

# The DIM LANTERN

## By TEMPLE BAILEY

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### CHAPTER IX—Continued —14—

The babies, arriving presently in a rollicking state of excitement over the advent of Auntie Jane, showed themselves delightful and adoring.

"Junior," said Jane, "are you glad I'm here?"  
"Did you bring me anything?"  
"Something—wonderful—"  
"What?"

She opened her bag, and produced Towne's box of sweets. "May I give you a chocolate, Judy?"  
"One little one, and just a taste for baby, Jane, where did you get that gorgeous box?"

"Frederick Towne."  
"Really? My dear, your letters have been tremendously interesting. Haven't they, Bob?"

Her husband nodded. He was sitting by the bedside holding her hand. "Towne's a pretty big man."

The nurse came in then, and Jane went with Bob and the babies to the dining-room.

After dinner, Junior went to sleep in Jane's arms, having been regaled on a rapturous diet of "The Three Bears" and "The Little Red Hen."

"They're such beauties, Judy," said Jane, as she went back to her sister. "But they don't look like any of the Barnes's."

"No, they're like Bob, with their white skins and fair hair. I wanted one of them to have our coloring. Do you know how particularly lovely you are getting to be, Jane?"

"Judy, I'm not."  
"Yes, you are. And none of us thought it. And so Mr. Towne wants to marry you?"

"How do you know?"  
"It is in your eyes, dear, and in the cock of your head. You and Baldy always look that way when something thrilling happens to you. You can't fool me."

"Well, I'm not in love with him. So that's that, Judy."  
"But—it's a great opportunity, isn't it, Jane?"

"I suppose it is," slowly, "but I can't quite see it."  
"Why not?"

"Well, he's too old for one thing."  
"Only forty?—Rich men don't grow old. And he could give you everything—everything, Jane." Judy's voice rose a little. "Jane, you don't know what it means to want things for those you love and not be able to have them. Bob did very well until the slump in business. But since the babies came—I have worked until—well, until it seemed as if I couldn't stand it. Bob's such a darling. I wouldn't change anything. I'd marry him over again tomorrow. But I do know this, that Frederick Towne could make life lovely for you, and perhaps you won't get another chance to marry a man like that."

Life for Evans Follette after Jane went away became a sort of game in which he played, as he told himself grimly, a Jekyll and Hyde part. Two men warred constantly within him. There was that scarecrow self which nursed mysterious fears, a gaunt gray-haired self, The Man Who Had Come Back From the War. And there was that other, shadowy, elusive, The Boy Who Once Had Been. And it was the Boy who took on gradually shape and substance fighting for place with the dark giant who held desperately to his own.

Yet the Boy had weapons, faith and hope. The little diary became in a sense a sacred book. Within its pages was imprisoned something that beat with frantic wings to be free. Evans, shrinking from the program which he compelled himself to follow, was faced with things like this. "Gee, I wish the days were longer. I'd like to dance through forty-eight hours at a stretch. Jane is getting to be some little dancer. I taught her the new steps tonight. She's as graceful as a willow wand."

Well, a man with a limp couldn't dance. Or could he?

A Thomas Jefferson autograph went therefore to pay for twenty dancing lessons. Would the great Democrat turn in his grave? Yet what were ink scratches made by a dead hand as against all the meanings of love and life?

Evans bought a phonograph, and new records. He practised at all hours, to the great edification of old Mary, who washed dishes and scrubbed floors in syncope ecstasies.

He took Baldy and Edith to tea at the big hotels, and danced with Edith. He apologized, but kept at it. "I'm out of practice."

Edith was sympathetic and interested. She invited the two boys to her home, where there was a music room with a magical floor. Sometimes the three of them were alone, and sometimes Towne came in and danced too, and Adelaide Laramore and Eloise Harper.

Towne danced extremely well. In spite of his avoirdupois he was light on his feet. He exercised constantly. He felt that if he lost his waist line all would be over. He could not, however, always control his appetite. Hence the sugar in his tea, and other indulgences.

Baldy wrote to Jane of their afternoon frolics.

"You should see us! Eloise Harper dancing with Evans, and old Towne and his Adelaide! And Edith and I! We're a pretty pair, if I do say it. We miss you, and always wish you were with us. Sometimes it seems almost heartless to do things that you can't share. But it's doing a lot for Evans. Queer thing, the poor old chap goes at it as if his life depended upon it."

"We are invited to dine with the Townes on Christmas Eve. Some

Edith had told Mrs. Follette frankly that she wished Adelaide had not been asked.

"But she fished for it. She always does. She flatters Uncle Fred and he falls for it."

Baldy brought Evans and Mrs. Follette over in his flivver. They found Mrs. Laramore and Frederick already in the drawing room. Edith had not come down.

"She is always late," Frederick complained, "and she never apologizes."

Baldy, silken and slim, in his page's scarlet, stood in the hall and watched Edith descend the stairs. She seemed to emerge from the shadows of the upper balcony like a shaft of light. She was all in silvery green, her close-clinging robe girdled with pearls, her hair banded with mistletoe.

For a moment he stood admiring her, then: "You shouldn't have worn it," he said.

"The mistletoe? Why not?"  
"You will tempt all men to kiss you."

"Men must resist temptation."

His tone was light, but her heart missed a beat. There was something about this boy so utterly engaging. He had set her on a pedestal, and he worshipped her. When she said that she was not worth worshipping, he told her, "You don't know—"

She was unusually silent during dinner. With Evans on one side of her and Baldy on the other she had little need to exert herself. Baldy was always adequate to any conversational tax, and Evans, in spite of his monk's habit, was not austere. He was, rather, like some attractive young friar drawn back for the moment to the world.

