

# With Banners

By Emilie Loring

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## SYNOPSIS

Brooke Reyburn visits the office of Jed Stewart, a lawyer, to discuss the terms of an estate she has inherited from Mrs. Mary Amanda Dane. Unwittingly she overhears Jed talking to Mark Trent, a nephew of Mrs. Dane who has been disinherited. Mrs. Dane had lived at Lookout House, a huge structure on the sea, built by her father and divided into two, for her and Mark's father. Brooke had been a fashion expert, and Mrs. Dane, a "shut-in," hearing her on the radio had invited her to call and developed a deep affection for her. Mark discloses that Mrs. Dane had threatened to disinherit him if he married Lola, from whom he is now divorced. He says he does not trust Henri and Clotilde Jacques, Mrs. Dane's servants. He says he is not interested in an offer of Brooke's to share the estate with him. Leaving her department store job, Brooke refuses an offer to "go stepping" with Jerry Field, a carefree young man who wants to marry her. At a family conference she learns she must live at Lookout House alone, since Lucette, her younger sister who is taking her job, her brother, Sam, a young playwright, and her mother plan to stay in the city. Jed and Mark are astounded when they hear from Mrs. Gregory, a family friend, that she had witnessed a hitherto unknown will with Henri and Clotilde two weeks before Mrs. Dane died. Brooke had arrived just as she was leaving.

## CHAPTER III—Continued

Jed Stewart was walking the floor when he entered his office. He stopped abruptly.

"Well," he demanded, "did she talk any more?"

"Not about the will. Why the dickens didn't you ask questions?"

"Didn't dare. Don't you see, Mark? Boy, don't you understand? Someone has snatched that second will she witnessed."

"Did you draw it?"

"Never heard of it. Perhaps your aunt had an acute attack of remorse. I argued with her, as much as a lawyer can argue, against cutting you out; she wouldn't come to me about a new will. Didn't Mrs. Gregory say that she had been distraught the last few times they had been together? She thinks it was because Mrs. Dane was making up her mind to disinherit you; you and I know that the will to that effect already had been drawn."

"You passed up a grand chance to cross-examine her, Jed."

"Didn't dare. She thinks the will she witnessed is the one probated; doesn't know that if it had been she would have been summoned to prove her signature. We mustn't let a suspicion of this second will get out. Where is it?"

"She said the Reyburn girl drove in as she left the place. Do you suppose Aunt Mary Amanda told her what was in it and that she—"

Jed Stewart stopped his restless pacing. His eyes and voice were troubled.

"Destroyed it? But how could Brooke Reyburn have known what was in the first will? Perhaps your aunt had told her that she was to be residuary legatee—it doesn't seem probable, but women do fool things." He grinned. "Of course men never do. We've got to get busy. If it isn't destroyed, that will may be at Lookout House; you've never liked the Jacques and you say that they hate you. I have an idea. Open your house. Live there. Get friendly with the girl."

"I would feel like a sneak to go there to spy on her."

"You suspect that she may have influenced your aunt to make a will in her favor, don't you?"

"I do."

"Then give her a chance to prove that she didn't. Take a couple of Japs and go down and live next door."

"I won't commit myself to that proposition in a hurry. If I decide to do it, will you come with me?"

"Sure, I've been hoping you'd ask me. Philo Vance is my middle name." Stewart picked up the note lying on the desk. "You'd better open the investigation by accepting this."

"The Reyburn girl's invitation to dine on Thanksgiving day? I would

feel like a spy, a traitor. The turkey would choke me."

"Do you want the truth about this will?"

"You bet I do."

"Then go. Don't write. We never send a letter when we can send a man." Phone the night before that you are coming. She'll have less time in which to think why you are accepting."

