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 11-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.—Angered at his wife's too open flirtation with young Anthony Pope, Richard Carter markedly shows his resentment. Isabelle, ardently returning her youthful lover's attachment, elopes with him on his yacht, and pursuit is useless. The news of the sensational affair, exaggerated, of course, by gossip, is kept as much as possible from being public property.

CHAPTER VII. — Ward Carter again urges Harriet to marry him, but she cannot bring herself to an alliance with him merely for the sake of self-advancement, and refuses. The fact of Mrs. Carter's elopement becomes public. Harriet's capable managing hand is more than ever needed at "Crownlands," and despite the complications she foresees as inevitable she decides to remain.

CHAPTER VIII.—Blondin puts pressure on Harriet to forward his marriage with Nina, but she makes up her mind to defy him. Richard Carter questions her concerning her knowledge of Blondin's intentions, and she counsels active opposition to the match. The family, with Harriet, move to a summer establishment on Long Island.

CHAPTER IX.—In the new home Harriet, with Madame Carter and Nina, settle down for a vacation. In a frank talk with Nina Harriet endeavors to show her Blondin's unworthiness, but it has little effect on the infatuated girl. On Richard Carter's insistence, Harriet is installed as mistress of the household, but finding her position untenable, declares her intention of leaving. Richard makes an offer of marriage, as a way out of the situation, but Harriet, considering such a thing impossible while Mrs. Carter (though divorced) is still alive, refuses, and leaves the house. To her old-fashioned ideas, the fact that Richard Carter has been granted a divorce from his erring wife does not free him from his marital ties, and marriage with him is impossible.

CHAPTER X.—At her sister's home Harriet helps to bring her small nephew safely through an attack of diphtheria. Linda cordially approves Harriet's stand on the question of marriage with a divorced man. David Davenport, Linda's brother-in-law, warmly presses his suit, and Harriet has about made up her mind to accept him when Richard Carter appears with the announcement that Isabelle is dead and no obstacle to his marriage with Harriet remains. The girl yields, and the marriage is quietly solemnized. Harriet offers to tell Richard the circumstances of her entanglement with Blondin, but he refuses to listen.

CHAPTER XI. — The news of their mother's death, shocking to Ward and Nina, is softened by Harriet's comforting. The three take a trip to Bermuda, and on their return Richard Carter realizes that he is deeply in love with Harriet, though their marriage has simply been one of convenience.

CHAPTER XII.—Formal announcement of the wedding is made, and Madame Carter somewhat grudgingly welcomes her new daughter-in-law. Harriet's close friends, however, many of them prominent in society circles, willingly accord her a place, and extend sincere congratulations to Richard.

"You see, you're only seventeen, Nina," Harriet said, "the age when most girls are still in the schoolroom, long before they have affairs! Well, you're not interested in college, so that ought to give you three or four clear years of girlhood. You're bound to have other affairs, you've proved that! You go to South America—perhaps there is some interesting man on the steamer; you go to Canada—to California; the world is yours. Now, Royal is different. He is an experienced man of af-

"You Aren't His Match, Now, Nina. In a Few Years You May Be."

fairs; he will always have an attraction for women, and they for him. You aren't his match, now, Nina. In a few years you may be—"

"I'm not jealous!" Nina said, proudly. But Harriet smiled.

"Yes, you are jealous. You wouldn't be a real true woman if you weren't!" she accused. A reluctant dimple tugged at Nina's pouting mouth. She did not dislike the idea of potential despotism, of the traveled, experienced woman of the world, confident of her charm.

"If I offered a check to Royal, do you suppose he'd accept it?" she remarked, after dark musing. She was sitting on the edge of her bed now, and Harriet was brushing her hair.

"If you really are worried about his business affairs, Nina, why not try it?" Harriet suggested, sensibly. To this Nina returned a pouting:

"I'm perfectly willing to try it!" And as a great concession she added, with a sigh: "And I'll tell him what Father thinks!"

"Now you're talking like a woman who has herself well in hand!" Harriet said, approvingly. "When are you to see him?"

"He's coming over especially to see Father tomorrow," Nina said. "I suppose I might as well go down," she added, eyeing herself gloomily in her mirror, "for Ward and that boy seem absolutely at a loss for amusement!"

"And I'll be down presently," Harriet said. But when Nina was gone she walked slowly to her own dressing table, and sat down, and regarded herself steadily, and with heavy eyes. Unexpectedly, here between the family dinner and the early going to bed, on a June evening, a crisis in her life was confronting her, and she knew that she must meet it.

