

The DIM LANTERN

By TEMPLE BAILEY

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CHAPTER XII—Continued
—18—

"Baldy," Evans said, "I don't agree with you that it was—the money. That may have helped in her decision. But I think she cares—"

"For Towne—nonsense." "It isn't nonsense. She knows nothing of love. She may have taken the shadow for the substance. And he can be very—charming." It wrung his heart to say it. But almost with clairvoyance he saw the truth.

When they returned to the house Baldy found a message from Edith. He was to call her up.

"Uncle Frederick has just told me," she said, "that Jane is to be my aunt. Isn't it joyful?"

"I'm not sure." "Why not?" "Oh, Towne's all right. But not for Jane."

"I see. But he's really in love with her, poor old duck. Talked about it all through dinner. He's going to try awfully hard to make her happy."

"Then you approve?" He heard her gay laugh over the wire. "It will be nice—to have you—in the family. I'll be your niece-in-law."

"You'll be nothing of the kind." "You can't help being—Uncle Baldy. Isn't that—delicious? And now, will you come in tonight and sit by my fire? Uncle Frederick is out."

"I've sat too often by your fire." "Too often for your own peace of mind? I know that. And I'm glad of it." Again he heard a ripple of laughter.

"It isn't a thing to laugh at." She hesitated, then said in a different tone, "I am not laughing. But I want you by my fire tonight."

It was late when Evans went upstairs. He had spent the evening with his mother, discussing with her some matters where his legal knowledge helped. They did not speak of Jane. Their avoidance of the subject showed their preoccupation with it. But neither dared approach it.

On the bedside table in Evans' room lay the valentine he had bought for Jane. There it was, with its cupids and bleeding hearts—its forget-me-nots—and golden darts.

Arthur Lane and Sandy talked it over. "I wonder what has happened. He looks dreadful."

The two boys were on their way to Castle Manor. They wanted books. Evans' library was a treasure-house for youthful readers. It had all the old adventuring tales. And Evans had read everything. He would simply walk up to a shelf, lay his hand on a book, and say, "Here's one you'll like." And he was never wrong.

But of late, Evans Follette had met them with an effort. "Look for yourselves," he had said, when they asked for books, and had sat staring into the fire. And he had not urged them to stay. His manner had been kind but inattentive. They were puzzled and a little hurt. "I feel sorta queer when he acts that way," Sandy was saying, "as if he didn't take any interest. I don't even know whether he wants us any more."

Arthur refused to believe his hero inhospitable. "It's just that he's got things on his mind."

They reached the house and rang the bell. Old Mary let them in. "He's in the library," she said, and they went towards it. The door was open and they entered. But the room was empty . . .

That morning Baldy had had a letter from Jane and had handed it to Evans. It was the first long letter since her engagement to Towne. Baldy had written to his sister, flammily, demanding to know if she were really happy. And she had said:

"I shall be when Judy is better. That is all I can think of just now. Her life is hanging in the balance. We can never be thankful enough that we got the specialist when we did. He had found the trouble. The question now is whether she will have the strength for another operation. When she gets through with that! Well, then I'll talk to you, darling. I hardly know how I feel. The days are so whirling. Mr. Towne has been more than generous. If the little I can give him will repay him, then I must give it, dearest. And it won't be hard. He is so very good to me."

And now this letter had come after Towne's second visit:

"Baldy, dear, I am very happy. And I want you to set your mind at rest. I am not marrying Mr. Towne for what he has done for us all, but because I love him. Please believe it. You can't understand what he has been to me in these dark days. I have learned to know how kind he is—and how strong. I haven't a care in the world when he is here, and everything is so—marvellous. You should see my ring—a great sapphire, Baldy, in a square of diamonds. He is crazy to buy things for me, but I won't let him. I will take things for Judy but not for myself. You can see that, of course. I just go everywhere with him in my cheap little frocks, to the theaters and to all the great restaurants, and we have the most delectable things to eat. It is really great fun."

Since he had heard the news of Jane's approaching marriage, Evans had lived in a dream. The people about him had seemed shadow-shapes. He had walked and talked with them, remembering nothing afterward but his great weariness. He had eaten his meals at stated times, and had not known what he



"I can't stand much excitement."

was eating. He had gone to his office, and behind closed doors had sat at his desk, staring.

And now this letter! "You see what she says," Baldy had raged. "Of course she isn't in love with him. But she thinks she is. There's nothing more that I can do."

