

The DIM LANTERN

By TEMPLE BAILEY

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CHAPTER X—Continued

"That's the thing for you and Del. He really loves fine stock. And you and he—think of it—riding over the country—planning your gardens—having a baby or two." Edith was going very fast.

"It sounds heavenly," said Lucy. "Then make it Heaven. Oh, Lucy, Lucy, you lucky girl—you are going to marry the man you love. Live away from the world—share happiness and unhappiness—" She rose from the table restlessly, pushing back her chair, dropping her napkin on the floor. "Do you know how I envy you?"

She went to the window and stood looking out. "And here I sit, day after day, a prisoner in a tower—and my page sings—that was the beginning of it—and it will be the end."

"No," Lucy was very serious, "you mustn't let it be the end. You—you must open the window, Miss Towne."

Edith came back to the table. "Open the window?" Her breath came fast. "Open the window. Oh, little Lucy, how wise you are . . ."

When Lucy had gone, Alice came in and dressed Edith's hair. She found her lady thoughtful. "Alice, what did they do with my wedding clothes?"

"We put them all in the second guest-suite," she said; "some of them we left packed in the trunks just as they were, and some of them are hung on racks."

"Where is the wedding dress?"

"In a closet in a white linen bag."

"Well, finish my hair and we will go and look at it."

As they entered it, the second guest-suite was heavy with the scent of orange blooms. "How dreadful, Alice," Edith ejaculated. "Why didn't you throw the flowers away?"

"Miss Annabel wouldn't let me. She said you might not want things touched."

"Silly sentimentality," Edith was impatient.

The room was in all the gloom of drawn curtains. The dresses hung on racks, and, encased in white bags, gave a ghostly effect. "They are like rows of tombstones, Alice."

"Yes, Miss Towne," said Alice, dutifully.

The maid brought out the wedding dress and laid it on the bed.

Edith, surveying it, was stung by the memory of the emotions which had swayed her when she had last worn it. It had seemed to mock her. She had seen her own tense countenance in the mirror, as she had controlled herself before Alice. Then, when the maid had left, she had thrown herself on the bed, and had writhed in an agony of humiliation.

And now all her anger was gone. She didn't hate Del. She didn't hate Lucy. She even thought of Uncle Fred with charity. And the wedding gown was, after all, a robe for a princess who married a king. Not a robe for a princess who loved a page. A tender smile softened her face.

"Alice," she said, suddenly, "wasn't there a little heliotrope dinner frock among my trousseau things?"

"Yes, Miss Towne. Informal." Alice hunted in the third row of tombstones until she found it.

"I want long sleeves put in it. Will you tell Harding, and have him send a hat to match?"

"Yes, Miss Towne."

The heliotrope frock had simple and lovely lines. It floated in sheer beauty from the maid's hands as she held it up. "There isn't a prettier one in the whole lot, Miss Edith."

Edith, having dispatched the box with a charming note to Lucy Logan, had a feeling of ecstatic freedom. All the hurt and humiliation of the bridal episode had departed. She didn't care what the world thought of her. Her desertion by Del had been material for a day's gossip—then other things had filled the papers, had been headlined and emphasized. And what difference did it all make?

CHAPTER XI

The day after Christmas.

"Baldy, darling: The operation is over, and the doctor gives us hope. That is the best I can tell you. I haven't been allowed to see Judy, though they have let Bob have a peep at her, and she smiled. Give my love to everybody. I have had Christmas letters from

Evans and Edith and Mr. Towne. Baldy, Mr. Towne wants to marry me. I haven't told you before. It is rather like a dream and I'm not going to think about it. I don't love him, and so, of course, that settles it. But he says he can make me, and Baldy, sometimes I wish that he could. It would be such a heavenly thing for the whole family. Of course that isn't the way to look at it, but I believe Judy wants it. She believes in love in a cottage, but she says that love in a palace might be equally satisfying, with fewer things to worry about.

"Somehow that doesn't fit in with the things I've dreamed. But dreams, of course, aren't everything . . ."

"I had to tell you, dear old boy. Because we've never kept things from each other. And you've been so perfectly frank about Edith. Are things a bit blue in that direction? Your letter sounded like it."

"Be good to yourself, old dear, and love me more than ever."

Jane signed her name and stood up, stretching her arms above her head. It was late and she was very tired. A great storm was shaking the windows. The wind from the lake beat against the walls with the boom of guns.

