

THE PROMOTER'S WIFE

BY JANE PELTS

NEIL PRAISES BLANCHE ORTON

CHAPTER XI.

That many men made quick fortunes in New York, I did not know. So it is not to be wondered at that I thought my Neil the most wonderful man because he could so quickly rise from comparative poverty to a position very nearly resembling affluence. I was a bit frightened, more than a little disturbed, as well as very happy. Frightened because of the way it appeared to affect Neil—he could talk of nothing but his success, what it would mean to us. Disturbed for fear I, a simple country girl, would not be able to hold my own with the people with whom he said we could now mix.

In Huntington one had been almost, if not quite, on a social par with all the rest save only for a few in the laboring class. Now he had not thought we lived handsomely enough to even know his bachelor friends until he had made all this money. He had long ago explained that a bachelor could live for very little because of the demand for hostesses for single men; that we could not hope to keep up with them for the simple reason that our income would not allow us to entertain on the scale to which they were accustomed.

"If we can't do things right, Bab, we won't do them at all," he had said rather impatiently when I remarked that we might do a little entertaining in a simple way. Then when I expressed a fear of meeting any more of his grand friends, he had declared: "You are all right, Bab! You can hold your own with any of them—when you get the right sort of dogs. It is like everything else. You play the part better when you are dressed for it. When you met Lorraine Morton you were embarrassed because of her clothes. Honest now, weren't you?"

"Of course I was. She was so stylish, and I looked so ordinary."
"Well, unless all signs fail, you can order all the clothes you want to in another week. And Bab, go to the best. I'm sick of staying at home. Get yourself togged out and we'll show the natives a trick or two."

Among the few women I had met in the year we had been married was a Mrs. Orton, a handsome, rather bold-looking woman. She had made a remark in my hearing which had called my attention to her. She had said:

"What I want, I get—if not in one way, in another. Don't you? You are foolish if you do not. There's all ways more than one way to manage."

I had repeated her little speech to Neil, and he had replied:
"Blanche is all right. It is easy to get what you want—if you want it badly enough."

"Blanche—do you know her well?"
"I have known her for a long time, two or three years. She's a peach too! The kind of woman who would push a man on to success."

"What kind of a husband has she?"
"A fine camp—she's a semi-invalid, so he claims."
"He has lots of money hasn't he?"
"No. She has, though."
"Some way, I didn't like her very well."

"That's too bad, because I do."
"It makes me nervous to be with those women. They look so smart and they talk about things of which I know absolutely nothing. I did not add that I had been happier not to know them. It would have displeased Neil."

It is said that it is in her own drawing-room that a woman is most certain of social success. That it is her battlefield upon which she prepares herself for victories. But with me it had proven almost a Gettysburg. Not that anyone was really aware of it; I had learned to cloak my feelings. But there was always the constant fear that I would do something to embarrass Neil—perhaps that I was not gowned to please him. I was so in love with my husband that the thought of displeasing him seemed to me terrible, and often made me self-conscious.

Neil had told me when we were first married that the secret of a woman's popularity lay in an unlimited ability to listen to what others were saying. I had tried to become a good listener, as a consequence. But after when I heard women like Blanche Orton chat and fling back gay remarks, I thought that it required some thing besides listening to be as popular as they were.

BLANCHE ORTON INSTILLS A DOUBT IN BARBARA'S HEART

CHAPTER XII.

Once when Neil had been very free with Blanche Orton, when I had sensed something—or thought I had—about his teasing—his caressing—manner with her that was specially

annoying. I said something of it to him. He laughingly told me that he treated other women the same way; so if I were going to be jealous of his manner with Blanche, I should be kept busy. I felt a little contemptuous, but I had long ago, although only married a little over a year, realized that Neil was Neil, and that I must love him, faults and all. If I were to love him at all.

I now knew that men weren't perfect any more than were women. When I was married I had thought Neil absolutely perfect. I could see no faults, no flaws. To be truthful, I saw very few even after living with him a year. Yet I often wondered where his lack of responsibility would lead him.

Often I was worried, too, about what Neil drank. Not that I would infer that he was a drunkard; but several times after we commenced going with his old friends he had taken more than was good for him.

Neil would laugh at me, tell me I was peevish because it made me ill, and a lot of other nonsense which quieted my fears for the time, but in no wise prevented their recurrence.

I had lunched with Blanche Orton, one day, and she had grown quite confidential—without in the least meaning to, I am sure. She called my husband "Neil" in the kind of way that only a certain amount of intimacy would warrant. She talked of the good times they had before he was married, and said that had she not already had a husband, she would have taken him.

