

CYNTHIA

*A Story of Mystery about a lost
Bride, a haunted House and a
little walled Garden of
old Georgetown.*



By
**ROSALIND
SIBOLD**

CYNTHIA

by

Rosalind Sibold

CYNTHIA is a charming, imaginatively told tale that will take the reader back to an earlier, more romantic America. It is *belle-lettristique* in its flavor. It carries gentle refrains of Hawthorne or Poe. It has an old house in Georgetown, a Library Ghost, the sweet memory of a beautiful girl who disappeared long ago—more than that, it would hardly be fair to reveal.

But there is also a curious story about the way in which CYNTHIA came to be written. As ROSALIND SIBOLD puts it: "A few years ago I was the private secretary of Mrs. Francis Biddle, wife of the then Attorney-General. When Mr. Biddle was appointed to be the American Judge at the Nuremberg Trials, I stayed in the Biddles' Georgetown home, a charming old house, with a secluded garden, which was also the childhood home of Fulton Lewis, Jr. There I wrote CYNTHIA. The house is portrayed as it exists: the rooms, the stairs, the library! (And there is a Library Ghost!) The garden is there, lovely, charming, a world of its own with its birds and flowers and squirrels. Cats come over the walls and wild brown bunnies peep through the garden gate. There, too, is the weathered

(continued on back flap)

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(continued from front flap)

urn set within the red brick wall. It's all very beautiful—but there is a melancholy note in the place, both house and garden.

“I wish you could sit in the library or garden as you read my story. . . .”

About the Author

ROSALIND SIBOLD was born in the historic town of Lewisburg, Greenbrier County, West Virginia, and received her early education at Greenbrier College. She studied medical-secretarial training in New York City and became assistant to the late Dr. Joseph Pardoe Shearer, the prominent Washington surgeon. During the Roosevelt Administration she was private secretary to Mrs. Francis Biddle, wife of Attorney-General Francis Biddle. It was while she was living in the house and secluded garden of their Georgetown home that she wrote *CYNTHIA*. (See opposite column.)

MISS SIBOLD has written verse and juvenile fiction which has been published from time to time. She is a member of The National Geographic Society. In addition to her literary talent, she is an accomplished violinist. At the present time she is sojourning in Florida, learning Spanish, watching surf and spindrift, pelicans and porpoises, and searching for starfish and sea urchins.



Jacket design by Gustav Schrotter



CYNTHIA





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A story of Mystery About a Lost Bride, a
Haunted House and a Little Walled Garden
of Old Georgetown in Washington, D. C.

by

ROSALIND SIBOLD

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Dedicated
to the memory of my mother

IT IS SUMMER and it is pleasant to rest in the morning sunshine of an old walled garden in Georgetown. All the world is outside the red brick walls, half covered with strong green ivy and a clinging red vine, and inside the walls is the garden world, secluded and quiet, suffused by a quaint charm peculiar to old gardens. And the birds and the little grey squirrels and I have it all to ourselves this summer morning. Downtown Washington seems far away.

The boxwood still supports the gossamer carpet upon which the fairies danced last night, and the sparkling drops of early morning dew linger in the shining mesh. There is one half-brown red rose on its tall slender stem, and in the earth urn beneath the wall fountain white lilies gleam in the sun. I water them each day and marvel that flowers so fresh and fair can grow in such an old urn. So worn it is and so marked and discolored by sun and rain!

The fountain itself is half filled with leaves. It is set deep within the old brick wall and it must have been here a long, long time, and the walls have stood a long time, too. They extend across the garden and turn to join the long narrow brick wall that runs the length of the garden and closes it in on that side. Occasionally an inquisitive cat appears over the top and lies in the sun, and through the small gap in the garden gate a wild brown bunny sometimes slips through, eyes so bright with wonder and curiosity.

The squirrels have a nest house high in the oak tree, and now there are two baby squirrels in the family. Adorable, lovable little balls of grey fur, and as quick as sunbeams! But they are learning to come for the peanuts I bring them. At first they were timid and hesitant, edging up warily to the bottom step of the porch where a few shelled peanuts had been spread to tempt them. Then finding that the next step and the next also held peanuts, they accepted me as a friend, and now they take peanuts from my outstretched fingers or from the white table top here beside me, and they sit up and nibble so daintily. Squirrels have such beautiful table manners!

The mockingbirds and the cardinals are here, feeding on the stale shredded-wheat biscuits I threw on the grass. I wonder if the flicker will come? Sometimes I hear him long before I find him with my eyes. When the ground is dry the sparrows take dust

baths in the earth between the flagstones that make the path from the garden gate to the porch steps. And how the robins love the soft brown earth after a rain! They run along in the flower beds and on the grass, listening with an ear to the ground for a worm, and with unerring divine sight dig in that place and pull forth the worm they have heard tunneling beneath them. Birds and animals have more faith than humans, I do believe.

The house that belongs to the garden is like it, dignified and lovely, and it too has a haunting charm, yet at the same time a haunting sadness. Sometimes it is as though it shuts me close within its past. It is as though a spell were being woven about me, shutting away the everydayness of the present world and taking me gently into the world of long gone days.

It is not mine, this house with its garden, and I shall not be here long, but it does not matter, does it, who I am or why I am here, to you who hold this book in your hands and turn the pages as your eyes follow the black printed words and lines? Your unspoken replies come to me through the same invisible aural sense as do the unspoken communings of the long-dead men and women who lived in this house years and years ago, and who watched spring and summer and autumn and winter come and go in and out of this garden. It is through the Library Ghost that I know them and want to be friendly with them. Birds sang from dawn to dark for them, I am sure, just as they sing now for me. The joyous note of the cardinal's song brings a catch to the throat and a lilt to the heart of me now as it must have done to the listening ears of the now-quiet dead. But the plaintive lament of the robins at dusk is a lonely sound. It is in keeping with the house and the garden when the evening shadows begin to fall.

Memory takes me back to a time in this house when it was necessary for me to go down the stairs several times during the night to get medicine from the refrigerator for someone who was ill. The house was quiet and dark, but friendly, and I liked it and I went down softly, turning on lights as I went. On one of the return trips I sat down to rest for a moment on the top stairstep, and as from this resting place I looked down, I saw the soft light on the rows of books in the library and on the heavy, richly colored draperies, and on the satiny sheen of the stair rail and the newel

post. The light gleamed softly on the silver hinges of the old dark doors and on the silver doorknobs themselves. It was all very beautiful to gaze upon, but I was most keenly aware of the house itself, as a House!

