

"THE TINDER BOX"

(Continued from first page)

walk with its rows of blush peonies, nodding along either edge. The two old purple lilacs beside the front steps have grown so large they seemed to be barring my way into my home with longing, sweet embraces, and a fragrant little climbing rose that has rioted across the front door ever since I could remember bent down and left a kiss on my cheeks.

The warm, mellow old moon flooded a glow in front of me through the big front door, as I opened it, and then hastened to pour into the wide windows as I threw back the shutters.

Logs lay ready for lighting in the wide fireplace at the end of the long room, and father's tobacco jar gleamed a reflected moonlight from its pewter sides from the tall mantle shelf. The old books melted into the dusk of their cases along the wall, and the portrait of Grandfather Shelby lost its fierce gaze and became benign from its place between the windows.

I was being welcomed to the home of my fathers, with a soft dusk that

other hour as I spent putting things in order in father's room, which opens off the living room, so I could go to bed by candle light in the bed in which he and I were both born. I wanted to sleep there and didn't even open any other part of the grim old house.

And when I put out the candle and lay in the high, old four post bedstead I again felt as small as I really am, and I was in danger of a bad collapse from self depreciation when my humor came to the rescue. I might just as well have gone on and slept between Henrietta and the wall, as was becoming my feminine situation, for here my determination to assert my masculine privileges was keeping a real man doing sentry duty up and down a moonlight road all night—and I wanted it.

"After this, James Hardin, you can consider yourself safe from any of my attentions or intentions." I laughed to myself as I turned my face into the pillow that was faintly scented from the lavender in which mother had always kept her linen. "I've been in Glendale two hours, and one man is on the home base with his fingers crossed. James, you are free! Oh, Jane!"

CHAPTER III. A Flint Spark.

THE greatest upheavals of nature are those that arrive suddenly without notifying the world days beforehand of their intentions of splitting the crust of the universe wide open. One is coming to Glendale by degrees, but the town hasn't found out about it yet. I'm the only one who sees it, and I'm afraid to tell.

When Old Harpeth, who has been looking down on a nice, peaceful, man ordained, built and protected world, woke Glendale up the morning after my arrival and found me defiantly alone in the home of my fathers—also of each of my foremothers, by the courtesy of dower—he muttered and drew a veil of mist across his face. Slight showers ensued, but he had to come out in less than an hour from pure curiosity. I found the old garden heavenly in its riot of neglected buds, shoots and blossoms, wet and welcoming with the soft odors of heaven itself.

It was well I was out early to enjoy it, for that was to be the day of my temptation and sore trial. I am glad I have recorded it all, for I might have forgotten some day how wonderfully my very pliant, feminine attitude rubbed in my masculine intentions as to my life on the blind side of all the forces brought to bear on me to put me back into my predestined place in the scheme of the existence.

"Your Cousin James' home is the place for you, Evelina, and until he explained to me how you felt last night I was deeply hurt that you hadn't come straight, with Sallie, to me and to him," said Cousin Martha, in as severe a voice as was possible for such a placid individual to produce. Cousin Martha is completely lovely, and the Mossback gets his beauty from her. She is also such a perfect dear that her influence is something terrific, even if negatively expressed.

"I have come to help you get your things together so you can move over before dinner," she continued with gentle force. "Now, what shall we put in the portmanteau first? I see you have unpacked very little, and I am glad that it confirms me in my feeling that your coming over here for the night was just a dutiful sentiment for your lost loved ones and not any unmaidenly sense of independence in the matter of choice where it is best for you to live. Of course such a question as that must be left to your guardian, and of course James will put you under my care."

"I—I really thought that perhaps

Cousin James did not have room for me, Cousin Martha," I answered meekly. "How many families has he with him now?" I asked with a still further meekness that was the depths of williness.

"There are three of us widows, whom he sustains and comforts for the loss of our husbands, and also the three Norton girls, cousins on his father's side of the house, you remember. It is impossible for them to look after their plantation since their father's death robbed them of a protector at least, even though he had been paralyzed since Gettysburg. James is a most wonderful man, my dear, a most wonderful man, though, as he is my son, I ought to think it in silence."

"Indeed he is," I answered from the heart. "But—but wouldn't it be a little crowded for him to have another—another vine—that is, exactly what would he do with me? I know Wide-gables is wide, but that is a houseful, isn't it?"

"Well, all of us did feel that it made the house uncomfortably full when Sallie came with the three children, but you know Henry Carruthers left James his executor and guardian of the children, and Sallie, of course, couldn't live alone, so Mrs. Hargrove and I moved into the south room together and gave Sallie and the children my room. It is a large room, and it would be such a comfort to Sallie to have you stay with her and help her at night with the children. She doesn't really feel able to get up with them at all. Then Dilsie could sleep in the cabin, as she ought to on account of the jimson weed in her phthisic pipe. It would be such a beautiful influence in your lonely life, Evelina, to have the children to care for."

I wondered if Cousin Martha had ever heard that Blue Bunch indulge in such heartfelt oaths as had followed that train down the track last night!

