

Alabaster Lamps

CHAPTER IX

By
Margaret Turnbull
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WNU Service



"Mother, How Brave You Were."

Not for long now could Polly count on blind obedience. It was not in the nature of things, nor the nature of a grown-up daughter. Polly decided the time had come for a frank confession.

While Mary brushed her hair, Polly announced that she meant to go to Venice and look about for a place to spend several months, cheaply and comfortably.

Mary said it sounded interesting, but did not commit herself further. She was tired and hurt by these half-confidences.

Frankness was impossible, until her mother was frank with her. She would not degrade her mother's intelligence, or her own, by playing the hypocrite. Mary said she was sleepy and went to bed. But not to sleep.

Mrs. Johnston stayed in her own room, the door slightly open between them. She dozed and stood in her dressing gown before the long mirror, a wonderful color study in a soft, clinging chiffon robe of blue, with her red hair flaming against white shoulders. Polly did not take her usual nightly delight in the spectacle. She braided her hair with no eyes for the vision in the mirror.

"Got to do it, Polly. Come," she said to herself and put down the comb. She went to the door and softly opened it.

"Mary, want to sleep?"

Mary shook her head, turned on the reading light, threw a rose-colored dressing gown over her shoulders and patted the bed beside her. She recognized from her mother's face that the time had come.

"I'd like immensely to have you come and talk yourself out to me. It's been—quite a while," she announced with a shy look up at her mother.

Mrs. Johnston sighed. There was no doubt she was in for it. She sat down, looked at Mary, shut her eyes and took the plunge.

"Mary, I'd like to talk about your father."

Mary sat up. Of all the unlikely things. Talk about her father! Blue-beard's door was about to be opened. From her earliest youth she could remember her mother saying: "Mustn't ask mother questions about father, Mary. It only makes Mummy unhappy and miserable." What could it mean?

Mrs. Johnston settled herself back on Mary's bed.

"How much do you know about me, Mary?"

"Only that you're the nicest mother ever invented," Mary told her, honestly. "The best looking and the best friend a girl ever had."

Mrs. Johnston leaned over impulsively and kissed the girl.

"I only hope you'll think exactly the same when I get through."

"Hurry up, Mother, and tell. You sound like a 'best seller.'"

"I have known some less interesting plots. Well, we'll begin with the fact that I was born of poor people. In Limerick, N. J. My mother and father both died when I was a little thing, about twelve, and a kind woman brought me up. She took me to New Brunswick, and sent me to school. I helped about the house after school hours. She kept a boarding house. I had only one relative in the whole world, my Uncle Michael, my mother's brother, and he was as crabbed an old bachelor as ever drew breath. He was supposed to be in Pennsylvania somewhere, working in the iron mines, when my people died. But nobody could find him, so Mrs. Bradley took me in."

"Mrs. Bradley died, and her sister came and took the house and ran it as a students' boarding house. I was lathered with the house, and kept right on working there. Mrs. Thomas, the sister, took no interest whatever in me. All she cared about was keeping the house clean and getting the work done. She didn't keep enough servants to do that comfortably, so I had to work from morning to night. It was ghastly."

She paused, looked at Mary shyly and began to describe the men at the boarding house. Mary listened, fascinated. To think that her mother was capable of keeping this old plot to herself all these years. It was most romantic. She waited eagerly for the first mention of her father. Her mother hadn't mentioned any Johnston yet, most of her talk was about some man named Dabbs. Her mind wandered off, thinking about the name and the man it suggested to her.

"It must be painful to have a name like that."

"Do you talk so?" asked her mother, a little uncertainly. "Well, anyway, this young man lived in the house, but he never looked at me."

"Mother!" scoffed Mary. "A lovely red-headed girl like you? I don't believe it."

"But you must, darling. There's a lot of difference between red-headed Mrs. Johnston, with lots of money and pretty clothes to set off her locks and hair, and a big, overworked, red-headed chambermaid in a boarding house."

"I hated nearly all men. I had a mind and hopes above my station. I was paid so little that I could only save money slowly. I wanted to get enough to nerve myself to leave that house. My ambition at that time was to be a school teacher."

She smiled at the girl and Mary smiled back.

"Mother, how brave you were. My heart just aches to think of you, with all your brilliant ideas, tied down that way."

"Bless you, baby!" her mother exclaimed. "My lost uncle turned up just about then, and found me out. He was a terrible creature; six feet tall, very dry and brittle and had a bad cough, and a vile temper. What was left of his curly hair had turned yellow-gray. The poor thing hadn't long to live."

"He had worked too hard, and lived too roughly, to know how to take care of himself. He had plenty of money. I discovered, and while he knew how to take care of it, he didn't know how to spend it. He didn't want to leave

to his room. There he was, sitting all huddled up by the window. I asked him if he minded my doing up the room while he was there, and he said he didn't. He had a telegram clutched in his hand. I could see that he was troubled. By and by I couldn't stand it any longer. I forgot my own troubles. I'd never been so sorry for anyone in my life. I went up to him, and quite forgetting I was a servant, said:

"Mr. Dabbs—Claude—what's wrong?"

"Claude?" Mary exclaimed. "Claude Dabbs? What a funny name! Why, it's the same as—"

Her mother stopped her with a quick: "It was funnier than that. I discovered afterward it was Claude Melnotte Dabbs."

Mary's soft laugh rang out, and then she checked it.

"Oh Mother, I'm sorry. I'm so interested. Hurry and tell."