Evans had taken the letter to the library to read. He was alone, except for Rusty, who had limped after him and laid at his feet.

She loved—Towne. And that settled it. "I am marrying Mr. Towne because I love him." Nothing could be plainer than that. Baldy might protest. But the words were there.

As Evans sat gazing into the fire, he saw her as she had so often been in this old room—as a child, sprawled on the hearth-rug over some entrancing book from his shelves, swinging her feet on the edge of a table while he bragged of his athletic prowess; leaning over war-maps, while he pointed out the fields of fighting; curled up in a corner on the couch while he read to her—"Oh, silver shrine, here will I take my rest . . ."

He could stand his thoughts no longer. Without hat or heavy coat, he stepped through one of the long windows and into the night.

As he walked on in the darkness, he had no knowledge of his destination. He swept on and on, pursued by dreadful thoughts.

On and on through the blackness. . . . No moon . . . a wet wind blowing . . . on and on . . .

He came to a bridge which crossed a culvert. No water flowed under it. But down the road which led through the Glen was another bridge, and beneath it a deep, still pool.

With the thought of that deep and quiet pool came momentary relief from the horrors which had hounded him. It would be easy. A second's struggle. Then everything over. Peace. No fears. No dread of the future . . .

It seemed a long time after, that, leaning against the buttress of the bridge, he heard, with increasing clearness, the sound of boys' voices in the dark.

He drew back among the shadows. It was Sandy and Arthur. Not three feet away from him—passing.

"Well, of course, Mr. Follette is just a man," Sandy was saying.

"Maybe he is," Arthur spoke earnestly, "but I don't know. There's something about him—"

He paused. "Go on," Sandy urged. "Well, something"—Arthur was struggling to express himself, "splendid. It shines like a light—"

Their brisk footsteps left the bridge, and were dulled by the dirt road beyond. Sandy's response was inaudible. A last murmur, and then silence.

Evans was swept by a wave of emotion; his heart, warm and alive, began to beat in the place where there had been frozen emptiness.

"Something splendid—that shines like a light!"

Years afterward he spoke of this moment to Jane. "I can't describe it. It was a miracle—their coming. As much of a miracle as that light which shone on Paul as he rode to Damascus. The change within me was absolute. I was born again. All the old fears slipped from me like a garment. I was saved, Jane, by those boys' voices in the dark."

The next day was Sunday. Evans called up Sandy and Arthur and invited them to supper. "Old Mary said you were here last night, and didn't find me. I've a book or two for you. Can you come and get them? And stay to supper. Miss Towne will be here and her uncle."

The boys could not know that they were asked as a shield and buckler in the battle which Evans was fighting. It seemed to him that he could not meet Frederick Towne. Yet it had been, of course, the logical thing to ask him. Edith had invited herself, and Towne had, of course, much to tell about Jane.

Evans, therefore, with an outward effect of tranquillity, played the host. After supper, however, he took the boys with him to the library.

On the table lay a gray volume. He opened it and showed the Cruikshank illustrations.

"I've been reading this. It's great stuff."

"Oh, Pilgrim's Progress," said Sandy; "do you like it?"

"Yes," Evans leaned above the book where it lay open under the light, and started to read to them.

That night Evans found out for the first time something about his mother. "You look tired, dearest," he had said, when their guests were gone, and he and she had come into the great hall together.

"I am tired." She sat down on an old horsehair sofa. "I can't stand much excitement. It makes me feel like an old lady."

"You'll never grow old." He felt a deep tenderness for her in this moment of confessed weakness. She had always been so strong. Had refused to lean. She had, in fact, taken from him his son's prerogative of protectiveness.

"You'd better see Hallam," Evans said.

"I've seen him."

"What did he say?"

"My heart—"

He looked at her in alarm. "Mother! Why didn't you tell me?"

"What was the use? There's nothing to be worried about. Only he says I must not push myself."

"I am worried. Let me look after the men in the morning early. That will give you an extra nap."

"Oh, I won't do it, Evans. You have your work."

"It won't hurt me. And I am going to boss you around a bit." He stooped and kissed her. "You are too precious to lose, Mumsie."

She clung to him. "What would I do without you, my dear?"

He helped her up the stairs. And as she climbed slowly, his arm about her, he thought of that dark moment by the bridge.

If those young voices had not come to him in the night, this loving soul might have been stricken and made desolate; left alone in her time of greatest need.

