



ALABASTER LAMPS

There was nothing so romantic to contemplate about Claude Malnotte Dabbs, village grocer, unless it were the first two-thirds of his name. When his dotting parents, the cognomen of Bulwer Lytton's here 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 winning 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 introduced as a "grocer's boy," Ned Carter, Claude Malnotte Dabbs returns from New York City to his home in Peace Valley, Pa. "Aunt Lydia," his housekeeper, explains that Carter is a chance acquaintance, a friend of the World War, whom he had met and taken a liking to.

CHAPTER II.—Carter tells Aunt Lydia he has been with his father and his sweetheart because of his resentment of their ultra pacifist position. With Dabbs he visits Clover Hill, abiding place of a "collection of good-natured acquaintances," according to the grocer. They almost run over a dog belonging to a girl whom Carter is attracted to, and in his absence the girl, Dorothy Selton, reveals that she knows him to be Ned Carter Rangleley, son of Loren Rangleley, New York banker.

CHAPTER III.—Next day Ned commences work as a "grocer's boy." At residence, the "White House," he delivers an order and meets "Johnston." There he meets a girl who tells him she and her mother are alone in the house, the servants having left them because of the "houseless." His promise to try to get her household help, meeting Dorothy Selton, his erstwhile sweetheart, he believes her attempt to discover the reason for his presence in Peace Valley. Arrangement is made for a cook to go to the Johnstons.

CHAPTER IV.—The cook being unable to begin work at once, Ned visits the White House to inform Miss Johnston of the fact. Explaining the situation to her, she tells him that "Mary" is astonished by that lady's emotion at the mention of Dabbs' name. As she arrives, and Mary, with Ned, goes to the village for groceries. He is seen by Dorothy Selton, who tells him that she knows him to be Ned Carter Rangleley, son of Loren Rangleley, New York banker.

CHAPTER V.—There is something about Mary vaguely familiar to Dabbs, and he is highly interested in her. Gossip concerning the mother and daughter, Mrs. Johnston accompanies Mary to an interview with Dabbs. He sees Mrs. Johnston and is obviously perturbed. He believes that she is something about Mary, who he had met and taken a liking to.

CHAPTER VI.—Claude reveals to Ned a romance of his early life. He had married, while at college, and under peculiar circumstances, and his wife left him the day after his graduation. He is convinced "Mrs. Johnston" is his wife, and he naturally wants to know who is Mary?

CHAPTER VII.—Mrs. Johnston tells Mary they are immediately possible through a trustee's disqualification. She plans an appeal to Loren Rangleley, her banker, and Mary's father. He is persuaded by Mrs. Johnston to go to New York, on Dabbs' money. Dabbs tells Ned he leaves his money to Rangleley and she and Mary are going to Europe.

CHAPTER VIII.—In an attempt to clear up the situation, Dabbs sends Mrs. Johnston to New York, and she returns with the money, satisfying Dabbs she is his wife, but who is Mary? Mrs. Johnston and her daughter go to New York, on Dabbs' money. Dabbs tells Ned he leaves his money to Rangleley and she and Mary are going to Europe.

CHAPTER IX.—Mrs. Johnston tells her daughter something of her early life and poverty, and acknowledges that Dabbs is Mary's father. The girl is pleased, declaring she likes Dabbs.

CHAPTER X.—Claude, at a meeting with Mary, is overjoyed when the girl gladly acknowledges their relationship. He has for some time been certain that the girl is his daughter. She tells him she and her mother are going to Europe next day. Dabbs promises to meet Mary there. She tells him her mother is in financial straits, but desires his offer of pecuniary assistance, believing him a comparatively poor man.

CHAPTER XI.—In Venice, Ned, after some showed maneuvering, meets Mary. He stresses the fact that she is his daughter, and she tells him she and her mother are going to Europe next day. Dabbs promises to meet Mary there. She tells him her mother is in financial straits, but desires his offer of pecuniary assistance, believing him a comparatively poor man.

up their minds. Ned looked at Mary with positive dislike. "That's Mrs. Johnston's daughter speaking," he said coldly. "I'm in love with Claude's."

