what she should wear on the morrow she was not thinking, but of a part of her life in which the present had no share. I refrained from breaking her reverie, and, quickly undressing, sank into the snowy bed, feeling like Sancho Panza, "Blessed is the man that invented sleep."

The sun was shining, brightly shining, and the street-cars and wagons were rattling below when I opened my eyes the next morning. Gwen was up and dressed, and standing at the window. I made a careful toilette, for upon that dress I depended very much. My appearance is anything but striking, for I am little and scrawny, and sandy-haired. Sometimes it is hard to tell where my complexion ends and my hair begins; but I have a respectable mouth and teeth, pale blue eyes, small hands and feet, and— I am helpless.

Sometimes in my skeptical mood, I wondered if the last was not the attraction that drew Paul's devotion, remembering what a worshiper of the "almighty dollar" his aunt was, but I would reproach myself immediately. He was always attentive and watchful, and I had nothing to complain of.

I thought of all this as I dressed leisurely that Sabbath morning in New Orleans—I thought of it as I turned to survey my costly dress gracefully hanging, my scarlet tie daintily tied, and caught the look of Gwen as she turned from the window.

"Your sleep refreshed you, Eunice; you look well," she said coming, and leaning upon the bureau-slab.

"And there is some color in your cheeks," I answered, "never mind, we both shall be 'red as a rose' this summer, sea-bathing and eating and drinking Mrs. Legarden's good things at the farm."

Gwen knew what that visit meant. Paul and I had decided to forego bridal trips, and spend our honeymoon at aunt's farm, where every summer a crowd of her friends came and spent the hot August days under its great elm trees.

"You must live with us, Gwen—live with Paul and me, until you marry Colonel Vandever or Mr. Somebody. Will you, dear Gwen?"

The little dash of color in her cheeks faded out, and her tones grew grave as she answered:

"My future is full of doubt, Eunice, and what wave of fate is the strongest remains to be seen. Whatever the end is, I shall ever remember your kindness—your friendship, and Paul's. Aunt Martha's is merely a conditional liking, depending on my marriage with her old lover."

"You have known Paul a long time?"

"Only since his return from New York this last visit—one month ago; but I have written a great many letters to him for his aunt in the twelve months past. It so happened we never met in his hurried visits to our home."

"It is a wonder to me you did not fall in love with him, Gwen. He is so frank and handsome," I said after a little silence, sticking the pins in my beaded velvet cushion as I spoke.

Gwen laughed a low, rippling laugh like some brook music in the heart of the woods—the first I had ever heard from her lips.

"You declared a few days ago matches were made in heaven, and as you and Paul are to be married in early June, what folly and trouble to Aunt Martha that would have been, since like Heaven she decrees to weave the web of human destiny—the veritable fate in one."

I passed the bitterness of her tones by, saying thoughtfully:

"If you had, and he had returned your love I wonder where I would have been today? You would have stood in my shoes."

"That is sheer nonsense, for I could never stand in that dainty No. 1 slipper," and Gwen looked down at my satinied foot with a serious glance.

I felt that there was a double meaning in her words—what, I could not determine, for at that moment Mrs. Legarden rapped at the door, and asked us to come to breakfast. We went down to the dining room, where a meal that might have appeased the appetite of the most fastidious epicure was served, and of which we partook unsparringly.

I learned that day that Gwendoline Hollis was a Roman Catholic. I also learned that her step-aunt would have much preferred her calling herself a Catholic, so bitter was she against the Anglicans. We spent Monday nights, reading, were you ever in the French market? Did you ever drink a cup of coffee at five o'clock, A. M., at one of the stands? If you have not, you have lost much.

Evening came ere we were aware and we had barely time to dress for the theatre. As we left, I threw a white silk open cloak around Gwen's shoulders, and she looked queerly with her black robes, her straight black hair drawn from her white brow

in softest braids low on her neck, and surmounted with a white rose and green leaves nestling beneath the rim of her velvet hat. I could not blame the Colonel for being in love with her pale, intellectual face. I loved it, and was never tired of watching it.

