

MAIDEN VOYAGE

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WNU Service.

CHAPTER XIV—Continued

—11—

"Good-by, Larry." Tony left the office in a dream, and in a dream boarded a street car. She went into the apartment feeling broken in body and soul; stretched herself on the sitting-room couch and lay with her eyes closed too tired to speak or even to think.

In her ears there echoed only one sound: the sound of a man's voice—a man's words.

"Tony, my darling, my darling—" Brenda came in from the kitchen with a cup of hot soup.

"Stay right where you are and drink this."

Tony jerked herself up to something nearer a sitting position.

"I thought you and Cliff were going to dine with Mr. Atwater?"

"I am. I'm all dressed but my dress."

The home routine went on. "He's at the club, he's at the club—" Tony's thoughts ran. "What excuse have I for calling him there? I could telephone and say—I could say—what on earth could I say?"

Her skin felt dry, and her heart was beating irregularly. She went into her room, got out of office clothes. A feverish restlessness was upon her, she must hear Larry's voice.

The telephone again; Tony had the receiver pressed to her ear before the bell fairly stopped ringing. It was Barney Kerr; the world went dark and dull. Tony slumped to her chair.

"Cliff said you'd had a bad smash this morning." Then the whole tiresome story to go over again.

"Listen if I come up, could I see you a few minutes?"

"Come up to dinner," Tony said languidly. "But it's just Aunt Meg and me, and we're not having anything exciting."

Barney sat opposite her as she lay stretched on the couch. "It's made me realize how much I think of you, Tony."

She opened tired eyes, dark in her pale face.

"I rather thought you did realize that."

"Ah, well," Barney said, in a voice that was fairly reproachful, "you know how I feel."

Tony was silent. After a while he added, lightly yet determinedly: "Some day you're going to be real nice to me, you know, Tony."

"Well—" she said, not hearing his words, hearing only something wearisome and distracting. If he would stop talking, in that mealy, kind, superior voice—

The clock struck nine. Barney edged his chair close to her couch.

"Did it make you feel faint?"

"Giddy, for a minute." Against her inner vision she saw again Larry's brown coat and its comforting shoulder; white sky and brown grass, gray crawling sea; she heard that voice crying out to her: "Tony, my darling, my darling—"

She came back to her senses, and to the quiet living room.

"There's the telephone. Shall I answer it?" said Barney.

"If you would. It's probably for Cliff."

Barney spoke next from the hall.

"She says she didn't ring."

"Oh, then it's the door bell. They sound alike at night, we don't know why. See who it is, will you?"

The room turned over; settled; Tony felt her heart begin to pump steadily, heavily; she raised her blue eyes to the door. It was Larry Bellamy's voice in the hall. His step. His smile looking down at her.

"Well—all knocked out, eh? Since I found my way here today, tonight on my way home I thought I'd look in and see how it was going."

Tony, not rising, stretched up a brown hand. There were introduc-

tions. Then Larry sat down beside the fire, and Barney took the other chair, and the couch completed the fireside circle.

"Tony's told you we had a nasty spill this morning?"

"It was a close call."

"The meanest I ever had. I blame myself. We were going at a pretty good clip."

"We weren't going over forty-five, I should think," Tony offered.

The two men talked together. There was but one lighted lamp in the room, but the fire blazed bravely. Tony lay looking from one speaker to the other; she had little to say. Her eyes roved and always came back to the brown earnest face of the man who was sitting there talking to Barney. Aristocratic and forceful that was Larry's face; Tony felt that she could watch it forever and never tire of its moulding, its expressions suddenly amused or suddenly serious, its kindly smile.

Brenda and Alvin and Cliff came in while they were talking, and they made the circle bigger. Brenda was delighted to present Alvin; in the soft lamplight and firelight they all talked together. Cliff's deep laugh rang out, and Barney grew animated and argumentative; presently Tony heard her aunt's little dry double cough behind the closed bedroom door and held up a warning hand.

"Yes, I heard it, too," Brenda murmured. "My aunt," she explained; "we're keeping her awake." Larry and Barney at once got up to go. "By the way," Larry said, in parting, "here's a bit of news that you can quote as much as you like."

"Oh, don't!" Tony begged, flushing.

"The papers are all going to have it, so don't worry," Larry said. "I am now the business and financial editor of the Call."

"Of the Call!"

"Yes'm. I had dinner with Arnoldson tonight. We threshed it all out, he had his lawyer there, and I had mine, and we're signed up. I sent Ruth a long wire."

"We thought it was the Examiner," Brenda told him, with her eyes shining.

"No, we couldn't come to terms."

"Thanks to me," Tony said, suddenly scarlet. Larry looked at her speculatively.