Ward's guest was only the young Saunders boy, who had been with them constantly last summer, and who was of absolutely no significance in their lives. And yet Harriet had been introduced to him all over again as "Mrs. Carter"—there was no halfway, in the eyes of the world at least, in this relationship of hers with Richard, and she must begin to take her place in the family.

"Mrs. Carter!" Harriet loved that distinction as if the title, the signature, and the dignity had never been vouchsafed to womankind before. She had marveled at her old self, that had taken "Miss" and "Mrs." with cheerful indifference—why, there was a world-wide chasm between the two! Just to have this silly Saunders boy call her Mrs. Carter, as a matter of course, was to receive the accolade that gave her all her longed-for dreams in one. It was the name of the man she loved, and, even though in a shadowy and unloved way, she liked the title that made her his.

And now she owed him the truth, the whole, painful, humiliating story. If she had told him months ago, so much the better and braver woman she! She had not done so; she had been fighting Nina and his mother then; she had been afraid. But she was not afraid now; he could forgive that long-ago girl of seventeen because her advocate was the woman of twenty-eight, the finished, cultivated, capable woman who had served him and his house, who must win his respect back because she loved him with every fiber of her being.

The words in which she would tell him came to her in a rush. Why—it was nothing! It was less than nothing. In half an hour she would be back here in her room again, with all the past clean and straight at last, with the cloud gone, and with her whole soul singing with hope of the glorious future. For a moment she knelt by her bed, her face in her hands.

She rose to her feet. There was a tap at the door.

It was Bottomley. "If you please, 'm—Mr. Carter would be so much obliged if you would step down to the library, 'm." Harriet gave herself a parting glance, and followed the man downstairs.

"Courage!" she said to herself, with her hand on the library door. "I've exaggerated and enlarged upon this thing too long! I've imagined it into an importance that it really hasn't at all!"

Richard was back at his desk; he smiled and rose as she came in. There was another man in the library, who rose and faced her, too.

And when Harriet saw him she knew that she was too late. It was Royal Blondin.

A dizziness and sickness came over her as she went slowly to the chair opposite Richard. She touched the desk for support as she sat down, and felt that her fingers were cold and wet.

"Mr. Blondin has come to talk to me about Nina," Richard said. Harriet somehow moved her dizzy eyes toward Blondin, and she smiled mechanically. But she had to moisten her lips before she could speak.

"I see!" Her voice sounded horribly choked to her; she could find nothing to add to the meaningless words.

"Mr. Blondin asks my consent to an immediate marriage," Richard said. "You know my objections to that, Harriet, of course! We have just been discussing them, as I explained to him. This is a painful matter to me, and I regret it. But Mr. Blondin has given me no choice but to tell him frankly why I think him an unsuitable husband for my daughter. I have told him exactly what my procedure will be in such a case, and I think we understand each other!"

Royal was smiling the serene, dreamy smile that characterized of him.

"Nina," he said, tenderly, "is warm-hearted. And a chance allusion to my financial position, which I thought I owed her, has distressed her unnecessarily. It will, truly, be out of the question for me to travel, as we had planned. The unfortunate speculations of my friend—"

"Whose name you withhold," Richard interrupted the musical voice to say, dryly.

"Because of a promise!" Royal flashed promptly. "But," he resumed, turning to Harriet, "I shall be able to negotiate this business, as I assure Mr. Carter, without any assistance from him or his daughter," his lip curled scornfully, "and I do not propose to give her up for any three years—or three weeks!"

Harriet could only look at him fixedly, with an ashen face.

"God help me," she breathed in her soul. "God help me!"

"Well," said Richard with weary impatience, "we did not call you down to bore you with this! I asked to see you, Harriet, because Mr. Blondin has made the statement to me, just now, that you were heartily in accord with his plans for Nina and that you approved of the affair!"

The prayer in Harriet's heart did not stop as she moved her wretched eyes to Blondin.

"I believed that you and she had not seen each other since December," she reminded him. "I lost no chance to advise her against the engagement! I thought it was all over!"

"Well!" Richard said, with a breath of relief. He had been watching her closely, now he settled back in his chair and moved his contemptuous scrutiny to Blondin.