"It's Mary Dabbs who is giving you a chance," she told him with spirit. "Mary Johnston would throw you over like that!" She snapped her fingers in an airy gesture. "So make up your mind, Loren Rangleley's son, for the offer will be withdrawn in a moment. Why should I?" she asked of blue sea and sky, "I jump for joy at the chance of marrying Ned Rangleley, when it comes to that?"

Neither she nor sky answered, but Ned did. "Done!" and his hand pressed hers. Loren Rangleley, after gravely discussing his business with Claude, though unreasonably conscious of Polly sitting nearby, took his departure. Before he left, Claude had told him that Ned was to be his partner and personal representative, and Loren had expressed the hope that Ned, who as he said, "had fallen on his feet," would appreciate his good luck. He was content, he said, to leave the boy in good hands.

When he had gone, Polly rose. "Better wait for the children," Claude suggested. "Why not dine here, Polly? We could all have dinner together quietly, and discuss Mary's plans for the future, and make our arrangements for her."

Polly stood irresolutely looking down at the Grand couple, just as her daughter had done that afternoon, oppressed by the tumult of her thoughts. "I want you to know, Claude, that it wasn't the money—your money, it was Mary's money, whatever her plans are. You may not believe that, but it's true."

"Why, Jimmy, I knew it, Polly. No need for you to tell me that." "I can get along," she told him, "on what I've left, especially if I live over here. Do what you like for Mary, but leave me out."

"How can I?" Claude asked. "Mary will want you, and I'll want you to stay with Mary, whatever her plans are, until she marries Ned. I'll keep away as far as I can. You'll have to let me play around with Mary a little, but I won't bother you. Of course, you can and will live where you like. But I think Mary will want you near her."

Polly sank into the chair at the window and played with her gloves. "Mary!" she murmured. "What's my life going to be like, without Mary?" Claude looked down at her pityingly. "Well, you're going to have her for a little while yet. Your case isn't nearly as bad as mine, Polly. Mary won't want to help buy her trousseau, but she will want you. He passed a moment and said, diffidently, "You will help me out with that—and some other things, won't you? You've no idea, Polly, how I've been hoping you'd take charge of the money and—"

"Spend it," Polly snapped. Claude nodded. His face, turned toward her in the faint twilight, looked strangely pleased. "By Jimmy! It would be great to see some of it go for things women like."

"You're rather wonderful, Claude Dabbs. I don't know that I quite take it in." C. M. Dabbs moved uneasily. "Oh, I've just gone along," he told her, "doing what came uppermost. It's you that are the wonder, Polly. Look what you've made of yourself—and Mary. Though," he sighed, "I haven't hardly forgiven you yet for keeping Mary to yourself."

Polly rose. "Don't, Claude, you can't understand." "Think I do," Claude told her, frowning. "I've given a lot of time to thinking that out, and it came over me with a bang, Polly, that in your place I would have done the same thing. What did you know about me?" "Or you of me?"

"Well," said C. M., "it happened that way, and we acted each according to our natures; but if I can make Mary happy, and buy you both some pretty things now, that's something." Polly looked at him in slow amazement. Before her his life seemed to spread out. He had talked and grown rich, unspiced. Claude was neither meek nor humble. He was wholly master of himself. Even while she determined never to ask the inevitable question, she heard it coming from her own lips.

"In all these years, those most have been some women."

"You spotted my taste for just women," Claude answered, broadly, "and I hadn't much time then, though I own—I missed 'em. I had a whole lot to look after. Tell you about it, some day, Polly, if you care to hear."

Polly nodded. She became aware that Claude was regarding her humorously. "I'll not notice," he said, as she looked up at him languidly. "I haven't asked how many men?" Polly laughed. "They didn't count. I had Mary."

