

I Love You, Clare.

Since the day Sam told Clare his story he had seen her only once; then one day on her way back from visiting Kazia and Stanislaus she stopped at his gate. "I wish you'd come down and have lunch with me tomorrow," she said.

"I'll be there," promised Sam. He didn't know what a time he'd have finding Clare's house in Essex Fels. It was one winding road leading into another, up hill and down hill, around a curve, then another curve. When he reached Clare's house he was

197.

surprised to see how large it was. The house was surrounded by tall handsome pine and hemlock trees.

A uniformed maid let Van in. Clare came down the hall to meet him. She looked happy, and was the only bright thing he could see. In a few minutes Clare was showing him through her house. Everything was on a large scale, large rooms, large handsome pieces of furniture, and every room dimly lighted, the sun shut out by evergreen trees.

"How do you like it," asked Clare as she paused at the last door in the upper hall.

"To be honest with you, I don't

care for it, too large, too dark, too elegant, for everyday use."

"I know," said Clare - "This was my husband's old home and he loved it this way. I never changed a thing in this house except my own room. You'll like that."

She opened a door. Sam looked in. He nodded. At a glance he saw the dark evergreens outside the four windows, but the whole room inside, had the appearance of sunlight. The furniture was light - the walls were sunlight yellow. The fluffy curtains at the windows had the same sunlit effect as the walls, as did the dainty ruffled bedspread and top covers.

"Soft mellow sunlight," said Van.
"Exactly what I was after when I planned it," said Clare, and she led the way down to the dining-room where they sat down to an excellent lunch.

When Van was leaving, he said -
"Clare I have something to say to you, but I can't say it here - Won't you come up to see me tomorrow."

Clare threw him a mischievous understanding look. Van smiled, and like the good sport that Clare was, she did visit him the next day. When they were seated in big comfortable chairs in Van's big comfortable living-room where sun poured in the south windows

Van asked - "Are you happy living

alone in that big house surrounded by dark trees? It isn't half as lonely here on this old back road three miles from the village."

"I agree with you," said Clare. "Your cabin with all its large windows and fine outlook from the top of your hill is a lot more cheerful."

There was a long pause, then Clare said - "Did it ever occur to you that you and I have the same background. Your father and my father both came from Yorkshire English stock and your mother and my mother came from Holland Dutch stock. We were both born on a farm and attended a country school until
141.

we grew up and went to college.
You became a man of the world,
and I married a man of the world.
Just naturally we have both taken
on a bit of polish and learned a
lot, but neither one of us has outgrown
the plain down-to-the-Earth teachings
of our early years. Fundamentally
we have not changed."

Clare sat looking at Tom with
a puzzled look on her face.

"I can't understand why you never
married," she said.

Tom grinned. "Good reason," he
said—"I never had time for marriage,
and I never met any women except
the women who were my patients—
149.

Oh yes, nurses, but I never got intimate with any of them. When I was close to forty years of age I found myself falling in love with one of my patients. She was a charming little woman who was perfectly willing for me to fall in love with her. She had a husband who was as fine a man as I ever knew, and she had two fine boys. I told her to go to another doctor. She did, and I never saw her again. That was my only love affair.

I had invitations to dinners and social affairs, but I never took time off to go to any of them. Do you know why I told you the story of
143.

my life, Clare, the last time you visited me? I wanted you to know my background. I love you, Clare, and I want to marry you. I never felt so comfortable and happy with any woman as I do with you. I feel at home with you. You don't want to live alone in your big house, and I don't want to live alone in this cabin anymore. I was as contented with my life here as a man could be. I was satisfied with the way I was living until I began to see a lot of you,

then when Kazia left you I began to think about you living alone. It didn't seem natural that a woman as attractive as you, should be living alone, and I began to have doubts about myself. I felt lonely after I was with you, and wished we could be with each other."

Clare's face was flushed, and she looked a bit embarrassed, but mischief sparkled in her eyes when she looked over at Van. "And what do you think I've been thinking all this time!" she said. "No, I don't like living alone. When my husband was living we kept two maids and had a lot of company."

145.

Now he's gone. Aunt Clare died, and then my father. I'll own, I do get lonely at times. I fairly rattle around in that big house of mine, and the maid I now have, is not satisfactory. I have my house up for sale. I had intended to take a small suite of rooms in a homey hotel if there is such a place, but I'd a lot rather marry you and come here to live.

Sam was across the room in two long strides. "The sooner we get married, and you come here with me the better," and he lifted Clare to her feet. "Come and look over the cabin and tell me what you want done to it."

Clare looked the cabin over carefully.

"Don't do anything to the living-room and kitchen," she said. "They are perfect. You have a store-room, a lavatory, and a shower-bath off the kitchen. If you add a good sized room and a bath back of the living-room we'll be all set."

They looked happily at each other.

"You and I can take care of the rooms Tom, and I love to cook. You'll never have to eat jaf unless you're sick."

"And I'll help you cook," said Tom. "Mother brought me up to help her in the kitchen. Cooking was my favorite job. I could always lick the spoon when I got through mixing the cake batter." Clare laughed. "I did the same."

Van put his arm around Clare and walked her over to the fire-place.

"We're a team! We'll cook together, eat together, live together, travel together."

They were both flushed and laughing when Sike walked in. He stood looking from one to the other.

"What's cooking! he said.

"We were just talking about cooking and a few other things," said Van.

"Clare, and I, have decided to get married."

Sike gave a long whistle. "The best news I've heard in a long time!" he said, and he walked over to Van and Clare and gave them

148

a great big handshake; then he stood back and looked at them.

"By Jove!" he said. "You two are a stunning looking couple. I never saw a handsomer pair in my life, and By Jove! You're both as fine as you look. Joe will be mighty pleased & Clare. She likes you better than any woman she knows."