"One moment!" Royal Blondin said, gently. But he was also pale. "You

"Ask Her—She'll Tell You! Ask Her!"

believe that I would make Nina a good husband, don't you?" he asked Harriet directly and quietly.

She was not looking at him. Her eyes were on Richard Carter.

"I believe you would ruin her life!" she said, deliberately.

"Thank you," Richard said. "I think that is all, Mr. Blondin. I was aware that you had—misunderstood Mrs. Carter when you made that statement!"

"Not quite all," Blondin persisted. "You believe that Nina would be wiser not to marry me?" he asked Harriet.

"You—" She cleared her throat. "You know that I think so!" she said.

Blondin laughed.

"And now, Mr. Blondin, you will kindly leave my house!" said Richard.

The other man was watching Harriet, with a menace in his narrowed eyes. White lines had drawn themselves about his tightly closed lips, yet he was smiling. He had lost the game, truly, but she knew he would play his last card, just the same. The suavity, the calm of years fell from him, and his voice deepened into a sort of cold and quiet fury as he said:

"One moment, Mr. Carter. Why don't you ask your wife what makes her think I won't make Nina a good husband? Why don't you ask her if she has been hiding something from you all this time? Why don't you ask her if she herself wasn't madly in love—and with me!—when she was Nina's age, and whether she was married in my studio, to me, ten years ago—!"

He had shot the phrases at her with a distinctness almost violent. Now his dry voice stopped, but his swift, venomous look went from the silent man at the desk to the silent woman who stood before him. Before either moved or spoke he spoke again.

"Ask her—she'll tell you! Ask her!"

"Be quiet!" Richard said. "I don't believe one word of it!" And then as the girl neither raised her eyes nor attempted to speak, he asked her, encouragingly and quickly: "Harriet, will you tell him that not one word of that is true?"

Harriet had risen, and was standing at the back of the carved black chair with both her hands resting upon it. She had looked quietly at Blondin, when he began to speak, and the beautiful white breast that her black evening gown left bare had risen once or twice on a swift impulse to interrupt him. But now she was looking down at her laced fingers, with something despairing and helpless in the droop of her bright head and lowered lashes.

It had had its times of seeming frightful to her, this secret, in the troubled musings of the past year. But it had never loomed so horrible and so momentous as now, in the silent library, with the eyes of the man she loved fixed anxiously upon her. He had trusted, he was beginning to admire her, and like his wife and his daughter and his mother, she had failed him.

"Harriet?" he said in quick uneasiness. She raised her head now, and looked at him with weary eyes devoid of any expression except bewilderment and pain.

"Yes," she said, simply. "That is all—quite true. It sounds—" she hesitated, and groped for words—"it sounds — as if—" she began and stopped again. "But it is all quite true!" she finished, in the troubled tone of a child who is misunderstood.

CHAPTER XIV.

The curtains at the French windows in the library at Crownlands stirred in the breeze of the warm summer night, the pendulum of the big clock behind Richard Carter moved to and fro, but for a long time there was no other sound in the library. Richard had dropped his eyes, was idly staring at the blank sheet of paper before him. Royal Blondin, who had folded his arms, for a moment studied Harriet between half-closed lids, but presently his eyes fell, too, and with a rather troubled expression he studied the pattern of the great oriental rug.

Harriet stood motionless, turned to stone. If there was anything to be said in her behalf, she could not say it now. For the first time the full measure of her responsibility and the full measure of her deceit smote her, and in utter sickness of spirit she could advance no excuse. It was not that she had failed Blondin, or that she had failed Richard, but the extent of her failure toward herself appalled her. She was not the good, brave, cultivated woman she had liked to think herself; she was one more egotist, with Nina, and Isabelle, and Ida, unscrupulously playing her own game for her own ends.

"I'm extremely sorry," Richard said, presently, in a somewhat lifeless tone. "I imagine that if my daughter had known this, she might have been spared some suffering and some humiliation. But we needn't consider that now." He was silent, frowning faintly. He put up a fine hand and adjusted his eyeglasses with a little impatient muscular twitching of his whole face that Harriet knew to be characteristic of his worried moods. "Mr. Blondin," he said, wearily and politely, "I have had a great deal on my mind, lately, and have perhaps been hasty in my condemnation of you. However, this does not particularly help your cause with my daughter. There are a great many aspects to the matter, and I—I must take time to consider them. Nina must be my first consideration, poor child! Her mother failed her—we have all failed her! She has a right to know of this conversation—"

Harriet stirred, and his eyes moved to her. Without a word, and with a stricken look in her beautiful, ashen face, she turned, and went slowly toward the door. When she reached it, she steadied herself a second by pressing one fine hand against the dark wood, then she opened it and was gone.