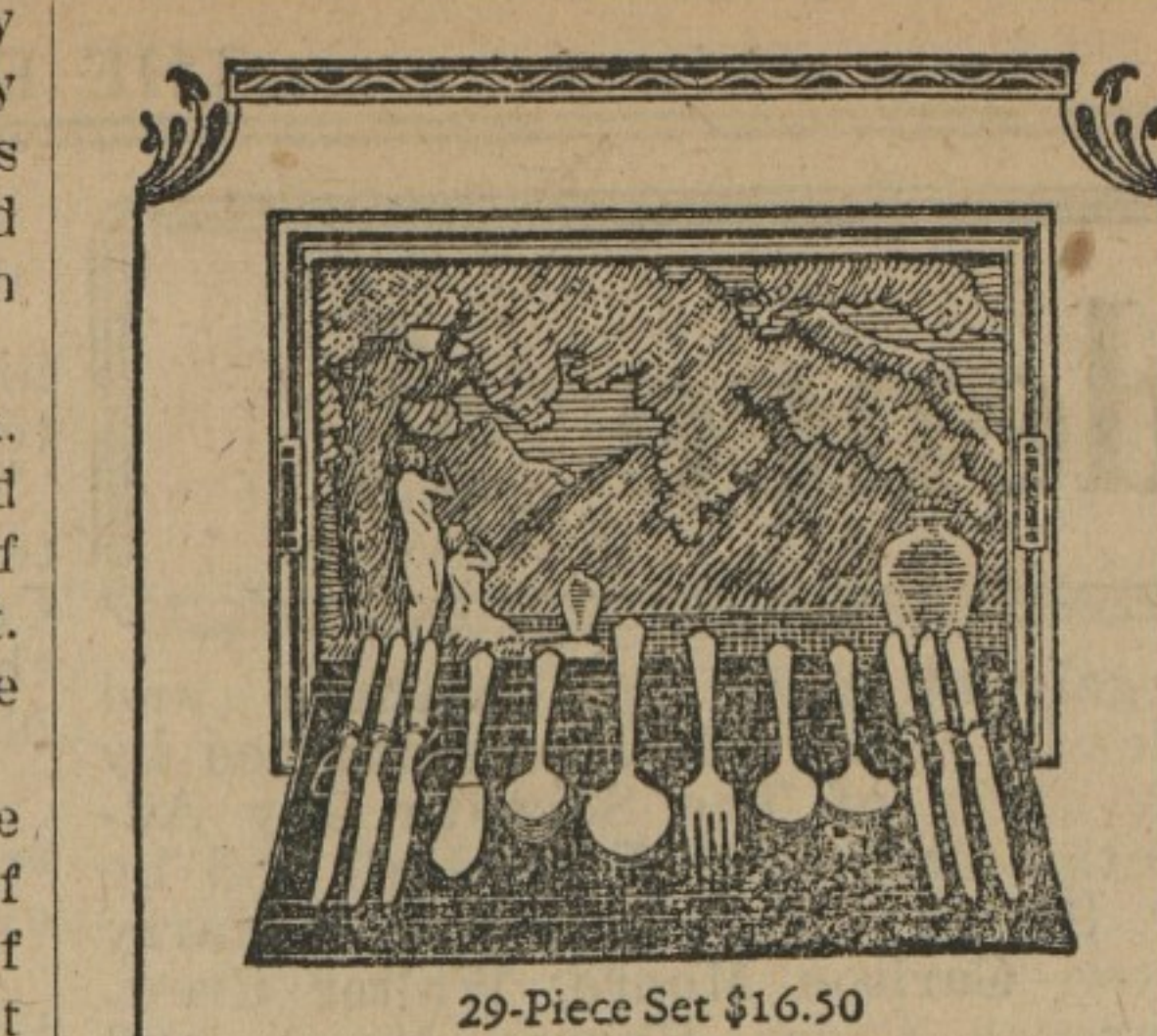
Claude laughed, too. "Well, you won't have her all to yourself, Polly, now that Ned's come into the story. You'd better try to like him. He's a nice boy, though his ways are sudden."

"I don't like his sudden ways," complained Polly. "How dare he say he's engaged to Mary?" Claude's slow smile stopped her. "I guess Mary knows."

Polly looked at him, half angrily. "Was you playing for this?" "Oh, Jimmy, no!" Claude gave a quick look at her. "I wanted the girl to myself a little while, but I know better than to interfere with young people when their minds are made up."

Then suddenly Polly realized. "Has she said anything to you about—when?" "No, but I know Ned. It will be soon. Will you go back with her to the White house, Polly, and stand by? We can talk everything over—later."

Polly hesitated and was conscious that Claude waited anxiously. "I must talk to Mary, first," she said, and saw the keen blue eyes regard her with a curious look of disappointment.



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