

MAIDEN VOYAGE

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SYNOPSIS

Antoinette Taft, twenty-three, attractive and ambitious but unable to hold a job, lives in a drab San Francisco flat with her sister Brenda and brother Cliff, who are older, her seventeen-year-old brother Bruce, and their Aunt Meg. In her job hunting rounds she interviews Lawrence Bellamy, editor of the Journal of Commerce, but finds he has no place for a woman writer. Tony goes home and busies herself with housework. Brenda and Aunt Meg arrive.

CHAPTER II

"I DECLARE, Tony, you have a wonderful nature!" she said.

"Hasn't she?" Brenda asked.

"You flatter and charm me, ladies," said Tony and drifted into the sitting room.

A long, lean, tousle-headed boy was stretched upon the sitting-room couch now; his heavy lesson book slid to the ground as he turned to face Tony.

"Boo," she said, "I didn't hear you come in. How was the meet?" "Five and five; we tied 'em in the last three seconds," the boy said, with a stretch and a yawn. "Dinner nearly ready?"

Presently they were at dinner. Tony, smiling at them all, said suddenly: "Isn't anyone going to ask me about the job on the Journal?"

"I knew the minute I saw you that there was nothing doing," Brenda said.

"Nope," Tony said heroically, "nothing doing!"

"Ah, my dear, I'm so sorry!"

"That means," Tony said, starting into space, playing with her knife, "that I've been to every city editor and every Sunday editor in this city. I am not destined to enjoy a newspaper career!"

"Aw, gee! Break you up?" asked Bruce's hoarse young voice, all sympathy.

"Kind of," Tony blinked and laughed.

"What'd he say, the Journal man, Tony?"

"Oh, he was nice enough. But he wasn't interested."

"Snuffy old miser!" Brenda said, helping herself to more strawberries.

"Oh, no, he's not, Bendy. He's a stunning young thing, as tall as Cliff—not much more than thirty. I should think, and very much the gent!"

"What did he say?"

"He wanted me to get advertisements, of course. I wonder," Tony said musingly, her elbow on the table, her square chin in one hand, "I wonder if it's horribly hard to get advertisements. Someone must do it; there are millions of them on all sides. Maybe I ought to try it. It might get me in, anyway."

"It doesn't seem to me the thing for a girl to do," Miss Bruce said with a decision that sat oddly upon her smallness and frailness.

"I'll get something," Tony said again; "but it seems so useless to get started in anything I really don't want to do."

As Tony and Brenda washed the dishes there was a stir at the hall door; a man's voice.

"Hello, everyone. Cliff here?"

"He's really shy—Barney: he's been standing there hating to make the break," Tony thought, as she called back cordially, "Come in, Barney. No, he's not. He went to Sacramento."

Barney's big bulk slid into the chair that Aunt Meggy, flutteringly departing, left empty.

"I can't stay," Barney said half-heartedly.

Tony, Brenda and Barney sat on lazily, idly, at the wide-opened window in the dim light. Bruce was snoring audibly on the couch.

"We can have a light if there's any purpose in it," Tony observed.

"No, I have to go," Barney said, not stirring. "What took Cliff to Sac?"

"They'd punched the switchboard wrong for the Weinstock thing," Tony stated indifferently.

"Who said so?" Barney's words were like bullets.

"Cliff did."

"What'd he say?"

"Well, if you must know, Barney, Cliff was shaving this morning, and Mr. Ridley telephoned. Cliff's first speech was 'The hell!' Then he rushed out like a fire wagon, and the next thing I knew he had telephoned that he was off for Sacramento."

"I'll bet you it was all right when he got there," Barney said, after thought.

"Was that bad, Barney?" Brenda asked anxiously. Darling old Bendy, Tony thought; she had had so much anxiety in her twenty-eight years!

"Oh, kinder."

"Was it—was it Cliff's fault?"

"It was all our faults, I guess. We did the drawings."

"It seems," Tony volunteered, "that they wanted this marble slab to stand up vertically, as it were, and it was cut to lie down sideways, and they said they'd have to take out a piece of wall in the basement."

"Who said so?" Barney asked, in the explosive, incredulous manner he had used before.

"Well, that was it. That was the trouble."

Except for repeating under his breath Clifford's own expletive, Barney made no comment on this. There was silence again. "See Bellamy on the Journal, Tony?" he asked.

"Yes, I did. This morning. Nothing came of it."

"Ha!" Barney ejaculated, and at his tone she felt her cheeks flush in the shadows. It was as if Barney felt himself personally charged with the business of getting Tony Taft, who had lost so many jobs in the past few years, still another.

"What was it that your Aunt Sally had in mind?"

"She wasn't at home when I telephoned, so I don't know," Tony said untruthfully. It was none of his business whether she was working or idle!

