

THE WOMAN HE MARRIED BY JANE PHELPS HEARTBREAK—AND MEASLES Chapter 107

A sort of early summer lethargy seemed to have settled upon me. Even the planning of my party, the first one we had given since our house was finished, failed to arouse me to interest.

Often he wandered over to Juanita's. I learned to know the signs. At such time I would sit by the window and wait, thinking long, narrowing thoughts. Since the night when Dick had repulsed me when I proposed to accompany him on his walks, I had not again offered. That I knew he was with Juanita made the watching, and the thoughts, more painful.

I had a curious feeling that Dick neither wanted me, nor wished me away. Sometimes I caught him watching me under-closed eyelids, at others with a look I could not fathom. Then again he would look so clean, so sane, so normal, so much the Dick with whom I had lived those long months in the desert, those months that at times seemed to drag, yet which I now looked back upon with regret.

Juanita came over frequently in those few days before the party, always with a question as to my need of her. It hurt me to see Dick flush with pleasure when he greeted her. At times he appeared almost inarticulate with happiness—or else I imagined it, he was so quiet. My mind was chaotic. At one time I would believe I was taking the right course, the only course to hold my husband at another I would wonder if I asserted myself, let Dick know that I disliked his intimacy with Juanita, if it would not, perhaps, prove the better way.

My preparations were about completed. I had sent out my invitations on ragged edged pieces of bark, and with quotation from some famous author, humorous or otherwise, to lend them interest and oddity. I had engaged two musicians—a surprise for Dick who wished one day we could have something beside the victrola for dancing. I had made out my supper menu. We had decided it more feasible than a formal dinner because of the size of our dining room. I had bought a new gown which I knew was becoming. Yet I felt heavy-hearted, apprehensive.

Yet of what? Nothing more had happened to cause me to fear. I had heard nothing, seen nothing, save what with perfect propriety happens between two close friends—such as Dick and Juanita were—or claimed to be. But intuitively something seemed to tell me that I was too trusting, too easily deceived. Strive as I would, I could not rid myself of the idea.

Then the night before the party something happened to put all but one thing out of my mind. Junior was coming home.

An epidemic of measles had broken out at the school, and it was so severe they were closing the classes for a week or two. The boys who lived near were sent home for greater precaution.

I was delighted that Junior was to be at the party, and could scarcely wait for Dick to come in from his walk to tell him. To my astonishment he grumbled:

"I don't see why he should be sent home just because a few of the boys have measles."

"But, Dick! He says the boys are very ill. And it will be delightful to have him here for the party. He loves to dance."

Dick made no reply, but went into the study and closed the door. I had a great deal to do, and with a shrug dismissed my disappointment at his lack of enthusiasm over Junior's coming. But I could not so easily dismiss the heart-break that thoughts of Juanita brought me—thoughts mixed with a sort of wistful envy.

Junior came next morning. I was too busy to go to the station, so asked Dick to meet him:

"He will feel neglected if no one is at the train," I said.

In half an hour Junior came whistling up the walk—alone.

"Where's your father? Didn't he meet you?"

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The boy stopped to give me a hug and two or three resounding kisses. "But we met Aunt Nita on the way home and she lugged him off to look for some book she seemed awfully keen about. Dad seems sort of happy over Aunt Nita. She's some looker all right. Was stunning this morning."

"What did she have on?" I asked to cover my emotion at the boy's frank remark about his father.

"Oh, some soft white thing, and a big lacy parasol—no hat."

"Well, never mind her. Take your bag upstairs and the come down and help me. We're having a big house-warming tonight. Darling!"

"Huly gee! I never thought them fellows getting the measles would get me such a good time. You bet I'll help. Say, mother, you'll dance with me, won't you?"

"You bet I will!" I languidly replied, comforted. I had my boy's love no matter what happened.

A CONTEPREMS Chapter 108

My party promised to be a success. The guests had all accepted and what is more to the point had arrived. All but Juanita. She was invariably the last guest no matter what sort of a function she attended. I suspected her of doing this on purpose to make her entrance more theatrical.

