

companionship. I knew all the time that he was making his sort of love to me. And I didn't care! I didn't care what he'd been to other women. I didn't waste a pang on Rachel Sayre. Every woman must take her chance, I thought."

She flung the fevered words at Daphne, one after another. They seemed to ring in her ears long after their echo died. She covered her face with her hands, then dropped them and looked over at Daphne.

"Why have I been such a hypocrite, pretending to myself, Daphne?"

"We none of us can help but be a little of a hypocrite, dear. Women want so many things they've not realized they wanted before. And while we're evolving from old women to newer, more honest ones, we're going to make lots of mistakes. Forget this whole thing, Nell, and put your face to the light. Take the experience for what it may be made to mean to you in self-understanding at least. We may all profit by our mistakes; trite but very true."

But Nell looked around fearfully, as though expecting an attack from an unknown source. Then with a little cry she flung herself in Daphne's arms. "I want Bob," she said. "I want to go home to Bob, to be with him, where it's safe. I'm afraid of myself, of being alone, Daphne."

Daphne shook her in a little exasperation. "Afraid! Where's your courage? We all have to learn. Come, look up!"

But Nell buried her face still deeper. "No, no. I want to save myself the torture of remorse. It's better to be conventional and secure, Daphne; not to have temptations. I'm going home to Bob."

"Fair to Bob?" asked Daphne softly. "Does that matter? I'm going home to him, that's just all."

"We'll see how you feel in the morning," said Daphne.

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XV.

STRANGE, coming at the time of Nell's decision, that a "different" letter should come to Daphne from George the very next morning after Nell's outburst. The letter went:

You have been away now, Daphne, nearly a year, and it's time, I think, that we should come to some understanding. The present status of our marriage is hardly fair to either of us. You are busy in New York and making good (so George didn't think she was addressing envelopes for a living!) and undoubtedly happy both in your liberty and the chance for the expression of your own powers. And I am busy, too; new friends, new reading, new discussions. Going about a good bit with Bob, to the Press Club and other of his haunts. Still, though perhaps we no longer actually need one another, our lives are bound together. Do you not think with me that we should come to some decision? I shall come to New York next week and will then have a chance to adjust matters with you, I hope.

He signed himself merely "George Tunison." That letter started Daphne's thoughts in a new direction. He was right, entirely right. She went at once to Nell in the bedroom, in the midst of packing, for Nell had not changed her mind about going home to Bob.

"Nell," said Daphne, "I've decided to take the trip with you."

By noon, then, everything was in readiness—trunks gone, berries telephoned for, telegrams sent to the place in Chicago where Daphne wished to stay and where Nell would stay, too, for a time; Nell's office enlightened regarding her sudden plans. Nell did not communicate with Karl Noble.

She thought of him, thought of him with a beating heart. But she was afraid to see him again, even to say farewell to him. And she wouldn't try to analyze her fears; she simply sank herself in work.

Daphne, however, called up Billy. At

first, as he recognized her voice, remembering his unanswered message, he was inclined to be sulky. But as she would have none of that he resiliently went into another mood, a rather jovial one. But she cut that short also by telling him she was going to Chicago.

He met that piece of news with silence. Then: "Why didn't you say something of this the other night?" he demanded.

Because I didn't know I was going till this morning."

"Well, you know how sorry I am, Daphne."

She didn't answer that and he went on. "Rita has left Benderly, taking the child with her. She left a note saying she would be with an aunt in Brooklyn for a day or so, but commanding Benderly to stay away. He came to me, really very much put out."

"Well, I'm really sorry about that," said Daphne. And then: "Good-by, Billy," she said softly, and rang off.

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XVI.

IT SEEMED impossible to realize a few hours later that they were on the train pulling out toward Chicago. Nell was quiet, very thoughtful, not at all inclined to talk; Daphne simply relaxed herself; she was very tired, she found; had been living at some tension.

The train stopped after an hour at a little station. Nell, turning from the window, uttered a word.

"Daphne, look! Isn't that Rita Benderly getting on?"

