

MAIDEN VOYAGE

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WNU Service.

CHAPTER I

WHILE she waited, Antoinette remained standing; she was nervous and excited, and it seemed easier to stand. Except for herself, there was nobody in the place.

There had been an inky, shabby, cold-looking boy in a suit too small for him idling at the battered and inky desk, spearing vainly at files with an old pen. But he had disappeared through the glass-topped splintered door marked "Editor. Private," to tell Mr. Lawrence Bellamy, editor of the San Francisco Journal of Commerce and Business, that Miss Antoinette Taft was waiting to see him.

Rain was falling in gray sheets. Traffic crashed and honked on Montgomery Street.

The boy returned; Mr. Bellamy would be free in a minute. Antoinette sat down, her heart beating fast, and perforce looked about the waiting room of the Journal.

Antoinette was seeking for a job. "You kin go in now," the boy said.

There was a fat young man in a cafe-au-lait raincoat in the revolving chair opposite that of Mr. Lawrence Bellamy.

"I wish you'd let me send you our figures?" said this individual engagingly rising as Antoinette came in.

"I won't!" said Mr. Bellamy. "May I leave you my card?" asked the visitor.

"Sure!" the editor agreed. The young man took out his fountain pen and wrote on the card, and Antoinette took the vacated chair. She saw the older man, lolling in his seat, glance at her card. "Miss Taft?" he asked. "Funny thing—my mother's brother was Taft Baldwin," he said.

"They're both good New England names," Antoinette said, with a slight effort to seem friendly and at ease.

"Your people from Boston?" "My father's family was. But his father came round the Horn in 'Forty-nine.' Antoinette went through the usual little story, smilingly.

The editor was dark, his brown face thin; his aquiline nose gave a sort of autocratic significance to his face. His hands were big and lean, his mouth large, his dark thick hair was in an untidy tumble and he wore glasses.

"Job, eh?" he began. Antoinette only smiled deprecatingly. "What experience have you had?"

"Not much—on newspapers. I did the social column for the Bulletin for two weeks. Then Margaret Russell—my friend, who had got me into it—came back from her vacation."

"That was the only work you ever did?"

"Oh, no." Antoinette smiled ruefully. "I've done lots of other things," she confessed. "I was in the Mercantile library for a year, and then in Younger's bookstore, helping my older sister."

"I know Paul Younger well," Mr. Bellamy said, with what appeared to be characteristic musing irrelevance. "Nice feller—dreamer, but that's all right. Your sister work there?"

"You'd identify her because she's tall and dark, and she wears her hair—" Antoinette made a gesture. One always made this gesture in describing Brenda's crown of braids.

"I know; young girl, rather pretty, wears turned-down collars; 'bout twenty-four or -five?"

"That's Brenda. She's really—a little older than that."

"Just the two of you?"

"Two brothers, Cliff and Bruce."

"Mother and father?"

"No, we lost them years ago. But

my aunt, Miss Bruce, lives with us."

"And you think you'd like a job on a newspaper? No social stuff on this paper, you know."

"I know. I know it's a commercial paper. This is what I was thinking, Mr. Bellamy, why shouldn't the Journal have one page of society news and of things interesting to women, recipes and fashions and a puzzle or two?" Her voice was dying into a suffocated silence under the effect of his narrowed smiling look and slowly shaking head. She struggled on: "It might mean that men would take it home to their wives—"

"I don't think we want to go



"And You Think You'd Like a Job on a Newspaper?"

into that line," Lawrence Bellamy told her.

"You don't?" Life was bitter in her mouth, but she could seem interested, could manage to smile.

"No! But we've got to put on more advertising before we— Let me explain the whole thing to you," the editor said. He proceeded to explain it, illustrating figures with a pencil. Antoinette listened respectfully, because she had no choice.

"Now, I'll tell you what I'll do, Miss Taft," Lawrence Bellamy said finally. "I've put a new man on here to rustle me up ads—only had him two weeks, and I don't know how he's going to turn out. I'll give him another week, and then why don't you get in on this? I'll let him keep whatever he's got, and I'll tell him that you're going after the department stores and the milliners and the tea rooms, how's that? You get forty per cent of what you bring in."