I think it was that night that the Ghost accepted me to membership. I was aware of a strong stimulation to my imagination, of a sense of companionship, of a oneness with the invisible. It was almost as though I had been expected and was being welcomed after long waiting, and I remember thinking that I would like to come back to the house sometime, alone, and sit on that top step again and recapture that *oneness* with the House. Now that time has come, and now that I shall be alone here for a time I shall wander quietly through the rooms from time to time and sit in the garden and listen.



The day has come to an end and tonight I am in the bedroom in which I sleep in this house, all alone in this big old house of many rooms whose walls, could they but speak of the happenings within them during the years, would fill these still rooms with their memories. But I am not afraid. I am a friend, safe within the confines of these friendly walls, and as such I open my mind and heart and listen. And as I lie in the dark I seem to hear:

“In this room I borned my baby and in this room many years later I lay down one night on my bed and died and my soul went home to God. Next day morn when the sun shone in through those windows and the pigeons thruttled deep in their throats, and the household woke up and after a time came to see why I did not wake up, they found me very fast asleep, here in my own bed. That is the way mortals should leave this earth, you know; just lie down in their own beds and fall into deep dreamless slumber. Yes, in my own bed—not *that* bed, you understand—not *that* narrow bed with that thin mattress and that hard board beneath it. Heavens, no! Mine was a wide deep bed with a real mattress, a feather tick they called them then, stuffed with feathers that were plucked from snow-white geese grown on my father’s estate and made into ticks and pillows for my marriage dowry.

“So it was there they found me. At least they found my body but I was gone from it, my spirit freed at last, as free to fly as the pigeons and the cardinals and mocking birds—all the birds I had listened to the many mornings as they wakened in the early hours and wakened me to hear their song. You hear them now, these mornings, as you lie in that bed. Sometimes you are awake before they are. You hear that very first awakening note and you think of a bit of verse you love. Like this, isn’t it?

‘It is the throat
Of the smallest bird
Upon whose note
The dawn is heard.’

“And you hear the striking of the big clock in the night. It is outside, not far distant, and it has been there many years. Often its reverberating strokes are unheard or unheeded, but many times you have listened and counted the strokes. I know, because I too have counted them. In the way of things that bring themselves to the mind by regularity of sound it is a comforting, reassuring voice in the night. There are the soft little night sounds, too, subdued chirps and the faint hum of insects outside the windows, *little* sounds that belong only to the nighttime. Lie quietly and listen.

“Yes, as I told you, here in this room my baby was born. In those days they did not send mothers to hospitals and put them to sleep to have their babies. I’m glad they do that now; but then I knew when she was born and when they cut the birthstring that had held my baby to me for all those months—in the innermost depths of my body, warm and safe and sweet under my heart—depending on me, and letting me know it, too, in her stirring moments, wanting to be born into this old world.

“I missed her from under my heart when she went from me. Only mothers know this, my dear, but not *all* mothers know it. Do not generalize mothers. Just because a woman is physically conditioned for motherhood is no assurance she will be a mother in all the requisites that motherhood can mean.

“So you dropped off to sleep, didn’t you? While I was telling you about my baby, my little Cynthia! And now it is morning,

another day, and soon you must get up. The birds are out foraging for food and the mother pigeon is edging her two little squabs out of the nest on the red roof outside the bathroom window. Funny little half-feathered fledglings, aren't they? But hurry now. It is a lovely new day. You must not miss it."



"O, here you are! I'm Cynthia. You'll usually find me here because this is my favorite room. In *this* room we had parties. Oh! Lovely parties! Laughter and friends, and candlelight and fire-light, and rare old wines! See, there yet is the stain on the satiny old board. The mellow lustre of old wood is so beautiful. They do keep these floors nice, don't they? I am glad of that. Now it is that nice little Irish girl called Sally who has been looking after them, the one with the rich trill and turn in her voice and the smile in her eyes when she opened the door to you.

"There isn't a nail in these boards. They were laid long ago and fastened together with wooden pegs. But the stain is still there. Look for yourself! And do you know who spilled the wine? The President himself! It was such a jolly party and he laughed so heartily that his hand shook and the wine spilled over.

"This was a happy home *then*. There was Father and Mother and David and Cynthia. Yes, I'm Cynthia, and David was my cousin and he was brought to live with us after his own mother died. We were the same age and he was just like a real brother to me. We had such happy times together in this house, exploring its nooks and crannies, sharing childhood secrets, and playing games and growing up. Then came the dreadful war, and David went away never to come home again.

"There was Anna, *Old Anna* we called her, and we called her that because we loved her. She had taken care of Mother while she was growing up, and when Mother came to live here, Old Anna and Thomas, her husband, came too.

"Molly was the cook who was always around no matter how many others came and went. Molly *belonged*. Her cabin was at the foot of the hill and David and I loved to go there and to play with her little pickaninnies. One of the baby twins died and David

and I were allowed to go down and take flowers from the garden—yes, that very old garden out there—to put on the little grave. We could not find Molly at first, but we went on in as we usually did, and there lay the little brown baby on a table in the center of the room, dressed in a snowy white dress, a pink ribbon around the tiny kinky head. But what caught our attention when we got closer was a sight so startling that it made us hold to each other's hand very tightly. There was a shiny silver dollar on the little baby's mouth, and a copper penny on each of its eyes! We talked about that for days.

“And, of course, there was John, my sweetheart John, who did not live here in this house, but who came often and was welcomed and loved by us all.

“It was in this room that John and I were married. There where the piano is now I stood by John in my bridal gown, he so tall and proud beside me. And the candlelight on the lilies and on the face of the minister before us was all a part of it. How well I remember the two small white satin pillows we knelt upon! Right there they were! It was all so beautiful and my heart was so full it was hard to hold back the happy tears that welled up from the overflowing of happiness and the tender love I had for John. My sweetheart and my husband-to-be! Oh, my dear!

