

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. Jed suggests that Mark open his part of Lookout House, get friendly with Brooke and try to find out about the will. Jed agrees to stay with him. Mark accepts Brooke's invitation for a family Thanksgiving dinner at Lookout. Mrs. Reyburn announces on Thanksgiving eve that she has been invited to England. Sam and Lucette decide to move in with Brooke and Sam plans to produce a new play locally.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

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"Worth looking at" were colorless words to express the grandeur of the shore Brooke thought, as, standing on a jutting crag, holding on her beret with one hand, skirts blowing, she looked down at the driving current, cold and stealthy in places, in others foaming and tossing white-edged green waves against ledges transformed by the magic of the slanting sun into ruddy copper, dark brown in the crevices. Spray, diaphanous as a mist from a giant atomizer, iridescent as jeweled malines, shimmered in the light. Beyond the surf a dozen lavender winged gulls floated on the water. An amber green wave out-lashed its predecessors, hissed, roared, broke against a ledge, and showered Brooke with crystal breath.

He drew her back to the path, pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped her wet face.

"I should have known better than to let you stand there."

"It wasn't your fault. I adored it. It made me feel as if every inch of me had been electrified. Why is it that when we are together I need to be rescued from difficulties? I want to thank you for—"

"Please, don't."

She wondered at the embarrassed fierceness of his voice.

"I won't, except to add that I know I owe my life to you. There, that's over. I promise never to mention it again."

Spurred by the stimulating air, she took her courage in both hands and plunged.

"Won't you please be friends? I didn't know Mrs. Mary Amanda Dane had any money, really I didn't, Mr. Trent."

In the instant that she waited for his answer, sun, sea, the roar of the surf were blotted out. Only his straight-gazing eyes meeting hers were real. They touched her heart, quickly, passionately. Then Mark Trent thrust his handkerchief into his pocket.

"Forget that Mr. Trent stuff. Being legatees in the same estate—my aunt left me a bank account, you know—ought to make us friends, oughtn't it?" His voice was light, but she sensed a tinge of irony. "We'd better keep going if we are to walk around the point before dark. Your mother and Sam went on some time ago. What did she mean when she spoke of hiking over the British Isles?"

"She is going to England to visit

her college classmate. Of course, I'm crazy to have her go, but—but I didn't realize how precious she was until I thought of her being so far away."

"Are your brother and sister going?"

"No. They are to be with me while Mother is away. I am so glad. It will give me heaps to do. I'm not used to this poison-ivy leisure that looked so alluring before I had tried it. My life was so full before—"

"Before you had Lookout House stuffed down your throat, you mean? I don't see why the dickens Aunt Mary Amanda tied that string to her legacy forced you to live in this house."

"It wasn't a string, and she didn't force me. I like old towns, and I love Lookout House."

"My mistake." Trent's laugh turned to a frown. "What are the town fathers thinking of to allow a gas station stuck out on this road? Has that house been sold?"

Brooke promptly defended the brilliant equipment in front of a small white cottage.

"I don't know who owns the place, but doubtless the town fathers were thinking of giving the poor man who has started the filling-station another chance. I heard that he had money, lost it, began to drink too much, and that a friend set him up in business here hoping to steady him."

"Who told you the story of his life?"

"Henri."

"Henri! Does he know the man?"

"He will have to answer that question. He asked me to buy gas at the new filling-station, and I do to encourage the poor fellow to keep on trying to make good."

"How about encouraging honest Mike Cassidy who started the garage at the end of the causeway years ago and has served the public faithfully and unselfishly? He has a wife and five children to support."

Why did his voice rouse opposition in her, Brooke wondered. She had doubts herself lately as to the permanency of the filling-station owner's reform. Twice when she had stopped for gas, a young Irish girl had reported the boss as "sick" and she had wondered if he were backsliding. Mark the Magnificent need not know that, however.

"Don't you believe in helping a man to come back?" she asked crisply.

"I do, most decidedly, but I believe also in helping an honest hard-working man like Cassidy, who has had the strength of character to leave drink alone, to keep his kids in shoes. Come on. We are almost quarreling. Why should you and I fight over a filling-station owner?"

"You're right, when we have so many other things about which to disagree."

Brooke's brown eyes met his, intent and darkly gray; wistfulness tinged her voice as she urged:

"Speaking of disagreeing—will you please behave like a sensible person and take the family treasures which belong to you?"

"Aunt Mary Amanda left them to you."

"I know, but it isn't right for me to have them, and what's more, I don't need or want them. I'd rather go without rings all my life than wear one of those gorgeous things she left, which are rightfully yours. Mr. Stewart has put all the jewelry in a bank vault for you. I have Mother's lovely china and glass and furniture which have been in storage since our home was broken up. I've had everything which belonged to your family moved to the chauffeur's apartment over the garage. There seems to be very little silver. Perhaps your aunt gave it to you?"

