

MULBERRY SQUARE

LIDA LARRIMORE

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WNU Service

SYNOPSIS

To the quiet household of Doctor Ballard, in Mulberry Square, youthful Dr. Hugh Kennedy, comes as an assistant, to stay a year. He first meets Janie, nineteen-year-old daughter of Doctor Ballard. Her older sister, Celia, a petted beauty, is away from home. Hugh regards Janie, a universal favorite, as a small girl, to be treated as a chum. He is impressed by evidences of Doctor Ballard's kindness of heart, and his popularity. Hugh sees a photograph of Celia, and is impressed by her loveliness. He continues to regard Janie as, as he expresses it, a "good little fellow," a "funny kid," but she has a far different feeling for him. Celia returns home.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

Muriel talked no further of Japan. Tom asked Janie about the playground.

"I think it's dear of Janie to be interested in those little foreigners," Celia smiled at her small grave sister. "She makes me feel absolutely worthless. I adore children. They were so cunning on the beach in their wisps of bathing suits. I used to build castles for them. We played fairy tales. They pretended that I was the Princess."

Janie knew that Hugh had no mental vision of Janie struggling with dirty little foreigners. He saw Celia beneath an umbrella on the beach, building castles for pretty clean children who called her "Princess." He saw her, perhaps, with his own children, red-haired boys who looked like Hugh, tiny blond girls with Celia's violet eyes. It worked out very well.

A maid brought tea and sandwiches and small round cakes in cups of dented paper.

"Aren't they cunning," Celia asked, "in their ruffled petticoats?"

Hugh smiled his appreciation. Tom dropped two lumps of sugar in Celia's cup. Muriel and Janie exchanged a long expressive glance.

Hugh was reminded of a servant they'd had who told fortunes with tea leaves.

"I had my fortune told at the shore," Celia's manner made it seem a remarkable achievement. "A crystal gazer. She told me I was psychic. She said she felt it the moment I entered the room. I do have strange premonitions sometimes. I feel them in my wrists. Little stabs like rose pricks."

Celia and Hugh and Tom talked about premonitions. Muriel lit a fresh cigarette. Janie continued to wish that she had never been born.

Tom presently glanced at Muriel, lying back in the low wicker chair, her long graceful legs idly crossed, the smoke from the cigarette wreathing above her head.

"You look like an ad," he said.

"Doesn't she?" Hugh agreed.

"Muriel is so sophisticated," Celia smiled prettily. "I wish I didn't look like a lace-paper valentine," she added with a quivering sigh.

"Excuse me," Muriel rose from her chair and walked toward the house. Janie followed, after a moment. She made no apologies. It wasn't necessary. Celia was talking about herself. No one noticed that Janie had gone.

Muriel was pacing back and forth in the wide oak-beamed hall.

"If I had stayed, I would have thrown things," she said to Janie.

Muriel looked almost ugly today. Her face was somber; her eyes were dark with helpless rage. Janie thought of the garden party when Muriel had looked pretty, standing against the oak tree, talking and laughing with Tom. She thought of running away with Hugh to the point beyond the White Marsh creek. She remembered how he had smiled at her and told her all of his dreams.

"Look at our Christmas tree now!"

"You can't see the tiny first star."

"It's lost in the dazle."

Janie looked at Muriel.

"It makes everything different," she said, "Celia being at home."

III

Celia cherished a secret. It had to do with square gray envelopes which arrived at irregular intervals.

"Who is it, darling?" Mother would ask. She liked to enjoy, vicariously, her pretty daughter's conquests.

"Just some one I met at the shore," Celia would smile mysteriously as though there were some things in life too sacred to be discussed.

Janie wondered about it. Celia, usually, made a grand parade of her victims. Could Celia have fallen in love? That, somehow, was a strange idea. You thought of people falling in love with Celia.

His name was Carter. Janie found a half-finished letter on Celia's cream and ivory desk.

"Carter dear—

"It's dreadful to be so sensitive. Nobody understands. Last night I went out and stood in the garden. The wind sighed through the trees and all the roses were still. I felt small and lost and alone. If you had been here—

Last night Celia had returned home at 8, from a dance at the club and

fallen asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow. Janie felt like adding a postscript to the letter. She nobly refrained.

