

MAIDEN VOYAGE

KATHLEEN NORRIS

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CHAPTER XV—Continued

—12—

Back at her desk in the city room again Tony found herself inclined to talk aloud.

"Oh, you fool!" she said under her breath. She ranged the little notes before her without seeing them; slipped a sheet of yellow paper into her typewriter. "What of it—what of it—what of it?" she said fiercely. "What do you care what he thinks? He knows I'm crazy about him. What of it? I wish I hadn't gone up there! I could have sent a note. Darling Betsy—she looked so sweet. I wonder how it'd feel to be married



Tony Found Herself Inclined to Talk Aloud

a man who made you feel completely crazy, nutty, the way I feel now. Going off with him in a car for Monterey—oh, I wish I hadn't gone up to his office! What did he say? Did he say anything at all? No, he didn't. He just sat there and was sorry for me."

She brought her mind to her notes: the bridesmaids for the Di Milano wedding had been picked. Mrs. James Lee Fairchild and her daughter Miss Janet were leaving for the East where Miss Janet would be placed in a girls' school. Mrs. J. Kane Kelly was entertaining for her niece, Miss Barbara Fairchild.

Tony felt broken and sick; her head ached. She could not keep her mind on what she was doing. At six o'clock she walked home. The walk seemed nothing tonight. The nervous energy that drove her would have carried her on for miles without fatigue or even consciousness. Reaching her own room she changed from her wedding garments jerkily, spasmodically; sometimes hurrying as if driven, sometimes stopping short to fall into restless and feverish thought. There was a telegram; blood rushed into her face, and her fingers trembled as she opened it. It was only a few words of love and gratitude from San Jose, signed "Brenda and Alvin Atwater."

"They don't care who knows they're bride and groom," Tony thought. "Oh, Larry—Larry!" She put her hands to her head and squeezed her palms against her temples.

In the sitting room Aunt Meg, Aunt Sally and her daughter Violet, still in their wedding regalia, were upon the inexhaustible subject of Brenda's marriage.

Tony sat down, handing the telegram to her aunt.

"See that? She couldn't wait to sign her new name."

"The place seems perfectly forlorn without her," Miss Bruce said tremulously.

"It's just the time she usually came home every night, so sweet and amiable always, and so interested!"

The telephone rang, and Tony sprang to it. Her heart was beating so hard and her senses in such confusion that it was difficult for a moment to identify the speaker at the other end of the line. Ruth—it was Ruth—

"Hello, Tony! Did you know I was home? We got home yesterday."

"I did. I telephoned just before I left the office, but you were lying down. And I didn't get your dinner message until today."

"We made the run in ten hours! From Los Angeles!" Ruth was happily exclamatory. "I went down there to see my cousin Ethel and her three delicious girls. I was so tired. Well, Tony, this is what I wanted. Any chance of your coming up to dinner tonight? Just the three of us, and Larry won't be here until half-past seven."

"I'd love it, but I can't. My Aunt Sally's here, and we're all talking wedding."

"And did Brenda look pretty?"

"She looked lovely. She was awfully pale this morning, but when we got to the church—"

"I thought it was yesterday!"

"No, this morning. I suppose I'm saying words," Tony thought, "but I don't know what it's all about."

"Oh, well, then, my dear, of course they want you at home. But, Tony, I've got to see you," Ruth protested. "What are you doing for lunch tomorrow—can you meet me at the Palace? I've got to go look at a desk for Larry. This is a profound secret, by the way, it's for his birthday. And you come along!"

"Tomorrow's Thursday—I'll be down at the office in the morning," Tony mused aloud. "Yes, I could do that. But I'll have to be back about half-past two."

Tony went back to the women in the sitting room.

"That was Mrs. Bellamy."

"You could have gone to dinner, Tony."

"I know, Aunt Meg. But I really didn't want to." She began to straighten the books in the cases; every muscle in her body seemed inclined to jerk and tear; it seemed impossible to go on quietly stacking books; it seemed impossible to speak quietly rather than to shriek. The fever in her soul was like a pain, more dreadful than any pain she had ever known.

Tony stood by the window looking out. The city was mantled in fog now. It was moving softly, stealthily in; she could telephone Larry. About what? About anything. "Larry, I made an engagement with Ruth for tomorrow, and now I have to break it, and she doesn't answer her telephone." But she would answer her telephone, of course. Chevalier was there to attest that Miss Taft had not telephoned; she would say that he had been there all afternoon.

