

# Alabaster Lamps



By Margaret Turnbull

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## STORY FROM THE START

Claude Melotte Dabbs, returning from New York to his grocery store in Peace Valley, Pa., brings with him a stranger, Ned Carter, whom he introduces to his housekeeper, Aunt Liddy, as a chance acquaintance. Ned tells that he has broken with his folks because of their pacifistic leanings. Visiting in Clover Hollow, the two men almost run over a dog belonging to a girl whom Ned recognizes. Later Ned delivers a grocery order, and in his absence the girl, Dorothy Selden, tells Dabbs that Ned's name is Rangeley and that he is the son of the famous banker. Next morning Ned, starting to work as a delivery boy, takes an order marked "Johnston" to the "White House," where he meets Mary Johnston. She tells him the servants have left, leaving her alone with her mother. Ned promises to get new servants. Meeting Dorothy, who is his former fiancée, Ned evades explaining his presence in Peace Valley. He arranges with Ettie Pulsifer to begin work with the Johnstons, but she is unable to start at once. Ned returns to tell Mary about hiring Ettie, and in explaining this matter to the mother is astonished at her emotion when Dabbs' name is mentioned. The cook arrives, and Mary and Ned start to town for groceries. They are seen by Dorothy Selden. Worried over financial difficulties, Mrs. Johnston is bothered by Dorothy, who warns her there is something suspicious about Ned. After seeing Mrs. Johnston at the inn, Dabbs tells Ned that he has something that he wants to get off his mind. He confesses that twenty years ago he married "Mrs. Johnston" so that she could inherit her father's estate.

## CHAPTER VI—Continued

"Yes," Claude Dabbs told him stoutly, as though in answer to the unspoken question, "that's what I did. Married for money. Sold myself for five hundred dollars!"

"Great Scott, C. M.! Get on! What happened?"

"After I married Polly, and got half the money down, I came home here, saying nothing to anyone. The understanding was that I was to go back at the end of the week, sign the necessary papers, and get the rest of the money. That was to end the whole business. When I got home, Pop was dying. He died the night I got home, and was buried three days after.

"After the funeral I made an excuse to Mom that I had to go back to settle things, and so I got away. I went to the lawyer's office and signed the papers. He told me that Polly's uncle was dead, had died two days after I married Polly, and I was to take the papers and deliver them to her. She was staying at a little second-rate hotel. She'd given up her job but she didn't want to spread herself until she got away from the town where she'd been a servant girl. Polly herself was to give me the rest of the money. I'd only been paid half before I went home. The lawyer laughed, when he told me that, and added: 'Women are women. She would have it so.' Then he looked sly, and said: 'Maybe this isn't such a mercenary affair as I was led to believe. If I were you, I'd make her see reason and stay in America before she spends all of her fortune in traveling, or gets taken in by foreigners. It's a lot of money. If I were in your shoes, I'd never let her go.'

"I walked away from him, thinking if he was in my shoes he'd be in a bad way. I didn't know whether it was because I was all worn out with grief over Pop, and sleepless nights and worry about Mom and the future, or whether it was because I was miles away from home and lonely. Somehow I didn't seem like myself. I seemed like some other person. I tried to shake the feeling off. I said to myself: 'All the time I'm with Polly. I'm going to be just myself—the Claude Dabbs I feel like. She don't know me as Claude Dabbs of Peace Valley.'

"I saw my future. A hard struggle with a country store and no time to do anything but work. God! how I rebelled in that short walk down. I didn't see why I should be shut up in a grocery for a lifetime, and that was all I could see before me. Why should my father have had to die, when there were men walking round hale and hearty, lots older than he.

"And I wanted Pop back! Nothing to do with the financial part of it, that aches. I cared a lot. Why, I could have stood the grocery part of it forever—for Pop. I hated every man of his age that came near me alive and happy, while Pop lay still. There was a sore place in my heart that I couldn't bear, marked with his name. Every time I went near it, I jumped away, like you jump when you

have had a bad spot and the dentist's fooling round.

"All the things I hadn't done that Pop wanted me to do; all the times I'd disappointed him and acted mean were there. It needed only a touch to send me running down that city street, crying like a baby.

"So I shut it off, in a corner of my mind, and said to myself: 'That's got nothing to do with this Polly I'm going to see. I'll get all through with this young woman, and then I'll go home to what I've got to go home to. But she's nothing to do with it.'

Ned stopped him. "C. M.," he said, "I don't think you exactly hated this Polly."

"Maybe not, but I wasn't looking forward with much pleasure to seeing her. I'd hardly looked at her in the boarding house, unless I had to yell at her for not tidying up my room, or for tidying it so I couldn't find anything; or not bringing my laundry up fast enough. No, that isn't quite honest. I'd noticed her, all right. She was too pretty not to notice. But my mind had been on other things then, and she was just—Polly. Understand?"

"I think I get the state of mind you were in," Ned admitted thoughtfully, "but I still think you liked the girl a lot more than you admit."

