HARRIET and the PIPER

by Kathleen Norris

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Harriet Field, twenty-eight years old and beautiful, is the social secretary of the flirtatious Mrs. Isabelle Carter, at "Crownlands," Richard Carter's home, and governess of 17-year-old Nina Carter. Ward, twenty-four years old and impressionable, fancies himself in love with his mother's attractive secretary. Mrs. Carter's latest "affair" is with young Anthony Pope, and the youth is taking it very seriously.

CHAPTER II.—Presiding over the tea-cups this summer afternoon, Harriet is profoundly disturbed by the arrival of a visitor, Royal Blondin. Next day, at a tea party in the city, Blondin makes himself agreeable to Nina, and leaves a deep impression on the unsophisticated girl.

CHAPTER III. — Harriet's agitation over the appearance of Blondin at "Crownlands" is explained by the fact that he had been a disturbing element in her life ten years before, and she fears him. The man is an avowed adventurer, living on the gullibility of the idle rich. He frankly announces to Harriet his intention of marrying Nina, who, as the daughter of the wealthy Richard Carter, is a highly desirable "catch," and urges her to aid him. She is in a sense in his power, and after pleading with him to abandon his scheme agrees to follow a policy of neutrality.

CHAPTER IV.—Harriet visits her married sister, Linda Davenport, with whom she had had her home during her unfortunate acquaintance with Blondin, and tells her of his reappearance. The two women, realizing the unscrupulous nature of the man, view the future with apprehension.

CHAPTER V.—Knowing the tender feeling she has inspired in Ward Carter, Harriet is tempted to marry him for the position and wealth he can give her, though realizing she does not love him. Blondin has ingratiated himself with Madame Carter, Richard's mother, and she is whole-heartedly in favor of his marriage with Nina. Ward urges Harriet to marry him at once. She procrastinates.

CHAPTER VI.

A most opportune lull followed, when Harriet Field had time to collect her thoughts, and get a true perspective upon the events of the past week. Nina was leaving for a visit to Amy Hawkes, at the extremely dull and entirely safe Hawkes mansion, where four unmarried daughters constituted a chaperonage beyond all criticism. Isabelle Carter was giving and attending the usual luncheons and dinners, her husband absorbed in an especially important business deal that kept him alternate nights in the city. The house was quiet, the domestic machinery running smoothly, the weather hot, sulphurous and enervating.

She dined as usual alone, that evening, and was surprised, at about eight o'clock, to receive the demure notification from Rosa that Mrs. Carter would like to see her. With hardly an instant's delay she went downstairs.

On the terrace outside the drawing room windows they were at a card table: Richard, looking tired and hot in rumpled white, Isabelle exquisite in silver lace, and young Anthony Pope. Near by, Madame Carter majestically [illegible]ered some illustrated magazines.

[illegible] appeared that they wanted bridge; it was too hot to eat, too hot to dance at the club, too hot—said Isabelle pathetically—to live!

Obligingly, Harriet took her place, cut for the deal. But her eyes had not fallen upon the group before she sensed that something was wrong, and she had a moment's flutter of the heart for fear some one suspected her, that she was under surveillance. Had Royal—had Ward—

She turned a card, took the deal, found Anthony Pope her partner, and entered into the game with spirit. Richard's first words to her were reassuring; if there was constraint here, she was not involved in it.

"No trump—says little Miss Field. Well, that doesn't seem to frighten me. Two spades."

"I think we might try three diamonds, Miss Field," Anthony said, gravely and pleasantly, and Harriet felt herself acquitted of any apprehension in that direction as well. It only remained for Isabelle to show friendliness.

"Du hast diamonten and perlen, you two. I can see that! You're down, Harriet!" Mrs. Carter said, thoughtfully. Harriet began thoroughly to enjoy herself. If they were all furious, at least it was not with her. She speculated, as she gathered in her tricks. Was it conceivable that Richard did not enjoy the discovery of the tete-a-tete dinner? But Isabelle had often been equally indiscreet, and he had never seemed to resent it before. Harriet knew that Isabelle was ill at ease; she suspected that Tony was furious. The old lady was obviously quivering with baffled interest and curiosity.