It was Great-aunt Rose who explained. She came to call one Sunday afternoon. Celia was spending the day with Aunt Rhoda. Janie sat curled up with a book in a fat leather chair. Mother rocked languidly and waved a palm-leaf fan.

"I suppose Celia has told you, Helen," Aunt Rose began.

"Has something happened?" Mother, of course, was expecting the worst. "Something which may be pleasant."

Aunt Rose smiled faintly. She never really laughed. It wasn't aristocratic. "A charming young man, vacationing at the shore, was very attentive to our pretty little girl."

"From Washington?" Mother had glimpsed the post-marks on the square gray envelopes.

"He is located in Washington now," Aunt Rose, on all occasions, spoke as though she were addressing a meeting of the D. A. R. "His home, he informed me, is in Charleston."

"What is his name?" Mother, Janie thought, was getting a little excited. Charleston! It had a fascinating sound. You thought of mansions and live oak trees and gardens of vivid flowers.

"Carter Shelby," Aunt Rose gave the name her unqualified approval. "I have made investigations. The Carters and the Shelys are prominent in Charleston society."

"And you think—" Mother was seeing visions and dreaming dreams.

"I think we are likely to lose our pretty little girl."

It was a loss which Janie felt she could bear with fortitude. Bless this Carter Shelby! If only Celia would marry him! Maybe then . . .

After that Mother ceased to look with a calculating expression at Celia and Hugh. Janie found her rummaging one day through a book case in the upstairs sitting room. It harbored the literary cast-offs of the years, baby books, "The Little Colonel" series, "Big Game in Africa," the detective stories that Grandfather Ballard had liked, two rows of massive volumes which were bound copies of a magazine. It was through these that Mother was busily searching.

"What are you looking for?" Janie asked.

"I remember seeing it once," Mother fluttered the pages and little puffs of dust swirled up into the air. Janie watched and wondered. Mother, as a rule, was not devoted to literature. "Here it is!" she exclaimed. "Janie! Would you look!"

Janie dropped to her knees and looked over Mother's shoulder. The article was entitled "Charleston Gardens." There were pictures in color of boxwood hedges and sun dials and clumps of flaming azaleas.

"A perfect setting for Celia!" Mother murmured with visions in her eyes. "It's lovely," Janie agreed.

"And look at this!"

Janie saw through a tunnel of arching trees a mansion of rose-red brick. Mother's finger trembled as it pointed out the line of lettering beneath the picture. "Magnolia—The Home of Colonel Valentine Shelby."

"It might not be the same one," Janie objected.

It did seem that Mother was counting a number of unhatched eggs.

"Aunt Rose never makes mistakes like that," Mother was dreaming over the picture. "I," she sighed, "will never escape this Square. But Celia certainly shall."

Celia, however, volunteered no information. She continued to act as though young Mr. Shelby was a subject too sacred to be discussed. When a square gray envelope failed to arrive in the morning mail she was petulant and plaintive. When it did arrive, she donned her "Saint Cecilia" expression. Janie wondered. Had Celia fallen in love?

Father went away for the last two weeks in August. His friend, Judge Trent, from Baltimore, had a camp in the Blue Ridge mountains. Father was pleased and excited.

"A legacy is useful," he said at breakfast the morning he left.

"I'll do my best, Doctor Ballard," Hugh promised gravely.

"Keep an eye on him, Janie."

"Both eyes, Father." Janie was perched on the arm of his chair, wanting to keep him, happy because he could go.

"Do take care of yourself, John," Mother was closing a bag. "Remember—nothing fried!"

Stoney was waiting with Father's car at the door. Rachel was announcing the time in melancholy accents. Father was kissing Mother and Janie and shaking hands with Hugh.

"Where's Celia?" he asked.

"She came in so late last night," Mother answered quickly. "I couldn't bear to wake her."

Father looked disappointed. "All right," he said. "Kiss her good-by for me."

