

Alabaster Lamps



By Margaret Turnbull

CHAPTER VIII—Continued

"We'll stop on our way to the station and get Mrs. Pulsifer to come and look after the house. Good night, dear, and if you dream of drowning, just call Mother."

Mary looked at her mother, standing in the doorway and ready to snap the light out.

"Lovely old thing," she called, "go and get your own beauty sleep. I'll have pleasant dreams."

When the darkness enfolded her, however, she made a distinctly wry face. How much, she wondered, was she a business necessity in this contemplated trip to New York, and how much was it her mother's plan not to let the next chapter begin with the grocer's clerk?

In her own room, Mrs. Johnson disrobed, her heart beating to the tune of one monotonous chant, which ran thus: "Not yet, Claude Dabbs, not yet shall you know about Mary." Then she planned her next move, which was to eliminate Dabbs and his too engaging nephew from Mary's life—and from her own.

Claude Dabbs waited until he knew there was no answer and no return of the money.

Then it was Polly.

He turned on the light, but seeing that the library was still occupied, looked in. Ned was sitting at the window, smoking. He looked up as Claude came into the room, and said, "Well?"

"It looks as if it was Polly. I feel that it is, crazy as it may seem to you. I hope she got all I meant, as well as the money."

Ned turned on him, more excited than Dabbs had yet seen him. "The girl! Uncle Claude, you'll have to explain things to her, won't you?"

"Yes, but who is she? That's what I want to get at," Claude said. His tone was that of a man hard-driven, holding on to his patience by sheer will power. "Is she an adopted daughter? Who was her father, and how old is she? Why do you think I told you what I did the other night, if it wasn't that I wanted to know who the girl is?"

Ned crossed to him, and put his hand on his shoulder.

"I give you my word, Claude Dabbs, I didn't realize it. I'm not more innocent nor more stupid than the average, but I slept through the last part of your story and my mind has been on other things. I didn't get you at all. Do you mean to say you—"

"Yes," and this time Claude's control snapped. "I want to know whether she's mine or not."

He wrenched himself away from Ned's hand. "I don't know that it will make a blamed bit of difference to anyone but me, but I'd like to know."

The morning came and went without news from the White house. By this time Ned was anxious. He had promised Claude to wait for him until he returned from a trip to the express office.

Immediately on his return Ned followed Claude into the private office.

"Met Ettie Pulsifer on the wood road this morning going to the White house. She's got orders to pack the trunks, set the house in order, and lock up. The key and the trunks are to be sent to New York. Says it was Mrs. Johnston who telephoned. Says the girl said they were only going up for the day, but the mother never opened her mouth. What do you think of it?"

"Looks to me, C. M., as though Mrs. Johnston wanted to keep Miss Johnston from you," and added mentally, but did not say it, "or me."

"That's what I doped out."

"Did you find out from Mrs. Pulsifer where the trunks were to go?"

"Sure." He took out a small leather notebook and opened it: "Hotel Plaza, New York."

"By G—d, I believe you're right and it is Polly, up to her old tricks. Never faces anything, but always runs away. Well, this time two can play that game. This time I'm going after her."

Ned, who already had made up his mind to follow Mary, cost what it might, and prepared to break from Peace Valley and Claude Dabbs if need be, took him up at once with "That's the way to talk."

"Yeh, I know," Claude admitted, shrewdly. "It's the way you think I ought to have talked and done, twenty years ago. But I didn't have the money."

"I've got the money," Ned began, but Claude stopped him preemptorily with:

"So have I. Enough for both. Don't bother about money."

"In that case," began Ned, but never finished the sentence, for young John came in to say that Ned was wanted on the long-distance telephone.

"Switch it in here, then, can't you?" Dabbs demanded.

Ned reached for the receiver. As he did so, Claude, with his usual docility, left the room.

Mary Johnston was on the wire.

Ned, thrilled, heard her voice telling him that Mrs. Pulsifer had the key of the house and was to close it, but would he see that little Phoebe Sayer received the borrowed garments back safely? Would he also tell Phoebe that she was sending her some books as a little remembrance? As for Mr. Carter himself, she would never, never forget all he had done for her, and she was so sorry she could not see him again. They were sailing in a few days.

"Sailing? Where?"

"I'm not quite sure, but think England first. Mother decided suddenly."

"But you can't go—yet. I beg pardon, Miss Johnston, but I wanted to see you. I'd something to say. I—"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Carter. I'll be so such obliged if you'll tell Phoebe, and—here is Mother, she'll be so grateful, too."