After three rubbers the game ended suddenly; Richard said he had some letters to write, and was keeping Fox waiting in the library; Anthony scribbled a check, said brief and unfriendly good-nights; Isabelle merely raised passionate dark eyes to his. She was languidly gathering in her spoils when the lights of his car flashed yellow on the drive and he was gone.

Immediately afterward Richard Carter said good-night to his mother and wife, and went in to his study. Madame Carter followed him in, and went upstairs, but Isabelle sat on moodily shuffling and reshuffling the cards, in the bright soft light of the terrace lamps.

"Wait a minute, Harriet," she said, briefly, and Harriet obediently loitered. But Isabelle seemed to have nothing to say. Her eyes were on the cards, her beautiful breast, exposed in the

"Wait a Minute, Harriet," She Said, Briefly, and Harriet Obediently Loitered.

low-cut silver gown, rose and fell stormily, and Harriet saw that she was biting her full under lip, as if anger seethed strong within her.

"Come upstairs to my room; I want to speak to you!" Isabelle said, suddenly. Harriet followed her upstairs, and they entered the beautiful boudoir together. Here Isabelle dropped into a chair and stared dully ahead of her, a queen of tragedy.

Germaine came forward, evidently more accustomed to this mood than Harriet was. Like a flash the high-heeled shoes, the silver gown, and the brocaded stays were whisked away, and a cool, loose silk robe enveloped Isabelle, and she took a deep, cretonned chair by the window. The lights were lowered, Isabelle nodded Harriet to the opposite chair.

"I ask you," she said, with a great breath of anger restrained, "I ask you if any woman in the world could stand it! You saw the way Mr. Carter acted. You saw him make me ridiculous—make a fool of me! The boy will never come to the house again."

"Oh, I don't think that!" Harriet said, in honesty.

"Mr. Carter stalked in upon us, at dinner—" his wife said, broodingly. She fell into thought, and suddenly burst out, "Harriet, my heart aches for that boy! My God—my God—what have I done to him!"

She rested her white full arms on the dressing table, and covered her face with her hands. Harriet saw the frail silk of the dressing gown stir with her sudden dry sobbing.

"My God—if I could cry!" Isabelle said, turning. And Harriet realized, with a shock, that she was not acting. "Mr. Carter only sees what I see," she added, "that it must stop. But I am afraid it will kill him. He isn't like other men. He—" She opened a drawer, fumbled therein. "Read that!" she said.

Harriet took the sheet of paper, pressed it open.

"'My heart'," she read, in Tony Pope's handwriting. "'I will go away from you if I must. But it will be further than India, Isabelle, further than Rio or Alaska. While we two live, I must see you sometimes. Perhaps outside the world there is a place big enough for me to forget you!'"

"Now—!" said Isabelle, rising and beginning restlessly to walk the floor. "Now, what shall I do? Send him away to his death, or risk Mr. Carter's insulting him again, as he did tonight! Anthony Pope means it, Harriet—I know him well enough for that."

She fell silent. Germaine appeared with a tray, and began to loosen and brush the dark hair, and Isabelle went automatically to the business of creaming and rubbing, still shaken, but every minute more mistress of herself. With the thick, dark switch gone, Harriet was almost shocked by the change in the severely exposed forehead and face. Isabelle looked fully her age now, more than her age.

"Well!" said the mistress, somber-eyed still, and with a still heaving breast. "There was something else, Harriet— Gently, please, Germaine, my head aches frightfully. Oh, Harriet, will you see what this Blondin man wants with Nina? She tells me he suggested some sort of summer party in his roof garden; I don't know quite what it is. But her heart is set on it. They seem to understand each other—I always felt that when Nina's affairs did begin, she would pick out freaks like this! Don't—" Germaine had gone to the bathroom for a hot towel, and Isabelle dropped her voice, almost affectionately—"don't worry about this little scene, Harriet. It will be quite all right!"