"Miss Grace, in our office, is going to marry Jay Klinker," Barney said after a moment. "She's not such a smart girl, but we all feel badly to have her go. For one thing, she's always on time." The voice that he had been trying to keep very casual over his pipe took on a slightly sentimental note. "I think that's darned important," he went on. "Being on time, dependable. And then she's a smartly dressed girl, neat. Men like women in offices to be neat—look nice. Then another thing, you never hear her. Quiet. All the girls like her, but there's none of this giggling and whispering—"

"I loathe you, you smug pig," Tony said pleasantly in her heart, as he paused. "Who are you to rub it into me that I don't get to the office on time and that my clothes are shabby? I loathe and despise you, smoking there and feeling so sure of yourself, and if you had forty thousand a week I wouldn't marry you under chloroform!"

Aloud she said nothing, and the rain began to spatter and whisper in the dark again. Barney said for the third time, "Gosh, I've got to go," and this time did go, with a little doorway murmuring to Brenda, and a casual "Night, Tony!" to the younger girl.

After a while Brenda said: "Feel awfully bad about that Journal job, Tony?"

"No," Tony answered readily, but in a tone so low that the other girl knew she was holding it steady.

"Not so much about that. But—oh, I don't know, the whole thing! Other persons get into the work they like, and get paid for it, and make good. I seem to have to do everything I hate—bookkeeping, jobs in stores, companion to crazy old ladies in love with their chauffeurs, teaching in private schools that go bust owing me a hundred and twenty dollars! It would seem that I can't do what I want to do, and I hate to do what I—"

She laughed, presently resuming on a less impatient note, "I hate to do what I have to do," she said mildly. "I hate office work, Bendy. If it were the stage, or a newspaper, or doing anything in the movies, I'd work like a dog. But just to go downtown tomorrow and get a job taking letters from young pipsqueaks who haven't the remotest idea what they're talking about, and hang my coat in a locker, and go to a cafeteria for lunch—and go on with it, Brenda, for three years and five years and ten and twenty—It scares me!"

"You'll never drudge along in an office for twenty years or for five!" Brenda predicted, in a troubled voice.

"You have!" Tony thought. Aloud she said nothing.

"You'll marry," Brenda said. Tony could feel her cheeks flush



"You'll Marry," Brenda Said.

resentfully. "Maybe Barney—" Brenda went on boldly.

"I don't think it'll be Barney," Tony answered moderately. "I wish," she went on, her tone warming, "I wish you could have heard the nice little sermon he was just preaching to me! Barney's so outrageously—stuck—on himself!" Tony interpolated, resentfully: "about being on time at the office, and dressing smartly—"

"He didn't!"

"He did."

There was a silence.

"It only means that he's in love with you."

"He's in love with Barney Kerr—that's who he's in love with!"

"No, honestly, Tony, Barney isn't so conceited! But he likes you so much that he worries about you—honestly, that's it."

"Any man can ask any girl," Tony observed, after thought. "He's never said anything."

"Not on a hundred and fifty a month, with a mother like his."

"He's really in love with the whole family, and I don't blame him, when you look at the family he's got!" Tony said. "He's lonely, and he likes our food, and he can talk about all circuit-breakers and pole-top whatnots with Cliff, and that's all there is to it."

"Tony," Brenda began, as Tony fell silent, "would you like him to ask you to marry him?"

"Yes," Tony answered without hesitation, "so that I could refuse him!"

Brenda laughed.

"He's too smart to risk that," she said. "In some ways he's much wiser than Cliff. But anyone seeing the way he watches you, Tony, and worries about your affairs and—well, even in this giving advice this evening—anyone can see that he's thinking of you all the time. And I know this," Brenda went on seriously, "I know enough of human nature to know that the minute a man like that marries a woman, she—she becomes sacred. You'd be completely spoiled—everything you did would be wonderful—would be perfect to Barney! And if you ever had a child," said Brenda, "well, I can imagine the St. Joseph airs that Barney would put on! Nobody could stand him!"

Tony laughed, not displeased with the turn the conversation had taken. She knew that it was true. Barney did take himself and his profession seriously, but he took his relationship to Tony seriously, too.

"I could marry Barney," she said thoughtfully, reluctantly.

"But it would just be a marriage, Brenda," she burst out, after a pause. "It would just be—oh, a little apartment somewhere, and being nice to Mrs. Kerr, and agreeing with her that there never was a son like Barney."

"But why should you want me to get married, Bendy?"

"I want you to be happy."

"I wouldn't be. And once you're married, you can't get out."

"I daresay it's quite different, though, once you're in."

Tony was silent.

"But, why not Barney?" The older sister persisted lightly. "Cliff loves him; we all do. We've known him all our lives."