"Yes," said Daphne. Then: "She's coming this way."

Daphne had told Nell of Rita leaving her husband, so both lowered their eyes as Rita came down the aisle. But as she neared them she recognized them and acknowledged the meeting with a pale little smile.

She sank into a seat near them and placed her sleeping baby comfortably across her knees, one arm about him. Then very calmly she turned and spoke to Daphne. "How do you do? Won't you come and talk with me?" she said.

Daphne rose, leaving Nell to take up her meditations again.

"I've left Raymond," said Rita as Daphne seated herself. "I'm returning to my father in Detroit."

"Won't you have a lot of work with that baby alone?" asked Daphne, thinking how young and how tragic Rita appeared.

"I've taken care of him since he was born. Raymond's really only been interested in him as an experiment." Rita suddenly flared up. "Well, I've left, that's all. And if ever Raymond finishes with his theories and his eternal talk and gets down to real living and real self-control, then maybe I'll go back to him."

She was silent a moment, but her hurt made her go on after a moment as she found in Daphne an interested listener.

"If he wanted a new kind of marriage, giving him perfect liberty to philander and do just as he pleased, then he shouldn't have used old environment—a home, the child, old rules for me," she flung out.

"I'm sure Betty will be awfully sorry if she feels she's the cause of this separation. She doesn't mean to do harm, I'm sure," said Daphne, treading a little dangerously, as she realized.

"Oh, Betty doesn't matter. She just happened to be at hand, and she had to try out her arts. She's one of the new women who's up to all the tricks of the old, but covers her track by saying she's living her own life."

The baby stirred and Rita had to give him her attention. She went on when he had subsided.

"They discuss and problemize, dissect marriage till there's nothing beautiful left in it," she said. There was a sob in her throat. Daphne remembered the long, deep looks she used to give to Raymond; she had been very, very proud of him; very deeply in love with him. "I just wanted to be let alone, to love and

serve. It's a simple creed, isn't it? So simple that if I'd told it to Raymond he'd have been frightened and have started right in to mold me along more modern, complex lines. But no matter how modern you grow, you can't put anything better into marriage than love and service."

It was a simple creed and a great one, though Daphne felt that for herself she must add one or two counts more. Still, perhaps if you loved well enough all things else were added.

"I've not asked anything about you," said Rita, turning resolutely from her own affairs. "Are you just taking a trip?"

"Nell and I are going to Chicago," said Daphne. "Write me there and tell me how things are with you, won't you, Rita?"

Rita promised as Daphne jotted down her Chicago address.

"Can't say how long I'll be there," she said; "a few days, anyway. And if ever you need me," she finished, as she handed the slip of paper to Rita, "don't hesitate—"

She paused, for Rita's eyes had grown large with fear and less vivid emotions. "Look!" she cried.

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XVII.

DAPHNE glanced down the aisle. Benderly and Billy Underwood were approaching, Benderly in the lead. When they neared Daphne and Rita they stopped with no word. Benderly simply gazed down at his wife, and there were new lines in his face. Then he had suffered a little, Daphne thought, and wondered what Rita had written to him in her farewell note. He looked as though he had lived through his lesson.

He spoke after a time. "Despite all you said about my following you, Rita, I had to disobey you," he began.

Billy put his hand on Daphne's arm. "Come," he said.

She followed him obediently back to her place beside Nell. He spoke a word to Nell, then sank down in the opposite seat.

"Well?" asked Daphne, looking straight into his eyes.

"Well," he answered, "Benderly pressed me into service. He suddenly turned coward. We learned of the little place to which Rita had flown from the Brooklyn aunt. Hopped on the train just behind you in the New York station. We waited till there was no chance for a stop. Benderly was afraid Rita might jump off. She's got spirit when she's angry; you've seen it!"

"And when do you leave the train?" asked Daphne.

"I thought to kill two birds with one stone—help Benderly, as he asked, and go on to Chicago on a little personal errand."