Brooke Reyburn stood in the doorway of the living-room at Lookout House. Behind her in the hall a graceful circular stairway wound up and up. She nodded approval. The room was the perfect setting she had visualized for the duchess of Argyle since the day she had known that her father had willed her the portrait. The green of the walls and trim repeated the color of the satin gown of the woman in the dull gold frame which hung above the mantel of carved black Italian marble, repeated also the shade of the feathers of the dozing parrot in a gilded cage, threw into relief dark polished surfaces of mahogany.

She had had everything that she thought belonged to his family stored in the apartment over the garage. Curious that she had found so little silver.

She looked at the door which Mary Amanda Dane had told her opened into the twin house. Something uncanny about it. Whenever she was in the room it drew her eyes like a magnet. Mark Trent's house was on the other side. It had not been lived in for years. What a waste. Had his wife refused to live there? His wife? She couldn't think of him as having had a wife. Why think of him at all?

She resolutely switched her thoughts to her surroundings. This was the same room in which she had first seen Mrs. Dane in her wheel chair, but how different. Then it had been drab and heavy; now it glowed with soft color. She would never forget the pathos in the woman's eyes as they had met hers, nor the eagerness of her greeting. She had registered a passionate vow to make her lovely and attractive in appropriate clothes. That had been her job—then—and a thrilling job, too, to help women make the most of their good points.

How Mary Amanda Dane had fooled her about money. The crippled woman had kept her feet firmly on the ground when it came to spending. Planning inexpensive, attractive clothes for her had been an exciting challenge. She had succeeded. The frocks had been charming, and with her drab wardrobe the invalid had shed much of her crabbedness. Lovely clothes did that for a woman. Pity that more husbands didn't realize the fact. Now she was gone and had left a small fortune behind her. Why had she denied herself so many of the luxuries of life. Brooke blinked long wet lashes and said aloud, as she had said many times since she had come to live at Lookout House:

"Thank you for everything, Mrs. Mary Amanda. Thanks billions."

She swallowed the lump which rose in her throat whenever she thought of the woman's incredible kindness. Hardly the time to go sentimental when at any moment the family might burst in on her. They were on their way to spend Thanksgiving. For the first time they would see the changes in the house; she had postponed their coming until it should be in perfect order.

The honk-honk of an automobile horn outside was followed by voices singing lustily:

"Over the river and through the wood,

Trot fast, my dapple-gray!  
Spring over the ground  
Like a hunting hound  
For this is Thanksgiving day."

The gay chorus was followed by laughter and vociferous cries:

"Whoa there! Stand still, Lightning! Whoa!"

Laughing, Brooke dashed for the front door. It was so like the Reyburn family to dramatize its arrival.

In a rush of cold air and excited greetings she piloted her mother and sister to the library. The startled parrot shrieked, "Stop! Look! Listen!"

"Boy, you don't need a burglar alarm with that announcer. You ought to loan him to a bank."

Lucette made a gamin face at the parrot as she slipped out of her ocelot coat. She dragged off her hat and patted the swirl of her dark hair.

Brooke hugged her mother. "It's wonderful to have you here, Celia Reyburn, and aren't you devastating in that eel-gray ensemble!"

"Not as devastating as you are in that shimmering white, daughter. It brings out the copper lights in your hair."

Brooke laughed. "We are like two diplomats exchanging compliments, the difference is that ours come from the heart. Where's Sam? Don't tell me Sam isn't coming!"

Lucette held a lighter to a cigarette with a faint hint of bravado.

"Don't cry, darling. Sam came. Didn't you recognize his voice singing as if his little heart would burst from joy as we approached this baronial hall? Doubtless he is kissing his peachy convertible good-



Laughing, Brooke Dashed for the Front Door.

night in your garage. He's crazy about that coupe you gave him, Brooke. He has named it Lightning. And can it go! Who's the tall gent with the undertaker expression who pulled our bags from the car as if he were extracting upper and lower molars?"

"Henri. He and his wife, Clotilde, worked for years for Mrs. Dane. I kept them on to help me settle. They take a lot of handling, believe it or not."