"In the first place, he isn't in love with me," Tony said. "In the second, I'm not in the least in love with him, and I never could be, and at that," she added honestly. "I think he wants me, has it in his mind, anyway, that we will marry some day, and I believe I could marry him and make him a darned good wife! But there's no—no flame to that, Brenda," Tony finished, in a low tone. "There's no glory. If I were successful at something—as a head nurse, or a reporter, or a photographer, or a lecturer, it'd be different. I'd marry with—style, then. I'd feel that I'd been a success at one thing and would be at another. But if I married Barney now it'd be a harbor—and he'd know it! It'd be just—just taking care of poor wild Tony, who tried for the stage and the newspapers and was fired and snubbed all round, and who finally realized that a woman's truest role is that of a wife and mother—"

She stopped, her voice thickening.

"It is the happiest life," Brenda offered, in a slow voice with notes of pain in it. "If you love a man, that is," she added.

"Ah, but you see I don't!" Tony said. "I know the real thing when I meet it. In that newspaper office today—down at the Journal rooms, I mean, I met a man—"

She stopped. Presently she resumed again, a little shamefacedly:

"You'd think I'm an absolute fool if I say that something—something flashed between us—between this Mr. Bellamy upon whom I'd never set eyes in my life before, and me—that was nearer—nearer—love, than anything Barney's ever made me feel! He had only to look at me to make me feel silly and cold and shuddery, you know that wonderful feeling that you're going all to pieces and don't care!"

"I don't know," said Brenda, laughing in sudden relief, "and I do think you're silly, idiotic, if you ask me. What do you know of this man?"

"Nothing!" admitted Tony, laughing too. "Except that he's somewhere around thirty, and married—"

"Married?"

"Yes, of course—he would be."

"But that isn't love, Tony."

"Well, maybe it isn't. But it's something—something a girl wants

to have before she gives in, Brenda."

"Antoinette Taft!"

"I know. I know how it sounds. I admit that it's supremely silly! I only used it as an illustration.—What on earth—!" She said the last words on an odd note of fright. For the telephone was shrilly ringing.

She ran out in the narrow hall. Brenda's face was a study in varied emotions as she listened to the conversation that was by turns puzzled, awed, excited, rapturous.

"Oh, Bendy, Bendy," gasped Tony, rushing back to fall at her sister's knees and clutch at her dramatically. "It's the Call! Some Mr. Greenwood of the Call! Bendy, he wanted to see me tonight—I'm to see him at two tomorrow! He wanted me to come down right now. Twenty-five a week—twenty-five a week, and I'm to try the society column! Oh, Bendy, you'll help me, won't you? I mean with the people who come into the store—I mean getting engagements and parties and everything! Oh, Bendy, he sounded so nice!"

"What is it?" Aunt Meggy here interpolated dazedly, from her doorway.

Cliff, blown and pale and tired, was in the hall doorway. "What's all the shouting about?" he said.

Tony enlightened them ecstatically.

"Oh, Cliff, just as I was despairing—I'd been to the Journal today, and there didn't seem a chance—just as I was despairing, this Mr. Greenwood telephoned from the Call, and he wants me to gather up all the news I can and begin tomorrow—and twenty-five a week, Cliff!"

"That's something like," Cliff said, with his slow smile.

"And, Cliff, you know I can do it," chattered Tony. "You know I can, Bendy! Aunt Sally'll help me, and Mrs. Terry!"

"Want to go down now and clinch it?" Clifford asked.

"Oh, Cliff, could we? He really did want to see me, because tomorrow's the day he usually has off, and he said I'd have to 'scout around and dig up a lot of mush for the Sunday page!'"

"Get your hat on," said Cliff. "I know a man named Burke who works on the sports section. We'll go down."

"You angel!" Tony called back, flying into her room to change. Brenda smiled at her oldest brother. "How'd it go in Sacramento, darling?"

"Oh, I think I butchered the switchboard, all right. However, we think we can work out of it."

Cliff put on his damp overcoat again, as Tony came out radiant and fresh in her dark blue coat and small hat, and they went away together.

CHAPTER III

"IT'S so much easier to go in there with you along, Cliff," Tony said, when they had left the street car and made a wet run for the lighted doorway of the big newspaper building.

"Sure," he said. "I hope Burke's there. He may not be, though."

The elevator flashed up past floors that were dark and deserted at eleven o'clock at night. They stepped out at the fourteenth floor; everything was brightly animated and exciting here, and Tony looked about her with avid interest at the glass-top doors that were opening and shutting continually upon seething inner apartments. A quiet girl at a telephone switchboard looked up.

"Mr. Greenwood?" The girl repeated the name cautiously into a black rubber mouthpiece. "There's a Miss Taft to see you here."

Sitting back, she said, "You can go right in. It's room 18."

Tony followed her brother dazedly. Here was room 18, with "City Room" lettered in black on the door, and "Charles Greenwood" set modestly in a corner below it.

(TO BE CONTINUED)