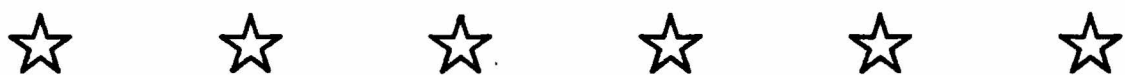
“I had a *lovely* gown. It was of shimmering satin, wide and full, and *so* beautiful. I wish you could have seen it. And the petticoats! I wish you might have seen them, too. Nowadays girls wear only one, don't they, and some girls not any at all. But then! Ah! The fine muslin one with the feather stitching and the tatting ruffle! And the batiste one with exquisite embroidery and inset of fine lace! But the prettiest of all was the petticoat made entirely of lace and it was next to my bridal gown that my own mother had been married to my father in. I wore her veil, too, that had been *her* mother's veil. The gown was so rich and lustrous when the candlelight shone on it, and it had medallions of real lace that had been made in Paris.

“My mother was there, in her room upstairs where you sleep, when Old Anna put the gown over my head, on top of all those petticoats, murmuring a saintly blessing as she smoothed and straightened the folds. And when she had finished and left my

mother and me alone, my mother put her arms around me and held her sweet soft face against my cheek and whispered to me: 'You take me back, my darling, right back to the night I wore this gown. May God bless you in it and grant to you the same happiness that has been mine!'

"'Oh, Mother!' I tried to say. 'I love you so very much. Thank you for telling me. I'll always remember, always, and when I have a daughter of my own I'll tell her just as you are telling me now.'

"But I never had a daughter. I never had any children at all, because I did not live to become a mother. Not even to become a wife to my John whom I loved so much and was married to in this very room you are sitting in! For, you see, I—but there! Your telephone is ringing. You must go. I'll tell you the rest another time."



"I saw you gettin' some mint yesterday for your iced tea. That old mint bed! It comes up green and tender every year. Why, you couldn't *kill that mint*. Planted by my husband it was, with his hands, and me thinkin' he had forgot the soil and the love o' growin' things! Old Thomas was never the same after he was near struck down by the lightnin' that day in the storm. He was tryin' to get Master's saddle horse in the stable but the black was feared o' the storm and ran under a tree, and lightnin' struck the tree and the horse, but my Thomas was spared. But he was never the same. Blighted he was and it hurted me bad to see him like that, but after a long time he began to walk again, after a fashion, and to do things he had a mind to, and to putter about in the garden.

"You didn't know all this when you drank the tea, did you now? Your frosty iced tea! These new-fangled boxes that freeze ice into clear little squares! I s'pose they're all right for folks nowadays at the rattle and prattle pace they keep up. In them days we stayed home more, and most usual we sat in the shade of that big oak tree there, my Thomas and me.

"Ain't the garden sweet? You do smell it, don't you? I used

to. I remember the smell of the boxwood, the scent of the roses and of them pretty little pinks.

“I see that the wind blew a limb down during that hard storm the other night, but the knothole limb is still there and the birds still love it and make their nests and raise their young in it. Under that very same tree we’d sit, in the cool o’ the evenin’, my Thomas and me; and Thomas, he’d make us a julep with the mint from the mint bed he’d growed, and cool it with ice that was froze in a country pond and packed in sawdust in the icehouse till ’twas needed.

“When my Thomas died the Master gave him a fine funeral, he did. An elegant funeral! And the Mistress brought out her own mournin’ veil for me to wear. That proud I was! I wisht Thomas could see me in it. Even through my tears I wisht that, but even then I felt like he knowed.

“Old Thomas went two years before Mis’ Cynthia did. He would have grieved sore for her, he would. Yet he might have found her. I think *he* might have found her. Oh, there’s been glad times and sad times in this old garden. There’s sunshine and shadow in hearts just like there is in gardens. Old Anna knows. I’ll wait for you to come again, Miss.”



“Help yerself, Miss, to that there mint bed Anna was tellin’ ye the tale of. It’s jes like posies—the more ye pick ’em, the better they’ll bloom. I wisht ye could ’ave seen the bed o’ valley lilies I had there onct. They was that pretty, now. Little white bell flowers hidin’ down ’tween the green pointed leaves, an’ the pure sweet smell o’ ’em was ’like a bit o’ heaven,’ the Missus used to say. The lilacs was sweet, too, in front of the old wall, an’ them little brown sweet-shrubs that grew on a bush yonder in the corner was a family fav’rite. Mis’ Cynthia used to pull ’em off an’ hold ’em tight in her hand when she was a little girl.

“Mis’ Cynthia loved this garden, she did. She grew up in it, jes like the pretty flowers themselves. The two o’ them, Mis’ Cynthia an’ little Master David played here day in an’ day out, as frolicksome as the kittens, an’ into as much mischief, too. I see

cats come in an' out nowadays, an' climb over the fence with an eye for the birds an' the young wild rabbits, but in them days we had plenty o' tame kittens that had plenty to eat without catchin' the songbirds. Cute they was, playin' an' cuffin' each other an' rollin' an' jumpin' for fireflies when dusk came on. '*Buttercup*' was what Mis' Cynthia called one fat little yellow one, an' the other baby—for all the world exactly like it—she called *Honeysuckle*.

"Anna an' I would set an' watch 'em an' talk old times. I'd recollect gardens I'd planted an' tended long before I ever saw Anna. Always had a green thumb, I had, an' I grew up lovin' the smell o' the earth, the feel of it in my fingers an' the growin' o' things in it. 'Dust to dust,' I'd heard the preacher say many an' many's the time, but it seemed jes a natcheral thing to me, to hear that. Not a fearsome thing to think on at all, lovin' an' knowin' earth an' dust myself. But I never went church-goin' like Anna done. I'd go mostly to please her now an' then, but I'd be a'noddin' in no time, jes couldn't foller up on the sermon talk at all. The preacher, he talked about God all right, but I always felt more at home with God when I was plantin' an' weedin' right here in this garden than I ever done dressed up in Sunday clothes an' shut up indoors.

Nature's doors is always open, Ma'am. Remember that! Folks may fail ye an' fool ye, an' ye'll grieve sore an' suffer hard, but Nature won't never let ye down. When things press ye too hard jes git out an' walk, or set an' look an' listen. Keep your heart open. Don't never harden your heart to Nature. Don't never do that!