CHAPTER XIII

Once more the Washington papers had headlines that spoke of Delafield Simms. He had married a stenographer in Frederick Towne's

office. And it was Towne's niece that he had deserted at the altar.

And most remarkable of all, Edith Towne had been at the wedding. It was Eloise Harper who told the reporters.

"They were married at the old Inn below Alexandria this morning, by the local Methodist clergyman. Miss Logan is a Methodist—fancy. And Edith is bridesmaid."

But Eloise did not know that Lucy had worn the wedding dress and veil that Edith had given her and looked lovely in them. And that after the ceremony, Delafield had wrung Edith's hand and had said, "I shall never know how to thank you for what you have been to Lucy."

"Gee, but you're superlative," Baldy told her as they walked in the garden.

"Am I?"

"Yes. And the way you carried it off."

"I didn't carry it off. It carried itself."

"Are you sure it didn't hurt?"

She smiled at him from beneath her big hat. "Not a bit."

The moment was ripe for romance. But Baldy almost feverishly kept the conversation away from serious things. They had talked seriously enough, God knew, the other night by Edith's fire. He had seen her lonely in the thought of her future.

"When Uncle Fred marries I won't stay here."

He had yearned to take her in his arms, to tell her that against his heart she should never again know loneliness. But he had not dared. What had he to offer? A boy's love. Against her gold.

So he talked of Jane. "She doesn't want her engagement announced until she gets back. I think she's right."

"I don't," Edith said lazily. "If I loved a man I'd want to shout it to the world."

They were sitting on a rustic bench under the blossoming plum tree. Edith's hands were clasped behind her head, and the winged sleeves of her gown fell back and showed her bare arms. Baldy wanted to unclasp those hands, crush them to his lips—but instead he stood up, looking over the river.

"Do you see the ducks out there? Wild ones at that. A sign of spring."

She rose and stood beside him. "And you can talk of—ducks—on a day like this?"

"Yes," he did not look at her, "ducks are—safe."

He heard her low laugh. "Silly boy."

He turned, his gray eyes filled with limpid light. "Perhaps I am. But I should be a fool if I told you how I love you. Worship you. You know it, of course. But nothing can come of it, even if I were presumptuous enough to think that you—care."

She swept out her hands in an appealing gesture. "Say it. I want to hear."

She was adorable. But he drew back a little. "We've gone too far and too fast. It is my fault, of course, for being a romantic fool."

"I'm afraid we're a pair of romantic fools, Baldy."

He turned and put his hands on her shoulders. "Edith, I—mustn't."

"Why not?"

"Not until I have something to offer you—"

"You have something to offer—"

"Oh, I know what you mean. But—I won't. Somehow this affair of Jane's with your uncle has made me see—"

"See what?"

"Oh, how the world would look at it. How he'd look at it."

"Uncle Frederick? He hasn't anything to do with it. I'm my own mistress."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Head-Hunters Hate White Men

The head-hunting Marindanim tribesmen of Dutch New Guinea, natives of the island lying north of Australia, practice head-hunting as they have for hundreds of years. The Marindanim, inhabiting the Digoei river district, are the most savage and successful of the head-hunting tribes on the island. They regard all other tribes as implacable enemies and raid them continually for their ghastly human trophies. So intense is their hatred of the white man that few whites ever venture near them. The Dutch government makes persistent but fruitless efforts to stamp out the habit of head-hunting.

'Twas High Time to Call Halt, Thought the Lady

Former Senator Fess was condemning in Atlantic City the war talk that is troubling the world.

"How unreasonable war is," he ended. "It is more unreasonable than the prize fight seemed to the old lady. An old lady said on her return from the big city:

"One evening my son-in-law took me to a prize fight. I never saw such a thing. The two men came out on the stage and shook hands like the best of friends, then they began to punch each other all for nothing. They kept on punching till a man in the corner yelled 'Time' and nobody answered, so I pulled out my watch and yelled, 'Ten o'clock!'"

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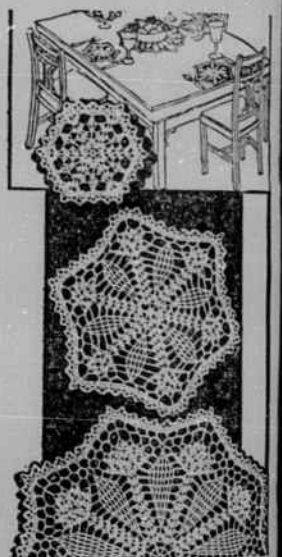
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