A chorus of good-bys. Stoney stowing Father's bags in the back of the shabby old car. Rachel wiping her eyes on her apron and grumbling for all she was worth. A waving of hands,

A splutter and roar from the engine. Father was gone!

Hugh was busy after that. He had no time to sit on the lawn at Aunt Lucy's and fall in love with Celia. Janie felt almost happy again and forgot to wish she had never been born. And then—

Janie came into the garden one evening through the alley-way gate. Celia was sitting with some one on the seat around the catalpa tree. But it wasn't Hugh. It was Tom McAllister. She walked slowly across the grass, making no noise at all.

"Celia, darling," Tom was saying, "have you ever had in all your life a really honest emotion?"

"That isn't kind." The silver harp strings quivered. "You don't understand me, Tom."

"Oh, yes I do. You're a clever little lady—but not quite clever enough."

"Life is so hard for me, Tom." The harp strings were playing a tragic tune. "I simply can't bear to hurt people. Sometimes I wish I were cross-eyed and had a wart on my chin."

"Celia! Celia!" A tender, laughing rebuke. "The Irish in me wants to kiss you. The Scotch in me tells me to spank you instead. I'll just be Irish tonight."

Janie momentarily interrupted Tom's romantic intentions. She slipped past them with a casual "hello" and walked on toward the house. Her eyes lifted to Hugh's window. Was he up there, watching Celia, caring because she sat with Tom McAllister beneath the catalpa tree?

Hugh's door was open when she reached the top of the stairs.

"Hello, Janie." He smiled as she stopped at the door. "Are you sleepy, little fellow?"

"Not very." She studied his face.



Janie Attended to the Dusting in No Very Amiable Frame of Mind.

He looked tired, she thought, restless, unhappy.

"Let's get the car," he said, "and ride for a million miles."

He did care about Celia. Oh, dear, big laughing Hugh . . . Janie swallowed hard.

"I'd love it," she said. "We'll ride and ride and ride."

"You're nice, Janie Ballard," Hugh said gently. "You're a very good little egg."

CHAPTER VII

Carter Shelby was expected at any moment!

Janie, returning from the playground one afternoon early in September, found the old brick house in a state of wild excitement.

"It's Celia's friend, Mr. Shelby," Mother said in answer to Janie's question. "He's coming for supper. The telegram arrived at noon. But we didn't open it and Celia came home only an hour ago. Stoney is out with Father and Hugh is freezing the sherbet. Rachel is as mad as a hornet's nest and I am simply exhausted."

"Where's Celia?"

"She's dressing." Mother's face was flushed. "Why haven't we had this room papered? It really is a disgrace. If only John Ballard would forget the widows and orphans long enough—"

"I don't see why you make such a fuss," Janie said rather crossly.

"Can't you appreciate Celia's feelings at all?" Mother's expression implied that Janie was no true daughter of hers but an orphan on a doorstep. "Isn't this Square had enough with children screaming and men in tree, his collar opened, his sleeves rolled up, a smudgy streak on his shirt sleeves and no one to serve but Rachel? And Celia is so sensitive—"

"Celia is a luxury this family can't afford."

"Janie!" Mother was close to tears.

"All right, I'll dust the living room. And I certainly hope that our labor is not in vain."

Janie attended to the dusting in no

very amiable frame of mind. She was warm and weary. She wanted a bath. Celia would be dressing while every one else worked like slaves. Even Hugh. She saw him turning the freezer in the shade of the catalpa nose. Dear Hugh. If Celia would marry this Carter Shelby . . . She returned to the dusting with new determination.

Celia, upstairs, was experiencing a moment or two of utter panic. She had described to Carter Shelby as a charming place, this shabby old-fashioned house. She had made him see her against a background of dim green arbors, climbing roses, ancestral portraits and faithful family servants. What would he think of Rachel? What would he think of the Square? She had let him suppose that they were wealthy. It was easy and pleasant to create that impression, traveling with Great-aunt Rose. You said she preferred a quiet hotel. You asked Great-aunt Rose to wear her amethysts and her diamond-studded combs. . . .