"But Miss Johnston—Mary—"

"Good-by, Mr. Carter."

At the other end of the line the receiver was hung up.

Claude came in and found Ned with his hand still on the telephone receiver, his face a study in perplexity.

"What's up?"

"They're going abroad, and soon. We've got to start things, right now. How soon can you get ready?"

"Ned!" Claude gasped. "Abroad! I hadn't really planned anything like that! Why, by Jiminy, Ned, I've never traveled farther than New York."

"Time you did. Look here, Claude Dabbs, are you going to sit here in Peace Valley and let everything slide as you did before, or are you going to find out the truth—about Mary?"

"If that girl's mine, I mean to know it."

This was so exactly Ned's state of mind that he found himself glaring at C. M., as at a rival, and with difficulty refrained from retorting, "So do I." Fortunately his brain told him that this was no time to tell Mary's possible father, if indeed that was Claude's proud position, his honorable intentions.

"Then you'd better come out into the world—with me, and pursue Mrs. Polly Johnston."

"I'm coming," Claude told him. "You go to New York tomorrow, Ned, and if we can't get the same steamer,

we'll take the next. I'll fix things here while you find out Polly's plans. I'll join you in New York."

"I'll go tonight."

"All right, and I'll join you tomorrow, and—and the best on the ship, Ned. You're my guest."

"I have money."

"Yeh, but you're coming with me, and we're going to need plenty, especially if you're—"

Claude stopped abruptly and finished rather lamely, "traveling with me."

Ned wondered what was on his mind. He was amazed at this Claude Dabbs.

Claude gave him a clue almost immediately. "Are you 'Carter' or 'Rangeley' this trip?"

Ned slid to his feet and faced him, but Claude stopped him before he could speak.

"You see, Ned, Miss Selden telephoned the station a day or so ago and sent a telegram to your father. It said that his son was living here under the name of 'Carter.' Guess the girl didn't realize she was on a party wire and what that means in the country."

Ned stopped him. "You mean to say you know?"

"Sure, I've known ever since you met the girl. She volunteered the information."

"And you never asked me a single question?"

"Why should I? Ain't we friends? I knew you'd tell me when you were good and ready."

Ned drew nearer and put out his hand. "Thanks. Do you want to know why?"

Claude smiled and shook his head as he took Ned's hand. "I guess not. You see, I do know Loren Rangeley, and of all the old—well, never mind and excuse me, Ned, for he's your father, and of course that's one thing to his credit. All I mean to say is if there's two sides to any question and Loren Rangeley's on one, let me get on the other."

"You know my father!"

"Only just in a business way."

This helped Ned very little. What could the great Loren Rangeley have to do with a country grocer? Sus-

picions began to cross his mind. Before he could stop himself, he said: "I say, Uncle Claude, what are you holding out on me?"

To his surprise, Claude Dabbs looked positively confused. "You're dead right, Ned, I haven't been entirely open with you either, but that can wait. All you have to tell me is whether you'll be 'Carter' or 'Rangeley' on this trip."

Ned hesitated. "I'd rather be 'Carter,' but we're apt to meet people who know me as Rangeley, so Carter's off."

"Best both of us sail under our true colors from now on and just be our natural, brutal selves. Well, get under way, Ned, and I'll start things here. Jiminy! Polly won't leave me gasping this time, though it never would have occurred to me to follow but for you."

Mary Johnston had departed from Clover Hollow with the expectation of returning on the afternoon train, or the next morning at the latest. They went directly to the Plaza, where her mother left Mary and took her own way to the lawyer's office. At least that was the version Mary was allowed to believe.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Johnston went directly to Loren Rangeley's bank, was ushered at once into the president's private office and held a long consultation. At the end she had negotiated a loan on the land; so that much of her version was true. She had also told Mr. Rangeley that she wished to get away on the first steamer to Europe, where she could live better and cheaper than she could here. It would be better to stay there until her financial position became secure, or at least improved, and it would serve to take Mary away from an undesirable suitor.

Loren Rangeley listened, gravely sympathetic. His quick, cold eyes noted that Mrs. Johnston had lost none of her charm for him; that she wore very well indeed. The loan he was making was amply secured. Indeed, there was every chance of the land experiencing a boom. He was in possession of facts that made this almost a surety, but he did not tell her so. It suited his purpose that while he waited and made up his own mind, she should not be in a position to know that financially she was quite secure.

He agreed with her that it would be better to go abroad with the girl. It is to be noted that even with this lead, and the fact that Mrs. Johnston had been staying in the town Dorothy Selden had wired from, he asked no questions concerning his son. He could and did, by the mere summoning of a private secretary, secure for Mrs. Johnston accommodation on a steamer.

