

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. She likes him very much, as she tells Brenda later. Diffident Barney Kerr drops in. Barney has his eye on Tony, but she despises him. Tony gets a telephone call from Mr. Greenwood, city editor of the Call, offering her a job as society reporter. Cliff, returning just then, accompanies Tony to the newspaper office. Tony finds the men in the office friendly and helpful. The first night she goes with Cliff and Joe Burke of the sports department to a restaurant and sees Bellamy. She thrills when he nods to her. She is thoroughly happy in the hustle and bustle of the newspaper office. She manages to solve the problem of getting photographs. The only other woman on the staff is Bess Cutter, who does a column and is very friendly with Fitch, general manager. Bess comes to depend on Tony. Bess invites Tony to dine with her at her apartment with Fitch and then go to the theater. Barney proposes to Tony and is rejected. Tony attends the Cutter affair and is displeased. She is assigned to cover the mid-winter carnival at Piedmont. She meets elderly Mrs. Patterson and her daughter Ruth, wife of Larry Bellamy. Ruth is in poor health.

CHAPTER VIII—Continued

Immediately there stepped in from the hallway the most stunning figure of a man Tony had ever seen: a tall man, splendidly made, his height and figure and handsome face set off by the dashing costume and the ribboned peruke of the Revolutionary period. He wore a magnificent skirted coat of black brocade heavily embroidered in silver and steel, a waistcoat gay in flowers, plum-colored, knee-breeches and silk stockings, buckled high-heeled shoes. At his throat and wrists were frills of fine lace; in his hand he carried a plumed cocked hat. She knew him: it was Lawrence Bellamy.

"Larry, you are marvelous!" said his wife.

"Oh, bravo," said Mrs. Peterson. "Come over here and meet Miss Taft, dear."

"Oh, Lord, I didn't know anyone was with you!" Benedict Arnold ejaculated. "Oh, say—" he stammered, Tony's hand in his, "well, hello—I didn't place you! You and I—where have you and I talked to each other before?"

"In your office. Months ago."

"Oh, sure, sure!" His face was brightening. "You were coming back; you didn't come back?"

"No. I got a job on the Call—that very day, I think. Society editor."

"Good work!" he said heartily. "Of course, I see it all, now. You've come over to do the High Jinks at the club."

"And I've just placed you," Tony said smiling. "I've been talking to your wife and Mrs. Patterson here without ever thinking that the name was the same."

"Well—this is pleasant. No, no tea. I'm going upstairs and get out of this stuff; I just tried it on to see if it would fit and you all wouldn't think I looked like a perfect fool," said Lawrence Bellamy, as he stooped to kiss his wife's pale face, "and then I'll get myself something in the pantry, and then I'll join you ladies. What do you think of it, Ruth?"

"It is simply stunning."

"This is one of the costumes from Arliss's 'Alexander Hamilton,'" the editor explained to Tony. "I was down there in Hollywood a few weeks ago and I borrowed this for me and a dandy for Ruth."

"And what do you go as, Mrs.

Patterson?" Tony smiled at the elderly woman.

"For many years now," Mrs. Patterson said firmly, "I've worn a lace dress and put a mantilla on my head and a rose in my hair. No trouble, and thank God I can wear my own shoes and stays!"

"And you're going tonight, Ruth?" Lawrence asked, from the door.

"For a while, Larry—for the dinner, anyway."

"Ah, you're a sport!" he said.

When he came back they talked for fifteen animated minutes before Tony rushed upstairs to get at her belated work, and she felt then, in the firelight, with their appreciative eyes upon her, that she was at her best; what she said sounded original and amusing, even to her, and when she got upstairs to the guest room and looked at herself in the mirror, she thought she looked her prettiest, too.

The guest room was as beautifully appointed as was the rest of the house. There was a small flat typewriter awaiting her on the gray-and-blue desk, and Tony settled down at once to work. When that was done she could study at her leisure the blue-and-gray carpet, and the gray-and-blue curtains with a touch of pale apple blossom pink for relief here and there; the apple blossom bed, with a satin comforter of powder-blue faced with gray.

She took a luxurious bath, creamed her skin and brushed her hair, finally put on her wrapper and lay down, pulling the satin quilt up over her.

Tony was half asleep when there was a tap at her door.

"Come in!" she said, rousing. It was Ruth Bellamy who came in, hesitantly, with a somewhat doubtful smile on her face.

"It's after half-past seven, and you asked to be reminded?"

"Oh, yes. Oh, come in, Mrs. Bellamy! I believe I was dozing."

Ruth came in and sat on the bed.

"I had the most delicious bath, and then all these books, and I think I was nearly asleep.—Oh, how wonderful your hair is!"