"It would be lovely," I answered, and the reply was not all insincerity, as I thought of the darkness of that long night and the Bunch's offer of a place at her sturdy little back "next the wall."

"But I will be so busy with my own work, Cousin Martha, that I am afraid I couldn't do justice to the situation and repay the children and Sallie for crowding them."

"Why, you couldn't crowd us, Evelina, honey," came in Sallie's rich voice as she sallied into the room, trailing the pup and the kit at her skirts and flying lavender ribbons at loose ends. "We've come to help you move over right away."

"Well, not while I have a voice in the affairs of my own husband's niece! How are you, Evelina, and are you crazy, Sallie Carruthers?" came in a deep raven croak of a voice that sounded as if it had harked partly from the tomb as Aunt Augusta Shelby stood in the doorway with reproof on her lips and sternness on her brow. "Peter and I will have Evelina move down immediately with us. James Hardin has as much in the way of a family as he can very well stand up under now."

And as she spoke Aunt Augusta glared at Sallie with such ferocity that even Sallie's sunshiny presence was slightly dimmed.

"Are you ready, Evelina? Peter will send the surrey for your baggage," she continued, and for a moment I quailed, for Aunt Augusta's determination of mind is always formidable, but I summoned my woman's wit and man's courage and answered quickly before she fairly snatched me from under my own roof-tree.

"That would be lovely, Aunt Augusta, and how are you?" I answered and asked in the same breath, as I drew near enough to her to receive a busi-

nesslike peck on my cheek. "I expect to have you and Uncle Peter to look after me a lot, but somehow I feel that father would have liked—liked for me to live here and keep my home—his home—open. Some way will arrange itself. I haven't talked with Cousin James yet," I felt white feathers sprouting all over me, as I thus invoked the masculine dominance I had come to lay.

"You'll have to settle that matter with your Uncle Peter, then, for, following his dictates of which I did not approve, I have done our duty by the orphan. Now, Evelina, let me say in my own person that I thoroughly approve of your doing just as you plan." And as she uttered this heresy she looked so straight and militant and altogether commanding that both Cousin Martha and Sallie quailed. I felt elated, as if my soul were about to get sight of a kindred personality, or, rather a soul relative of yours, Jane.

"Oh, she would be so lonely, Mrs. Shelby, and she"—Sallie was venturing to say with trepidation, when Aunt Augusta cut her short without ceremony.

"Lonely, nonsense! Such a busy woman as I now feel sure Evelina is going to be, will not have time to be lonely. I wish I could stay and talk with you further about your plans, but I must hurry back and straighten out Peter's mind on that question of the town water supply that is to come up in the meeting of the city council today. He let it be presented all wrong last time, and they got things so muddled that it was voted on incorrectly. I will have to write it out for him so he can explain it to them. I will need you in many ways to help me help Peter be mayor of Glendale, Evelina. I am wearied after ten years of the strain of his office. I shall call on you for assistance often in the most important matters," with which promise that sounded like a threat she proceeded to march down the front path, almost stepping on Henrietta, who was coming up the same path, with almost the same emphasis. There was some sort of an explosion, and I hope the kind of words I heard hurled after the train were not used.

"That old black crow is a-going to git in trouble with me some day, Marfy," Henrietta remarked as she settled herself on the arm of Cousin Martha's chair after bestowing a smudgy kiss on the little white curl that wrapped around one of the dear old lady's pink little ears. I had felt that way about Cousin Martha myself at the Bunch's age, and we exchanged a sympathetic smile on the subject.

"Well, what are you going to do, Evelina?" asked Sallie, and she turned such a young, helpless, wondering face up to me from the center of her cluster of babies, that my heart almost failed me at the idea of pouring what seemed to me at that moment the poison of modernity into the calm waters of her and Cousin Martha's primitive placidity.

"You'll have to live some place where there is a man," she continued, with worried conviction.

My time had come and the fight was on. Oh, Jane!

"I don't believe I really feel that way about it." I began in the gentlest of manners and slowly, so as to feel my way. "You see, Sallie dear, and dearest Cousin Martha, I have had to be out in the world so much—alone, that I am used to it. I—I haven't had a man's protection for so long that I don't need it, as I would if I were like you two blessed sheltered women."

"I know it has been hard, dear," said Cousin Martha gently looking her sympathy at my lorn state, over her glasses.

(To be continued)



A Tall, Gray Figure Pacing Slowly Up and Down the Road.

was as still and sweet as the grave. Sweet for those that want it, but I didn't. Suddenly I thrilled as alive as any terror stricken woman that ever found herself alone anywhere on any other edge of the world, and then as suddenly found myself in a complete condition of fright prostration, crouched on my own threshold. I was frightened at the dark and could not even cry. Then almost immediately, while I crouched quivering in every nerve, I seemed to hear a man's voice say comfortingly:

"You don't need to be frightened."

Courageously I lifted my eyes and looked down between the old lilac bushes and saw just what I expected I would—a tall, gray figure pacing slowly up and down the road. Then it was that fear came into me, stiffened my muscles and strengthened my soul—fear of myself and my own conclusions about destiny and all things pertaining thereto.

I never want to go through such an