He showed himself a genial teller of tales—and capped each of Frederick's with one of his own. His mother was proud of him. She felt that life was taking on new aspects—this friendship with the Townes—her son's increasing strength and social ease—the lace gown which she wore and which had been bought with a Dickens' pamphlet. What more could she ask? She was serene and satisfied.

Adelaide, on the other side of Frederick Towne, was not serene and satisfied. She was looking particularly lovely with a star of diamonds in her hair and sheer draperies of rose and faintest green. "I am anything you wish to call me," she had said to Frederick when she came in—"an 'Evening Star' or 'In the Gloaming' or 'Afterglow.' Perhaps 'A Rose of Yesterday'—" she had put it rather pensively.

He had been gallant but uninspired. "You are too young to talk of yesterdays," he had said, but his glance had held not the slightest hint of gallantry. She felt that she had, perhaps, been unwise to remind him of her age.

She was still more disturbed, when, towards the end of dinner, he rose and proposed a toast. "To little Jane Barnes, A Merry Christmas."

They all stood up. There was a second's silence. Evans drank as if he partook of a sacrament.

Then Edith said, "It seems almost heartless to be happy, doesn't it, when things are so hard for her?"  
Adelaide interposed irrelevantly, "I should hate to spend Christmas in Chicago."

There was no response, so she turned to Frederick. "Couldn't Miss Barnes leave her sister for a few days?"

"No," he told her, "she couldn't." She persisted, "I am sure you didn't want her to miss the ball."  
"I did my best to get her here. Talked to her at long distance, but she couldn't see it."

"You are so good-hearted, Ricky." Frederick could be cruel at moments, and her persistence was irritating. "Oh, look here, Adelaide, it wasn't entirely on her account. I want her here myself."

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Aquatic Bladderwort Catches Fish  
The aquatic bladderwort catches young fish that venture into its trap by means of a valve that shuts behind them. The Venus fly trap offers entrance to insects and frogs and locks them in with its sensitive triggerlike hair. Pitcher plants are full of water in which their victims drown. One species of Borneo pitcher plant is 12 inches in diameter and holds seven pints of water. Its prey consists of small rodents and birds.

So Christmas Eve came, and the costume ball at the Townes'. There were, as Baldy had told Jane, just six of them at dinner. Cousin Anna-belle was still in bed, and it was Adelaide Laramore who made the sixth.

He hunted up new clothes and hung them on the shaking figure—an overcoat and a soft hat. It seemed a charitable due to clothe him with warmth. In due time someone stole the overcoat, and Evans found the poor thing stripped. It gave him a sense of shock to find two crossed sticks where once had been the semblance of a man. But he tried again. This time with an old bathrobe and a disreputable cap. "It will keep you warm until spring, old chap—"

The scarecrow and his sartorial changes became a matter of much discussion among the Negroes. Since Evans' visits were nocturnal, the whole thing had an effect of mystery until the bathrobe proclaimed its owner. "Mist' Evans done wob' dat e'vy day," old Mary told Mrs. Follette. "Whuffor he dress up dat ol' sca'crow in de fiel'?"

"What scarecrow?"  
Old Mary explained, and that night Mrs. Follette said to her son, "The darkies are getting superstitions. Did you really do it?"

His somber eyes were lighted for a moment. "It's just a whim of mine, Mumsie. I had a sort of fellow feeling—"

"How queer!"  
"Not as queer as you might think." He went back to his book. No one but Jane should know the truth.

And so he played the game. Working in his office, dancing with Edith and Baldy, chumming with the boys, dressing up the scarecrow. It seemed sometimes a desperate game—there were hours in which he wrestled with doubts. Could he ever get back? Could he? There were times when it seemed he could not. There were nights when he did not sleep. Hours that he spent on his knees.

So the December days sped, and it was just a week before Christmas that Evans read the following in his little book. "Dined with the Prestons. Told father's ham story.—Great hit. Potomac frozen over. Skated in the moonlight with Florence Preston.—Great stunt—home to hot chocolate."

Once more the Potomac was frozen over. Florence Preston was married. But he mustn't let the thing pass. The young boy Evans would have tingled with the thought of that frozen river.

It was after dinner, and Evans was in his room. He hunted up Baldy. "Look here, old chap, there's skating on the river. Can't we take Sandy and Arthur with us and have an hour or two of it? Your car will do the trick."

Baldy laid down his book. "I have no philanthropies on a night like this. Moonlight. I'll take you and the boys and then I'll go and get Edith Towne." He was on his feet. "I'll call her up now—"

The small boys were rapturous and riotous over the plan. When they reached the ice, and Evans' lame leg threatened to be a hindrance, the youngsters took him between them, and away they sailed in the miraculous world—three musketeers of good fellowship and fun.

Baldy having brought Edith, put on her skates, and they flew away like birds. She was all in warm white wool—with white furs, and Baldy wore a white sweater and cap. The silver of the night seemed to clothe them in shining armor.

Baldy said things to her that made her pulses beat. She found herself a little frightened.

"You're such a darling poet. But life isn't in the least what you think it."  
"What do I think it?"  
"Oh, all mountains and peaks and moonlight nights."  
"Well, it can be—"  
"Dear child, it can't. I have no illusions."  
"You think you haven't."

It was late when at last they took off their skates and Edith invited them all to go home with her. "We'll have something hot. I'm as hungry as a dozen bears."  
The boys giggled. "So am I," said Sandy Stoddard. But Arthur said nothing. His eyes were occupied to the exclusion of his tongue. Edith looked to him like some angel straight from heaven. He had never seen anyone so particularly lovely.

CHAPTER X

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### THE CHEERFUL CHERUB

I felt such a shivery feeling just now, I think that I'm falling in love. I know it won't last but it's nice for a while— Oh, Cupid, please give me a shove!



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