"Oh, surely!" The companion's voice was light and cheerful; she went upstairs only pleasantly excited and thrilled. And at the breakfast table next morning Harriet could show the head of the house the same bright assurance. Richard had come downstairs early, and they had their coffee alone.

"Nina?" asked her father.

"She comes back today," Harriet said. "Mrs. Carter is going to have her masseuse, so she won't be down. She asked you to remember that you are dining at the Jays' tomorrow. There's to be tennis at about four."

"Finals," he said, nodding, and went out to his car apparently well pleased with himself and his life. Harriet started for the Hawkes' with a philosophic reflection or two as to the ephemeral quality of married quarrels.

She brought Nina back at noon, a garrulous and complacent Nina, who could pity the elder Hawkes as girls who "never had admirers." When they reached the driveway of Crownlands, Harriet recognized the car that was already there, and said to herself that Anthony Pope would join them for luncheon. But just as she and Nina were about to enter the cool, wide, dark doorway, Anthony himself passed them. He was almost running, and apparently did not see them. He ran down the shallow steps and sprang into his car, which scattered a spray of gravel as he jerked it madly about, and was gone before she and Nina had ended their look of surprise. Harriet went slowly upstairs, with a dim foreboding far back in her heart.

At about three, when Harriet and Nina were idling on the shady terrace, with the hound, the new magazines, and their books, Hansen brought one of the small closed cars to the side door. Five minutes later Isabelle, in a thin white coat, a veiled white hat, and with a gorgeous white-furred wrap over her arm, came out. Germaine was with her, carrying two shiny black suitcases. Isabelle, Harriet thought, looked superbly handsome, but Germaine had evidently been scolded, and had red eyes.

Isabelle came over to give her daughter a farewell kiss.

"Mrs. Webb has telephoned for me, ducky. Your father isn't coming home tonight, but have a happy time with Miss Harriet, and I'll be back in a day or two. Good-by, both of you. All right, Hansen!"

They swept away, leaving Harriet with a strange sense of nervousness and suspense. The summer air seemed charged with menace, and the silence that followed the noise of the car oddly ominous.

Madame Carter was on the terrace when they came back at five from an idle trip to the club, reporting that her son had just returned unexpectedly from the city, and had gone in to change for golf.

Nothing alarming here, yet Harriet experienced a sick thrill of apprehension. Something abnormal seemed to be the matter with them all this afternoon!

"Did you call me, Mr. Carter?" She hardly knew her own voice, as he came down the three broad steps from the house. Her hands felt cold, and she was trembling.

"Do you happen to know where Hansen is, Miss Field?"

"Driving Mrs. Carter to the Webbs' at Great Barrington," the girl answered, readily. "Mrs. Carter left in a hurry. She did not expect you tonight. Hansen ought to be back at about seven, I should think—"

He was not listening to her; abruptly left her. When Harriet went into the house she saw nothing of him. She made her usual little round, spoke briefly to a maid about some fallen daisy petals, consulted with the housekeeper as to the new cretonne covers. A man was to come and measure those covers this very afternoon—perhaps this was he, modestly waiting at the side door.

But no, this man briefly and simply asked to be shown to Mr. Carter, remarking that he was expected. He disappeared into the library; Harriet saw no more of him for an hour, when he silently appeared beside her, and asked to see the chauffeur Hansen as soon as he came.

Richard brought the strange man to the dinner table; but there was nothing in that to make the dinner so unnatural. To be sure Richard ate little, and spoke hardly at all; but this Mr. Williams was quite entertaining, and the old lady in good spirits.

At eight Hansen was back, presenting himself in his dusty road-coat; Mr. Carter immediately drew him with Williams into the library. Nina loitered up to bed, but the old lady and Harriet remained downstairs. They did not like, but they sometimes amused, each other. Suddenly came the summons: would Miss Field please step into the library?

Hansen was going out as she came in; Richard was at the big flat-topped desk, the man Williams standing somewhat in shadow. Harriet's heart leaped; they were going to ask her about Royal.

