

RIVAL WIVES

CHAPTER XXV
NAN'S heart stood still. Her eyes, black with fear, asked Willis the question which she could not make her lips form.

"No, he isn't dead—not even badly hurt," Willis reassured her gently. "Nan drew a shuddering breath of relief. 'Thank God!'" She pressed against the cushion of the sofa for a minute, trembling violently. Then, "What are you waiting for, Willis Todd? Start the car. Get me there as quick as you can. Tell me what happened, Willis, but drive—drive!"

"So that's how you feel?" the man who loved her said grimly. "Goodbye, Hope! All right, dear—girl! Don't worry about me. I'll rather have your friendship than any other girl's love. It was that the youngsters, Pat and Curtis, were playing with the police dog on the lawn when the dog dashed off, and Curtis dashed after it, and Willis dashed to Curtis to come back, and tore out after him. Curtis was jumping over to take the stick from the dog's mouth when a taxi swerved around the corner, too fast to stop time."

"Oh!" Nan gasped, and clung stick to Willis' arm. "It seems that your faith in Little Pat's bodyguard was justified, for Pat flung Curtis out of the way of the taxi and both wheels across his own up. Both broken. Little Pat's in a hospital, poor lad."

"And Curtis," Willis whispered, a killing hand over her eyes to shut out the horrible picture that Willis described.

"Little Pat must have flung him out of the way of the taxi and both wheels across his own up. Both broken. Little Pat's in a hospital, poor lad."

"Mr. Morgan was going to do that anyway," Nan interrupted. "Oh, Willis, are you sure Curtis isn't badly hurt? You're not keeping anything from me?"

"I know you, like this, so I'll tell you the Morgan home just before I went to the station. Talked to Morgan himself. Told him I was going to meet you at the train. He said that the arm and leg were that outside of howling for you to be a lawyer's all right."

"Oh, Willis, you are a darling!" Nan ducked her head swiftly and her lips against the tanned hand that was gripping the steering wheel. "Don't do that!" Willis commanded sharply. They did not speak until his car swept up to the door of the Morgan home. Then, "Wait out here for you, honey," Willis said. She understood that it was intolerable to him to see her—him he loved so devotedly—with a man whom she loved even more devotedly and hopefully.

Etella opened the door. "Good evening, Miss Nan. The Black and white are up in Curtis' room now. Curtis has been crying for his mother since he got hurt."

Dr. Black and John Curtis Morgan, both with their backs toward Nan, were looking at the foot of the bed, looking for the benefit of the patient little patient.

"I won't have a nurse, either," Curtis shrieked, a white hand clutching his injured arm. "Nan said I didn't have to have a nurse any more. I'm too big to have a nurse. I want Nana to stay with me!"

"Nan-Child!" Nan sang out from the doorway. "Go this is the way you behave when I go to the capital to take my bar examination."

"It's Nana!" Curtis shouted, sitting bolt upright in bed and looking heartbreakingly pale and dizzy from effort. "Father, you and Dr. Black go off and tell your old jokes somewhere else. I want to tell Nana all about my accident. Nana's going to tell her but me!"

"Hello, junior partner," Morgan said, his arm about her shoulders and the girl close to him, with back affection, as he turned to Dr. Black. "Doctor, isn't she a ridiculous little thing? All our young men will be committing murder for the pleasure of having the prettiest little lawyer in the state to defend them. You ought to be disbarred for that reason."

"Aw, Nana, make 'em go away so I can tell you about my accident!" Curtis implored dispirately.

"Nana," the nurse contributed, in the professional tone that she gave to many a nurse's use toward small patients, "this little boy will not sleep if he can't tell his sweetest all about his accident."

"Nana isn't my sweetest!" She said to her "parent" pro tem. "Cause I heard my teacher, Mr. Anderson, say so to the principal. He said I was a better student than Miss Nan Carroll. She's my parent pro tem. What's a parent pro tem, Nana?"

"Nan could have kissed the nurse for the delicate diplomacy which made her engage both the father and the doctor in conversation while she was still shouting his explanation. Her face was flaming as she drew up a chair to the injured boy's bedside, but when the door closed upon the three whom Curtis had crowd out of the room, she pressed the bent and kissed him with the passionate love of a mother, rather than like a "parent pro tem."

"Little Pat's a hero, Nana," Curtis began, especially holding fast to the hand, "like the boy stood on the burning deck. But he isn't dead. Both his legs got broke, and Cop took one of my arms, and Cop hurt me at all. In the story books the dog always gets killed, but his little master, but I'm glad he didn't get killed."

Nan slipped out of the house without saying good-night to her mother. From the hall she heard the masculine rumble of what she knew to be a very earnest conversation which she could not in all to interrupt. She Willis Todd patiently waiting for her, and the glow of his eyes was so comforting to the overwrought girl.

"The kid all right, honey?" Willis asked gently as she climbed into the seat beside him.

"Yes. Oh, Willis, what an awful food I've been!" She slumped a forlorn little bundle and began to sob gaspingly against his

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



SALESMAN SAM



BOOTS AND HER BUDDIES



MOM'N POP



OUR BOARDING HOUSE



THE TINYMITES



By KNICK

