

MILITANTS IN MARRIAGE

By Emily Calvin Blake

Illustrated by Dorothy Dulin



OW came happy, work-filled days. Daphne, with the awakening of new forces that drove her pen furiously. Nell, very happy with soft blushes and thoughts of pastel colors; cream and white froths of laces for adornment. She seemed uplifted to walk on clouds with some secret knowledge.

And about this time they received letters again from their husbands. George's letter was surprising. He told Daphne that he and Bob were now friends. While at first he admitted he had blamed Bob for the catastrophe of Daphne's leaving him, still he had come to a more just understanding. Perhaps their joint misfortune (the first time he had alluded to the flight as such) had drawn them together. No other reason occurred to Daphne.

And Bob had begun on a book. Nell read part of his letter to Daphne. "A dynamic idea has me in its grasp, and I am at work."

"Well, I am glad," said Daphne, and as she said it she realized there had been a little vagrant prick of conscience now and then at the thought of George alone, probably wanting his wife very much; undoubtedly holding himself quite blameless for her going away.

"It will do Bob good to be kept busy," said Nell, but in her heart there was a strange feeling of desolation, as though a familiar picture had gone from it. She knew at last that she had been cherishing the thought of Bob pining for her; realizing what he had lost.

She changed the subject abruptly. "How are the Benderlys?" she asked. She had had no desire to visit their attic again. She liked places where she was more personalized. Daphne, however, continued her visits there and at similar studios.

"They are very well," said Daphne.

"But isn't it embarrassing for you all, especially for Rita, after her jealous display?" asked Nell.

Daphne laughed. "Not at all embarrassing. Rita's outburst was honest; we all recognize that, and so it was worth something. It's true, she's sorry she cut the evening so abruptly when you were there. But then her reactionary moment has afforded food for many discussions and conjectures."

Nell made a little face. "It makes me tired how that kind of people try to get somewhere by a method of mathematical deduction."

Daphne did not answer that comment because she was puzzled. It didn't seem like Nell somehow.

"Does Betty still go to the Benderly parties?" Nell finished.

"Certainly. She's greatly interested; almost more so than anyone else. She considers that Rita afforded fine material for thought."

"Well," said Nell satirically, "it might be enlightening to learn your last conclusion as to the outburst."

"Oh, Billy Underwood seems to have struck the most universally appealing solution. He feels that a woman with a child is apt to revert. Indeed, he warned Raymond of just that possibility when Raymond married Rita and wanted to be sure that his third marriage would be a success by adding the element lacking in the first two. There'd been no children before."

"Oh," said Nell. "Go on, Daphne. This is exhilarating."

"Well, there's really nothing more to say, except that we are all inclined to agree with Billy that motherhood makes a woman reactionary and primeval for a time. She wants her mate; she's afraid of losing his protection, his support. And Rita agrees with him fully. But she says that phase will pass with her, she feels

SYNOPSIS.

NELL RAYNES and Daphne Tunison, girlhood chums, separated before their marriages, were drawn together again by chance. Nell's husband, an idealist and radical, made her married life unpleasant by forcing her to work in a law office and manage her household as well. Daphne, tall and beautiful, had a husband who fairly idolized her, but after listening to Nell's husband, Bob, she became dissatisfied with conditions. Her husband's constant attention displeased her. She longed for the life Bob had made known to her. Nell, staying overnight with Daphne, tells of her plan to leave Bob, which decided Daphne that her life with George is intolerable. They leave together. Six months pass. Nell and Daphne, in New York, occasionally write to their respective husbands, but they are satisfied with their new freedom and do not offer to return to Chicago. Nor do Bob and George ask them to. Daphne writes for a living and Nell has a lucrative position with an advertising firm. They mingle with a set of bohemian men and women, and soon smoke and drink cocktails like the rest.

sure, as the child grows older and is less helpless and needful of her, and she, in turn, of Raymond."

"You like Billy Underwood, don't you, Daphne?" asked Nell. "You're seeing him a lot."

"Yes," said Daphne; "he's different." "Well, he struck me as just a harmless, traditional sort," said Nell.

"You're jesting or else quoting, Nell," said Daphne calmly. "I'm going to the theater with him tonight. What are you doing?"

"Reading and mending; that's all."

The bell rang. Daphne seized her hat, pulled it well down on her head, shrugged herself into her plain coat and with a nod to Nell went downstairs to meet Billy—on speculation, since it was just 7:45.

Billy was at the door. "Your landlady and several others have interviewed me and found me sadly wanting," he said with his quick smile. He was freshly shaven, clean cut, altogether good to look at, Daphne found. Strange how he could quicken her pulses. Billy was so much everything she didn't intellectually admire in a man despite her quotations of him to Nell. And yet she liked best of all to be with Billy, just Billy, who fitted about from brunette to blonde with his casual words and his plays at profundity, and who wouldn't recognize a responsibility if he met one. She flung her mood from her and determined to enjoy the evening.

The play was feeble, but Billy's funny comments kept Daphne amused. Still, being restless, she was glad of the final curtain.

"Let's get a bite," said Billy as they left the theater.