The house was full when we arrived. With difficulty we reached our box, and were scarcely seated ere the curtain rose and the play began. The rendition was good, characters well sustained. In second the scene, I felt Gwen grasp my hand and give a quick gasp. I saw that she was deadly pale, and trembling from head to foot.

"My goodness, Gwendoline! what's the matter?" Mrs. Legarden whispered, excitedly, while Paul, drawing the curtain so as to shield her from the public, bent over and said:

"Drink this," handing her a glass of water the boy had brought a few minutes previous.

She obeyed him, her eyes not lifting their long lashes from her white cheeks, then leaned her head against the back of my chair. Paul lifted the little nervous hand next to him and pressed it. He bent his head until his flaxen hair touched hers.

"Dear Gwen, if you do not feel well, I will take you back to the hotel; do you wish to go?"

She shook her head, and declared she felt much better; but her colorless face sadly belied the assertion. We remained through, but I felt convinced that Gwen studiously avoided looking at the stage the rest of the evening although I heard her next day tell Colonel Vandever the acting was good.

How fast the days went by! We went everywhere; we visited Carrolton and Magnolia gardens; we went to the Lake, and watched the aquatic feats of Boyton; we spent a morning at the Fair grounds; we crossed the "Father of waters," saw Algiers; the gunboat—the Robert E. Lee—the jettes—and wandered through the cemeteries—those marble homes of the dead above ground, around which roses and geraniums bloom from January to December; and solemn and grand above all rose the monument erected to the memory of the Confederate dead. We stood beneath it, not with ill will, but remembering as our Union soldiers fought bravely and died, so did the gallant sons of the "Lost Cause."

One afternoon Paul and I went out together. Mrs. Legarden and Colonel Vandever had gone to meet the Hammettons, of New York, registered that morning at a neighboring hotel, and Gwen was suffering from sick headache. So we wandered from St. Charles to Camp street, up past La Fayette square, on to a small cemetery resting in the heart of the city.

Sottily the gulf breeze swept through the orange trees, scattering the blossoms along the shelved walks, and the rose leaves over the tombs. Sweetly the dead seemed to rest in that quiet, blossoming spot; and loath to depart, we lingered until the air began to grow chill. As we turned our footsteps toward the gate, a sound of voices on our right came to us, and the figures of a lady and gentleman were outlined against the background of a gray tomb overgrown with ivy. The former knelt as we passed, and began to pluck away sprigs of grass at the base; while her companion, leaning his arm against the railing, said very distinctly, in French:

"It would have done no good *petite*—such a worthless fellow was I. Therefore, when Richards was taken for me in the mole, I did not contradict it, but got off in the next boat to Galveston, and ever since have lived in San Francisco. I was a disgrace to you. It were better to mourn me as a dead man."

Paul stood still a moment, then walked down a cross path toward which the stranger passed; but as he did so, the lady rose suddenly, and dropping her veil over her face, went out with her companion.

"How like Gwen she was, Paul!" I said, as soon as he returned.

His face flushed as he answered:

"I did not see her face."

"We said no more, but I saw that Paul looked thoughtful. When we arrived at the hotel, we learned that an engagement to sup with the Hammettons had been accepted, and all were going except, Gwen, who had retired to her room without her supper; but she came into the parlor, just as we were leaving, to get Paul to mail a letter for her. He was out on the gallery, and, hesitating a moment she parted the lace curtains and stepped out. Some ten minutes passed, and Mrs. Legarden, growing impatient, motioned me to summon Paul, as it was time to visit the Hammettons.

Passing through a contiguous window, I passed to see where Paul and Gwen were standing; and as I did so, I heard the former say:

"Gwen, it is useless to deny your visit. I picked up your handkerchief that fell from your pocket as you passed

ed through the gate of the enclosure. Why would you not trust me?"

