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*The House on the Hill By Jacqueline Kazarian*

I live in one of the worlds created by William Saroyan. He lived in many worlds and he left his mark on each of them and the people around him. The Fifteenth Avenue home is the only remaining Saroyan property. All of the others have been sold ... the beach house in Malibu, the apartment in Paris and the two tract homes in Fresno. There were a few others; the flats on Taraval and the home for Aram and Lucy on Maroney Lane in Pacific Palisades; they too have long been gone. This was the home he built for his mother and sister and himself back in 1938 when he was rolling in money and successful as the daring young man in the literary world. He had his own ideas about what he wanted and he chose the highest lot in the Henry Doelger tract in Golden Gate Heights. The west side of the house has a panoramic, endless, unforgettable view of the Pacific Ocean and the horizon; an ever changing view. It may have been a tract house, but soon, with all the personal changes and additions, it became his special place.

They moved in during the spring of 1939, after much excitement and preparation. It was a big thing to move into a brand new home, built just the way you wanted. The furniture had been made to order. There were special bookshelves, fireplaces, an Armenian cracker bread closet, an extra bedroom, a bathroom and a library for his own warm and wonderful apartment downstairs. He was in charge of making the decision for their house and money was never a consideration. He asked Nana and Cosette their opinions and showed them samples, but I think he really made the choices. They were pleased he did. The lower floor was his private domain, complete with player piano, often blasting loudly when he was home. The neighbors could attest to that. His desk, really a plain oak table that he refinished, was placed in front of the huge window that overlooked the garden and the Pacific and there was his typewriter. The walls of his library, study, workroom were covered with

brushed white pine bookshelves going from ceiling to floor. They were filled with books and books and more books. The room even smelled like him; a kind of haunting, musty, mannish one.

He wanted this to be the best home he could get for his mother, Takoohi and his sister Cosette and himself. In 1943, when he wrote the best seller, Book of the Month Club selection, *The Human Comedy*, he said, in the dedication to his mother: "I have wanted it to be an especially good story, the best I might ever be able to write". So it was with this house. It had to be the best he might ever be able to provide. He had always longed for a home of his own and this house was to be the beginning of dreams come true. They had been living in a rented, upstairs flat at 348 Carl Street overlooking Kezar Stadium and the Golden Gate Park. Moving to Fifteenth Avenue was like moving to the Top of the Mark, a fashionable, historic hotel in downtown San Francisco.

I was ten years old, my home was down the hills on Sixteenth Avenue. The idea of Nana's living up the hill filled me with excitement as I used to run up the long flight of stairs on Sixteenth Avenue, over the hill to Nana's house. The house immediately had a sort of enchantment for me and going there made me feel like a little princess. When I got to spend the night, it was almost as though the black and green bathroom shower sprinkled some kind of heavenly water on me, for the next morning I fancied myself somehow different. Those early years he was there most of the time but was going to New York frequently to open a new play or just meet with important people in the world of writing. When he was home, he got up late in the morning, because he often wrote through the night and Nana made sure we children (there were five grandchildren) were very quiet upstairs when we visited. The door at the top of the long flight of stairs from his apartment was always closed. Nana and Auntie Cosette guarded it, making sure we didn't go beyond it, unless he shouted "Kids, come on downstairs". We would giggle and rush past the door with haste, just in case Nana or Cosette changed his mind.

We took it for granted that the happiness that was, would remain. But Nana had high blood pressure and died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1950. She didn't have the pleasure of living in the house very long. It was very sad and came as a shock to Uncle Bill, Cosette, my mother, Zabelle, and the grandchildren.

Auntie Cosette lived alone in the house until she died, and Uncle Bill, even after he was married and divorced, came and went as the spirit moved him. Cosette literally lived for him and Aram and Lucy and was there at his every beck and call. She carefully guarded his belongings that remained in the house, and rarely allowed anyone to enter, whom she suspected of anything. In the beginning, she had been his secretary and managed his correspondence. Later, his agent and manager took over, but she was still in charge of forwarding mail to him wherever he was, which was here and there and there. He moved around a lot, especially after the children grew up, but the house remained some kind of mecca for him. The surroundings were frozen in time and he continued to return again and again until the end.

Today, the house still is high on the hill, but it no longer has the distinction of being the highest site in the Heights. After Cosette's death in 1990 it was to be sold. My husband suggested we buy it, knowing how much I loved it. To this day, it still holds the original enchantment for me. When people visit, they too sense a feeling, not always identifiable. The house is well designed, compact and cozy. I greet each day with a loving embrace, if only a fleeting memory. Reaching back into the past becomes easy, as the rooms and gardens speak to me, recalling the way it was, full of all the joy and pain of living. I remember hearing Uncle Bill say: "I'm going to build a home for Ma ". They had a deep and close relationship. He respected her and sought her counsel, even though he didn't always do as she said. He was in touch with her wherever he happened to be in the world. Telephone calls, long, long ones, were a frequent thing, as she would sit on the bench in the entry

hall and they would carry on, mother and son. Writing wouldn't work, as he couldn't read Armenian and she couldn't read English. She was proud, very proud of him. She was an elegant, aristocratic, wise lady, and I learned much from her growing up, including my Bitlisi Armenian.

Uncle Bill wanted her and all the family to have the things they didn't have in the beginning. He knew, that money could buy, what only money could buy. He held on dearly to his vivid memories of the family that he enjoyed as a little boy, for such a brief time. Armenak, his father, had been a minister in the American Presbyt