

The TINDER BOX

By MARIA THOMPSON DAVIESS
AUTHOR OF "THE MELTING OF MOLLY"



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(Continued.)
And there were hundreds like her. I could fill the crowded parts of the city with them. And as I had begun to think of the idea of proposing to the southern man, who is of no consequence to me himself, or the world at large, down in Glendale, where I have all known me all my life and would expect anything of me anyway after I have defied tradition and gone to college, five lovely, lonely girls would have to go without any delightful suitors like Richard, or Folk Hayes forever.

And, still further, I thought of the other girls, coming under the influence of those five, who might be encouraged to hold up their heads and look around and at least help out their neighbors in their matrimonial quest, and as I sat there with Jane's compelling and Mary Elizabeth's hungry eyes on me I felt that I was being besought by all the lovers of all the future generations to save down some sort of awful barrier and give them happiness. And it was the thought of the men that was most appealing. It takes a woman who really likes them as I do and has their good really at heart to see their side of the question as Jane put it, poor dears. Suddenly I felt that all the happiness of the whole world was in one big, golden chalice and that I had to hold it steadily to give drink to all men and all women.

Then before I could stop myself I decided, and I hope the dear Lord—I say it devoutly, will bless it, will bless that poor man in Glendale if I pick out the wrong one. I'm going to do it. "I accept your appointment and terms, Jane," I said quietly as I looked both those devious, if fanatic, women in the face. "I pledge myself to go back to Glendale, to live a happy, healthy, normal life as useful as I can. I shall work at my profession wholeheartedly, take my allotted place in the community and refuse to recognize any difference in the obligations and opportunities in my life and that of the men with whom I am thrown and to help all other women to take such a fearless and honest attitude—if Glendale blows up in consequence. I will seek and claim marriage in exactly the same fearless way a man does, and when I have found what I want I shall expect you to put \$100,000, \$20,000 to each, at the disposal of five other suitable young women to follow my example, as noted down in this book."

"Just record the agreement as a note in the book, and I will sign it," answered Jane in her crispest and most businesslike tone of voice, though I could see she was trembling with excitement, and poor Mary Elizabeth was both awestruck and hopeful.

I'll invite Mary Elizabeth down to Glendale as soon as I stake out my own claim, poor dear.
And here I sat alone at midnight with a huge steel-bound, lock and key book that Jane had had made for me, with my name and the inscription, "In case of death send unopened to Jane Mathers, Boston, Massachusetts," on the back, committed to a cause as crazy and as serious as anything since the pilgrimages or the quest of the Knights for the Grail. It also looks slightly like the trying to produce a modern Don Quixote, from a nine edition, and my cheeks are flaming so that I wouldn't look at them for worlds. And to write it all too! I have always had my opinion of women who spill their souls out of an ink bottle, but I ought to pardon a nihilist that in the dead of night, cold with terror, confides some awful appointment he has had made him to his nearest friend. I am the worst nihilist that ever existed, and the bomb I am throwing may explode and destroy the human race. But, on the other hand, the explosion might be of another kind. Suppose that suddenly a real woman's entire nature should be revealed to the world, might not the universe be enveloped in a rose glory and a love symphony? We'll see!

Also could the time ever come when a woman wouldn't risk hanging over the ragged edge of heaven to hold on to the hand of some man? Never! Then, as that is the case, I see we must all keep the same firm grip on the creatures we have always had and haul them over the edge, but we must not do it any more without letting them know about it. It isn't honest.
But suppose I should lose all love for everybody in this queer quest for enlightenment I have undertaken? Please, God, let a good man be in Glendale, Tenn., who will understand and protect me—no, that's the wrong prayer! Protect him—no—both of us!

CHAPTER II.
The Maiden Lances.
A WOMAN may shut her eyes and put a man determinedly out of her heart, and in two minutes she will wake up in an agony of fear that he isn't there. Now, as I have decided that Glendale is to be the scene of this bloodless revolution of mine it would be awful to carry out such an undertaking anywhere but under the protection of ancestral traditions—I have operated Richard Hall out of my inmost being with the utmost cruelty on an average of every two hours, for this week Jane and I have been in New York, and I have still got him with me.

I at last became determined and chose the roof garden at the Astor to

tell him goodbye and perform the final operation. First I tried to establish a plane of common citizenship with him by telling him how much his two years' friendship across the waters had meant to me while we studied the same profession under the same stars, drew dear old Paris flame into her jeweled night fire from Montmartre together. I was frankly affectionate, and it made him suspicious of me.