His voice was full of anger, with a thrill of sorrow mingling. I saw Gwen bury her face in her hands an instant, then suddenly catch hold of his arm, saying, brokenly:

"Paul, I will confess the truth! I was in the cemetery—I stood beside my mother's grave. The young man with me, I knew years ago—I knew him in this city, for I was born and raised here. You believed I had been here before, I saw it the night we came; but Mrs. Legarden had bidden me never to mention my past life. It was one of disgraceful connection, she deems, because her lordly brother took my mother from off the stage, and my poor, dear brother gambled his last dollar at roulette table. Who my companion was, is a secret. It is sufficient to say, he would harm me no sooner than a brother. Believe and trust me, Paul."

I heard not his reply, for I left with out interrupting them; and soon after they returned to the parlor, and Gwen bidding us good-night, went immediately to her chamber.

Madri-Grass! It dawned with a crisp breath that seemed to have frolicked across the gulf to herald the carnival day of King Rex—the most amiable monarch in earthly realms. The clouds hazy and sweet as Aurora's veil, fled away, and let the golden sunbeams flood the city with brightness and warmth. At twelve o'clock the boom of cannon toll to the thousands of spectators, crowding *banquettes* and galleries that His Majesty and mighty pageant had arrived and would hold revelry until summoned to the royal palace with the going down of the sun. Through the densely packed streets they passed—Canal was one moving mass of heads; every window was filled—even house-tops, and from these heights, hushed and breathless, innumerable eyes looked down and beheld the gala scene of the year.

The hours fled away—evening grew nigh—and Comus, wine-loving Bacchus' son, turning from the footsteps of his gay, rose father, who in days of old loosened the steps and tongues of his yielding subjects with Samian wine, left the importance of instilling a lesson that might guide them through the trials and troubles of the coming year. So, illuminating the arched of time back to primeval days, he drew forth the grand Scriptures of the annals of the Jewish race, and presented the sacred pageant of the chosen people from Adam and Eve in Paradise to the triumph of Titus over the capture of Jerusalem.

Slowly the grand panorama moved on, lighted by flaming robes and flambeaux, slowly it disappeared like a dream of Arabian enchantment, and only the illuminated galleries, the agitated mass of heads, were left to tell the tale of the "Mystic Krewe." Hushed, expectant, we had stood and watched the brilliant vision, and now joined eagerly the crowd that, like a tidal wave, moved onward to try "Varieties," where again our eyes were entranced by the tableaux proceeding, the ball of the "Krewe," and by the witching of music, the gallant men and beautiful women of that brilliantly-jeweled throng.

Far past midnight it was when we left the realm of enchantment. Paul and I led the way toward the hotel, and at the entrance passed to bid adieu to the Hammettons.

Pleasant greetings had been exchanged, our friends had departed, when Paul cried out:

"Gwen! Gwen! Where is she?"

"She was not with us."

"Go back immediately to the theatre—both of you," Mrs. Legarden cried, excitedly.

They obeyed her instantly; and, nervous and excited, we went up to our rooms to await their coming. Tired as she was, Mrs. Legarden walked the floor, trailing her handsome silk more quickly than gracefully over the length of the room. She walked the floor and began to complain of Gwen's carelessness.

"She might have been more watchful. Why could she not have taken Paul's arm?"

"At this I felt guilty, for I had hurried her nephew ahead."

An hour was spent in waiting and watching. At last we heard Paul's step and voice, and I opened the door at his first rap. He entered alone, with pale, troubled face.

"I have not found her," he said. "Vandever may be more fortunate. I called to see the Hammettons. They said they saw her no more after we left the theatre, and suppose she had gone ahead with Eunice and me."

There was a hopeless, perplexed look in Paul's face, and he paced the floor impatiently.

He glanced around the room as if to find her, and as his eyes fell on a white envelope lying on the bureau, he sprang forward and grasped it. It was sealed and in Gwen's even hand writing addressed, to her step-aunt. The latter motioned Paul to read it, which he did.

