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## The TINDER BOX

by  
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AUTHOR OF  
"THE MELTING OF MOLLY"



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### CHAPTER 13—Continued.

The subject of the rally was a fine one for everybody to get together on from the start, and before any of them realized that they were doing anything but plan out the details of a big spread, the like of which they had been doing for hospitable generations, for the railroad commission they were organized into a flourishing equality league, with officers and by-laws and a sinking fund in the treasury.

"Now, Evelina," said Jane as she sat on the edge of my bed braiding her heavy, sleek black braid that is as big as my wrist and that she declares is her one beauty, though she ought to know that her straight, strong figure, ruddy complexion, aroma of strength and keen, nearsighted eyes are—well, if not beauties, something very winning, "we must not allow the men

time to get sore over this matter of the league. We must make them feel immediately that they are needed and wanted intensely in the movement. They must be asked to take their place, shoulder to shoulder, with us in this fight for better conditions for the world and mankind in general. True to our theory, we must offer them our comradely affection and openly and honestly express our need of them in our lives and in our activities.

"I asked young Mr. Hayes to take me fishing with him tomorrow in order to have a whole quiet day with him alone, so that we could get closely in touch with each other. I have had very little opportunity to talk with him, but I have felt his sympathy in several interesting glances we have exchanged with each other. I am looking forward to the establishment of a perfect friendship with him."

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I told myself that I was mistaken in thinking that the expression in Jane's eyes was softened to the verge of dreaminess and my inmost soul shouted at the idea of Jane and Polk and their day alone in the woods.

Since that night that Polk humiliated me as completely as a man can humiliate a woman he has looked at me like a whipped child, and I haven't looked at him at all. I have used Jane as a widespread fan behind which to hide from him. How was I to know what was going on on the other side of the fan?

It is a relief to realize that in the world there are at least a few women like Jane, that don't have to be protected from Polk and his kind. Jane is one of the hunted that has turned and has come back to meet the pursuer with outstretched and disarming hand. This, I suspect, is to be about her first real tussle. Skool to the victor!

"I advised your Aunt Augusta to ask you to talk again to your Uncle Peter, and Nell is to seek an interview with Mr. Hardin at her earliest opportunity, though I think the only result will be instruction and uplift for Nell, as a more illumined thing I never had said to me on the subject of the relation of men and women than the one he uttered to me last night as he said good-bye to me out on the porch in that glorious moonlight that seems brighter here in Glendale than I have ever seen it out in the world anywhere else."

"What did he say?" I asked perfectly naturally, though a double bladed pain was twisted around in my solar plexus as the vision of Jane's last night interview in the moonlight with the Crag and Nell's soon to be one hit me broadside at the same time. I haven't had one by myself with him for a week.

"Why, of course, women are the breath that men draw into their lungs of life to supply eternal combustion," was what he said when I asked him point blank what he thought of the league. "Only let us breathe slowly as we ascend to still greater elevations with their consequent rarefied air," he added, with the most heavenly thoughtfulness in his fine face. Did it ever occur to you, Evelina, that your Cousin James is really a radiant beautiful man? How could you be so

mistaken, as to both him and his personal appearance, as to apply such a name as Crag to him?"

Glendale is going to Jane's head! "And I have been thinking since you told me of the situation in which he and Mrs. Carruthers have been placed by this financial catastrophe how wonderful it will be if love really does come to them when her grief is healed by time. He will rear her interesting children into women that will be invaluable to the commonwealth," Jane continued as she tied a blue bow on the end of her long black plait.

"Do you think that there—there are any signs of—of such a thing yet?" I asked with pitiful weakness as I wilted down into my pillow.

"Just a bit in his manner to her, though I may be influenced in my judgment by the evident suitability of such a solution of the situation," she answered as she settled herself back against one of the posts of my high old bed and looked me clean through and through.

"I hope you have been noting these different emotional situations and reactions among your friends carefully in your record, Evelina," she continued in an interested and biological tone of voice and expression of eye. "In a small community like this it is much easier to get at the real underlying motive of such things than it is in a more complicated civilization. I have seen you transcribing notes into our book. Since I have come to Glendale I am more firmly determined than ever that the attitude of emotional equality that we determined upon in the spring is the true solution of most of the complicated man and woman problems. I am anxious to see it tried out in five other different communities that we will select. I would not seem to be indelicate, dear, but I do not see any signs of your having been especially drawn emotionally toward any of your friends, though your attitude of sisterly comradeship and frankness with them is more beautiful than I thought it was possible for such a thing to be. You are not being tempted to shirk any of your duties of womanhood because of your interest in your art, are you? I will confess to you that the thing that brought me down upon you was your news of this com-

(Continued on last page)

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