"I believe it. This room looks like part of a House Beautiful exhibit. It's corking."

"Wait till you see the rest of the house, Lucette. Here's Sam. I would recognize his bang of a door if I heard it in Timbuctoo. Welcome to Lookout House, Sammy! It's wonderful that the theater closed just at this time."

"Yeah! It's all in the point of view. There are them who think otherwise. However, I'm not kicking."

He caught Brooke in a bearlike hug. He kept his arm about her as he looked around the room.

"Swell joint you've got here. I like the greenhousey smell from those plants. Say listen, we've missed you like the dickens, haven't we, Mother?"

"We have, Sam." Celia Reyburn steadied her voice. "We'd better stop emotionalizing and get ready for dinner. I have kept house years enough to know that promptness at meals helps to keep the homemaker's life's walk easy."

"You would think of that, Mother. It isn't dinner to night. I planned a buffet supper, not being sure at what time my relatives from the big

town would arrive. Come upstairs and I'll show you your rooms."

A family might get on each other's nerves, as of course it did at times, but there was nothing like it, Brooke concluded fervently, as after supper on a floor cushion in front of the library fire she leaned against her mother's knees.

Perhaps it was because she had been too absorbed in her own concerns before to notice, but Sam and Lucette seemed to have grown older, to have changed, seemed also to have something weighty on their minds. What was it? What had happened?

As if she knew what she was thinking, Lucette burst out nervously:

"If Sam can stop that nut-munching marathon, perhaps he'll announce the latest Reyburn news flash."

Brooke sat erect. "What news?" Sam took careful aim at the parrot's perch. The nutshell struck its bullseye and roused the dozing bird.

"Hell's bells!" he croaked, and ruffled his feathers.

"Looks as if he were caught in a typhoon, doesn't he?" The laughter in Sam's voice vanished. "Mother has been invited to spend the winter in England with her friend Lady Jaffrey."

"Sam!" With the exclamation Brooke was on her feet. "Do you mean it? How perfectly grand! She lives in an old castle, doesn't she?"

"Hey, pipe down, Brooke. There's a nigger in the woodpile. Wait till you hear the condition."

"A condition in Lady Jaffrey's invitation, Sam? I can't believe it."

"Be quiet, children. Let me talk." Arms crossed on the back of the wing chair in which she had been sitting, Celia Reyburn faced her family. Her cheeks were pink; her eyes, as blue as her son's, were brilliant with excitement. She clasped her hands tightly as if to steady them.

"The chair recognizes the lady from the big city," Sam encouraged with a grin.

"What's the condition, Mother? Don't you want to go?"

"Very, very much, Brooke, but I shouldn't enjoy a moment of the visit if I left your brother and sister in that apartment alone. Perhaps I'm a selfish woman, but I would like to and will go, if my mind is perfectly at ease about Lucette and Sam. If they will come here to you, and if you will have them—"

"Have them! Mother, don't be foolish! I have been rattling around in this big house like a dried coconut in a shell. Of course I want them—but will they come?"

"Who's being foolish now?" Lucette flung her cigarette into the fire. Her cheeks were almost as red as her painted lips. "Of course we'll come, Brooke Reyburn. Of course we'll play ball Mother's way. Sam and I aren't cold-blooded fish. If taking to the sticks to be chaperoned by big sister will make Mother's visit happier, we'll settle down here with bells on. She's earned all the fun she can get. She'll have one grand time and mow those stiff Britishers down in swaths and come home Countess Whoosit, or I miss my guess."

"Lucette!" Celia Reyburn protested indignantly.

"Don't mind her, Mother," Brooke reassured. "By the time you return your younger daughter will have acquired all the social graces—"

"Just a minute! Now I make a condition. I come only if I keep on with my job."

"It would mean early and late commuting, Lucette."

"I've thought that out. In Sam's convertible we can make it."