It was only a little after nine, however, when she arrived. A little gasp of admiration went up when she appeared. Her gown of chiffon was made with several skirts, one over the other, from the deepest orange, her favorite color, to the faintest shade of yellow. She wore a gold band and a necklace of deep orange beads on one shoulder. Her stockings and slippers matched her gown. As usual she wore no jewels.

No one could deny or question her beauty. My heart almost ceased beating when I saw the look in Dick's eyes when he greeted her. Junior was standing beside me, and even so I could not restrain a sigh, as I saw a look pass between them.

I danced with Junior, while Dick took Juanita for a partner. Every one was very gay, and my party bade fair to be a success. People wandered all over the house, admiring, asking where I got this idea, that bit of color, or praising the ensemble. It was not my place as hostess, as well as designer of the decoration, to allow them to go unattended. I let them return to the dancing, however, without me, pleading a wish to look after the supper.

The study was dark when I passed the door, save for the faint glow of the reading lamp, although I was sure that only a short time before it had been as brilliantly lighted as the rest of the house.

more thoroughly. Mr. Baker took Juanita home. I thought Dick looked disappointed when he offered, but he said nothing, and Juanita in her orange dress ravished him with a look as she accepted the invitation.

I went up with Junior and talked a few moments. Dick had gone directly to bed. Late as it was, I was not at all sleepy, so I sat by my window and tried to think, to plan.

"I can't ignore it any longer," I whispered to myself. "It must not go any farther. I must find some way to win him back before it is too late."

I wondered if ever a wife had been placed in the same position, and if so what she had done? I thought with a shiver of self-reproach that had I been the right sort of wife in the first place Dick never would have known Juanita. Somehow, everything went back to this—my wickedness, my failure in those first years.

"I will fight her with any weapons, but Dick must not know I am fighting," I said as I finally arose.

A CRY FOR HELP Chapter 109

The years spent in New York seemed very distant, and I had grown careless in writing Mrs. Gray. But in my need her sweet motherly face came before me, and thoughts of her as the one person in the world who could help me filled my mind.

I wrote asking her to make me a visit. I did not realize until I heard from her husband that she was ill and could not take such a journey, how much I had depended upon her coming I could hope for help from no one. I must fight my trouble, attack my problem alone.

I felt almost sure that as long as Junior was at home Dick would not see as much of Juanita as he had before he came. So as I must make hay while I could, I started at once to put into execution a plan I had formulated.

"I'm going over to Aunt Nita's," Junior remarked, "don't you and father want to go with me?"

"I'll go!" Junior replied, but Dick excused himself.

As tactfully as I could I turned the conversation upon Dick. I told Juanita I suspected he was not well, that he was unlike himself.

"If I did not know him so well, I would think he was getting silly in his old age," I said when Junior had gone out on to the porch with Juanita's pomeranian. "He acts as if he were in love."

"What do you mean?" Juanita had flushed.

"Just what I say. Dick is a peculiar temperament. He changed in many ways when he lived on the desert so long. He is easily affected by colors, by anything which appeals to his sense of beauty, or rhythm. But this only lasts while he is with the person, or in the place where he is so affected, as soon as he is away, he is himself again."

I had thought of going to Juanita and frankly asking her to keep away from Dick, to keep him away from her, to refuse to see him. Then I recalled her mocking laugh, the glances I had seen her give Dick, and felt sure she would only laugh at me. If I could turn them against each other in some way it would be far better.

The publisher by his rejection of the manuscript had helped me. Juanita had said so much about her helplessness on the very points the publisher criticised that it did not need a woman's "I told you so," to make Dick feel I had been right in my feeling that if she was helping she should be recognized if she was not, he would do better to work alone.

"I should like to go away for a while, Dick. Suppose you come along and get material for some good stories?" I ventured a day or two after this. I had not seen Juanita, but she had been over, Junior was at home, and I smiled as he told me:

"Father was so glum over his book I stayed right with them and helped entertain Aunt Nita."