Her daughter's mirth was not the pleasantest sound in Mrs. Johnston's ears just then. "I discovered that this young man, with the funny name was in great trouble. His father was dying and the boy had no money to go home with, and his mother was quite too poor to send him any."

"Oh, poor thing. Of course you loaned him your savings."

"I didn't. I told him my troubles, and offered him five hundred dollars—if he would marry me."

"Mother! You didn't!"

"Sorry dear, but I can't stop to make this romantic. I'm telling you the plain, unvarnished truth. I thought his troubles and mine showed me a way out. I said if he would marry me and show himself to me, I would give him five hundred dollars. He was to promise to go away and never try to see me again. He was to leave me to go my way alone, while he went his."

"But Mother! What a cold-blooded thing to do!"

"Wasn't it?" agreed Mrs. Johnston, much embarrassed. "But you see it didn't seem like that to me, Mary. Please remember that he was only my door of escape and it was absolutely a business proposition."

"Oh Mother!"

"I can't help it, Mary. That's what I offered him, and after the first moment of astonishment, and when he was convinced that I was not fooling him and would actually have the money—I had two hundred and fifty dollars of my own savings to show him—he agreed."

"Oh dear," groaned Mary, "then he was just as bad!"

"I don't know," Mrs. Johnston said thoughtfully. "I've often wondered. You see, his father was dying."

"That's so, I'd forgotten."

Mrs. Johnston looked as though she was about to say something in her own defense, thought better of it, and went on, doggedly: "Uncle wasn't told anything about the agreement. Both my uncle and his lawyer were favorably impressed with Claude."

"Uncle insisted that we have the ceremony performed at once, and that suited both of us. Claude looked sick with anxiety, and was eager to get it over and start home. We were married before a justice of the peace, who knew neither of us. Right after the ceremony Claude went home with half of the five hundred in his pocket. The other half was to be his when he signed the papers agreeing to leave me alone, and not to block any petition I might make for divorce, on the grounds of desertion, later. The lawyer had to have time to draw the documents up."

"Mother, I simply can't recognize you as the calculating girl who married that way!"

"You'll have to, Mary. I did it. Just in time, too, for my uncle died that night. I was free and the money was mine. I left the boarding house and went to a quiet little hotel. I never told the people at the boarding house anything about the money, or the marriage."

"The lawyer was kind. He made arrangements for me to go to France and live with some friends of his sister who would finish my education. I was supposed to be a young widow."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"I found Mrs. Thomas in a fine rage. I'd forgotten to do the third floor before I went out. That was the floor young De Harms, Woods and Dabbs occupied. I went up there as quickly as I could get my things off and began slapping things together. Young Dabbs' room I left to the last, because—well, because he was a decent young fellow and wasn't so fault-finding as the others."

"I thought you hated all men," commented Mary, slyly.

Her mother ignored her. "I went

"Bad Man" Began His Lawless Life Early

Bill Langley probably was one of the toughest characters that Texas ever produced. Owen P. White tells us, in Collier's Magazine. According to his family Bible he was born of honest, God-fearing parents, but he took to shooting early. When he was only fourteen years old he was doing his daily dozen with a pair of six-shooters and filling all the trees in the ancestral wood lot with clusters of leaden bullets, generally grouped a dozen in a spot and no spot more than six inches in diameter. Thus early in life did Bill make a bid for fame. He learned to shoot with both hands; afoot or horseback. It was the same to him. But, sad to relate of one so young, Bill's conscience apparently was just as well trained as his shooting eye. It never bothered him in the slightest degree. Hence, before he was nineteen years he had six ticks on his gun and had been hanged by a Texas vigilance committee. But the hanging did not "take." Members of the party fired shots at him as they rode away. One of the bullets clipped the rope, weakening it, and a few

moments later he dropped to the ground and quickly recovered. After several years of wild depredation, Langley was executed in Giddings, Texas, October 11, 1878.

What She Wanted to Know

Mandy, black and ponderous, had trouble with her teeth and was looking over some dental plates.

"Could Ah eat wid 'em as good as Ah used to eat wid mah own?" she asked.

"Oh, to be sure," replied the dentist. "These plates are so scientifically fabricated that mastication is facilitated to a degree equal to, if not exceeding, Nature's own product."

"Yassuh, yassuh," from Mandy, still unconvinced. "But what Ah want to know is kin you chew wid 'em as well as wid you own?"—Pittsburgh Chronicle-Telegraph.

Road Made of Glass

What is probably the only glass road in the world is to be found at Obsidian Cliff, near Mammoth Hot Springs, in Yellowstone National Park. The construction of this roadway was accomplished by building great fires around the blocks of volcanic glass which compose the sides of the cliffs. When heated the rocks were suddenly cooled by dashing water upon them, thus shattering them into small fragments. In no unique manner the roadway was formed.

Classification of Nails

The term "penny," as applied to nails, denotes a certain arbitrary size. The expression originated in the Fifteenth century, at that time designating the price of nails per hundred.

CUTE PANTIE PLAY-FROCKS; GINGHAM'S PLACE IN MODE

LIKE so many little animated daffodils and buttercups will we tota be looking this Maytime and summer time, too, for Dame Fashion is informing mothers that until further notice yellow will rank as one of the very popular colors for little folks' dresses.

This preference for yellow is evidenced through-out all fabric showings, especially gingham, organdies, volles and dotted swisses. Included also in the list are dainty printed dimities and plaques, with flowerets scattered all over their surface or perhaps dots

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