I was in no way jealous for myself. I was sure Neil loved me, and I was quite apart from the petty suspicious that are the Nemesis of so many married women. It was for Neil I was jealous. I wanted him to be so fine, so far superior to other men, that people would look up to him instead of—well, imagining him a flirt.

"Neil is wonderful!" she had said. "He will be a very wealthy man some day. He knows how to take advantage of things. And he hasn't any foolish notions about its not being right to do so."

I didn't quite understand her and said so. She laughed and replied:
"Oh, nothing! Only some men are such cranks, they never get on."

That night we talked together. Neil and I. I told him how much I loved him, that it wasn't for what he gave me, either. I recall that, among other things, I said:
"I want you to remember, Neil, that I think you the best man in the world. Nothing matters, nothing counts to me but you—and our happiness together. I am going to keep you always, against anybody or anything." Then I asked for money to buy a dinner gown.

"Why so much emphasis tonight?" he asked as he drew me to him and kissed me telling me to get the gown and change it.

"No special reason, only what I have said is true," I did not tell him of the sickening foreboding Blanche Orton's half confidence about his business ability, had left in my heart.

I did not realize what it meant to have Fortune bring lavish gifts in one hand, whilst she carried a drawn sword in the other.

Yet, for the first time, I had a suspicion that perhaps Neil, in his anxiety for money, his desire to "get on," as he called it, might perhaps do things that other men, men of strict integrity, might frown upon. Father had always been so absolutely honest; he had had no patience with men who, for material advantage, would quibble with honesty. So I had ingrained in me a sort of horror of anything approaching laxity.

But I was young, loved my dearly, irresponsible husband fondly, and I soon forgot to worry about the remark Blanche Orton had made. Or if I thought of it at all, it was to shrug it away with the thought that I had attached a meaning to her words which she had not meant to convey.

Then, too, I also loved the luxury Neil's money made possible—the lacy things to wear, and the things for my home; the food and servants. All I soon learned to take as a matter of course and to care about, more and more.

BAB OVERHEARS A DISTURBING CONVERSATION

CHAPTER XIII.

We still kept the apartment we had rented when we were first married. But we kept two servants, and when we entertained Neil always sent a man from the club to wait. We had a small car also, and I had—at Neil's suggestion—brought many new and expensive things for the house. But Neil constantly talked of the "deal" which soon would be "put through" and then we would give up our little apartment and go to

one of the handsome new ones just built on the fashionable East side of town.

"It is silly to keep buying things if we intend to move," I said to him. "You know they never look the same in another place."

"We want to have things decent while we are here. We'll make a bon-fire of them when we go," he returned.

Of course I knew he did not mean that he would burn them, but that they would amount to so little when he had made the money he expected to, that they wouldn't count. So I went on buying beautiful things for the house and handsome clothes at the most expensive modiste's.

Often when I looked into the glass I would wonder if I were the same girl who, only a little over a year ago, was satisfied to dress in muslins and gingham. Now nothing was too ultra for me to wear. I had acquired a certain style which seemed to call for extreme fashions, and as Neil never grumbled about the bills which were always sent to him, I had gradually grown more and more extravagant in my spending.

Not that I yet bought like some women we knew. I had neither expensive jewels or furs. But it costs a great deal for a woman to wear handsome evening and afternoon gowns, and to be correctly tailored for the street. Hats, boots, and underwear all were of a kind I never had dreamed of possessing—very unlike the plain practical things I had in my simple trousseau.

Neil was becoming very uncertain in his hours. It annoyed me and I spoke of it to him:

"You are getting later and later for dinner, Neil. If you keep this up I soon shall not see you at all."

He made no reply. During dinner I tried to get him to talk of what he was doing, but instead of this he talked of trivial matters.

He seemed to be regarding me critically, carefully. I had an impression that he was holding something back; that he was weighing every word he spoke.

The next day I recalled his manner at dinner when I overheard two men speak of him. I had gone into the Waldorf to wait for Lorraine Morton with whom I had agreed to lunch. I waited in the writing room, and as I was a little ahead of time I busied myself by writing mother. On a settee near me were two men.

"I saw young Forbes this morning. He stopped me, and I must say he had two very peculiar men with him. Not his sort at all."

"Forbes' friends are not all distinguished, by any means," the other replied. "It seems a pity that some young men think that to be successful in business they have to do shady things or to be intimate with those who do. In time they all go under together. Forbes comes of good stock. It's too bad. I wonder what kind of a wife he has."

Just then Lorraine came in, and I heard no more. I called her attention to the two men and asked her if she knew them.

"Never saw them before, why?"

"Do you know any other Forbes besides Neil?" I then asked.

"No—why again?"