"It was over there where that shinin' reflectin' ball is now that the old sun dial stood. Countin' the hours, jes countin' the hours go by. Wonder who ever took that old sun dial away? Wonder where it is now? I mind how Missus spelled out the wordin' on it to little Mis' Cynthia, holdin' her pretty baby finger on each letter. As near as I can recollect it said:

'One hour alone is in our hands
The hour on which the shadow stands!'

That's pretty, ain't it? An' it's a good thought to think on, too. Mis' Cynthia an' Dr. John stood an' looked at it but I reckon

they counted on more hours than one shadder ever stood on. Pore Dr. John! I wisht I'd a-been spared till Mis' Cynthia got lost. Little Mis' Cynthia! I'd a-found her and brought her back."



"Welcome to my library! It is your friend The Library Ghost. There is rain in the garden today so you are spending more time than usual here in the old library. I seldom leave it for it is my favorite room in this house, and I have come to believe it is yours also. You like the silent company of the rows of books that line the walls in their orange-brown shelves, and the fireplace with its polished brass andirons and tongs and basket. You are at home here, working at the open desk, or in the chair by the telephone or reading and resting in the deep chair with the comfortable flowered cushions and ottoman.

"The blending colors of the window drapes are pleasant to rest the eyes upon, though their sheen in the daytime is not the same as it is at night when their folds are drawn across the panes of the windows and their pattern is displayed, and when the folding doors are spread wide and shaded lights cast beautiful shadows on rugs and furniture.

"That is how they looked, the drapes and the shadows, when you saw them from above, as once you sat on the top step of the stairs in the small hours of the night while the members of the household slept and you were all alone with the unseen friendly ghosts. It was that night that you became really assured that your sensing of us from time to time had not been a half-remembered dream or a flight of your imagination—although you have your share of that, heaven knows! But that night you were attuned to the naturalness of the acceptance of souls in their accustomed places, and you were welcomed to your place as a friendly soul to them. You were able to shut out the tangible things of the day and to open your mind and heart to accept the things you had often sensed and known were there.

"You were aware of my presence in this room, it is true, on the first day you entered here, but as time went by and the house in its entirety became a more familiar place to you, it was a natural

assumption that you would always find me here. Not that you are always comprehensive of my presence, but when you are you are not afraid nor do you object to sharing your solitude with me. It is with gentle acceptance, a sort of welcoming by-thought, as though you had forgotten that I am always present.

“It is not always when you are alone that you are aware of my presence. Often you know even when there are others in the room with you, but you do not speak of me. Once you tried, thinking you would like to share with them your pleasure of the company of your unseen friend, but you realized your mistake and your attempt ended in an explanation so light, so whimsical that it was quickly forgotten.

“This sensing of the presence of the unseen is innate in some animals and is by no means confined to animals, or is it uncommon in human beings, but not everyone has time or can take time to stop quietly and listen, and to believe is his so-called ‘imaginings.’ And not to many is afforded the privilege of such an opportune setting as exists here. Essential also, or so I believe, are an open mind, sympathy, and an understanding heart, all of which narrows down to an affinity of mind and spirit. I am convinced that this must be so as surely as I am convinced of the irrefutable rule of the chemical affinity of elements.

“The memory of that night on the stairs is stamped on your mind and it is no effort for you to visualize the scene of subdued color and light and shadow below on your waking eyes. You have not forgotten and that is why you can hear our elusive communings with you as you wander about the house and garden.

“The four walls of this room hold within them as many memories as those shelves hold books, and among them for me are the memories of Cynthia. Cynthia was my sweetheart and this was her home.

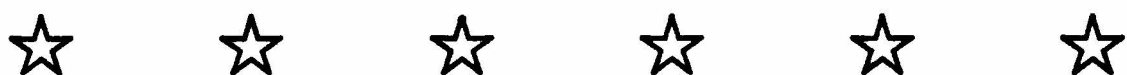
“Some of our courtship took place in the garden, and in long walks along avenues that are now historic sites and fashionable houses on side streets with secluded gardens and bizarre doorways. One of our favorite walks was along the river at the foot of the hill and on the towpath beside the canal. Wild flowers bloomed there in great profusion when spring came to Georgetown, and the willows that lined the river bank waved their ever-deepening

green branches in the sunlight. Men and small boys fished from the river banks or from flat-bottomed boats which they poled lazily through the water.

“But it was in this room on a winter night as we sat before the fire that Cynthia gave me her promise to marry me, and it was in the drawing room across the hall there that we were married. It was a *summer* evening, an evening long ago, that she became my bride.

“No man could ever have had a sweeter, more beautiful bride than my Cynthia. And I loved her with all my heart. How lovely she was in her bridal gown and veil, and how steady and true were the tones of her sweet voice when she gave her responses to the vows that made her my wife! A summer evening long ago!

“But there! The rain is over, the sun is out! Why don’t you go back to the garden while it is yet day? There will be other rainy days in which you may sit in this room and listen to the story of your Library Ghost.”



“Good day! It is nice to see you that you enjoy lunching, even alone, in this shadowy old dining room. Welcome to the company of those who dined here when I was the master of this house. I see that distinguished company dines here in this room from time to time around this table just as it did around mine years ago. It is good for a man to have a home and friends, a place where he can gather with them over good food and drink. Fine friends and fine talk! And a wife to grace his home and his table! What more could a man ask for? Life is generous. A man should be generous, too, with all he has at his command, be it much or little, to share with his family and neighbors and all his household. An open, generous heart is a priceless gift.

“This is a fine old house. It was here that I brought my bride, and it was at a table such as this that we sat together many and many a time. A man and his wife breaking bread at their own table, facing each other over gleaming silver and linen, seeing through soft candlelight the love in each other’s eyes. Where there is love between the lights of the candles a home exists between

the walls of a house. It is not always so but thus it was with us—living in this house together, loving each other, 'till death us did part.

“Such harmony has not always existed in this house. A luxurious setting does not necessarily make for harmonious living. A man and his wife should not be lost to each other. Love is not love that is a torturing thing between a man and a woman, lacking trust, torn by fear, undermined by jealousy.

“But a woman is different from a man. A woman needs understanding and kindness, and tenderness, and protection. Although a man needs the understanding love of a woman, he should be the bulwark for her, a husband to lean on, *to turn to*, to seek out in time of perplexity and trouble, or weariness, or pain. She needs protection in *little* things, just to know she has someone to turn to!