"My wig?" Mrs. Bellamy's face had been artfully rouged and painted; with the silver curls above it, and the earrings of brilliants quivering when she moved her head, she looked ten years younger—fifteen years younger than the woman Tony had met downstairs a few hours ago. "Ridiculous what they can do!" she smiled deprecatingly.

"It's very becoming!"

"It's too becoming. I don't look this way any more," the other woman said, shaking her head. "But this is what I came in about," she went on: "Mother and I were saying that—since you're young, and this is a dance, would you like us to hunt you up a costume?"

Tony pointed, and Ruth turned her head to see the gay full skirt of the Portuguese costume, the embroidered blouse and bright head-dress dangling on hangers at the dressing table.

"It's the real thing; my brother had a friend who had to go to Rio," Tony explained, as the other woman admired it. "And he brought it home for Brenda. But it was always miles too big for Brenda, so I wear it."

Tony put her feet on the floor, went to the dressing table, and picked up a brush. She looked at her hostess in the mirror.

"You're not going to have much fun, are you?" she asked soberly, in sudden understanding.

Mrs. Bellamy, lingering, seated herself beside the almost dead fire.

"No," she answered, smiling nervously, and yet, Tony saw, glad to talk too.

"You're a good sport!" Tony smilingly repeated the husband's phrase.

"I try to be. At times it is hard."

"Was the little boy—was Peter—sick very long?" Tony was standing opposite her hostess now, brushing her thick dark hair.

"He was killed."

"Ah-h-h!"

"He was at a friend's house, playing with little Dick Sykes. They were at the garage—"

"Terrible for you!"

"It was terrible for my husband, too. We never talk of Peter."

"Perhaps," Tony said timidly, "it would be better if you did."

"Peter was the only one. You see, I was thirty-three and Larry only twenty-one when we married," Mrs. Bellamy said suddenly.

"You look twenty-one tonight," Tony commented readily.

The older woman got to her feet, laid a hand on Tony's shoulder.

"Come and see me again," she said wistfully, shyly. "When you are over on this side of the bay, or any time, I'd be so glad of it. I've been living very quietly—too quietly."

"I will!" Tony promised, touched. But as she got herself into the becoming stripes and colors, she wondered if she would. Life was brimful without the Bellamys!

CHAPTER IX

TWO weeks later the Bellamys came over to the city for a few weeks to stay at the Fairmont hotel, and Tony was almost immediately asked by her new friend to come up and have tea with her. She had a thoroughly pleasant hour with the mother and daughter, enjoying the



Creamed Her Skin and Brushed Her Hair.

luxury of the big corner suite, and the hot tea, and the sense that she was liked and admired. After that she went in two or three times a week.

Once Brenda went with her, and Ruth and Mrs. Patterson liked Brenda, too; they both made it a point to go into Younger's and buy books from Tony's charming sister. And at Christmas time Tony had beautiful presents.

The Bellamys, remembering happier Christmases that a noisy little boy had made complete, went to Havana. But they left their gifts behind them; there were flowers for Aunt Meggy, there was a lovely scarf for Brenda, and for Tony herself there were frail delicate underthings from Ruth, a book from Larry, and a handsome coat from "her attached old friend Harriet Patterson."

She went up to thank them as soon as they came back, and found Ruth alone. It was a dark, foggy January afternoon, and Tony was glad to get warm and to give all her Christmas news over her teacup, and get all of Ruth's in return. Ruth looked better than Tony had ever seen her; she had a good color,

and seemed in fine spirits, and she quite simply laid some of the improvements to Tony herself.

"You've been extremely good for me, my dear. Both Mother and Larry see it. A daughter couldn't have been sweeter."

"I've done nothing; you make me ashamed!" Tony protested.

"I'm fond of you. I don't get fond of many persons," Ruth said with her pathetic smile.

Lawrence Bellamy was not always at the hotel for the tea parties that his wife so much enjoyed, but he came in once or twice, and was always glad to find Tony there. Sometimes they discussed the personnel of the Call office; he knew all the important men there, and was inexhaustibly interested in what went on.

"Boo, that horrible Fitch! He came to dinner one night. I hate him!" Ruth said. "Do you know him, Tony?"

"Oh, yes." She smiled dreamily. "And Bessie Cutter, too," she said.

"I suppose every one in the office is on to that," Ruth observed.

"She did a column called 'Bessie Saw It,' for a while. Now they say she's going to do some work for the Sunday issue."

"Can she do anything?"

"Not really. She's been tried out almost everywhere." Tony had a moment of pity for Bessie. Not much fun ahead of her. Every one said that Frank Fitch was cooling. She could sell her diamonds, maybe."

"The Fitches came to our house for dinner one night," Ruth said. "And she's a sweet little thing."

When Larry went to dress for some business dinner, Ruth said thoughtfully:

"One wonders that Larry doesn't see some attractive woman; they all like him! And after all, I'm twelve years older than he is."