"Just a moment, Miss Field," Richard said. "Will you sit down?" And as Harriet, looking at him in frightened curiosity, did so, he began quietly: "We are in some trouble here, Miss Field. I hardly know how to tell you what we fear. Did you notice anything strange about—Mrs. Carter's—manner today?"

"I thought I did," Harriet admitted.

"Did you think of any reason for it?"

Harriet gave the stranger a glance that made him an eavesdropper.

"I fancied that it was connected with—with what distressed her last night, Mr. Carter."

"You may speak before Mr. Williams," Richard said. He looked

Harriet Gave the Stranger a Glance That Made Him An Eavesdropper.

down; was silent. "I asked him to help me," he added, slowly. "Was young Mr. Pope here today?"

"This morning, I don't know how long," Harriet said, with a great light, or darkness, breaking in upon her mind, "he was leaving when Nina and I came home."

"Do you know who took the telephone call from Mrs. Webb?"

"No, because nobody did. No person named Webb called from Great Barrington, or anywhere else, today," said Williams, breaking in decidedly, his voice a contrast to Richard's hesitating tones. "As a matter of fact, Hansen didn't drive to Great Barrington. Two miles from your gate here, Mrs. Carter gave him other directions."

"What directions?" Harriet asked, antagonized by his manner, and feeling her cheeks get red. The man evidently had small respect for womanhood.

"He drove to New London," Richard supplied. "Pope's yacht is there."

His manner was very quiet, he spoke almost wearily, but Harriet felt as if a cannon had exploded in the study.

"I've had New London on the wire," said Mr. Williams. "Mr. Pope had been getting ready for a cruise. The chances are that they have already weighed anchor."

"On the other hand," Richard said, glancing at his watch, "we have an excellent prospect of finding them there. I was not supposed to come home until tomorrow night. I found Mrs. Carter's message at five, twenty-four hours earlier than she expected me to. Williams may be mistaken, of course," he finished, with a glance at the detective.

"Not likely!" said Williams, with a modest shrug.

"However, even if he is right," Richard resumed, "the chances are that they are still there, and if they are, I will bring—my wife back with me tonight. Meanwhile, I leave the house in your care, Miss Field. I needn't tell you that my mother and Nina must be kept absolutely ignorant of what we suspect. You'll know what to tell them, in case I should be longer away. If our calculations are wrong, there's no telling where I may follow Mrs. Carter. I leave this end of things to you!"

"I'm sorrier than I can say," she said, huskily.

"I know you are! It's—" Richard passed his hand over his forehead—"It's utter madness, of course. But, please God, we can keep it all hushed up. She has Germaine with her; Hansen I can trust. We're off now, Miss Field. I'll keep you informed if I can."

Harriet went back to the drawing room with her heart big with pride. He had mentioned Hansen and Germaine, but he knew that he could trust her! The event was sensational enough. But back of the excitement lay the joy of being needed and being trusted.

(To be continued.)

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State Roads Chief Is Having Bill Drawn Authorizing Removal

Having settled his controversy with State Forester Besley by an agreement under which the State Roads Commission is to have jurisdiction over all signs along the right of way of the State roads, Roads Chairman Mackall is preparing to "buck" the Standard Oil and other concerns, including tire companies, supply houses and general mercantile concerns which have signs along the public highways of the state of Maryalnd, even if they are on private property.

Some of these signs give informations as to the distance of one town to another, and give a driver who is off the home roads some idea as to the direction in which he is going, and there will be great opposition to the bill. The State Roads Commission is claiming that the information upon the said signs is often misleading, about which we have our doubts.

Some days ago he took up the matter with Attorney-General Armstrong and asked if there was some way the Roads Commission could control highways signs, even if they were on private property, especially those signs which professed to give information concerning the State roads. As a result Mr. Armstrong is preparing a bill to be sent to the General Assembly by Mr. Mackall.

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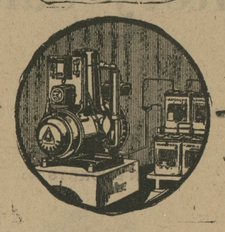
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