"Well, maybe. But anyhow, this is a much better thing for me. I'm to be an associate editor, and confer with Arnoldson about pretty nearly everything. So, mademoiselle, I'll be seeing you in the city room one of these days."

"Good-night, boss!" Tony said meekly.

Cliff walked down to the street with them; Brenda and Tony had hardly heard the closing of the hall door when they began hastily putting the sitting room to rights, making up Cliff's bed on the couch, opening windows.

"Tony, are you dead? You've had a terrific day. Starting from Santa Barbara this morning in the dark—"

"No-o-o," Tony said, in a voice through which bells rang. "I feel perfectly wonderful!"

CHAPTER XV

THE next day there was confusion and excitement in the office; nobody could talk of anything but the change, and Tony received due respect as a close friend of the new associate editor.

"Is he nice?"

"Mr. Bellamy? He's charming."

"They say Danielson's frantic."

"Fitch doesn't look any too gay."

Mr. Fitch, whatever his feelings, was not in evidence, but Bess Cutter was. Fat and soft and pathetic, with a lace hat and much too much rouge accentuating the wrinkled bagginess of her face and the false

gold of her hair, she went from desk to desk, trying to seem a part of the city room again.

"Did—did Frank say anything about my doing some work for him next month, Tony?" she presently asked.

"No, he didn't, Bess. He may have to Greeny."

"I was going up to Tahoe. But now I'm not, and I'd have time for space and detail again," Bess murmured carelessly. "You ask Greeny, will you?"

"I surely will."

Tony heard her telling Vince in a low tone that she regretted the scene she had created in the office a few days before. A friend had sent her down some "grapa" from Sonora, and like a fool she had taken some on that hot, hot day. "Frank and I never stay mad very long; we're too old friends," Bess said uneasily. From her tone Tony knew that at all events they were not yet reconciled after the last sensational break.

Mae Ethyl Muzzy was virtuously indignant at Bessie's lack of pride in coming into the office at all.



"Mr. Bellamy? He's Charming."

"My gracious," she whispered to Tony. "He's done with her—I mean she let herself in for it, didn't she?—and he's done with her, and what of it? Mrs. Fitch was saying on Saturday night—"

"Oh, you met Mrs. Fitch?"

"My mother and I went over and had dinner with them on Saturday night."

"Oh?"

"He wants me to do articles about all the country clubs," Mae went on. "It ought to be quite a feature, I was just telling Van and Joe Burke about it, and they say he'll help me do it. They want to run my picture up at the top of the article."

"Marvelous!" Tony commented. In her soul she said: "Well, if it wouldn't make you sick!" Aloud she asked, "What are you getting now, Mae?"

"Fifty."

Tony raised her eyebrows politely; she herself was getting thirty dollars a week.

"New associate editor, Greeny?" Tony said smilingly, as the city editor came up to her desk.

"Seems so. Pip, too, from what I hear," Greeny said, with a jerk of his head toward Mr. Arnoldson's office upstairs. "Say, Bessie, I want to speak to you a minute," he added.

He and the late editor of the "Bessie Saw It" column withdrew

to a quiet corner of the office, and Tony, covertly watching, as they all were, saw that whatever he was saying angered and mortified his companion dangerously.

"Tony, come over here a minute!" the harassed Greeny presently called. "Here's the thing," he explained in a confidential undertone. "Bess here—you know how we all feel about her—she's one of us, she belongs here; that's all right. But Frank—Frank Fitch, see?—he's trying to land something good for her, and he thinks he has landed something good for her, and until he does he thinks it'd be smarter of her not to come in, see?"

"You mean that Frank Fitch don't dare come in here while I'm here, and for good reason?" Bessie began ominously. "Well, you're right, I've got something to say to Frank Fitch—"

"Listen, Bess," Tony interrupted. "Will you just listen to me, and then you can say anything you like. You're not going to get anywhere with Frank Fitch this way. You know that; you only make him mad. Now, you clear out, and some day this week Greeny'll telephone you to come down; we'll pick a time when he's in a good humor, won't we, Greeny?"

"Bet your life!" Greenwood said fervently. For Bess was obviously softening. Encouraged, Tony recommenced with fresh zeal.

"Yes, but I can't walk out now," Bess objected sullenly after a while; "they all know I came down here to see Frank."

"Well, then, I'll tell you what you do," said the resourceful Tony. "You and Greeny and I have been talking about new Sunday articles, see? Greeny, you tell Bess now, so that they'll all hear, that she better go into the Sunday room with you and see Davids. And I'll tell 'em out here you've got a new idea to work up. Good luck, Bess!" she ended loudly, going back to her desk.