Tony wondered tonight how much real ecstasy and passion had gone to Brenda's marrying. Love was there, of course, but what sort of love? She had been tremendously pleased at Alvin's adoration; she had been maternal and amused; very sure of herself. All her phrases for Alvin were motherly.

That was one way of loving; perhaps the most satisfying of all, to Brenda. But there were other ways. There was the way of a woman of twenty-five and a man nearly ten years older; a way that included admiration, all the respectful homage that a girl loves to give to a

man, and this tearing agony of physical need, too. Brenda had been the first person to discover the charm of Alvin; but everyone adored Larry. There was not a man in the office who had not felt the stimulus and inspiration of his coming. He was forceful, dynamic, an instantly impressive and memorable personality. Alvin had taken his completely happy wife to four rather ordinary rooms in Monterey; Larry—ah, what wouldn't he do—what couldn't he do for the woman he loved!

While she thought her odd restless disconnected thoughts, Tony had been staring out of the window. Now, without being exactly conscious of what she did, she went into the kitchen, propping the swinging door open so that she could go on with the general conversation.

"How's potatoes Suzette, Aunt Meg, and a salad, and the custard?"

"Oh, now, listen," Miss Bruce said, with an awakening face. "If you're going to have potatoes Suzette, count your poor old aunt in. We haven't had them for months!"

"Just as easy to do six as four, Aunt Sally."

"Well, my dear, now that you mention it, I do believe I'll telephone Allan—"

Time droned on; it would always be like this, now. Dishes and toast and the foggy view of southern downtown from the window, and the voices of stupid sweet affectionate aunts. Tony's body writhed; she felt as if her soul was writhing.

After a while the Cravens were going, with many weary good-bys.

Everything seemed very quiet and lonesome without Brenda, but as she lay awake that night looking wide-eyed at the angle of moonshine that came down the shaft and kept the room bright, Tony was not thinking of her sister. Her body seemed on springs; there was no sleep anywhere; there was no lying still.

CHAPTER XVI

TOWARD morning she fell into uneasy dream-ridden slumber; Ruth was a small gray mule, Ruth had always been a small gray mule, it seemed, inexplicably married to Larry. It was all quite natural and taken-for-granted in the dream. They were all going to China on a large ship with newspaper presses crashing and crashing punctually on the deck—

Aunt Meggy waked her at ten. Wasn't there a very important club meeting to settle the question of clean vegetable markets, at eleven?

"At half-past ten!" Tony ejaculated, out of bed before the apologetic pleasant voice had stopped. "No, no coffee, Aunt Meg. I'm lunching with Ruth; I'll make it up then!"

She was assuming her wedding garments with all possible speed as she spoke: dark blue suit, white frill, dark blue and white hat, and the resuscitated gardenias pinned carefully on her shoulder.

Tony walked two brisk blocks in morning fog, got on a street car, transferred. At twenty-nine minutes to eleven she entered the big brown imposing clubhouse, ascended in the elevator with a score of well-dressed, middle-aged, murmuring women. The auditorium was only half filled, but the chairwoman and a few satellites were already grouped about a little table in the center of the platform, and the press women were seated at their own table below. Tony slipped into a chair, laid out yellow paper, murmured to her associates.

Tony came out into the street at quarter-past twelve, went down to the empty office and typed a few notes, went out again and walked down to the long cool restful arcade of the Palace. Ruth was there—not a gray mule at all, but quite smart in pale gray cloth, with a gray hat and gray slippers, with violets fresh and fragrant on her coat collar, and a gray fur about her shoulders.

"What are you grinning at, you absurd girl?" Ruth asked, as they kissed.

"A ridiculous dream I had about you last night."

They followed the head waiter between tables, were established in a quiet corner of the arcade; there were menus, music.

"Crabs are back. Let's have something crabby."

"I always have sand dabs at the Palace," Tony laughed. "I think I've been here five times in my life," she confessed.

"We stayed here, Larry and I, and Mother and little Pete, when we first came to California," Ruth said, with a little change in her voice. She did not often speak of her son, and when she did it was always with this little drop in tone, this flattening of expression.

Tony's open bright face clouded. As her own being, her senses and soul responded to the sweeping first chords of passion, it was becoming increasingly difficult to think of Ruth as anyone's wife—much less the wife of tall, dark, handsome Larry, or as anyone's mother. It was incredible that there had been a child, a dark, handsome eager boy like his father—

"I had no breakfast," Tony said, filling the gap. "So you may imagine how food smells to me. I've been at a dull club meeting all morning."