Then I tried to tell him just a little, only a hint, of my new attitude toward his sex, and before he had had time even to grasp the idea he exploded.

"Don't talk to me as if you were an alienist trying to examine an abuse case, Evolina," he growled, with extreme temper. "Go on down and rusticate with your relatives for the summer and dry the bats in your belly at the old mossbacks while I am getting this Cincinnati and gulf stations commission under way. Then, when I can, I will come for you. Let's don't discuss the matter, and it's time I took you back to your hotel."

Considering the situation, and my intentions, I was a bit frightened as the huge engine rattled and roared its way along the steel rails that were leading me back, down into the Harpeth valley. But, when we crossed the Kentucky line, I forgot the horrors of my mission, and I thrilled gloriously at getting back to my hills. Old Harpeth had just come into sight, as we rounded into the alley and Providence Knob rested back against it, in a pink glow that I knew came from the honeysuckle in bloom all over it like a mantle. I traveled fast into the twilight and I saw all the stars smile out over the ridge, in answer to the heath stars in the valley, before I got across Silver Creek. I hadn't let any one know that I was coming, so I couldn't expect any one to meet me at the station at Glendale. There was nobody there I belonged to—just an empty house. I suppose a man coming home like that would have whistled and held up his head, but I couldn't. I'm a woman.

Suddenly that long glowworm of a train stopped just long enough at Glendale to eject me and my five trunks, with such hurried emphasis that I felt I was being planted in the way, for I had and I would have to root myself here or die. I still feel that way.

And as I stood just where my feet were planted, in the dust of the road, instead of on the little ten foot platform, that didn't quite reach to my sleeper steps, I felt as small as I really am in comparison to the universe. I looked after the train and groveled. Then, just as I was about to start running down the track away from nowhere and to nowhere, I was brought to my senses by a loud boop and then a snubby choke, which seemed to come out of my bag and steamer blanket that stood in a pile before me.

"Train's gone, train's gone and left us! I knew it would, when Sallie stopped to put the starch on her face all over again. And Cousin James, he's as slow as molasses, and I couldn't dress two twins in not time to button one baby. Oh, d—! Oh, d—! And the sobe rose to a perfect storm of a wail.

Just at that moment, down the short platform an electric light was turned on, and my fellow sufferer stood revealed. She was a slim, red haired bunch of galates, stylish of cut as to upturned nose and straight little skirt, but wholly and defiantly unshod save for a dusty white rag around one pink toe. A cunning little straw bonnet, with an eury lace jabot dangled in her hand, and her big brown eyes reminded me of Jane's at her most inquisitive moments.

fanning herself with a genteel turkey tail fan and carrying a large covered basket.
But the tail piece of the procession paralyzed all the home coming emotions that I had expected to be feeling save that of pure hilarity. James Hardin was carrying two bubbly, squirmy, tousle headed babies on one arm and a huge suitcase in the other hand, and his gray felt hat set on the back of his shock of black hair at an angle of deep desperation, though patience shone from every line of his strong, gaunt body, and I could see in



Cousin James in the Midst of Sallie's Family and Baggage.

the half light that there were no lines of irritation about his mouth, which Richard had said looked to him like that of the prophet Hosea when I had shown him the picture that father had had snapped of himself and the Crag, with their great string of quail, on one of their hunting trips just before father died.

"Eve!" he exclaimed when he suddenly caught sight of me standing in the middle of the dusty road, with my impediments around me, and as he spoke he dropped both babies on the platform in a bunch and the small trunk on the other side. Then he just stood and looked, and I had to straighten the roar that was arising in me at the sight of him into a conventional smile of greeting suitable to bestow on an enemy.

But before the smile was well launched Sallie bustled in and got the full effect of it.

"Why, Evelina Shelby, you darling thing, when did you come?" she fairly bubbled as she clasped me in the most hospitable of arms and bestowed a slightly powdery kiss on both my cheeks. I weakly and femininely enjoyed the hug, not that a man might not have—Sallie is a dear, and I always did like her gush shamefacedly.

"She got often that train that left us, and she ain't got a bit of sense or she wouldn't," answered the Blue Bunch for me in a matter of fact tone of voice.

"What for did you all unpack outen the sully if you sawed the train go by?" she further demanded, with accusing practicality. "Don't you know when you're left?"
"Oh, Henrietta!" exclaimed Sallie, looking at the young philosopher with terrified helplessness. "Please don't mind her, Evelina. I don't understand her being my child, and nobody does, unless it was Henry's grandmother on his mother's side. You had heard of my loss?"
If I hadn't heard of the death of Henry Cerruthers, Sallie's elaborate black dresses, relieved by the flimsy exquisiteness of white crape ruches at the neck and wrists, would have proclaimed the fact.