“She doesn't have to be, or to feel that she is a clinging vine. A man, a true man and a real husband, *wants* to feel that his wife depends on him. What is he for if not to stand between her and the world! To be sure, he admires her courage and her intellect, but intellect has nothing to do with loving. It may be only the lovely delicate turn of her head, the tilt of her chin that further endears a woman to the man who loves her—just love in small ways. The very fineness of her emotions and the sweetness of the giving of her love make her more vulnerable to hurt, but being privileged to know this should make a man who loves a woman love her all the more and enfold her in an understanding, protective love. Old fashioned? Some of the husbands and wives of today might say that perhaps, but not all. There will always be some who still believe the old-fashioned ways are best for love and marriage.

“And so did we live together in this house, in this room—my wife and I—trusting each other, loving each other and our children, drawn closer by the joys and sorrows that knitted us together.

“In this house we received the news that David, who was like a son to us, had given up his life for his country, and in this home together we waited, hand in hand, all through the long night that our daughter Cynthia was so mysteriously lost to us, never to be found.

“The walls of this old house encompassed sadness then, and

anxiety, and grief beyond expression, but love remained between us to the end. When I was taken ill with the prevailing fever my wife was at my bedside, her hand in mine when I left this world.

“A good life it was and a full one, and although I am sure my dear wife grieved for me and missed me in these rooms, the memories of our life together sustained her many times because she had happy memories to hold to. Not everyone does, you know. Memory is a precious thing, my dear, but watch your memory. Learn to sort your memories but learn to store up only the precious ones. Never hold fast to a bitter memory.

“Now finish your lunch, my dear, and may God bless you.”



“Well, *here* you is, honey, here in my ole kitchen! Come to see Molly, ain’t you? I bin waitin’ fo’ you. En I bin watchin’ you doin’ ’roun’ here in my ole kitchen now en den, en settin’ in de back yard in de sun. Jus’ lak Mis’ Cynthia use to do! Fo’ all de worl’ jus’ lak she done do! She’d want to cook, she say, so she kin keep house fo’ Doctah John w’en dey gits married up; en she’d putter ’roun’ awhile but pretty soon—‘Molly’ she’d say—‘Molly, *you* look after it,’ en next thing you know out in de garden wuz Mis’ Cynthia, settin’ in de sunshin’ en dreamin’ ’bout Doctah John, one o’ her little kittens curled up in her lap.

“Sometimes it’d be: ‘Molly, I want some butter, please.’ En she’d take de butter en butter up de paws o’ de little kittens, en dey’d set up so cute-like en lick dey paws en wash dey faces.

“It wuz right yon’er in de closet dat Mis’ Cynthia’s old mammy cat wuz always layin’ a batch o’ baby kittens. Yas Mam, seem lak ev’ry blessid time de moon change I’d fin’ a new nest o’ kittens in de closet. Some o’ ’em I’d carry off down de hill but not ef Mis’ Cynthia ever bin seen me. No Mam, she love ev’ry lastest one o’ dem little cats. Pore chile! Pore Mis’ Cynthia!

“Yassum, you finds me here now even ef yo’ eyes can’t see me, en I wuz here den, in my kitchen, but I ain’t never slep’ under dis roof. No, Mam! Dis house always bin ghos’ha’nted! ’Taint only dese days dat houses is ghosted. I cook here but I ain’t never bin slep’ here. I had my ve’y own cabin down de hill

en I slep' in it wid my own fam'ly. Lots en lots o' times I wuz res'-broken lookin' atter so many o' my own, but ev'ry day God send I walk up dat hill in de mornin, a-puffin' en a-blowin', en drap down it ag'in atter firs' dark.

"You bin down here in de dark too, ain't you? Down in dis kitchin, gittin' little pills outen dat box w'at makes de ice in it? I seen you. I seen you reachin' up en gropin' 'roun' in de dark fo' dat string w'at pulls de 'lectric light on, dat ole swingin'-away-from-you string wid a whiskey cork tied on de end o' it to catch it by. Lawd Gawd, honey, you ain't never need be 'fraid in my kitchin.

"Some mighty good cookin' bin done in dis kitchin, bakin' en roastin' en fryin' en stewin'. Dem rolls I use to bake! Dey wuz high-up rolls, light as a feather, white en sof' in de middle en brown en crusty on de bottom en top. You don't see rolls lak dem now. Folks don't know how to make 'em. Nowadays dey makes little bits o' rolls, jus' finger rolls.

"She makes a good loaf—dat high-yaller gal w'at flaunts 'roun' dis ole kitchin sometimes, en sets at dat table en strings beans en shells peas, en rolls her eyes en laffs en shows her white teeth w'en de groc'ry boy come sweet-talkin' her. She kin cook de way white folks wants dey cookin' done dese days. She's yo' frien', too, en all her little thoughty kind things she do fo' you she want to do. She don't have to do 'em. She jus' want to. De color o' de skin honey, ain't got nothin' to do wid de understandin' o' de heart. No, indeedy, it ain't.

"But now you is here restin' yo'self, en readin' en writin', all by yo'self. I sees you doin' 'roun' a little fo' yo'self in dis kitchin. It's good to do work wid de hands. It takes de hurt outen de heart en rests a troubled mind. Lot o' trouble in dis ole world, honey, yestidday, today en tomorrer! Lot o' trouble!

"Dem's pretty limes en lemons you is cuttin' up en squeezin'. You laks de pretty colors, don't you? En de nice smell? Dat's a nice salad you turnin' out. A caroty-yaller carrot en a snow-white cocoanut all grated up en mixed up en put in dat crispy-green lettuce cup. Mighty pretty 'tis! You goes fo' pretty things all right. You laks to look at all dem stacks o' pretty plates en party dishes in de pantry yon'er, en de crystal glasses en little coffee cups.

You don't wish fo' none o' 'em, you jus' makes 'miration o' 'em. You looks en thinks how pretty dey is. En dey is, en so' de silver dishes en de teapots en trays, en de drawers o' pure silver knives en forks en spoons, all polished up so bright-like, wid 'nitials on each piece. Bride's 'nitials! Nice to sort out en polish up, en to look en to set de table wid, en dey mus' be nice to eat wid, too! You laks 'em all but I b'leeve w'at you has de mos' fondness fo' is de linens.