"When do you wish to sail?" Rangeley asked.

"Saturday," said Mrs. Johnston coolly. Somehow she did not like his smiling scrutiny any better this time than she had the last. It would be better to escape before he brought the battery of his elderly charms to bear upon her. In her present financial condition it might be difficult to hold him off successfully. Flight, now, might be as useful in her case as in Mary's.

Mr. Rangeley was mildly surprised at this sudden action, but on the whole pleased. He meant to go abroad this summer himself. Nothing like promptness in action. Mary's suitor must be indeed objectionable to cause Mrs. Johnston to take such drastic measures.

Mrs. Johnston left, with the money and the steamer reservations. At the last moment Mr. Rangeley told her that business might compel him to cross over, possibly within a few days, but Polly Johnston refused to borrow trouble. She took a cab back to the Plaza to break the news to Mary.

Mary listened without speaking, and with wide, homesick eyes. It was incredible! What was there to hold Mary in this country?

Mrs. Johnston had invented the story about the suitor to suit her own purposes, without really visualizing Ned in the background to give her fib color. Had she unconsciously told the truth?

It could not be possible that her wonderful Mary had any real feeling about the grocer's clerk. If she had, then thank the Lord they were going! But she would let Mary infer that it was to escape Loren Rangeley. His name once mentioned, Mary made no protest.

It was only when they were dressed for dinner, and their guests had been announced, that Polly ventured to tell the girl the sailing date was Saturday.

Mary said nothing, but under dark brows her blue eyes looked the question that her mother knew must sooner or later be answered.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Insects in Cold Weather

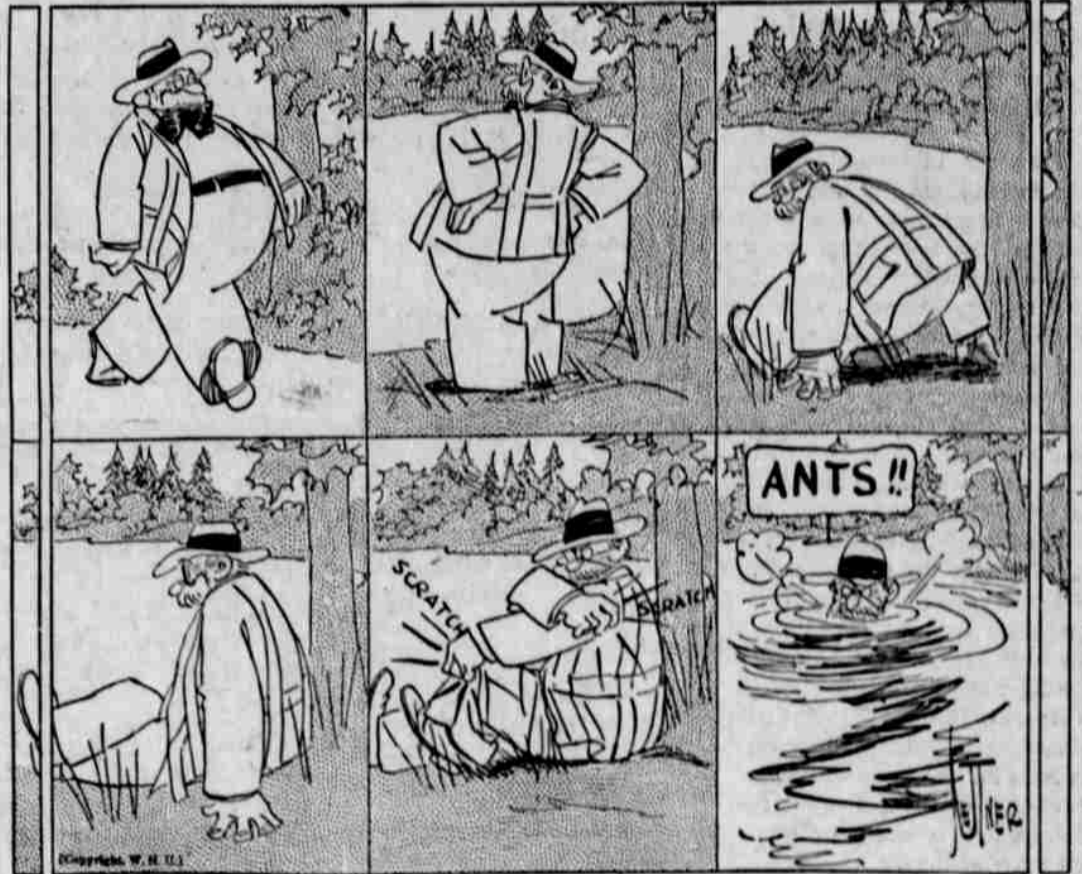
While the majority of insects disappear during cold weather, some are known to live and thrive at temperatures which kill most of their kind in a few minutes. About 900 different insects have been found living on or in the snow. About twenty-five species are known to come out on the snow in Europe and America. Some of these are so small that they are never seen except in winter, and they are so little known that they have no popular name. It is not known how, or on what they live.