What would he think of it all? Celia mentally inspected the dining room with its dingy paper and the stains on the ceiling where the bathroom plumbing leaked through. Carter was fastidious. She remembered that he had noticed little things. She liked him for it. But now. If only she hadn't made it seem like a picture. Mulberry Square! He had liked the name. She had talked about the fountain . . .

She knew she was half way in love with him. He was so good-looking, his ardent dark eyes, his wavy dark hair, his charmingly graceful manners. She hadn't been quite sure of him. In spite of the letters, she wasn't quite sure of him now. She wanted him to take her away from this dreary old Square. Celia and Carter. They were handsome together . . . "Mrs. Carter Shelby, Oh, yes, the Charleston Shelys. Lovely little thing" . . .

What should she wear? Celia, in peach-tinted lingerie, fluttered distractedly around the room. The white tulle? That was too formal. The primrose chiffon? The lilac organdy? That was becoming.

She slipped it on. As her head and throat emerged from the lilac cloud, she smiled again. Did it matter, after all, that the house was shabby and needed repairs?

"You pretty thing," she whispered to the dreaming girl in the mirror.

Hugh was standing beside the newel post as Celia walked down the stairs. She saw in his eyes a tribute to her beauty. He was much less attractive than Carter Shelby, she thought. But he admired her.

"Thank you for helping, Hugh." She let her hand rest for a moment on his arm.

Janie came out from the living room. She looked sulky and cross and disheveled. Funny little brown girl! It was a shame that Janie was so plain.

"Hurry and dress, dear." Celia smiled at her grave little sister.

The dining room looked better than she had expected with the pink and lavender cosmos and the tall pale candles. Celia lowered the shades. There! Upstairs she heard water running and Mother calling to Father. They were good to her. She would make it up to them when she had a great deal of money. It was her duty to marry well. She alone could rescue them all from this tawdry old Square. . . .

Mother came downstairs, patting herself into place. Father presently followed, Janie, Hugh. The long hand of the clock moved to half-past six.

"Shouldn't he be here, darling?" Mother asked anxiously.

"He didn't say any definite time."

"Coming by train?" Father was hungry and wanted his supper.

"He's driving."

"I'm starved," Janie said with a patient sigh.

Hugh picked out notes on the piano and looked at Celia in her lilac organdy frock. Celia listened for the door-bell and pleaded the edge of her handkerchief.

The bell rang. All eyes turned to Celia.

"You go, Rachel," she said.

Rachel returned with a telegram.

"Fo' you, Miss Celia."

Celia ripped it open, pulled out the yellow sheet. She read it through and crumpled it in her hand.

"He isn't coming!" she cried in a passion of anger and disappointment.

"Never mind, darling." Mother's face paled. "It's all right." Mother was soothing Celia with soft little hushing sounds. "Don't fret."

"No use wasting a party." Father was smiling as though a tragedy had not occurred. "Call over the wall, Janie, to Doctor and Mrs. Warden."

Celia was amiable at supper. She laughed at the doctor's jokes and was attentive to dowdy Mrs. Warden. But at the end of the meal her handkerchief was torn into ragged shreds.

II

The next day it rained. The house was chilly. Celia came languidly downstairs at noon. She wore an old woolen dress that was faded and out of plait. Her eyes were heavy. She

hadn't slept very well. Janie was lying flat on her stomach beside the living room hearth.

"Didn't you go to the playground?" Celia asked.

"The kids aren't ducks," Janie turned a page.

"Where's Mother?"

"Having lunch with Mrs. Leland." Janie kicked her heels together. "It's a committee meeting."

"When do we have lunch?"

"We don't. Rachel is in bed with neuritis."

Celia moved restlessly around the room. How shabby it looked! No one had dusted. The flowers were drooping. Glimpsed through the rain-splattered windows the Square was dismal and forlorn. How could Janie be contented, reading beside the hearth?

"Peter Bruce phoned you," Janie said.

"What did he want?"

"I don't know."

Celia didn't care. Peter Bruce with his thick red hands. Was this to be her life? She drooped like a willing flower into the chair beside the hearth.