She walked the floor, a tense little figure, fighting against fear. The storm had become a whistling pandemonium. She gave a cry of relief when the door opened and her brother-in-law entered.

"I'm half-frozen, Janey. It was a fight to get through. The cars



"Can't you trust the maids?"

are stopped on all the surface lines."

"How is Judy?"

"Holding her own. And by the way, Janey, that friend of yours, Towne, sent another bunch of roses. Pretty fine, I call it. She's no end pleased."

"It's nice of him."

"Gee, I wish I had his money."

"Money isn't everything, Bobby."

"It means a lot at a time like this." His face wore a worried frown. Jane knew that Judy's hospital expenses were appalling, and bills were piling up.

"I work like a slave," Bob said, ruefully, "and we've never been in debt before."

"When Judy is well, things will seem brighter, Bob." She laid her hand on his arm.

He looked up at her and there was fear in his eyes. "Jane, she must get well. I can't face losing her."

"We mustn't think of that. And now come on out in the kitchen and I'll make you some coffee." Jane was always practical. She knew that, warmed and fed, he would see things differently.

Yet in spite of her philosophy, Jane lay awake a long time that night. And later her dreams were of Judy—of Judy, and a gray and dreadful phantom which pursued . . .

The next day she went to the hospital and took Junior with her.

When he saw his mother in bed, Junior asked, "Do you like it, Mother-dear?"

"Like what, darling?"

"Sleeping in the daytime?"

"I don't always sleep." She looked at Jane. "Does little Julia miss me? I think about her in the night."

Jane knew what Judy's heart wanted. "She does miss you. I know it when she turns away from me. Perhaps I oughtn't to tell you. But I thought you'd rather know."

"I do want to know," said Judy, feverishly. "I don't want them to forget. Jane, you mustn't ever let them—forget."

Jane felt as if she had been struck a stunning blow. She was, for a moment, in the midst of a dizzy universe, in which only one thing was clear. Judy wasn't sure of getting well!

Judy, with her brown eyes wistful, went on: "Junior, do you want Mother back in your own nice house?"

"Will you make cookies?"

"Yes, darling."

"Then I want you back. Aunt Janey made cookies, and she didn't know about the raisins."

"Mother knows how to give cookie-men raisin eyes. Mothers know a lot of things that aunties don't, darling."

"Well, I wish you'd come back." He stood by the side of the bed.

"I'd like to sleep with you tonight. May I, Mother-dear?"

"Not tonight, darling. But you may when I come home."

But days passed and weeks, and Judy did not come home. And the first of February found her still in that narrow hospital bed. And it was in February that Frederick Towne wrote that he was coming to Chicago. "I shall have only a day, but I must see you."

The next time she went to the hospital, she told Judy of his expected arrival. "Tomorrow."

"Oh, Jane, how delightful."

"Is it? I'm not sure, Judy."

"It would be perfect if you'd accept him, Jane."

"But I'm not in love with him."

"Bob and I were talking about it," Judy's voice was almost painfully eager, "of how splendid it would be for—all of us."

For all of us. Judy and Bob and the babies! It was the first time that Jane had thought of her marriage with Towne as a way out for Judy and Bob . . .

From his hotel at the moment of arrival, Towne called Jane up. "Are you glad I'm here?"

"Of course."

"Don't say it that way."

"How shall I say it?"

"As if you meant it. Do you know what a frigid little thing you are? Your letters were like frosted cakes."

She laughed. "They were the best I could do."

"I don't believe it. But I am not going to talk of that now. When can I come and see you? And how much time have you to spare for me?"

"Not much. I can't leave the babies."

"Your sister's children. Can't you trust the maids?"

"Maids? Listen to the man! We haven't any."

"You don't mean to tell me that you are doing the housework?"

"Yes, why not? I am strong and well, and the kiddies are adorable."

"We are going to change that. I'll bring a trained nurse up with me."

"Please don't be a tyrant."

"Tut-tut, little girl," she heard his big laugh over the telephone, "I'll bring the nurse and someone to help her, and a load of toys to keep the kiddies quiet. When I want a thing, Jane, I usually get it."

He and the nurse arrived together. A competent houseworker was to follow in a cab. Jane protested. "It seems dreadfully high-handed."

They were alone in the living-room. Miss Martin had, at once, carried the kiddies off to unpack the toys.

Frederick laughed. "Well, what are you going to do about it? You can't put me out."

"But I can refuse to go with you"—there was the crisp note in her voice which always stirred him.

