

The DIM LANTERN

By TEMPLE BAILEY

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued

"Nothing is too good for you, Jane. I can't say it as I want to say it, but you'll never know what you seemed to me on Sunday as you came through the mist."

Evans' voice shook a little, but recovered himself in a moment. "Here come the Townes," he rose as Edith entered with young Baldwin.

After that Evans followed Baldy's lead as a dispenser of hospitality. The two of them passed cups, passed thin bread and butter, passed little cakes, passed lemon and cream and sugar, flung conversational balls as light as feathers into the air, were, as Baldy would have expressed it, "the life of the party."

"Something must have gone to Casablanca's head," Frederick Towne remarked to Jane. "Have you ever seen him like this?"

"Years ago. He was tremendously attractive."

"Do you find him attractive now?" with a touch of annoyance.

"I find him wonderful"—her tone was defiant—"and I've known him all my life."

"If you had known me all your life would you call me wonderful?"

She looked at him from behind her battements of silver. "How do I know? People have to prove themselves."

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Strolling up to the tea-table, he was aware at once of a situation which might make for comedy, or indeed for tragedy. It was evident that Towne was much attracted to little Jane Barnes. If Jane reciprocated, what of young Follette?

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They laughed at her, and Edith said, "Adelaide will never break. She'll melt. She's as soft as wax." Then pigeonholing Mrs. Laramore for more vital matters, "Uncle Fred, I am going out to Baldy's studio; he's painting Jane."

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"May I see it?"

Baldy, yearning for solitude and Edith, gave reluctant consent. "Come on, everybody."

So everybody, including Dr. Hallam and Mrs. Follette, made their way to the garage.

Edith and young Baldwin arrived first. "And this is where you work," she said, softly.

"Yes. Look here, will you sit here so that I can feast my eyes on you? I've dreamed of you in that chair—in classic costume. Do you know that you were made for a goddess?"

"I know that you are a romantic boy."

"How old are you?" she asked him.

"Twenty-five."

"I don't believe it. I'm twenty-two, and I feel a thousand years older than you."

"You will always be ageless."

She laughed. "How old is Jane?"

"Twenty. Yet people take us for twins."

"She doesn't look it and neither do you."

The others came in and Edith went back to her thoughts. He wasn't too young. She was glad of that.

The sketch of Jane was on an easel. There she stood, a slender figure in her lilac frock—bobbed black hair, lighted-up eyes—the lifted basket with its burden of gold and purple and green!

Towne stood back and looked at it. Jane at his side said, "That's some of the fruit you sent."

"Really?" Frederick had no eyes for anything but Jane, in her lilac frock. Jove, but the boy had caught the spirit of her!

He turned to Baldy. "It is most unusual. And I want it."

"Sorry," said Baldy, crisply. "I am sending it off tomorrow."

"How much is the prize?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"I will write a check for that amount if you will let me have this."

"I am afraid I can't, Mr. Towne."

"Why not?"

"Well, I feel this way about it. It isn't worth two thousand dollars. But if I win the prize it may be worth that to the magazine—the advertising and all that."

"Isn't that splitting hairs?"

"Perhaps, but it's the way I feel." "But if you don't win the prize you won't have anything."

"No."

"And you'll be out two thousand dollars." The lion in the Zoo was snarling.

And above him, breathing an upper air, was this young eagle. "I'll be glad to give the sketch to you if it comes back," said Baldy, coolly, "but I rather think it will stick."

It was, in a way, a dreadful moment for Towne. There was young Baldwin sitting on the edge of the table, swinging a leg, debonair, defiant. And Edith laughing in her sleeve. Frederick knew that she was laughing. He was as red as a turkey cock.

It was Jane who saved him from apoplexy. She was really inordinately proud of Baldy, but she knew the dangers of his mood. And she had her duties as hostess.

"Baldy wants to see himself on the news stands," she said, soothingly; "don't deprive him of that pleasure, Mr. Towne."

"Nothing of the kind, Jane," exclaimed her brother.

"Baldy, I won't quarrel with you before people. We must reserve that pleasure until we are alone."

"I'm not quarrelling."

Jane held up a protesting hand. "Oh, let's run away from him, Mr. Towne."

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