"Sof'-shinin' pretty linens! Dem pretty little tea napkins wid de scallopy edges, en de pretty tray cloths en lunch pieces—now dey is pretty. But dem *big* napkins! Now, dey *are* pretty, dem big squar's o' fine linen, white as snow dey is, en all de edges folded down by hand en sewed down wid one little stitch at a time fo' to hold de folds.

"En dem high-up 'broidered 'nitials! Ole bridal linens, dat's w'at dey is. But ain't dey shiny en smooth en white? Jus' think how many times dey bin washed en ironed! Black hands still doin' dat washin', too, en black hands still holdin' de iron en smoothin' out all de creases. I sees dat black boy w'hat knocks en comes in so polite-like, to fetch 'em w'en deys soiled en mussed up, en brings 'em back all stacked up clean en white in de high basket, all ready to git mussed up ag'in. Dat's life, honey, dat's life! Jus' mussin' up en smoothin' out, over en over ag'in.

"You make yo'self at home here now. Don't min' me. Jus' don't pay me no min'. I comes back en sets en ponders 'bout bygone times even ef de folks w'at lives here don't never know I'm 'roun'. Bein' daid en gone ain't near so bad as livin' some-times, honey.

"But don't yo'all take a nap dese summer noons? Don't fo'git to take off yo' pretty ap'un. Pleasan' restin', now!"



"Bedtime again? The garden has cast its spell over you and sent you to bed early. The days and nights are quiet here now, but the house comes alive at night. As though I needed to tell you! There are things that do not have to be put into words for you, you

sense them and divine their meaning, and you know that you are not wrong, that your intuition of these things is sure and true and direct. Trust this sense, my dear. It is a gift to treasure.

"Yes, the house has its own sounds when it comes alive at night, its whispers and murmurs, all the little voices of the house itself when all is quiet inside it. When dusk falls on a house that is lived in there is the glow of candlelight, the gleam of silver and linen, the ring of fine crystal. It is all beautiful but unless there is love and harmony in the hearts of those who surround themselves with these things, it is empty meaningless beauty.

"I see that you have an appreciation of the fine and beautiful things in this old house. The lovely table linens and the towels! The bed linens, too! Sometimes when you are wakeful in the night your hand rests upon the heavy embroidered monogram or the initials in the center of the linen sheet that covers you. Idly your fingers trace them in the dark as you watch the pine bough sway softly—or wildly if there be a storm—against the glass of the window in the shadowy light. The texture of the linen is pleasing to your touch and with the awareness of it comes the remembrance of the sight of its sheer beauty and elegance. It isn't just a bed sheet that one lies upon or that covers one's body. It is more than that. Oh, yes, it is far more than that.

"This house was my home for a long time, and I knew sorrow and loss in it, but no jealousy or bitterness ever entered in. I have lain awake in the dark many nights, tears wetting my pillow, but none were tears of bitterness. There is a difference in tears, you know, and one seldom goes through life without them. I don't believe I would want to, do you?

"A few years before my own life came to its ending I experienced grief and loss in the death of my dear husband. I missed him sorely and grieved for him, yet his tender understanding love lingered on in my heart. We were together when David and then Cynthia were taken from us and I was grateful to God that this was so, that I had my husband by my side when these grievous losses came to us.

"Losing David was a deep sorrow to us all. We loved him as our own and we grieved for him. Yet the grief of losing him was different from the shock of losing Cynthia. How *did* we live

through that? How did we? That is one thing we learn about living—as long as we stay in the world we must go on—there is nothing else to do.

“But what a swing from happiness to stark tragedy in the loss of Cynthia! We were stunned, unbelieving, unable to realize what had happened. There was our Cynthia, our daughter, whom we saw wedded to the man she loved, surrounded here in her home by family and friends who loved her and who rejoiced in her happiness. One moment she was there before our eyes, within sight of us all as we had gathered about her and John. A few moments later she was gone and nowhere to be found.

“We called and searched, thinking she was with one or another group of the company within the house. John, halfway up the stairs calling: ‘Come down, Cynthia. You tarry too long, you promised to be back in a moment, you know. Hurry now, my love.’

“And Anna, packing the trousseau: ‘But no, Doctor John, she is not here. Miss Cynthia did not come up. She is still downstairs.’

“‘But no, Mis’ Cynthia ain’t in the kitchen’, Ma’am.’

“‘Not here!’

“No, not here!’

“‘Perhaps the bride is hiding, perhaps she is playing a prank on the bridegroom!’

“‘No, she is not on the verandah.’

“‘No, we did not find her in the garden!’

“‘Where *can* she be? Where *did* she go?’

“Astonishment turned to alarm, to fear, to frenzy as the night wore on, and to despair as other nights came and went without the finding of our darling.

“Missing her from under my heart was not the same as missing her out of my life as I came to do later, after full realization of the tragedy of her disappearance lay upon us.

“Our little Cynthia! My mind went back to her babyhood, how Old Anna would sit and rock her and croon to her, there in front of my fire before she took her off to the nursery to bed.

“There was always a cheerful fire in that chimney place then. It is covered by grillwork of black grating now, and the slide that opens and closes it to the furnace makes a harsh, abrupt noise.

You have fumbled over it in the wintertime, and held your hand against it to see if it were off or on. But I like to *see* a fire. So did my Cynthia.

"She grew from sweet babyhood into sweeter childhood, a delight to us all; and into girlhood, gracious and charming in manner and beautiful in face and form. And the loss of her was a grievous sorrow for us to bear. That was long ago. A long, long night ago!

"And now it is well past your bedtime. Sleep well, my dear. Whatever the morrow may hold for you there is only peace and quiet rest for you tonight."



"The roses you brought in this morning are very like the ones that Cynthia used to gather from that same garden so long ago. They brighten the tones of color here in the library and no doubt their fragrance wafts through the open doors of the rooms. It was the fragrance of lilies however, that gently scented the house that night, the night Cynthia and I were married.