"I'm very sorry—" Blondin said hesitatingly, when the men were alone.

"Mrs. Carter," Richard said, getting to his feet, and very definitely indicating an end to the conversation, "before she consented to the—arrangement into which we entered, of course took me into her confidence in this matter!"

"She—she did?" Royal stammered.

"Certainly she did," Richard said, harshly. And looking at him the other man saw that his face looked haggard and colorless. "She did not mention your name, I presume out of a sense of generosity to you. I could have wished," he added, "that you had been similarly generous, and had seen fit to leave her, and leave my daughter alone. I think I must ask you to excuse me," said Richard at the door. His tone was one of absolute suffocation. "I can see no object in your frankness tonight, unless to distress and humiliate Mrs. Carter. My daughter, and not myself, is the one entitled to your confidence, and you are well aware of my feeling where she is concerned! I would to God," said Richard, with bitterness, "that I had never seen your face! Mrs. Carter has been a useful—and indispensable!—member of this family for many years; if there was in her past some unpleasant and painful event, that is her own affair—!"

"Not when she marries a man who is unaware of it," Blondin suggested, in his pleasant, soft tones.

"That is mine!" Richard said, sternly. And he opened the library door. "Good evening!" he said.

"Good evening!" Blondin, with his light, loitering step, crossed the threshold, and Richard closed the door. He took his chair again and reached toward the bell that would have brought Bottomley to summon Nina in turn. But halfway to the bell his resolution wavered, disappeared. Instead, he rested his elbows on the table, and his head in his hands, and there sounded from his chest a great sigh that was almost a groan.

Oh, he was tired—he was tired—he was tired! It was all a mess—the boy, the girl, their mother, his own arrangements for their protection and safety. All a mess.

She had been beautiful, that girl, with her golden hair in the lamplight, and her white arms a little raised to rest her locked hands on the chair. Like some superb actress of tragedy, some splendid and sullen prisoner at the bar. The slender figure in the dull wrapping of satin, and the white bosom, had looked so young, so virginal, the blue eyes were so honestly frightened and ashamed. And she had been that bounder's wife—in his arms! Divorced! Harriet Field? Poor girl, cornered by this unscrupulous scoundrel, this bully, with all the ugly past dragged up like the muddy bottom of a river, staining and clouding the clear waters. And what a look she had given him, there under the lamp!

"It's a funny code," he mused. "Barbarians, that's what we are, when it comes to women. Nina, Ida, Isabelle, Harriet—all of them pay for the man-made rule! I shouldn't have forced her hand in this business marriage; it was taking an advantage of her. No woman wants to marry for anything but love, and if she had married for love, she would have made a clean breast of this old affair, of course. I didn't exact that. We've made a nice mess of it, all around!

"I mustn't let her work herself into a fever over all this!" he found himself thinking.

But Nina must be the first consideration. He must plan for Nina. He brought his thoughts back resolutely—his daughter must break her engagement now, there was that much gained. And for the journey to Rio—

"But why didn't she tell me!" he interrupted himself, suddenly. The reference was not to Nina. Again he saw the superb white shoulders in the sort flood of lamplight, and the flash of the blue eyes that turned toward Blondin.

"She could have killed him!" Richard said. "My God! how she will love when she does love!"

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Meanwhile, to Harriet had come the bitterest hour of her life. She had reached a crossroads, and with steady fingers and an anguished heart she prepared for the only step that to her whirling brain and shamed soul seemed possible. She must disappear. There was no alternative.

She had harmed them all, they could only think of her now as an unscrupulous and mischievous woman who had by chance entered their lives when they were all in desperate need of wisdom and guidance, who had played her own contemptible game, and added one more hurt to the hurt reputation of the house of Carter.

Harriet got out of her evening gown and into a loose wrapper. She went about somewhat aimlessly, yet the suitcases, spread open on the bed, were gradually filled, and her personal possessions gradually disappeared from tables and walls. Now and then she stopped short, heartsick and trembling; once her lips quivered and her eyes filled, but for the most part she did not pause.

Nina, at about eleven, had come to the door between their rooms, and opened it. The girl was undressed, and for a few moments she watched Harriet scowlingly, with narrowed eyes.

