



ALABASTER LAMPS by Margaret Turnbull.

There was nothing especially romantic to contemplate about Claude Melnotte Dabbs, village grocer, unless it were the first two-thirds of his name. When his dotting parents prefixed the cognomen of Bulwer Lytton's hero in the drama, "The Lady of Lyons," to his family name, it may have been an augury or at least an influence; for C. M. Dabbs, while sticking to the hard facts of life and wringing success from his career as a tradesman, nevertheless had romantic yearnings—desires to see existence through "the mist of alabaster lamps."

THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—With a stranger, whom he introduces as his nephew, Ned Carter, Claude Melnotte Dabbs returns from New York to his ancestral grocerie at Peace Valley, Pa. To "Aunt Lydia," his housekeeper, he reveals that the stranger is a chance acquaintance, veteran of the World War, whom he had met and taken a liking to.

"I feel perfectly all right, Mother. It's only a bit sudden, and I can never care about the city in this weather. But I'll be ready."



In Her Room Mrs. Johnson Disrobed.

"I'm going to send her back the money," declared Dabbs. "Going to send her back her cursed five hundred and feel that my soul's my own. I scraped and saved that money the first year I was clear of debt, and I've held it all this time just for—just for this chance."

It, but would he see that little Phoebe Sawyer receive 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.

"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."

"I'll go tonight," Ned declared. "I'll go to New York tomorrow, Ned. You go to New York tomorrow, Ned. If we can't get the same steamer, we'll take the next. I'll fix things here, and you'll see out Polly's plans. I'll join you in New York."

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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 tutor.

Loren Rangeley listened, gravely sympathetic. His quick, cold eyes noted that Mrs. Johnston had lost none of her charm for him; that she was very well indeed. The loan he was making was amply secured. Indeed, there was every chance of the loan repaying 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.

"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 suit 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.

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