Janie lay on her stomach, reading, munching an apple, turning a page now and then. Celia thought that she envied Janie in spite of the fact that she was solemn-looking and brown. It would be comfortable to be insensitive, not pained by shabbiness, torn into shreds of emotion. If only Carter had come . . .

Hugh came in presently. Celia brightened a little. They had a picnic lunch in front of the fire; scraps of chicken, buttered toast, cocoa and cakes.

Hugh talked to Celia and watched the shine of the firelight on her honey-colored hair. Lovely, he thought, the curve of her throat, her delicate oval face. She would always be lovely. Her bones were beautifully formed. . . .

Janie lay on the hearth rug and looked at Hugh. Celia would make him miserable, she thought. Hugh was sincere and honest and fine. He would worship Celia and Celia would take advantage. Janie didn't want Hugh to be hurt. It was miserable, being hurt. "Don't fall in love with her, Hugh. Oh, darling laughing Hugh!" . . .

The door-bell rang. Celia slipped away to answer it. A tall young man in a belted coat stood on the rain-splashed steps.

"Is this Doctor Ballard's residence?" A southern accent.

"Yes." The rain was falling on his wavy dark hair. His face was dark even when he smiled. His teeth were very white.

"Is Miss Ballard at home?"

Celia answered in person.

"Why, Carter Shelby!" The silver harp strings were tautly drawn. She advanced to meet him, both hands extended in a pretty gesture of greeting.

"My car broke down." Young Mr. Shelby was explaining, smiling down at Celia, holding both of her hands. "I left it and came on the train."

Celia led him into the living room. She chattered brightly. She introduced him to Janie and to Hugh.

He ought to wear costumes, Janie thought. A brocade vest, a coat with velvet lapels. Strange that his face was dark even when he smiled. . . .

Women like a suggestion of mystery, Hugh thought. He doubted if even in the very far South they spoke with such an exaggerated drawl. He thought of the gambler in "Show Boat." Ravenal—that was his name. Celia seemed nervous. He wished he could help her somehow . . .

"Have you had lunch?" Celia asked when Hugh had taken his coat and Janie had pushed the armchair close to the fire.

"Well, no. As a matter of fact—" He accepted a cigarette and bent to the lighter Hugh snapped.

Lunch! Celia thought of Rachel in bed with neuritis. She thought of what was left in the icebox. She thought of Mother lurching with Mrs. Leland. She felt very badly used.

Janie was sorry for Celia. She couldn't bear it, somehow, to see her shaken and nervous. She wished she had dusted this morning and rearranged the flowers.

"Our maid is ill," she explained to Carter Shelby. "And Mother isn't at home. Last night we killed the fatted calf." She smiled her wide gay smile. "There's nothing left but the bones."

Hugh laughed. Why will she say such things? Celia inwardly fumed. Carter Shelby smiled.

Joker Postage Stamp

Niue, one of the islands of the South Seas and a dependency of New Zealand, for many years used the stamps of that commonwealth overprinted with the name "Niue" and a value expressed in native words using English letters. In 1908, when a new supply of stamps arrived, one in particular seemed to cause an unusual amount of merriment on the part of the natives. An inquiry revealed that the stamp was overprinted "Tahae Sileni" instead of "Tehae Sileni" which does not seem provocative of much mirth until it was learned that the former means "Thief Shilling" and not "One Shilling" as intended by the printers.

No Region Altogether Free From Lightning

Lightning occurs all over the world, both on land and sea, but its distribution is very nonuniform. In the United States some regions have a hundred times as many thunderstorms as others, the area of most frequent occurrence centering around northwestern Florida where there are on the average about ninety thunderstorms per year. Severe lightning is also experienced in the northern New Mexico and southern Colorado area, where the average number of thunderstorms per year is about seventy. In the vicinity of New York city the yearly average is about thirty, while around San Francisco it is only one. Lightning is much more severe in some thunderstorms than in others, but nothing indicates that on the average the storms occurring in different localities differ much in severity.

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HERE ARE THE SIGNS:

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