Tony had not known them very long before she had heard and divined much of the story of Ruth's life. Ruth had been an heiress; her Patterson grandfather had been a banker, a financial genius, one of the big figures in New York immediately after the close of the Civil war, and he had left her, or rather had left his son, Ruth's father, a considerable fortune. In the Piedmont house, which Tony gathered belonged to Mrs. Patterson, were paintings of Ruth as a little girl of ten, and one of her with her horse; photographs of Ruth in a school graduation dress, in a ball gown, on shipboard, at the Deauville races. Tony gathered that the thing lacking to Ruth in those years had been normal companionship with her own kind; any interested young man had been naturally considered a fortune hunter. She had not married.

Then, when Ruth had been thirty, a New York financial paper had wanted to see Grandfather Patterson's letters and diaries, to use in a series of articles about the New York of his time, and the promising young journalist, little more than a year out of Harvard, who had been sent out to Patterson manor farm on Long Island had been Lawrence Bellamy. Lawrence had been young and gay; Ruth impressive in her wealth and position at thirty-one. He had imagined that many suitors were interested; presently he had found himself installed as the only one, her squire when she went into town to the opera, and incidentally to the Patterson box; her authority on the problems presented by managing the manor farm; there were splendid dairies, calves, bulls, stallions, hunters, and racers. Lawrence grew interested. They were married, and Ruth had a few years of flawless happiness, had a small square son to stamp about "Merrivale Hills," could drive about to other estates like theirs, and show other women how fortunate she was.

Lawrence had continued in newspaper work, refusing to give up the career that interested him to become a rich woman's husband, and as his star had begun to rise, somehow—Tony sensed—Ruth's had begun to fall. First there had been money loss, a great deal of it, and

the sale of Merrivale Hills; and then falling health. Through them Ruth had clung all the more tenaciously to her wonderful husband and son. Then had come the San Francisco venture, and the beautiful house in Piedmont, with Lawrence growing handsomer and cleverer and more successful every day, and the Journal promising to be a success. Ruth had been forty-two then, to his eager, vital thirty.

But nothing had been really disturbing, nothing had forced upon her the realization of their changing positions until little Peter's death. That had brought her house of cards down about her ears with a shattering crash; there could be no more illusions, no more hopes. She had sunk, within a few short weeks, into the shrinking, nervous condition in which Tony first had seen her. She had felt herself the elderly, childless wife of a rising and brilliant man, and not all his kindly matter-of-fact affection, and not all her mother's anxious spolling and loving could seem to save her.

"Happiness is absolutely relative, Bessie," the more thoughtful Tony once said to her sister. "I see it more and more every day. There's no use trying to estimate whether persons are happy or not; you can't tell until you know what they're comparing it to. Ruth has so much less than she used to have that she's almost in melancholia. We have so much more than we ever thought we'd have that we can hardly keep our feet on the ground. And yet even now we haven't one-tenth—I mean in actual income and position and possessions—of what the Bellamys have."

"Poor thing!" It's the little boy's death, I suppose. She can't forget it."

"And feeling so much older than he. If she were thirty-two instead of forty-two I suppose there might be another child; as it is I don't think there's any hope of it."

"He's—how old?"

"About thirty-one or -two, I think."

"Ten years. You three run in neat decades," said Brenda.

"That's true. Good gracious, is she twenty years older than I am!" Tony murmured, under her breath. "You really like her, don't you?"

"I like her liking me," Tony answered, after a moment's thought, in honesty that surprised even herself. "I don't mean that!" she said laughing. "I do like her—you have to like Ruth, she's so generous and kind and all that. But of course she's not the personality that Larry is."

"Oh, Tony, you're so beautiful, so firm and young and glowing and happy—have mercy on her!" Brenda thought.

The Bellamys rented an apartment in the smartest of the California street places; a roof apartment with a wonderful view of the city, and determined to remain in San Francisco.

On a certain rainy March afternoon, with the freedom of a favored friend, she went up there unannounced, gave Chevalier her wet mackintosh and dripping umbrella, and entered the living room to find a fire blazing and Lawrence reading galley proofs in a deep chair beside it.

"Oh, delicious fire—I'm freezing!" Tony exclaimed joyfully. "Hello, Larry. Cold?"

"No-o-o. I had some work to do, and I thought I might as well do it here."

"Ruth?"

"At a bridge lunch somewhere. She'll be in. She said to be sure to keep you if you came in."

"Oh-h-h-h!" Tony shuddered luxuriously. "I'm on a story, but the woman is right up the street here at the Fairmont, and she won't be home until six."

"Then you're here until six?" Larry said, with a glance at the clock.

"The truth is," Tony said, her cheeks bright from the windy climb up the hill, "the truth is, I'm glad to see you alone for a minute, for I'm in a tight corner."

(TO BE CONTINUED)