"As I told you, we were married in the drawing room across the hall, surrounded by those who loved us and were gathered to wish us happiness and Godspeed, and after the hush that attended the ceremony the sound of voices and laughter filled the walls of the house. Once it had subsided to an extent, and after the cutting of the wedding cake, the guests mingled through the rooms partaking of refreshment and engaged in sparkling conversation. In the midst of the festivity I drew Cynthia apart from them and we came to this room for a moment alone together. It was a memorable moment and I held her in my arms, my own at last. My wife! My dear wife Cynthia!

"It was while we stood thus, exchanging endearments, that Cynthia moved in the circle of my arms, as though to release herself.

"'What is it, my darling?' I asked. 'Where are you going?'

"'There is something I must get. Excuse me. No, I must fetch it myself—I'll be back in a moment,' and with a hasty kiss my

lovely bride in her shining bridal gown was out of my arms and out of the room.

"She did not return immediately, as I expected her to do, and after a few moments of waiting I went to look for her. I went from room to room scanning the occupants, and failing to see her I began to make inquiry from one to another if they had seen her. Receiving a negative reply I turned to the stairs, confident that her mission had taken her to her room. Raising my voice above the merriment below I called to her to hurry, to come down, but it was Anna's voice, not Cynthia's that answered me. Cynthia had not been seen upstairs.

"'But she must be there, she must be,' I cried as I ran up the steps, trying to stifle the alarm that was beginning to fill my mind. I could not find her and a stab of cold fear supplanted the alarm I had felt. Cynthia, my bride of but a few moments, had disappeared. My Cynthia, whom I loved with all my heart, whom I had pledged to cherish and protect!

"We searched every room of the house, every closet and nook and cranny. Calling 'Cynthia, Cynthia!' we ran to the garden and the summer house, the barn and the carriage house and on to the quarters, looking into outbuildings and under porches.

"The search extended into the neighborhood and throughout all Georgetown, as its populace, black and white, joined the officers of the law with flares and lanterns, men and women searching, calling, listening all through the night.

"Morning found us with drawn faces, anxious eyes turned again and again to other anxious eyes, hopeful yet fearful. Ears listening for any new sound from the outside, for any utterance of a returning watcher at the doors. No welcome sound fell upon our ears. Our listening was in vain.

"Dark fears filled our minds. Abduction! kidnaping! Foul play of some kind! Yet Cynthia had no enemies, nor did we, certainly none that we had knowledge of. There was no clue, nothing, nothing, nothing!

"For days and weeks the search went on, its radius ever-widening from city to countryside. There was no clue, there was nothing at all. It seemed as though our Cynthia had vanished from the face of the earth.

"After each new attempt of our own we returned to the house. There we had seen her last and there we gathered to go over it all again, questioning, surmising, wondering, drawn together—especially the three of us—mother, father and husband, by our unutterable, unfathomable loss. Again and again I repeated her last words to me as we had stood together in the library: 'I'll be back in a moment, John, I want to get something. Something I want to get. Back in a moment.'

"But the old house would not give up its secret.

"The days dragged by and the months grew into a year until the day of the anniversary of our marriage day dawned. Hope had died in me, or so I believed. I could stand it no longer. I gave up my practice which had gone unattended anyhow, and made preparations for leaving the city. I closed the shutters and locked the doors of the house that was to have been our home, Cynthia's and mine, and with the words she last spoke to me echoing in my mind I said goodbye to her parents and left this house to take passage as ship's physician on a vessel bound to far ports of call. Oh yes; I kept in touch from time to time, but the replies were ever the same. No word, no word at all.

"Our ship sailed far and wide and touched on native ports and those of foreign soil. Always I went ashore, looking, listening, hoping that by the wildest whim of fate Cynthia might somehow be restored to me. My search was always the same, always in failure to find her or to hear that she had been seen in any part of the world.

"My hands compounded the medications and tended the ill and injured men of the sea, and my eyes looked across the vastness of its deep waters and watched the sun come out of the sea at dawn and drop back into it at evening. The days and nights went by, uncounted. It was mine to see strange unusual sights, and to meet men of many lands, but never mine to see my wife Cynthia again.

"I never returned to this city or to this house again. In one wild dark night of hurricane force our ship with all on board was buried beneath the sea she had sailed upon for so long a time. No, in life I never returned, but my spirit returned to this room where I had last held my darling in my arms, where my eyes had last

rested upon her, so lovely, so beloved. My Cynthia! 'Back in a moment,' she said, 'back in a moment.'"



"I've followed you about today, up and down the stairs and through the rooms, and now here we are in the garden. *You* can enjoy the sunshine and smell the flowers. How well I remember their fragrance! Let us sit here together and I will tell you the rest of my story. The warmth of the sun will 'drowse you off,' as Molly used to tell me, and the garden will cast its spell over you.

"I was telling you about my wedding, wasn't I? Our wedding, John's and mine! A marriage that was never a marriage! I must go back a bit and tell you that a few weeks before we were married John had to be out of the city for a short time. Of course I missed him very much and we wrote love letters to each other, but letters took longer in transit in those days than they do now, and when, two days before his return, a long-expected letter in his dear familiar handwriting came for me, I wanted to be alone and uninterrupted when I read it.

"The household was busy with preparations for the wedding. There was cleaning and cooking and planning, and I was being called to try on my trousseau gowns, to open another lovely gift that had just arrived, to do this, to see that. So when the postman handed me my letter I sought concealment, as I had done often-times before, in our secret hiding place, the hideaway that only David and I and old Thomas had shared the knowledge of. As children we had come to know about it and had kept our special little treasures and keepsakes there. When the word of David's death reached us, only a few months before the date set for our wedding, I went there again, alone, and shed tears over what was left of our childhood treasures.

"And so it was to this familiar place that I took my love letter from John, safe in the pocket of my gown, that bright June morning and I read it by the light of one of the short candles we kept stored there.

"First of all I want to tell you about the letter. It was a real

love letter and as I read what my John had written to me, tears of joy and tenderness filled my eyes and I knew that I would keep and treasure that letter always. I left it there for safekeeping. Perhaps it is faded and fallen to pieces now but I can tell you what it said, the words that were penned in ink by the hand of my beloved.

To Cynthia, my dearest Cynthia, and my dearest of all in all the world: I hold your letter to my lips and against my heart as soon, God willing, I shall be holding you. All my love is with you, and I believe that yours is with me—the same and all mine. I love you. my love for you is deep and true, and in my heart I know that you love me and trust me. Soon you will be mine to love and to cherish all your life, my Cynthia, *all our lives*, until death us do part. Expect me soon, my darling.