Claude sighed. "It's possible. It's so hard to make people see, though, that sometimes you're one part of yourself and sometimes you're another."

He began again, as though anxious to get on.

"It was getting pretty late and I thought if I got there just in time for supper I would have to ask her to eat



## "I Looked Up and There Was Polly."

with me. I didn't think I could stand talking to her, so I stopped at a restaurant.

"Son, I don't know that I can make you understand it, but I might just as well have had something strong to drink. The food made me feel so queer; like plowing ahead at someone or something. I took a little walk, and then I said to myself that now I'd only got to get it over and then I could take the nine o'clock train home—and that would be all of that."

"The hotel wasn't far from the station, and it wasn't very handsome, I guess, but it was finer than any I'd ever been in. I asked for Polly by her own name, only saying Mrs. instead of Miss. It was her own idea. She didn't wish to have anything like talk about us. I said I was her husband. The woman called up and told me Polly would be down in a minute. 'The parlor was full of people, but nobody I knew. I sat down and waited, and while I waited that hurry and rush of excitement inside me kept up. It was hard to sit still. I wanted to walk about and talk, but I held myself in. I looked at the people who came in, and they all seemed the same kind of red-faced, common people. Nobody I knew.'

"Then I heard a voice near me say: 'Well, so it's you.' I looked up and there was Polly."

Claude glanced at Ned, who, his eyes shaded with his hand, seemed to be listening intently.

"Wish I could make you see just what she looked like to me. I'd never seen her in right clothes; just house dresses and apron things. There, beside me, was one of the prettiest girls I'd ever seen in my life. She was dressed all in black—mourning for her uncle—and it set off her fair skin. It made her red hair look like autumn leaves, kinda flaming and yet soft. I'd mostly seen that hair bundled up in a dusting cap. Well, I guess I gawked at her before I rose to my feet, and Polly was confused, too, and kept looking away from me. 'We can't say anything private here,' she said. 'Maybe you'd better come to my room.'

"I told her I guessed that would be

all right, for I'd said I was her husband when I came in.

"Oh," she says, 'did you? The it's all right. Come along.'

"We went up and she opened the door and I went into her room."

Claude's pipe went out. There was silence in the room as he filled it, but Claude did not feel it. He had forgotten that he was telling the story to Ned. He had forgotten everything that belonged to himself in the present. He was back in the past, seeing the shy, awkward Claude Dabbs on the threshold of that girl's room. He remembered that already it looked different from the rest of the house. She had flowers in a vase on the rough, cheap, pine dressing table. She had spread clean towels on that, on the bureau and on her trunk, discarding the dirty-looking scarfs that had adorned them. They had been too shy to look at each other. He had stared out of the window.

Every time Dabbs brought his eyes around to her, he caught her looking at him, and finally she laughed.

It was wonderful, that laugh. It made him feel young again. He had been feeling like an old man, with a weight of sorrow and care on his shoulders, but that girl's laugh had made him feel his own age. Her laugh was young and spiced with deviltry. Back of it all was the new strange feeling the girl gave him.

He saw himself solemnly giving her the papers. He watched her while she put them carefully away in a bag, and counted out the rest of the money. There had been a moment's awkwardness over that, he remembered. He had made an involuntary movement of his hand, to give it back to her, but she as involuntarily, thrust it back at him. Then he laughed, folded it up and put it away. But he did not go. He had known that he should, but he could not. He sat down beside her, and they began talking, awkwardly enough at first. Then suddenly they were no longer the Claude and Polly of the boarding house days, but two young things who had lots to say to each other, and enjoyed saying it.

She told Claude of her plans. She meant to travel and study and see everything. She was fond of reading. Indeed, she had read and planned in a way that seemed remarkable to him for a girl, a servant girl, too, but he noted that she did not ask about his plans. Every time their conversation touched his life, present or future, she changed the subject. Then he knew that she meant him to understand she would have nothing to do with him after tonight. After tonight, Claude would not see her; after tonight she would be away enjoying things, out in the freedom of the world, with money, and she would have no use for him, no use at all. It had eaten into the young Claude's consciousness that she was going to use him as a shield until she met some one she really cared for. Then she would drop him, and his name. "After tonight" echoed and re-echoed in his mind, and he forgot that he had no right to expect anything else, for he had taken her money. Jealousy gradually took possession of him. He watched her talk and smile. It struck him. His train had gone.

He did not go; merely sat watching her. He had known, even then, that she saw what she had done to him, and it had gone to her head. He had been one of the "boarders" in the old days, one for whom she must fetch and carry. Now he was at her mercy.

He began to think of lots of things that proved she had not been as indifferent to him in those old boarding house days as she had pretended. Even before the money came, Polly Johnston, the man-hater, had a soft spot for one man—Claude Dabbs. All unconsciously she had let him see that. Claude had wondered afterward if it was not a conscious use of her new-found power. He began to believe that it was not entirely by accident that she had made him come to her for the money, instead of having the lawyer pay him. He had never, until then, guessed that the girl liked him—that way. But now she told him more than she meant, or knew, and when she realized this, she pulled herself up and began telling him that the lawyer had arranged for her to go to France. She would go as a young widow, to people who would help her; let her see everything and do everything she wanted to do.