"Why didn't you invite her to dinner?" I asked Dick. "Was she as gorgeously gowned as usual?" He had said he couldn't go away.

"Looked like a Christmas tree!" Junior replied. "Honest, mother, Aunt Nita is all right for a once-in-a-while person, but as a steady diet she won't do. Makes me think of a circus rider. It's all right at parties and things, and when I was a kid I thought she was wonderful. But honest, I'd hate to have you doll up like she does."

I could have hugged that blessed boy. He was playing into my hands as beautifully as if he knew what I was trying to do.

JUANITA STILL BELIEVES Chapter 110

"What won't you go away for a time?" I asked Dick the next morning at breakfast. "Of course I don't mean until Junior returns to school."

"I had seen the doleful look on my boy's face, and knew he thought I intended to leave him at home alone."

"I can't afford to go!" Dick answered shortly.

"But I can't! I haven't spent nearly all I made on the Baker house and we both need a change."

"Go if you like, but leave me out of your calculations. If the book had been accepted I should have taken that yachting trip. As it is I shall remain at home and write pot-boilers."

"But I couldn't have gone on the yachting trip—at least you said nothing about taking me."

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"I'm terribly sorry for your disappointment, Dick," I said honestly, "but next time write your book alone."

"You better believe I will! If I ever attempt another."

"And you won't take a short vacation with me—why?"

"Because I am not going to let you support me any longer. I have had scarcely anything toward the expenses for months, ever since I commenced that failure over there," he pointed to the rejected manuscript. "I'm through letting a woman support me."

"Nonsense, Dick! What difference does it make who earns the money as long as we have enough to comfortably live? It isn't fair of you to talk like that, and you know it. You can do so again. But I think a rest, a change, would do you good. Then too, Juanita may feel a bit disgruntled over the criticisms, and it will give her time to get over it." Dick, like all men, hated any sort of unpleasantness.

"I tell you I can't go!" Dick returned, "at least not now!"

"Had Dick been disloyal? That he had been fascinated, carried off by his feet, I had proof. I wasted my love perhaps, but I was parched for the lack of it, and it was only the love that belonged to me that I longed for. It had become almost a mania with me—this determination to hold the man who had promised to cherish me until death did as part, and whom I loved more desperately every day."

MRS. BAKER WARNS NAN Chapter 111

Was love like mine an insanity? All I asked was a little affection in return for a life of service. But had I sinned so in those first years that I was receiving only deserved punishment?

suspected him, or that I knew I had lost his love—I must win him back.

I like most women, had read in newspapers, in books, had seen in plays, how the wife tried to win back the careless husband by making him jealous. In books and plays it never fails, yet I couldn't bring myself to carry on a flirtation with any man. It seemed to me as if it made common the woman who did it; made her worse than the disloyal husband whom she was trying to hold.

Then there was always—Junior, he my man. But it is one thing to be convinced of this yourself, and quite another to convince a man that it is so—especially a man

who is fascinated by another. And added to this was the love of home. The word had become daily sweeter and dearer to me—a home with Dick and Junior—our home, the one we had planned so joyously together and in which I had experienced little save sorrow, but which I loved with an intensity hard, perhaps, for the ordinary wife to understand.

In my heart I could not feel that Dick had done anything wicked, anything worse than I had seen—the love-words and the kisses, which I took this small and dreary comfort with me to my room at night, while Dick sat in his study until nearly morning, writing, or thinking of Juanita—which man that it is so—especially a man

coming less and less often but Dick going more often to her. I had not changed my tactics. I talked of her to Dick, of Dick to her. I wondered in a way at Dick, his going so often to her, until one day I found a scribbled note from her on the floor of the study where he had dropped it.

"I am lonely, and shall think you have ceased to care if you do not come often. I am not quite well, so you must come to me."

She was playing on Dick's sympathies. Mrs. Baker had become very friendly with me, and said one day:

"Don't trust Juanita too far, Mrs. Gray."

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