Ever your own,
John

“That was how the letter read.

I told you about my wedding gown and how John and I knelt together and exchanged our vows. Yes, I told you about that. After the ceremony and following the congratulations and expressions of felicitation of our friends and relatives who had gathered to see us married, there came the wedding supper and the cutting of the cake. Such a beautiful wedding cake! And John’s hand was steady and strong against mine as we cut it together there in the candlelight.

“While the party was in gay progress and the guests were scattered throughout the rooms, John and I slipped off to be by ourselves for a moment in the library where, although we were alone together, we were surrounded by our wedding gifts of silver and gold, and crystal and linen, gifts of beautiful design and quality and texture. Yet at the moment they were in the background of our happiness. We stood close and looked into each other’s eyes, and our murmurs of affection seemed to be but the echoes of the vows our lips had spoken such a short while before. It was a moment of deep tenderness between us when John clasped me in

his arms and whispered, 'My darling! Cynthia, my wife Cynthia!'

"Even in the midst of such happiness his words captured the refrain of a memory, like the sound of a half-forgotten chord in a song of sublime melody. My letter! My love letter I had hidden away to be kept for all time, never to be lost or destroyed, and that I had meant to carry away with me! I wanted to get it. And knowing the time was all too short before I would have to change to my traveling gown, I decided that now was the moment to fetch it while the wedding guests were enjoying the supper party.

"'What is it?' asked John, as I half turned in his arms. 'Where are you going?'

"'It is something I forgot, something I must get,' I replied.

"'But can't I get it? Where is it? Let me get it for you, my dearest,' he said.

"'No, no thank you, John. It is something *I* must get. I'll be back in a moment,' I told him. And with a murmured 'I love you' and a hasty kiss, I hurried out of the library into the hall and covered the few steps leading to the little powder room beyond the stairs. I closed the hall door of the powder room behind me and crossing the small room I pulled open the unlatched door on the other side that gave onto the back porch and the steps leading to the garden.

"Lifting my skirts I ran down the steps into the summer night.

"The light was dim in the garden and the lilac bushes were thick and tall, almost a part of the shadows themselves there in front of the fountain in the wall. Yes, that old wall you are looking at. But I knew my way and I held my gown and my pretty petticoats close about me as I slipped into the darkness behind the lilacs. It took but a moment to tilt and to twist the iron urn in the fountain that released the catch in the bricks behind it, the catch controlling the mechanism that opened the door of bricks set so cleverly in the wall.

"The door began to open and the only sound was the soft little humming sounds of June bugs and tiny garden insects, the little night sounds my mother loved. I remember that and I remember too how spicy-sweet was the scent of the pinks, and the roses in the dim garden.

"It seemed to me that the door opened more slowly than usual.

'It is because I am impatient to get back to John and our guests. I must hurry,' I said to myself.

"The door of bricks swung outward and in its place was an aperture high enough and wide enough to admit the stooping figure of an adult person.

"Quickly I stepped inside, my hand finding the tin box of matches on the inner recess of the door as I did so, my other hand hastily adjusting the lever that held the heavy door open. I knew that I would be there but a moment, only time to pick up my precious letter from the small table of bricks David and I had used for our treasures when we were children. There on the table, I was sure, was my letter, and there beside it the candle. I scarcely needed the light of it because of a beam of moonlight shone through the narrow opening in the wall, yet—perhaps from force of habit—I lifted the short candle and struck a match, shielding the flame with my hand as I touched it to the blackened wick. It flared up and the light cast weird shadows on the dark walls.

"Both the table and the damp floor were dotted with candle drippings, and the little beads of wax gleamed in the half darkness when the yellow light fell upon them; but the moonlight outshone the light of the candle as its soft rays penetrated the slanting aperture. Through the narrow door I could see the familiar shadows of the garden, and at the same time I was acutely aware of the sound of the music and the voices of my family and friends inside the brightly lighted house. Suddenly I felt alone and lonely, and the chill of the dark cavern reminded me that until now I had never entered its hidden depths at night.

"I felt an urgency to hasten my errand and swiftly I turned my thoughts to the table before me. I did not need to set the lighted candle down upon it, for the rays of light rested upon the table itself and flowed down the darkness of the sloping passageway along which frightened black feet once crept, fleeing for life and safety to the tempo of bursting heartbeats inside frightened breasts. 'The old slave road to the river, the Hope Road to Freedom!' old Thomas had called it.

"It was eerie, to be sure, but it was a familiar place to me, for the inside of the hideaway had always been the same, *always* requiring the light of a candle. I picked up the envelope in which

my letter from my sweetheart was folded and I placed it inside the front of my wedding dress. The paper was damp, and I remember that I was aware of the chill of it against the warmth of my body. Holding it thus, safe and close to me, I turned to leave, and, as I turned—dear God! Oh! dear God in heaven—the heels of my dainty satin wedding slippers slipped on the black dampness of the rock floor beneath my feet!

“I think I cried out, I *think* I did.

“As I fell, the lighted candle dropped from my fingers and my outstretched hand struck away the iron lever from its half-secured socket, and to my horror I saw the door moving slowly toward me, back into its accustomed place in the old wall.

“Then the back of my head hit sharply on the hard cold stone.

“I never regained consciousness and that is all I remember in life. And so that is how I lived and that is how I died. My twenty years of life!

“They never found me. Old Thomas might have, he might have remembered our childhood play and found me had he been alive, although he was never quite right in his mind after his accident. But Thomas had died. Old Anna had found him in his chair in the sun, his gnarled old hands quite still, his stout old heart quiet for all time.

“He was the only one who knew. *But now you know*, and if—but ah, too many years have gone—the mechanism is rusted, the bricks decayed! Mould and decay! If you but knew how to tilt the urn in the fountain where the white lilies bloom, would you tear away the strong network of green ivy that has hidden my resting place all these years? Would you push back the years as you push back the green leaves and tangled brown roots?

“Oh you, friend of ghosts and a garden! Would you clear away the leaves that fall around the lilies in the fountain yonder, and tilt and twist the urn to open the old door in the garden wall, would you swing open the door and step in? Would you?”



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