"Silver! Very little silver! She had the Trent service which came originally from England and any number of beautiful pieces. That silver is a family tradition. Where is it? She didn't give it to me. What does Stewart say about it?"

"He thought that because of the epidemic of crime reported in the newspapers, Mrs. Dane might have become timid about keeping valuables in the house and had it stored in a bank. But he found no receipt for it among her papers. Do you think she sold it?"

"Sold it! No. I'll bet—" he broke off abruptly. "See that great rock sticking up off shore? I used to imagine it the peak of a submerged island rising from the sea."

"Perhaps it is. 'Islands arise, grow old and disappear.' That isn't original. Sam has taken the title for his comedy from it. The first night



"Neighbor!"

I spent at Lookout House I was kept awake by the wailing of that distant siren. Now I don't notice it."

"You'll notice it if you stay here during the winter as Jed told me you were planning to do. There goes the sun behind the city!"

They walked in silence back to Lookout House. On the threshold of the living-room she stopped in startled disbelief. Jerry Field stood by the fire talking to her mother. Who was the brown-haired girl in blue beside Lucette?

"Couldn't wait for you to send out At Home cards, Brooke," Jerry Field greeted jauntily. "You remember that you said I could come to Lookout House when you were settled, don't you? I wanted to meet your family, wanted them to know that I'm in your stag line for sure."

His eyes flashed beyond her to Mark Trent on the threshold. There was laughter in his voice and a hint of challenge. Before she could answer, he commanded:

"Come hither, Daphne, and meet our neighbor. This is my sister."

"Neighbor!" Brooke smiled at the brown-haired girl as she welcomed her with a cordial handshake. "I would know that you were Jerry's sister, you look so like him; but is the neighbor stuff a joke?"

"No, Miss Reyburn, we really are staying on the point."

Daphne Field's smile disclosed small teeth as perfect in color and size as a row of matched pearls. She turned to Sam.

"I've heard that you are the coming playwright, Mr. Reyburn, that you have a touch of O'Neil's tragic outlook, a seasoning of Kaufman's humor, and a hint of Coward's sophistication."

Sam grinned. "Is that original, or did you get it from the Times?"

The girl pouted: "Of course it's original. Why, Mark!"

Daphne Field's breathless exclamation, the radiance of her face revealed so much that Brooke had the embarrassed sense of having looked for an instant at a naked heart. Trent came forward. Was the firelight playing pranks, or had his face gone dark with color?

"Where did you drop from, Daphne? How are you, Field?"

Why didn't someone say something and smash the strained silence, Brooke wondered impatiently. It was as if the firelight had cast a spell and tied all their tongues. Her mother's eyes were on Daphne Field as she thoughtfully pulled her gloves through her hands. Sam, back to the room, was poking at the parrot. He hated emotional scenes—off the stage. The atmosphere fairly quivered with things unsaid. Lucette came to life.

"Turn on the lights, Sam, this gloom may be artistic, but it gives me the merry-pranks. This has turned out to be meet-your-neighbor day, hasn't it? Who's the dame in the floppy hat, Brooke, who looks like a super-animated Bo-peep, and carries a cane which easily could be mistaken for a shepherd's crook? There's the chance of a lifetime for you to get in a little missionary work as clothes adviser; you'd better begin with a streamline diet. She thinks everything here, including Mother, 'charming.'"

"It must have been Mrs. Dane's friend Mrs. Gregory; they call her the Empress here. So she has called. That means, if she likes us, that we shall be admitted into the inner social circle. Jerry, I was so dazed by your appearance that I forgot to ask what you meant by that word 'neighbor.'"

"Sure, we're neighbors. Daphne and I have taken a house here for the season."

"Season! What season?"

"This winter, of course. Didn't you say that many of the houses were to be kept open?"

"Ye-s. But why—" Surprise crisped Brooke's voice.

"I've been wanting for years to paint snow. Found I could hire a house with a studio here. You don't mind, I hope?"

"Don't be foolish, Jerry. Of course I don't, only—"

"No matter what Brooke thinks, I'm all for it, Mr. Field," Lucette encouraged. "It will be grand to have someone kind of young in the neighborhood—and—Oh, Sam, two more recruits for the cast of your play! Line of applicants for parts will please form on the left."

"Play! What play? I adore dramatics," Daphne Field's voice and eyes were eager.