"But you won't do that, Jane." He held out his hand to her, drew her a little towards him.

She released herself, flushing. "I am not quite sure what I ought to do."

"Why think of 'oughts'? We will just play a bit together, Jane. That's all. And you're such a tired little girl, aren't you?"

His sympathy was comforting. Everybody leaned on Jane. It was delightful to shift her burdens to this strong man who gave his commands like a king.

"Yes, I am tired. And if the babies will be all right—"

Soon they were dining in a charming French restaurant. The waiter, with the first course, interrupted them. When he once more disappeared, Frederick persisted. "I'm going away tomorrow. Won't you give me my answer tonight? After lunch I'll take you home and you can rest a bit, and then I'll come for you and we'll dine together and see a play."

She tried to protest, but he pleaded. "This is my day. Don't spoil it, Jane."

It was nearly three o'clock when they left the table, and they had a long drive before them. Darkness had descended when they reached the house. It was still snowing.

Bob was upstairs, walking around the little room like a man in a dream.

"I can't tell you," he confided to Jane after Frederick had left, "how queer I felt when I came in and found Miss Martin with the babies, and that stately old woman in the kitchen. And everything going like clockwork. Miss Martin explained, and—well, Towne just waves a wand, doesn't he, Janey, and makes things happen?"

"I don't know that I ought to let him do so much," Jane said.

"Oh, why not, Janey? Just take the good the gods provide. . . ."

Before Frederick Towne reached his hotel he passed a shop whose windows were lighted against the early darkness. In one of the windows, flanked by slippers and stockings and a fan to match, was a French gown, all silver and faint blue, a shining wisp of a thing in lace and satin. Towne stopped the car, went in and bought the gown with its matching accessories. He carried the big box with him to his hotel. Resting a bit before dinner he permitted himself to dream of Jane in that gown, the pearls that he would give her against the white of her slender throat, the slim bareness of her arms, the swirl of a silver lace about her ankles—the swing of the boyish figure in its sheath of blue.

He wondered if he offered it to Jane, would she accept? He knew she wouldn't. Adelaide would have made no bones about it. There had been a lovely thing in black velvet he had given her, too, a wrap to match.

The evening stretched ahead of him, full of radiant promise. He knew Jane's strength but he was ready for conquest.

His telephone rang. And Jane spoke to him.

"Mr. Towne," she said, "I can't dine with you. But can you come over later? Judy is desperately ill. I'll tell you more about it when I see you."

Bob had cried when the news came from the hospital. It had been dreadful. Jane had never seen a man cry. They had been hard sobs, with broken apologies between. "I'm a fool to act like this . . ."

Jane had tried to say things, then had sat silent and uncomfortable while Bob fought for self-control.

Miss Martin had gone home before the message arrived. Bob was told that he could not see his wife. But the surgeon would be glad to talk to him, at eight.

"And I know what he'll say," Bob had said to Jane drearily, "that if I can get that specialist up from Hot Springs, he may be able to diagnose the trouble. But how am I going to get the money, Janey? It will cost a thousand dollars to rush him here and pay his fee. And my income has practically stopped. With all these labor troubles—there's no building. And Judy's nurses cost twelve dollars a day—and her room five. Oh, poor people haven't any right to be sick, Janey. There isn't any place for them."

Jane's face was pale and looked pinched. "There's the check Baldy sent me for Christmas, fifty dollars."

"Dear girl, it wouldn't be a drop in the bucket."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Emma Lazarus

Emma Lazarus was a famous Jewish poet and social worker born in New York city. Her first volume of poetry was published when she was only 18. Subsequently she wrote a novel called "Alide" based on the life of Goethe. She aided in providing work and education for large numbers of Russian Jews who fled to America. Her sonnet to the Statue of Liberty was placed inside the base of the monument in 1886.

COMMENTS

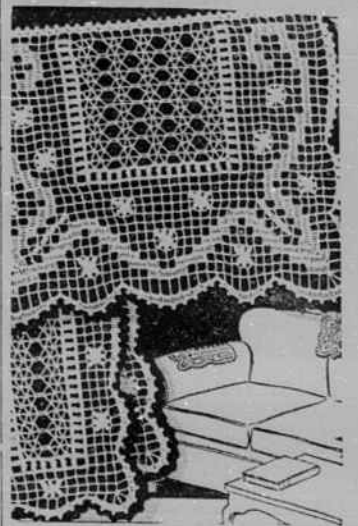
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