"Aunt Legarden,—You have told me in case I refused to marry Colonel Vandever, your home could no longer be mine. To-day I had to make a decision, so I write this as an adieu.

"I thank you for giving me a home so long, and I am grateful, but not to that degree as to sell myself to a man I could never love. To Eunice and Paul I give my best wishes. I shall depart at daylight with my brother, who is spared to me, though I have mourned him as one dead. He is an actor, and lives in San Francisco. We have met to part no more in this life. Again, accept my thanks. I leave all your gifts behind, for in leaving your home I feel that I forfeit the right of keeping them."

"Gwendoline Hollis
Madri-Grass, March 22, 1876."

Paul crushed the missive in his hand, and turned upon his aunt with a fully.

"You are to blame for this, Aunt Martha! You would have sold her—a child almost—to a man of sixty. If she goes to ruin, may God forgive you, for on you will rest the blame!"

He grasped his hat to leave, but I clung to his hand. Daylight was breaking—a pale-gray gleam, and played upon his face in ghastly hue.

"Let me go with you, dear Paul," I cried; "let me go? We can reach Galveston boat in ample time, and persuade her to come back to us."

He said no, but I pleaded again, and we went out in the pale lantern lawn, leaving Mrs. Legarden wiping the tears from her rouged cheeks.

Down Canal we hurried; we obtained a carriage at last, and on, on went, not saying a word but watching eagerly to catch the first glimpse of the boat bound for Galveston.

"Thank God!" Paul ejaculated as the driver halted, and we saw we were in time.

Early as it was, there was a stir on board, and as we passed over the first person we met was the stranger we had seen in the cemetery with Gwen. He was idly smoking a cigar, and standing with his face toward the water.

Paul went up to him.

"Your sister and my cousin by marriage, is aboard. I have come to see her. Please show us the way."

The young man drew himself up haughtily and his eyes, so like Gwen's flashed.

"You cannot see her sir!"

"I will see her and Paul, dropping my hand, strode to the rear end of the boat, forgetful of all save the object of his visit.

In the dress she wore to the ball, with a dark shawl thrown around her slender form, Gwen stood behind the piano awaiting the return of the stewardess. I saw that she had been crying."

"Gwen—Gwen! my darling!"

Paul uttered the words with a tenderness foreign to his former tones, and as I passed I saw him spring forward and clasp her in his arms, and kiss her tear-wet face as he had never kissed mine.

She gave a little cry at the sound of his voice, and struggled to free herself from his embrace; but I caught sight of her face. It was rosy with love's sweet flush; and feeling as if my life was gone forever, I dropped upon a chair and bowed my head unmindful of the steady gaze of Gwen's brother who had followed us in silence, and stood at my side.

"Eunice! my poor Eunice! forgive me," I heard Paul say, and he took my hand from my face and kissed me. I looked up—bathed from desperation—and saw his clear gray eyes, full of trouble, bending near me. He seemed so have grown old—very old in one night—for there were deep lines around his eyes and lips. I could not help feeling sorry for him, and I said tearfully, though it nearly broke my heart:

"Dear Paul, how can you help loving Gwen? I believed you liked me and would have loved me, but Gwen was seen and you could not control your affections, and tears choked further utterance, while he seized my hands again, and called me a forgiving angel."

Time will heal all wounded hearts, I suppose. Madri-Grass is over, and we have returned to our Northern homes. Gwen and Paul will be married next fall. Mrs. Legarden has decided to become Mrs. Gabriel Vandever, and has made friends with Gwen's handsome brother. To me, no chance is in prospect.

Mr. Edwards, of San Francisco, has no little hatchet, but says that he gave away his cat and kitten to a friend in Santa Clara, forty-nine miles away, and that the cat came back the next night, carrying the kitten in her mouth.

Joan of Arc, with her chain armor on, may have appeared here, but it takes just the same courage in our day for a woman to go around with her calico gown tucked between her legs washing "pains."