"You were a great help to Raymond, weren't you?" said Daphne. "Did you have to lift him up the train steps or something of that sort?"

"Now don't be horrid, Daphne."

She said nothing more, and Billy proceeded to make himself generally agreeable and useful, while the pair across the aisle began to talk together, earnestly. At first it had been a monologue carried on by Benderly.

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XVIII.

AT 9 THE next morning Daphne, Nell and Billy returned from an amicable breakfast. Across the way Rita, star-eyed, sat with Benderly, who kept his eyes eternally upon his wife's face. The crowing baby lay upon a pillow placed upon the opposite seat, Benderly's protecting hand hovering near.

The train pulled into a station. "Shall we get out?" asked Benderly of his wife. "The train stops here for fifteen minutes."

Rita sprang up. She lifted the smiling baby, then on an impulse she went to Nell; Nell, who had once shown so much interest in the little fellow.

"Oh, Mrs. Raynes," Rita cried, "are you getting out here?"

"No," said Nell. "Then would you mind taking care of baby till we get back?"

"I'd love to," said Nell. She put out her arms and received the child. He was in exuberant mood, full of graces and desire to be noticed. Nell was delighted to play with him, and she cared nothing for Billy's bantering remarks.

"But he is a nice little fellow," Billy agreed. "Do you suppose he had anything to do with Rita's riding beyond Detroit?"

"Of course," said Nell with conviction. "A man couldn't let a dear little creature like this go right out of his life. You can't understand that, of course, Billy Underwood. You're a butterfly!"

But Billy refused to be offended. He seemed beyond any mere scratches. If Daphne had recognized that the light in his eyes betokened a high purpose, that he was tensing himself to a great act of self-sacrifice, she might have been spared some discomfort later. As it was she kept herself resolutely from any chance torch by refraining to meet Billy's engaging eyes.

The train began to move slowly, and Billy, suddenly galvanized into action by what he feared, ran to an open window, from which he shouted and beckoned frantically. The quite unconscious backs of Rita and Benderly gave no sign that they heard. And the train had moved uncaringly out of the station before they turned and by their attitude of helplessness gave forth that they knew they had been left behind.

"Well, this is a pretty thing," said Billy, returning to Daphne and Nell. "Commend me to Benderly for acting the idiot every time. What's to be done with the child?"

"Oh, said Nell, "we can get him some warm milk or orange juice or something till we hear from Rita."

"I wasn't thinking of his stomach," said Billy. "I thought he might cry or something and I'd have to walk him about."

But the baby was beautifully good. He went to sleep, slept two hours, woke up and stretched out his fat arms toward Nell. And he had not cried one note when the train pulled into Chicago. Neither had his parents been heard from.

Nell wrapped the baby warmly in his long serge coat, tied his bonnet close about his winsome face and refused to relinquish him to Billy, much to that young man's relief.

Pandemonium reigned as usual under the great shed. Clanging of bells, switching of engines, sounds of many voices. Nell, fearing the child might be frightened, held it closely to her with a motherly air really very charming.

In the station waiting-room Billy found seats for his charges. "I'll get a taxi," he said. "What's that North Side address again, Daphne? And give me your trunk checks."

She gave him the address and the checks. Billy was gone but a few minutes. "All ready!" he sang out, and they all went on to the big doors leading to the street, Billy in the lead, Daphne and Nell following perforce in single file.

Near the door Nell bent to make some final arrangement for the child's full protection against the Chicago lake wind. A man hurrying by touched her arm.

"I beg your pardon," he said, then stopped.

Nell looked up, gasped, tried to say something, then gave up the unproductive effort. It was Bob she faced, and no detail missed her. Bob, carrying a black leather bag; with him, very close to him, in truth, a slender, wistful-eyed girl, who looked with some curiosity at Nell, so long checking Bob's progress.

"The taxi's waiting, Nell," Billy's rather irritated voice broke in. "Are you coming?"

Nell moved forward, and in a moment she was being whirled away from Bob and the pretty, exceedingly pretty, girl.

(To be concluded next week)

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