"How's Mr. Fitch's lady love?"

"Hanging around. She hasn't written anything for months, but she's always trying to work up something. It's pitiful, I think," Tony said, warming to her subject.

"Bess will try to get everyone enthusiastic about some picnic, or some party at the Press club or Solari's, and it's sickening to see that the boys don't warm up to it at all."

"It's horrible. But isn't it just what a woman like that ought to expect?"

"I know, Ruth. But you feel sorry for her just the same."

"He doesn't pay attention to her any more?"

"He's got another one, Mae Muzzy," Tony said simply. "What makes me wild is to see Mae so



"I Know, Ruth. But You Feel Sorry for Her Just the Same."

sure of herself, typing away as if we could ever use a word the way she writes it, and having to consult with him every hour or so."

Ruth was not listening. Her alarmed eyes had crossed the big room; now she murmured in annoyance:

"Oh, heavens, did you ever know it to fail! There's Larry! Not a word about the birthday now, Tony! Who's with him?"

Larry had been about to seat himself at a near-by table; now he saw them and came smilingly over to stand with the proud air of an exhibitor beside the round-faced,

squarely built, smiling, blond young man who was his companion. Ruth's short-sighted eyes blinked for a minute; then she half rose with a delighted cry.

"Joe! My dear! Joe Vanderwall! Where on earth did you come from?"

The newcomer stooped to kiss her; was presented to Tony. Tony saw pleasant blue eyes and liked the simple friendly smile. What was he—Danish, Norse?

"This is—what?" Ruth explained, her faded face a flush of excitement and satisfaction as they all took their places. "Joe, you're my half-brother's son—what does that make me? Step-aunt? Anyway," she said to Tony, "this is Mother's adored grandson, and Carrie's brother—you've heard us talk of Caroline?"

"I knew there were children, but I thought they were the sand box and romper size," Tony said.

The room, that had seemed to rise and turn and waver as Larry came up, settled into place, and they were all easily talking together.

"This feller got in on a boat this morning," Larry said. "I tried to telephone you, tried to telephone your mother. No use. So I thought I'd take him to lunch and then try again."

"Well, Joe, you darling," Ruth kept saying happily. Her face was radiant. Tony furtively studied the nephew of whom she was evidently very fond and proud. He looked nice. Fair hair somewhat rumpled; fine big lean brown hands; age perhaps thirty.

She had often heard the names "big Joe" and "little Joe." Big Joe was Ruth's half-brother; Mrs. Patterson was very proud of him. He was a—what was it, an engineer of some sort? Anyway, they had always lived in East Africa, big Joe and his wife, and there were "children." Caroline was one of the children, evidently, and this nice Joe another.

Ruth was immediately deep in hospitable plans. Joe must stay with them, of course, and she would get just a few nice people for a dinner that night. He had to dine with a scientist in Berkeley. Tomorrow night, then? Swell. And Tony, too? But Tony would have to run away to the Friday Night.

"What is the Friday Night?" asked Joe.

"A dance," Tony explained smiling.

"Could I go?"

"I could certainly get you a card for the dance," Ruth told him. "I'm one of their patronesses. But Tony goes—"

"As the social reporter of the Call," supplied Tony, as Ruth hesitated.

"Don't you like to dance?"

"I adore it. But there's a lot more to these dances than dancing."

"I'll bet there is, I'll bet there is!" Doctor Vanderwall agreed. "Ruth, she's grand!" he said delightedly of Tony, who laughed and flushed in a girl's pleasure at the immediate conquest.

"Behave yourself, Joe," said Ruth, not quite pleased, despite her indulgent tone and smile. "I never heard you so foolish!"

"The bad news for Miss Taft is that I'm here for three years."

"Three years!"

"Yep. Hochenheimer foundation, Flora and fauna. I'm to have a lab down at Carmel-by-the-Sea, wherever that is!"

"Oh, it's a lovely place!" Tony said enthusiastically. "My sister lives at Monterey—at least," Tony amended, flushing and laughing, "she has since yesterday."

"Since yesterday! What is this—a joke?"

"No, seriously. She was married yesterday."

"You Taft girls seem to be going fast," said Joe.

"You must forgive him, Tony; he's quite crazy today!" Ruth apologized.

"No, I'm not, Aunt Ruth. But I'm excited."

(TO BE CONTINUED)