"They were talking of some man named Forbes, and said he was of good stock. It seemed odd that I should hear them. I had no slight notion of confiding in Lorraine Morton. But once more I had that sensation of foreboding that I had experienced the day I lunched with Blanche Orton."

Lorraine shot a keen glance at me. It seemed to me there was some sort of meaning in her look. Then she asked:

"Does Neil—Mr. Forbes tell you about his business? Some men are very secretive. I know. I should want to know every blessed thing about a man's business if I were married."

ONE OF NEIL'S DEALS GOES THROUGH

CHAPTER XIV.

"Hip-hip-hurray!"
Neil it was whose voice had rung out in the cheer. I was waiting dinner for him, but had not heard him come in.

"What's it all about?" He had grabbed me around the waist and was whirling me about the room for all the world like a top. I Derwish.

"It's over! The deal went through today. My, but your husband's some money-maker! Say you're proud of me, Bab! Say it quick or I'll go and find someone who will." Anxious as always for praise.

"Of course I am proud of you, you dear boy. I'm always proud of you. Come, you shall tell me all about it while we have dinner."

Neil was very gay all through dinner, yet he really told me nothing. Again and again he reiterated that the "deal had gone through" and more than once I had to tell him that I was proud of him.

"We'll go and look at those apartments I told you of, on Sunday, or would you rather have a house?" he asked.

"Oh, let us have the apartment. A house isn't half so pretty nor so easy to manage. But Neil, why not stay here until our year is up? We'll have to pay unless we find someone to take it."

"Stay here! Well, I guess not! We'll get out of this joint just about as fast as we can, then we'll show them a few things." ("Them" being his friends of course.)

He was so boyishly happy. I said no more. Yet I dreaded the thought of change. The apartment, while not large, was comfortable and was almost luxurious in its furnishings. With the two servants I had little real care, and we had been happy there—in our first home.

After Neil's first ebullition of joy had somewhat subsided, as we were sitting in the library, sipping our coffee, I tried again to question him.

"Never mind the details, Bab. The thing is done. You couldn't understand if I tried to tell you."

Lorraine said today that if she married she would want to know all about her husband's business. It made me realize I knew absolutely nothing of yours."

She probably would have to take it out in wanting. Men aren't apt to tell their wives very much of their business. Women gossip too much, for one thing; and for another a man has to talk business all day, and he doesn't want to talk it all night as well."

I said no more about the business, but told him of the conversation I had heard at the Waldorf. I described the men, and asked if he knew them. He said he did not recognize them from my description, so I repeated what they had said. If it was some other Forbes, there was no reason why I shouldn't tell Neil. I watched him as I repeated the conversation I had overheard. I had forgotten no word of what they had said—it had made me too anxious. Just as I finished I looked up and was surprised and puzzled to see a wave of crimson rush across Neil's face. But at the same time he said carelessly:

"There are several families of Forbes in New York. But we are not related."

Once again I had been uneasy for no reason. I must stop imagining things, I decided.

The remainder of the evening we spent planning when we should move—always supposing we found an apartment that suited us—and what we should do about the disposal of the one we were when occupying.

"If you rent it furnished or unfurnished you may have the rent," he said.

"Oh, I'll surely rent it, but I hate to let anyone have our things."

"We shan't need or want them. Might as well let them stay here."

The very next day I found a tenant for the apartment who would take possession whenever we were ready to vacate. I had spoken to the superintendent, and he sent this man to me—a bachelor who would take it off of our hands if we would leave the furniture.

BAB'S MOTHER GIVES HER GOOD ADVICE

CHAPTER XV.

Neil was a man of slight artistic culture, but he took an instinctive delight in the beautiful. Anything really lovely gave him pleasure, and inversely anything ugly gave him pain, that at times seemed almost physical.

"You like it?" he asked.
"It was our first visit to the new apartment we had rented since it had been decorated for us."

"Like it! I just love it and who would it! But it is so large and I shall have to have another servant. I dread that."

"Never mind. Call her the third in your room, if you like, but don't let her spoil the beauty of the rose for you." And Neil, well-groomed, alert, brimming over with good nature and satisfaction, eager and keen, drew me to him and kissed me many times, added: "My rose, aren't you Babe? The setting is none too good for you."

When Neil was like this I was repaid for any carelessness, and laxness on his part. I would forget everything save that I loved him, and that he belonged to me.

Neil's very appearance was reassuring. I was overwhelmed by the optimism of prosperity, and it brushed from my mind all misgivings. I seldom allowed them room save when something was said to cause them. But as I knew few people, most of them introduced by Neil, it was rare that anything unpleasant or unsettled reached my ears.

I had made many acquaintances but few friends. I had erred on occasions, and found that a supposed

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