"We've been talking about producing Sam's comedy, 'Islands Arise,' for charity. Of course it's a terrific job. We always paint our own scenery—"

"Hold! Jerry the boy artist will paint the scenery;"—Field's enthusiasm cooled—"afraid my box of a studio wouldn't be big enough though."

"There is a large empty room on the second floor next to Lucette's. Couldn't decide just how to furnish it, so I've waited. We can use that. Won't it be grand, Sam?" Brooke explained and demanded in the same breath.

"Yeah, but what does that prove? How do I know whether the Field team can act, or whether they'll gum up the show?"

"Don't be a grouch, Master Reyburn," Lucette jibed. "You'd better page the family Lost and Found Department for your manners. I adore neighbors. I'm pleased purple that we are to have two such snappy ones."

Mark Trent straightened and flung the cigarette he had but a moment before lighted into the fire. He kept his eyes on Lucette as he announced:

"Newsflash! Not two new neighbors, but four, lady. I'm opening my house next week. Jed Stewart and I will keep bachelor hall there. My announcement doubtless lacks the romantic overtones of Field's, but we'll do our best to make you Reyburns neighbor-conscious."

In the firelit library of his house, Mark Trent was perched on the corner of the large flat desk. As he filled his pipe he compared the old-fashioned air of dignified restfulness of the room with its deep chairs in the smoking-room manner and its two-story book-lined walls, divided half way up by a gallery, with the charm of its twin on the other side of the brocade hanging which screened the door connecting the two houses.

Jed Stewart, lounging in a crimson leather chair, hands in his trousers pockets, legs outstretched, was staring at the blazing logs, watching the blue and yellow, copper and green tongues of flame lick at the chimney. The faint thunder of waves dashing against ledges, the ceaseless crying of sea gulls stole through the heavy hangings drawn across the long windows. Impatiently he sat up.

"We've been here a week, Mark, and we are not the fraction of a degree nearer finding that last will and testament of Mary Amanda Dane's—if there is such a thing."

"And the silver; don't forget the silver, Jed. I can account for the will being lost—if there was one—but what has become of the silver? I've had it so much on my mind that I consulted Bill Harrison."

"Who's he?"

"The inspector in charge of police headquarters across the causeway. He's been on the force here since I was a small boy."

"What did he say about the silver?"

"He didn't say, he doesn't talk much. He asked a few questions about the Jacques and said he would drop in here this afternoon to take a look around. Mrs. Gregory is coming later—hope they don't meet—I asked her to have tea with us. Met her yesterday on the street, and she let it be known that her feelings were hurt that I had not invited her before. I—I asked her to bring Miss Reyburn."

Mark Trent slid from the desk and absentmindedly twirled a globe which showed the countries of the world as they had been before the Treaty of Versailles had remade the map of Europe.

"Do you think Brooke Reyburn suspects that we are here as amateur detectives, Jed?"

"Amateurs! We may be, but you've called in a professional on the job, haven't you? You can't tell what that girl thinks, but why should she suspect our reason for being here more than Field's, and one couldn't suspect that lad of ulterior motives. He always looks to me as if he were on the verge of kissing a lady's hand. Why didn't you accept the lead in Sam's comedy? It was offered to you, wasn't it?"

"It was, but long ago I outgrew dramatics. What do you think of 'Islands Arise'—that's the name of the play, isn't it?"

"That it will get a fair hearing, at least. The theater-going world isn't so cocky and hard-boiled as it was some years ago and it may appreciate Sam's ideas and ideals. You'd be a knock-out in the lead, fella."

"I wouldn't take part in the play if I were aching to act. I see the Reyburns as seldom as possible. Thanksgiving day when Brooke started to thank me for pulling her from under that car, I burned with shame when I remembered why I had accepted her invitation. I don't care for this spy stuff, even if I do believe that the girl by some hocus pocus hypnotized Aunt Mary Amanda."

"You show it. Getting to be the strong, silent type, aren't you, Mark? If you feel that way about her, why did you ask Mrs. Gregory to bring Brooke here this afternoon? You never have been fair to that girl. You started with the idea that she's crooked, and you're sticking to it like honey to a glass dish."

Trent blew a shrill whistle through his fingers. Stewart laughed.

"I get you, the stop signal. I'll toss her a posy, then I'll quit. I'm supposed to be stage manager of Sam's play, but I'd sure make a mess of it without Brooke as my property woman. She's executive and then some. She never forgets."

"When does the play come off?"

"First Thursday in January. Sam thought of New Year's eve but gave that up for fear he couldn't lure a producer away from New York festivities."

"That isn't far off. We'll have a grand celebration here for the cast and friends who come from town. We'll invite the neighbors to supper and dance after the show. Have you a speaking part?"

(TO BE CONTINUED)