"And meanwhile—" they were standing now—"meanwhile I'll ask Mrs. Bellamy what she thinks of any woman's stuff in the Journal," the editor said, guiding her toward the door. "She gives me pretty good steers sometimes!"

Antoinette bowed a smiling farewell, went out into the dark, wooden, inky hall, and walked down two flights to the street. The whole morning had been an utter waste of time.

Rain was still falling heavily; there was no use going home; nobody was there. Aunt Meggy would be at the sewing society meeting, Bruce was in school, Cliff at the office, Brenda at the store.

Antoinette wandered past the Hall of Justice and the little park whose green leaves were tossing in the warm sticky rain, and went idly

along the narrow streets of Chinatown. Somehow she was still smarting over the recent interview with the handsome, aristocratic editor of the Journal. While they had been talking, he had told her something of his own history. He had graduated very young from Harvard, and after some experience on college periodicals had become associated with a financial journal in New York, had married almost immediately, had continued in newspaper work ever since. The present venture in San Francisco was new but already was marked with success. He was only thirty-one or -two, Antoinette judged, probably less than ten years older than herself, he was pleased with life, sure of himself and his job! It was "his idea" to do this, and "his innovation" to do that; he could smile down, he could deprecatingly shake away her poor little suggestions; he was full of suggestions and ideas himself.

After all she would go home to lunch. She climbed into a car on Market street. Presently she entered the doorway of a dilapidated building that contained eight five-room flats on four floor levels. Steep wooden steps, peeling and paintless, led up from the street that ran for blocks between the shabbiest and least interesting of the city's dwellings. Almost all the windows had little signs on them, little confessions of poverty and failure. "Modes," "Violin Studio," "Rooms," "Home Board," said the signs, patient and fly-specked, year after year.

There were no signs on the Taft windows; they were top-floor windows, anyway, above the eyes of the crowd. On the right of the narrow entrance hall there was the doorway of a dark bedroom, Antoinette's and Brenda's room, where one must always snap on a light. Lighted, however, it was a pleasant room enough, with a great window that was always open, on an air-shaft, and an oblique upward view of the sky.

Next to this bedroom was the bathroom, dark and dank. Then came Aunt Meg's room; the best bedroom in the house, small but bright, for it looked out across the southern city and Twin Peaks, and shared with the sitting room next to it the only exposed side of the apartment. On the left side of the hall, was a small black hole originally intended for an occasional servant, and now occupied contentedly enough by seventeen-year-old Bruce, who had a very treasure house of broken cameras, nails, tools, radio equipment, guns and cartridges on table, window ledge, bureau, mingling in casually with his shirts and collars. The other was a fair-sized kitchen with a skylight upon whose dusty face the rain was hammering and dancing again, as Antoinette came in.

The kitchen clock said twenty minutes past two. Antoinette made herself a luxurious meal of brown toast and tea. There was a saucer of stewed tomatoes in the ice-box; one sardine. She grilled the sardine, scrambled an egg in the tomato sauce, and presently carried an epicurean tray in to the sitting-room window; found her book. The rain, the discouraging editors, the condition of the family budget were all forgot; Antoinette was in London streets, in London clubs and studios, following a shabby cassock through strange and dramatic adventures.

After a while the food was gone, and the rain had disappeared, too. Antoinette put her head down on her arms and sat motionless for some fifteen minutes. Then suddenly she sprang up, her book coasting to the floor, and snatching up the tray fled rather than walked with it to the kitchen. Cup,

spoons, plate into the dishpan, hot water, tray tipped up on the dresser again, teapot rinsed and turned upside down—

Antoinette worked as if whips were driving her. She went into the bedroom and came out with two waists and several pairs of stockings, took a basin from the damp, vegetable-scented back porch, rinsed and soaped busily.

Meanwhile, with characteristic fatal determination to be thorough, Antoinette was starting several other things and planning in her busy brain to do more. She hung the waists daintly on hangers in the sitting room, put the dish towels on to boil, took out the stove tray and slid it into the sink to give it a thorough cleaning, brought her sewing materials into the kitchen to catch up a run in one stocking and the split heel of another, and poured a bag of peas into a pan.