When they had gone she sat on, working, telephoning, thinking. These editorial pets who were spasmodically featured for a column of this or that were a sorry crew.

Presently Mr. Arnoldson came in, and with him, very tall and square-shouldered, and smiling his own characteristic smile, was Larry. The editor-in-chief introduced him to Greeny, the two men knew each other anyway, and shook hands heartily, and then Greeny took him about the office, stopping at the desks, or at the knots of men who gathered in his way. Larry gave Tony a special smile. "Hello, Tony," he said.

"Does it mean you'll see much of him?" Brenda asked that night.

"Not necessarily. His office is upstairs, and he'll be frightfully busy getting to know the ropes. Besides, I'm not really there much, except Thursdays," Tony answered.

Once he was in the city office and nodded at her, and once he was talking hard with Mr. Arnoldson and some other man, going down in the elevator when she got in, and then he naturally only lifted his hat with an abstracted smile of greeting. That was all in the first two weeks of his tenancy of the imposing upstairs office that had his name on the door. Then one Wednesday afternoon she found a note on her desk; just one of the usual carelessly penciled office notes: "Ruth gets back today; wants you to come up and dine with her tonight."

It was dated "Tuesday," and signed "L. B." Tony twisted it in her fingers for a moment and then telephoned to the office of the business manager to ask if Miss Taft could see Mr. Bellamy. Yes, Miss Taft was pleased to come right up.

Her heart was beating hard as she went upstairs.

"Tony, you look magnificent yourself!"

"I am. Brendy was married at noon today, you know."

"Sure enough! Ruth wired, I think."

"But how grand you look!"

"I am beautiful, I think," Tony said complacently. Her dark blue coat was embellished by an immaculate and delicate frill of white; gardenias were on her shoulder, and one gardenia was pressed against the brim of her dark-blue hat. "I've never been so grand," she observed. "Brendy was lovely, too, and her beau-papa gave us a noon breakfast at the Fairmont. Then Aunt Meg and Aunt Sally went off to weep together, and the Atwaters got into their Buick and started for Monterey, and I came down to break the back of my Thursday stuff and found this."

She displayed his note.

"I'm terribly sorry, Larry, will you tell Ruth? I went home early yesterday, on account of wedding excitement, and didn't find this until just this minute."

"I'll tell her, and you telephone in the morning, and cook up something between you," Larry glanced at a paper on his desk.

His tone was somehow horribly disappointing, horribly hurtful. Tony felt the chill of death at her heart. That kind, puzzled look—

"What's—what's the matter?" she faltered, as he did not speak.

"Is anything?" Larry asked.

"Well," Tony said thickly, "that's what I'm asking you."

Larry took off his glasses; wiped them; put them on again.

"Then I say that nothing is the matter," he said; and after a moment, as she did not speak, "Sit down, Tony. Perhaps there's something we ought to say, something I ought to say about all this."

She sat down, looking at him expectantly, with her blue eyes heavy with shadows, and her lips trembling. Then suddenly she put her head down on her arm childishly and burst into tears.

"I'm m-m-miserable, Larry!" she sobbed.

The burst of tears ended almost as suddenly as it had begun. Tony felt ashamed of herself, and, what was worse, felt that the situation had suddenly gone flat.

Sniffing and gulping, not looking at him, she fumbled for her handkerchief, blew her nose, and wiped her eyes.

"I don't know why I did that," she apologized, swallowing.

Larry was sitting facing her, his big hands on the arms of his chair. The expression of his face was completely non-committal; his fine gray eyes were narrowed and fixed on space. Tony's heart sank as she looked at him; he was not going to help her out.

"You knew I felt that way," she said sullenly.

The girl had a desperate sudden feeling of suffocation; a desperate need to awaken, to be away from here—somewhere else, somewhere alone in the dark.

"However, if you don't understand me, Larry—" she began, with broken dignity. And with hands that trembled she gathered up her bag, and the new soft white gloves.

"If I did," Larry said suddenly. "Then what?"

For a second she stared at him, paling. Then dully, hopelessly she looked away.

"I don't know," she said.

"Exactly," Larry added briefly. There was silence again.

"Don't think I'm glad about it," Tony said, standing up. And confusedly, as he made no comment, she added, slowly, "I had no idea of—of saying all this to you—"

After a pause he said, somewhat unnaturally, in a careless everyday voice: "Oh, that doesn't do any harm."

Tony was fitting on the soft new white gloves, her bag caught up tightly under her arm.

"And you'll give my message to Ruth?" she said, trying for an ordinary tone.

"I will indeed."

"I'll telephone her and make a tea date," Tony walked to the door, looked back, nodded a good-by, and went out, closing the door carefully behind her.

(TO BE CONTINUED)