SO THEY turned into a little side street and walked till they came to what had once been a residence; now its first floor was used for a restaurant. When the proprietor, sitting at his desk, beheld Billy with Daphne, he nodded in friendly fashion, slipped from his revolving stool and took them in fatherly charge to a far corner. Inadvertently, it seemed, as he left them, his hand moved a dragon screen, swinging it about a few inches, thus preserving the couple from the chance gaze of their few neighbors.

"Kind of the old chap," said Billy. "Kind but not necessary." Daphne did not relish the maneuver.

Billy's little bite consisted of spaghetti with green peppers and a high glass of beer. Daphne, a fruit sandwich and her unfailing favorite, preserved figs with whipped cream.

"And still you remain slender," Billy bantered her.

"Do you know, I received an order today for half a dozen cameos," said Daphne.

"No, I didn't know; how should I guess? In a little while, Daphne, you must start out on some real work."

"Well, I'm learning while I'm working."

They did not speak again for some time. Daphne finished her figs.

"Let's go," she said. "I must be nervous or something. And you've probably a hard day's work ahead of you. How many books are you going to review tomorrow?"

"Seven," he answered promptly, unblushingly.

"How interesting for the writers," she laughed. She pushed back her chair, rose and secured her coat from its hook. Billy took it from her and held it while she slipped into it.

"Dear little girl," he murmured. He put his arms about her, and shielded by the thoughtful screen he bent and kissed her upon the lips.

Driving home, Daphne settled herself in one corner of the vehicle, as far away from Billy as she could manage. He tried to find her hand, but was unsuccessful.

"What's the trouble, Daphne?" he asked at length. He was genuinely surprised at her withdrawal.

"I object to being kissed," she said quietly, "without prelude."

"Without prelude? I don't understand."

"Oh, yes, you do."

"Well, I like spontaneity; there's the only honesty."

She spoke warmly. "You like, Billy. You wanted to kiss me, so you kissed me. You didn't think of my wishes in the matter. And after all your vigorously expressed disgust for man's predatory instincts."

"Daphne, you're not a bit interesting when you're serious." He leaned back, half closing his eyes, trying to give the portrait of a terribly bored man. But Daphne pressed on.

"You're not modern at all. You've done just as the old man has been doing since Adam, fitting a set of qualities to conditions as you see them. Because I'm not living with my husband, because I frankly discuss most subjects with you and our friends, I'm the kind of woman you can lightly kiss. You ought to read woman by the light of her recent history, not by antediluvian poetry."

Beneath her lightness there was something doing havoc with her. She was making too much of an unimportant matter, he felt, and suddenly the truth

burst in on him. He sat up straight, all his listlessness, all his acting, gone.

"My God, Daphne, are you in love with me? Is that really why you objected to that easy sort of kiss?" he cried.

She covered her eyes miserably. "I think I am, Billy."

He leaned nearer, all fervor. "Let me kiss you again, Daphne."

"So you may better translate your emotions. Oh, Billy, Billy, what made me fall in love with you? I don't admire you very much."

He took her cold hands in his. She felt his pity flowing out to her. She did not ask for pity. She had progressed beyond that. This thing had come to her; it was not to be helped. Simply talk it out and then be done with it, except for the fight afterward to forget.

"Billy," she said, "I have none of the old pride of a woman in love with a man who simply cares for her as a friend, shall we say? So please don't feel so sorry for me."

But he insisted, and in the dimness she smiled. Old situations, old handlings, man's eternal egotism. And yet (how she despised herself) she wanted to feel his arms about her, rest her head on his shoulder. She could not have resisted had he drawn her to him. She sat up very straight, hands wrung together, till the taxi stopped.

"Daphne—" he began.

But she said: "Here we are, Billy." He helped her out. "On my soul, Daphne, this is too bad. I wish—"

She felt he was being honest at that moment; that he did know a very sincere desire to help her.

"You know I'm tremendously fond of you, Daphne, and if I can do anything, anything, be sure I'll not hesitate."

"I know, Billy—and now, good night."

She went swiftly up the steps, while he stood watching her, but she did not turn again.

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DAPHNE inserted her key, turned it twice to the left and once to the right before it did its work, and then went up to her room. She could see a light streaming softly through the transom. Nell, then, was still up. Daphne knocked softly and coincidentally pushed open the door with her knuckles still on the panel.

Nell was not alone. She sat on the tufted window seat, a man close beside her. A low, cream-colored lamp, with winking topaz stones in its shade, was on the table near her, giving her a startling beauty. Her hand had lain in the man's, but was quickly withdrawn at Daphne's entrance.

The man, whose face had been turned from the door, now moved about, and Daphne saw Karl Noble, the young musician.

Daphne spoke at once, softly, quietly, as though no curiosity and a little fear had not shot through her seeing those two so close together. "How are you, Karl?" she said.

He stood up. "Very well," he answered; "and about to go."

"Well, good night," she said, and went on into the little alcove. She took off her hat and coat, switched on the wall light, turned it off again, and set to burning a twisted candle, which flickered in long shadows on the wall. Drawing a chair near the window, she sat down and tried to think things out straight.

She loved Billy Underwood. Something quite outside of her control had made its choice; settled on Billy. She thought how great it would be to be always with Billy, helping him to larger understandings, helping him to cast off his pretenses, while he filled the need in her life. Need! Why, she was making herself out just the weak woman who couldn't go her way alone, supreme and sufficient in her trained independence. Well, it was true. She found an insistent