Bits of Byplay

By Luke McLuke
Copyright, 1915, the Cincinnati Enquirer

A Cheerful Cuss.
An optimist is wise old Ben.
He never feels dismayed.
He knows he won't get sunstruck when
You cast him in the shade.

The Wise Fool.
"It is better to give than to receive,"
quoted the sage.
"Are you talking about money or advice?"
asked the fool.

Advice.
Be sure to read this rhyme today.
Learn it by heart—it's true.
If you don't break your habits they
Are certain to break you.

Paw Knows Everything.
Willie—Paw, are two always' company?
Paw—They are unless they happen
to be man and wife, my son.

Maw—Willie, you go upstairs and go to bed.
You Know Him.
Sad is the lot of Oswald Spout,
Who talked so much that he lost out.
He'd be an easy street, the runt,
If he had just kept his mouth shut.

Muh!
"There is nothing quite so hard to
beat as a hard boiled egg," jokingly re-
marked the wise guy.
"I guess you never tried to beat a
gas meter, did you?" responded the
grouch.

Timbre.
I heard the timbre of her voice,
And it did not make me rejoice.
So, in the hope that she would stop it,
I cried, "Sny, cut that, please, and
chop it!"

Killed the Fool Lightning.
Lightning struck the home of Fred
Klemm, near Duncan's falls, in the
Sunday morning's storm and was de-
stroyed.—McConnellsville (O.) Herald.

Ojczyzynie Is Correct.
A co po Bogu najdrozszego, dlatki
Dla duszy kielwaj i zystaj;
Siodkie imiona oja i marki
Wzieszyca a mowy ojczyzynie.
—Kuryer Polski.

Has the Honeymoon Ended?
National Gro. Co. versus Pop and
Kiss, \$86.10.—Detroit Legal News.

Well, Well!
Dear Luke—Jesse James is the night
watchman for the Louisville National
Banking company. Can it be that Wil-
liam Sabbathday is responsible?—Mac,
Louisville, Ky.

Cheese It, Girls!
Dear Luke—Geter & Baker are un-
dertakers at 647 West Adams street,
Jacksonville, Fla. Fair warning to the
corn feds.—Mrs. A. R.

And That's No Joke.
Nowadays a barroom is a place in
which you can buy chewing gum, cho-
colate candy, buttermilk, sweet cider,
certain soda fountain drinks and min-
eral water; and where sausage, hard
boiled eggs, roast beef, cheese, soup
and other necessities of life are given
away. But a woman who has trusted
you to lead her from the altar to the
grave cannot be persuaded that you
went to the barroom for any of those
things.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Giddap!
Dear Luke—Leslie N. Nuthen lives at
Bardonia, Ky. To his friends he is
known as Les N. Nuthen.—R. S. T.

Names Is Names.
John B. Putoff is a resident of St.
Marys, O.

Things to Worry About.
The hum of the camel is good to eat.

Our Daily Special.
A man with a weak backbone never
gets very far up the ladder of fame.

Luke McLuke Says:
When a princess gets a chance to
ride in a big car she thinks she has to
keep her nose up in the air all the time
or you will imagine that she isn't used
to motoring.

A girl always has sense enough to
keep her mouth shut about her rela-
tions. That's why hubby comes home
some night after they have been mar-
ried about six months and finds the
house filled with tacky looking rubes
and learns that his wife's cousin Mary
has brought her family to visit for a
week or two.

It is possible for a man to forget the
\$5 he loaned to a stranger, but he never
forgets the dime change he has com-
ing when he gives his wife two bits to
buy 15 cents' worth of something.

The girls of today are lucky. There
is no big family Bible with all of the
birth dates in it resting on the cen-
ter table in the parlor.

This would be a better world if some
of the reformers would find time to
mind their own business.

It must take a lot of coal to warm
the house in which the ladies shown
in the cuts in the underwear adver-
tisements live. Last time I saw them
the thermometer read around zero, and
yet the ladies were grouped in the
living room gossiping about fashions
and sitting on divans in front of open
windows reading love stories. And yet
the most comfortably dressed of the
lot wore nothing but a pair of shoul-
der ribbons and an abbreviated lace
curtain.

The Bank of England shipped 50,
000 pounds sterling in sovereigns to
the United States.

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