

(Column about old Nashville written by Louisa Cooke Don-Carlos)

Our English basement was really the first floor. The tall 12-foot front door upstairs opened on a shallow lawn with a bronze swan fountain enclosed in an iron fence abutting on Gay Street.

The Vine Street (7th Avenue) basement entrance was up some steep stone steps. The dining room looked out of its bay windows and the rocky Vine Street hill and Mr. Mc's home across the way — which swarmed with his 12 children — a young stepmother — numerous servants and a gentle greyhound called "Tootsie lala." As "Mr. Mc was a Republican" he and Papa were barely civil.

We strung a cord from our second story window to the Mac's porch and had a "send a phone." A small basket drawn back and forth by strings wound on big spools. This carried paper dolls, sweets, notes, invitations and the eternal barter and exchange of the juvenile tribe.

Our dining room was warmed by a coal fire under a marble mirror-topped mantle and furnished with heavy Victorian walnut, china cupboards lined one wall and the lower shelves made lovely doll houses until Mr. Schepflin, Ada's Jersey godfather, sent us to fine mansions from New York with furnishing complete. Bobby's rocking horse stood in the servants' hall — for "Taffy" (covered with real horse hair) was too big for the nursery. This also was a Schepflin (sic) gift, for the wealthy woolen manufacturer delighted to make us the most expensively beautiful presents and every Christmas sent a grand fruit cake, baked, iced and decorated by his cousin the Baroness, who had run away from Germany to America with her father's handsome equerry, and had to bake cakes to eke out the living Heinrich made as the Schepflin's coachman. They lived in a vine-covered cottage on the Schepflin estate in Dunellen, and a whole bevy of little tow-headed Heinrichs were our playmates through the lovely stonewalled gardens when we went on our annual visit to Jersey.

But back to the basement. The kitchen I have described in my chapter about the peanut pancakes. Though that word I never heard until I was out West. We always called 'em "batter cakes." in the basement there was a long dark pantry, a sub-cellar, and a passage leading to the coal cellar under the front sidewalk, where coal was dumped through a manhole. This passage was the place for one of my naughty pranks.

It was dark and damp and the gas was only lit for Sam to chop cedar kindling for the great fires and fill the tall painted coal boxes that stood on every hearth upstairs.

One day I was lying on the sofa lounge in the back parlor reading Saint Nicholas magazine when Flossie came in very mysteriously, whispering "Miss Lou, you all better come downstairs and bring a quarter, there's a gypsum come, she knows eberything. She done tole Mam Betty's fortune and me about how me and Lige oughter git married."

Seated before the range in the kitchen, I found a swarthy woman, gaudily dressed in baggy, dirty clothing. She was so dark I at first took her for a mulatto but her hawk-like nose, flashing eyes and long straight braids proclaimed her a true child of Egypt. She finished the food Aunt Bet had piled on her plate and intoned "Blessed is the hand that feeds the poor!" Then she turned her brilliant eyes on me and said in a wheedling voice, "Come little lady, gringro-chal!

Give me your white pud." I approached timidly and when she made me cross the Gypsy child's palm with silver, I put my quarter into her small dirty, ringed hand.

"You be a learned chal but you will never be great until you have shed many tears, traveled in many lands and are old and poor. I see you wedded to a tall fair Rye with a bearded face who sets high, ruling a dark people who do not speak his tongue."

"Is he from across the ocean in some foreign land?" I queried.

"Nay, that I do not know. My little God does not say, little chal. The vision fades and their voices cackle and screech like hoodie crows." That was the fortune the Gypsy told me at Gay and Vine Streets when I was almost 12 years old. And nine or ten years afterward my husband was a tall fair-bearded gentleman, who, in the pre-Oklahoma days judged the five civilized tribes (the Cherokees, Choctaws, Osages, Shawnees and Chickasaws), who came into his Indian Territory Court.