"I really ought to find an old sheet and re-cover that ironing board—we'll only burn the blanket right through at this rate—I wonder if there's an old sheet in Aunt Meggy's room?"

She went into her aunt's room and gave a dramatic shriek.

The window had been left open, and Jingle had performed his favorite trick of coming along the back porch and over the roof and down the fire escape, and so making a leap into his favorite spot, in the center of Aunt Meggy's bed. His paws had, of course, been thick with soot and mud.

"Yes, and you know you're a bad cat!" Antoinette said grimly, as he leaped gayly past her to the kitchen. She repaired the damage gingerly: her own hands were far from clean. Presently she went into the bathroom to wash them and was in there when Brenda came home a moment later.

"Hell-oo!"

"Brenda, my darling, you're early!" Antoinette kissed her sister affectionately. "Darling, what time is it?" she asked, going on with the wiping of her hands.

"It isn't five yet. But it was so dark, and going to rain again, and appraisers or accountants were there, or something. Anyway, Paul," said Brenda, who usually spoke of her employer thus familiarly, "told us we all could go home!"

She was as tall as Antoinette, but more slender, with a certain fastidious delicacy of build and expression.

"Oh, it's good to get home!" she exclaimed. Presently she followed Antoinette to the kitchen, to find her in a whirl of activities.

"What on earth are you up to?" "I did the stockings—oh, and both waists, too—and then I got into the vegetable box."

"And you're cleaning the stove too."

"Sit down, Bendi, and rest. Here, do the peas. I'll get out of all this!" Antoinette brought to the confusion her own swift energy and concentration, and was wringing out the hot clean dish towels when her aunt came in.

Little Miss Bruce was cramped with the cold; her gloves and boots and shoulders were damp; she fairly shuddered with pleasure as she came into the comfortable warm kitchen.

"You got caught in it, Aunt Meggy!"

"Caught in it, I should say I did!" scolded Miss Bruce, with a pretty little petulant manner that had remained with her since long-ago days of popularity and youth and prettiness. "I do believe we could have a fire in the sitting room tonight. Oh, later, later. There's Jingle—Jingle, you bad cat, where were you all morning?"

"Bad cat is right!" said Antoinette. "He was out on the roof again, and he leaped in your window. And I wish you could see your quilt!"

Miss Bruce, small, gray, fuzzy-headed in her mackintosh and tied small hat, stood rooted with horror to the spot.

"He didn't! I left—alackaday! I left that window open at the bottom; I'm always forgetting that!" lamented the older woman. "Yes, rub yourself against my legs now," she reproached the cat. "Cliffy home tonight, darling?"

"Nope. Gone to Sacramento."

"That looks as if Barney Kerr was half as important as Cliff!" Miss Bruce said triumphantly, scornfully.

"Maybe they need Barney here," Antoinette, who for reasons of her own did not quite like to have Barney depreciated, even for the aggrandizement of Cliff, offered mildly. "Boo-boo home?"

"He went to the water polo."

"I don't think, after his pneumonia, that he ought to play water-polo."

"I don't believe he's playing, but of course he had to go yell for his team."

Brenda sat at the kitchen table in a contented dream of pea shelling; Antoinette finished up the other odds and ends of work with the familiarity of long practice. Miss Bruce, returning in a practical alpaca gown of many seasons' wear and a large checked apron, inspected the kitchen alertly. Presently Antoinette spoke musingly:

"I wonder if queens—or let's say movie queens, there are so few of the other sort left—I wonder if movie queens ever do anything as pleasant at the end of a bleak wet afternoon as to come out to a nice warm kitchen and have the sort of dinner they like to cook!"

This affected Miss Bruce emotionally. Her back was to the kitchen, as she filled the kettle at the sink, but her voice was thick with sudden tears.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

TONY TAFT was a swell reporter, an expert at gathering social news for a big San Francisco newspaper, but she couldn't manage her love...

And thereby hangs the tale that is told so delightfully by the most famous of American women authors

Kathleen Norris

Read this opening installment of "Maiden Voyage" and you will not want to miss a single sentence of this absorbing story of love behind the news.