He remembered how the other, younger Claude, after listening to her silently for awhile, had blurted out: "When are you coming back?" "Never!"

Follow the astounding adventure of Polly and Claude in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## Sting Removed From Rebuke of Small Son

I have a little son called Jim—just Jim Nye, that's all—and one day when he was only five years old I requested him to do some slight thing or other, but he kept on playing and humming a little song about the "sand man." I spoke to him again more firmly, for as a general thing my children regarded me more as a source of amusement than anything else, and as he did not stir I gave him a gentle spank with the dictionary. It did not hurt him, and he rather enjoyed it until he looked at my face and saw that I was in earnest, and then his heart broke with a large report.

At dinner he said nothing and ate very little, and when it was over and

we were just about to leave the table he got up in his mother's lap and said: "Mamma, I wish you had mawled Jesus. He loved little children."

This episode did not make me feel so rightfully proud of myself, but I was glad that the child at least regarded his mother as a very worthy woman.—From "Bill Nye, His Own Life Story," by Frank Nye.

## Simple Divorce

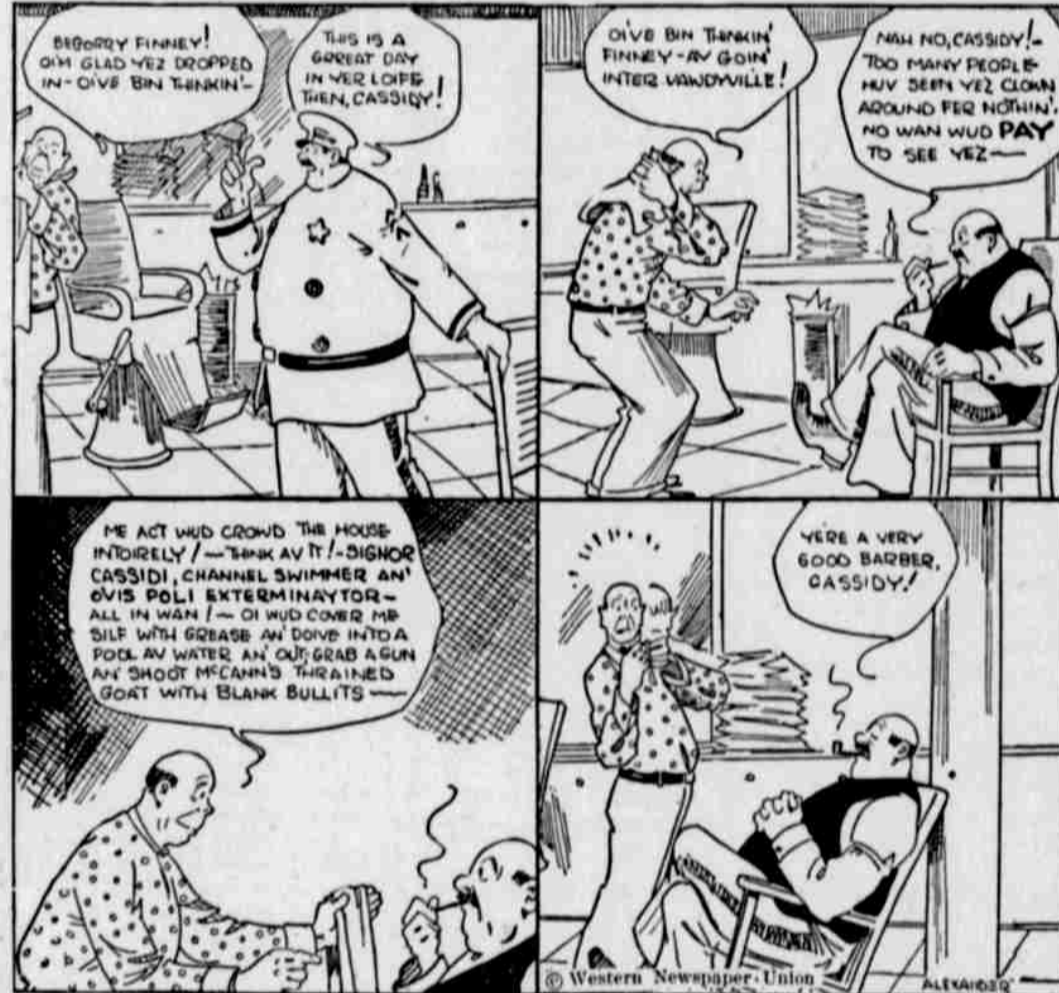
Among some of the tribes in the Arctic region a man who wants a divorce leaves home in anger and does not return for several days. The wife takes the hint and departs.

# OUR COMIC SECTION

## Catching



## FINNEY OF THE FORCE



## THE FEATHERHEADS

## He's So Original

