

Tubby Mauleverer said to you?"

"No," Theo indignantly replied; "but he's much more original than Laurie."

"I don't think any of you know the real Laurie, here at home."

"Well, I'm blown," said Theo. "He's my own brother, anyway!"

"I wonder," said Fenella, "if I had better tell Agnes."

"I shouldn't," Theo advised. "She doesn't sympathize with lovers."

"But she might advise."

"Not she! She will only say a prayer over you."

"Still," persisted Fenella, "Laurie seemed to think it might be a good thing for her to know. He would have told her himself, only he had no opportunity of getting her alone."

"Why didn't he stay till to-morrow?" Theo asked.

"He couldn't—his leave was up to-night."

"I TELL you what, then," said Theo, running to the door, "I'll fetch Agnes, and you can tell her right away, and get it over."

"Don't interrupt her if she is saying her prayers," called Fenella softly; and then, returning to the mirror, let down her hair again.

"I love your hair," she murmured; "that's what Laurie said. It's so bright and warm and soft and living. You would only have to wind a long tress of it round my neck, to keep me always at your side. Round his neck!" She drew a piece round her own white throat, but tossed it back as Theo came in, followed by Agnes.

Agnes was tall and slight, and spiritual-looking, with small, straight, and sorrowful features like those of an angel on a gargoyle. A pale grey dressing-gown and a white scarf drawn over her head and looped round her neck made her look like a saint or a nun.

"You want to see me particularly, Fen?" she asked.

Fenella gathered all her hair up in a bunch and began plaiting it busily. "I wanted to tell you something—something about Laurie."

"Yes!" Agnes said composedly. Composure was a habit with her—so cultivated that it had become second nature.

"How good you look, Agnes," said Fenella nervously. "Somehow one always feels you ought to be in a cloister. It seems almost wicked to talk about the world to you."

Agnes smiled. The smile was a singularly sweet one and transformed the austere sadness of her face into tender sympathy. "I hope I may be in a cloister some day," she said. "But never mind about me! What is it about Laurie?"

Fenella began rather shyly: "Well, Laurie suggested that I should tell you that—" She hesitated and broke off before Agnes' calm and steadfast regard.

"Why," asked Agnes, "didn't Laurie tell me himself?"

"He had no chance. He could never get you alone, he said, so—"

Theo put her arm round Fenella's neck, laughing. "You're actually blushing, Fen. What an out-of-date girl you are! Shall I tell for you?"

"You needn't," Agnes said; "I've guessed."

"And you don't mind?" questioned Fenella eagerly.

"Of course not. Why should I? If Laurie is sure of his own mind and you of yours—" Agnes broke off, and her tone changed as she added, "Only you know, Fen, mother and father may not be very pleased."

Theo burst into laughter. "Very pleased!" she repeated. "I like your moderate way of putting it. You are always so afraid of exceeding the truth by a hair's breadth. Why, father will have a fit, and mother will snort with rage. We shall all have a rotten time when it is broached to them."

"Why didn't Laurie tell them at once?" asked Agnes. "He is acting a lie by keeping it secret."

"It only just happened—to-day," replied Fenella, "and he thought it best to wait until he comes home on leave. The holidays will be nearly over then, and if your father and

mother are very angry, I can go away at once—even before Theo goes back to school."

"I'm not going back to school," said Theo; "you can bet your life. I would sooner run away with Tubby than that. The idea of a girl who is nearly engaged going back to lessons!"

Agnes looked at he reflectively. She was accustomed to her younger sister's vagaries and modern way of talking, and the four years between them made the one a child compared to the other.

"I wish," she said to Fenella, "that Laurie had told them. I don't like deceit of any kind. Why did you tell Theo and me?"

"Laurie wished me to. He thinks a lot of your opinion, Agnes. And he knows you have a good deal of influence with your father and mother."

"I?" disclaimed Agnes. "They think me a fanatic—they talk as if I were spoiling my life by giving it to heavenly things instead of earthly ones."

"Yes; I know they talk. But they trust you; they feel that you are beyond the reach of ordinary considerations—that you are good—true—steadfast. And those things count—in any home. They are a force just as—in a different way, of course—Love is." She went up to Agnes and took her arm.

Agnes lifted her eyes—clear, golden eyes—with a serene light in them. "Mine is Love," she said, "Love of the Highest."

"I know," said Fenella. "I feel that. Love is the mainspring of every woman's life—love of some man."

Agnes drew herself away horrified. "Fenella! what are you saying?"

"I don't mean anything profane," Fenella assured her. "Your love is higher than mine, perhaps—I'm not sure. After all, in loving a creature of God, one is loving God Himself. But we won't argue about it to-night. Only tell me that you will keep our secret—Laurie's and mine."

"I will say nothing about it," Agnes agreed; "but if I am asked and I have to answer, I shall tell the truth."

"Very well! We will leave it like that." Fenella kissed her gently on the smooth, pale cheek, and went across to the dressing-table to find a tie for her hair.

As she passed the window, where the blind was slightly raised, so that a line of moon light shone in, she paused and looked out. "What a perfect night!" she said, adding mentally, "I wonder where Laurie is now!"

Then she gave a sudden start, and glanced hurriedly round to see if the other girls were watching her. Neither was looking in her direction. Theo was intent on practising a rag-time step, and Agnes had sat down and leaning her arm on the table, was thinking deeply.

CHAPTER III.

... and a Shadowy Third."

FENELLA drew the blind down and said: "I wonder if Laurie remembered my photograph!"

"What photo?" asked Theo absently.

"I was giving him one, in the morning-room, just before dinner, and your mother came in suddenly. He slipped it into a book, and then he took the book to the shelf and put it in with the others. He meant to get it again later, I know—but—he forgot!"

"Well, it wouldn't matter much," observed Theo.

"Yes, it would. I had written on the back."

She was going towards the door, as she spoke, and stood there now, irresolutely.

"I must go and see," she added hurriedly. "I can find the book. I know where he put it."

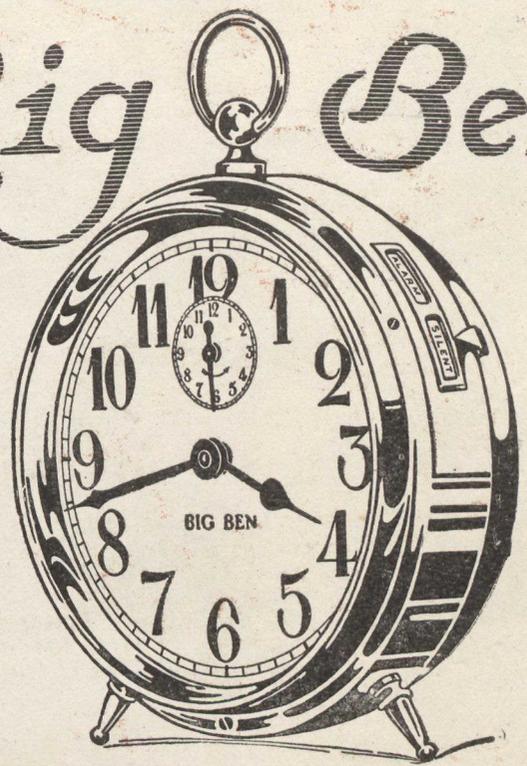
"Shall I come with you?" suggested Theo.

"No—no! I won't be long. I'll just run down."

The next instant she was through the door and had closed it gently after her.

(To be continued.)

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