Disciples and Apostles

The 12 disciples were the original apostles. Later this term was used to designate those who promoted the doctrine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There were a great many later apostles, the most prominent of whom was the Apostle Paul.

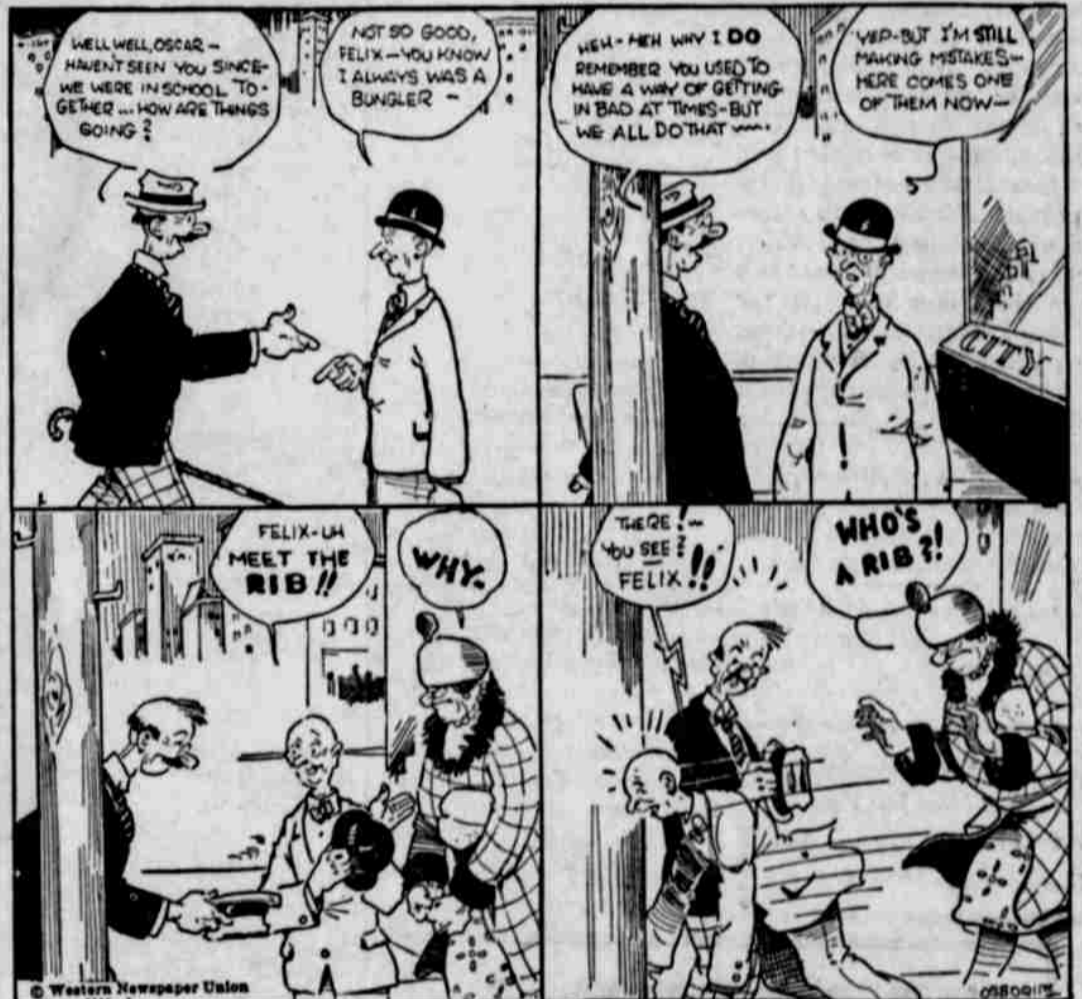
OUR COMIC SECTION

Our Pet Peeve



THE FEATHERHEADS

Oscar Proves His Point!



FINNEY OF THE FORCE

Sundial and Clock—Two-time Mama



In Her Room Mrs. Johnson Disrobed.