"But you and Sam won't be coming down at the same time, and—"

"Don't be so sure, Brooke." Sam aimed a nutshell at the parrot. "The theater has closed permanently and I'm up against one of those simple economic problems, where's the next job coming from? I'll go to New York to see off Mother and take my play. Now that producers have begun to sniff around for bargains, I may get my chance."

"Sam—dear—" Brooke attempted to lighten her dismayed voice. Bad enough for him to be out of work without having her turn sob-sister.

"You'll find something. I read the other day that the theater is on the up-grade. If you don't—oh, Sammy, what a chance for you to write! Why not give your play a try-out here? We'll do it for the town's welfare fund, in the Club House theater. What a chance to try 'Islands Arise' on the dog!"

"News flash! The Reyburns stage a play!" Lucette cut in.

"Why not?" Brooke persisted eagerly. "Most of the summer homes are to be kept open during the winter and—Answer the phone, will you, Sam? Take the message for me. I've been pestered to death by tradespeople and insurance agents wanting to sell me something. Tell them I'm out of town for the evening—anything."

The silence of the room was broken only by the snap and hiss of the fire as Sam Reyburn put the receiver of the handset to his ear.

"Hulloa.—Yes.—Miss Reyburn is out of town for the evening.—Sure, she'll be back tomorrow.—Oh, it is!—Yes, I'll give her your message. She'll be pleased purple. I get you. I'll tell her. 'Bye!' He laid the phone on the stand.

"Who was it, Sam? What will please me purple?" Brooke demanded unasily.

"A party by the name of Trent."

"What did he want?"

"Not much. Only to say that he accepted your invitation for Thanksgiving dinner with pleasure."

## CHAPTER IV

Brooke noticed Mark Trent's quick glance about as he entered the dining-room at Lookout House. She felt an instant of self-consciousness as she took the seat against the variegated yellow background of tall mimosas and acacias which filled a broad bay-window, which her mother refused with a quick shake of her head and a smile. She immediately forgot herself in pride of her sporting family. Each one was so gay, so determined to do his or her share to make the party a real festivity. Holidays were hard days since her father's death, but always someone who was alone had been invited to keep the feast with them. Thinking of others helped immeasurably to bridge the sense of loss, Celia Reyburn argued.

The dinner was a success. Brooke breathed a little sigh of relief as she rose from the table. This Thanksgiving dinner had been the first entertaining in her own home. Of course the guests had been her family and Mark Trent only, but she had felt pride in having it a success.

As she served coffee from the massive silver tray in the living-room, she glanced at Mark Trent standing before the fire. With his elbow on the mantel, he was talking to Celia Reyburn seated in a corner of the couch. The orchids he had brought her added the perfect touch to her amethyst frock. Orchids for her mother, gardenias for Lucette, and deep fragrant purple violets for his hostess. He had said it with flowers. A lavish gentleman. Had Henri turned chalky as he had announced dinner, or had she imagined it? He had stared at Mark Trent as if seeing an unwelcome apparition.

With a groan of repletion Sam pulled himself out of a deep chair.

"Boy, let's get out and walk! I feel like a stuffed, trussed turkey. Why do we eat so much more on Thanksgiving? Because we haven't any sense. Notice that I'm acquiring the analytic method, question and answer. Anybody here got the energy to take the shore walk?"

"I'll go with you, Sammy." Celia Reyburn smiled at her tall son. "Elaine Jaffrey is a great hiker; she will probably walk me all over the British Isles. I must get in practice. Just wait until I change my shoes."

"Boy, I'm glad we have one sport in the family. I'll bet Lucette has a heavy date, and is expecting someone. Coming, Brooke? Coming, Mr. Trent?"

"Mark to you, I hope, Sam. Do come, Miss Reyburn," Mark Trent urged. "It's a grand day. After hours of storm, there is enough wind to make the surf worth looking at."

(TO BE CONTINUED)