"Are you going away?" she said, presently. Harriet brought heavy eyes to meet hers, and stood considering a minute, as if bringing her thoughts back a long distance.

"I—going away? Yes," she said, slowly. "Yes, I may."

Nina stood watching, which seemed vaguely to trouble Harriet, who gave her a restless glance now and then as she went to and fro. Presently she spoke to Nina again.

"Good-night, Nina!"

"Good-night!" snapped Nina, and the door slammed.

Harriet continued to move about for perhaps half an hour before Nina's odd manner recurred to her, on a wave of memory, and she seemed to hear again Nina's ungracious tone.

"He told her!" she said, suddenly. "She saw Royal, and he told her! Poor child—"

And she went to Nina's room, with a vague idea that she would sit beside the weeping girl for awhile, one heavy heart close to the other, even if no words could pass between them.

But Nina lay sleeping peacefully, and Harriet, after watching her for a few minutes, went back to her own room. She went to the open window, and stood staring absently out at the dark summer night, the great branches of the trees moving in the restless wind, and the oblong of dull light that still fell from the library window.

She could not see the horror as Richard saw it; she could not see herself as only a mistaken woman, a woman with youth, beauty, and intelligence pleading for her, one problem more in his life, it is true, but only one among many, and not the greatest. She did not see him as he saw himself, his family as the somewhat troublesome, and yet quite understandable, group of selfish human beings in whose perplexities he had always played the part of arbiter.

To Harriet the thing loomed momentous, unforgiving, incalculable. It assumed to her the proportions of a murder. Richard, in her estimation, was not what he thought himself, a somewhat ordinary man in the forties whose life had already held poverty and disillusionment and wholesome disappointment, whose nature had been tempered to humor and generosity and philosophy; to Harriet, he was the richest, the finest, the most deserving of men, and she the adventuress who had brought his name down to shame and dishonor.

Until two o'clock she was wretchedly busy in soul and body. When the last of her personal possessions was packed, and when she was aching from head to foot, she took a hot bath, and crept into bed.

But not to sleep. The feverish agonies of shame and reproach held her. She was pleading with Richard, she was talking to Nina—she was making little of it—making much of it—she was saying a reluctant "yes—yes—yes!" to their questioning.

At four o'clock she dressed herself again, half-mad with headache and fatigue, and went out into a world that was just beginning to brighten into faint shapes and colors.

A steamer moved majestically up the river, the smoothly widening wake spread from shore to shore; pink light showed at one cabin window; and into Harriet's somber thoughts came unbidden the picture of a yawning cook, stumbling about amid his soot-blackened pots and pans.

With the morning, the peace of a conquered spirit fell upon her. She had thought it all to an ending at last. It seemed to Harriet that never in her life had she thought so clearly, so truly, so bravely. Her duty to Richard, to his children, to Linda; she had faced them without fear and without deception, tasting the humiliating truth to its bitter dregs, planning the few short interviews that must precede her leaving them all forever.

For Harriet emerged from the furnace the mistress of her own soul. She had been wrong; she had been weak; she had been contemptible, but not so wrong or weak or contemptible as they would think her. She would go on her way now, the braver for the lesson and the shame. And what they thought of her must never shake again her own knowledge of her own innocence.

Go on her way to what? She did not know. But she neither feared what the future might hold nor doubted it. She could make her own way from a new beginning. "But before I go," said Harriet, resolutely, "I must tell him that I'm sorry. And I must ask Nina to forgive me."

She turned, and buried her face in the thick, soft sleeve of her coat. But she did not cry long, and when Jensen, the boatman, came out on the dock at seven, the lady he knew to be his new mistress was sitting composedly enough on her bench, studying the now glittering and sparkling river with quiet eyes.

Harriet nodded to him, and rose somewhat stiffly, to go up to the house. She mounted the brick steps with a thoughtfully dropped head — the straight shafts of the sunlight were

"Where Have You Been?" Said Richard, Sharply, Then, "You Look Ill!"

making it impossible to face the house, in any case—and so was within three feet of Richard Carter before she saw him.

He looked fresh, hard, even young, in his white flannels. They stood looking at each other for a moment without speaking.

"Where have you been?" said Richard, sharply, then, "You look ill!"

Tears, despite her desperate resolution, suddenly stung Harriet's eyes. And yet her heart leaped with hope.

"I wanted to see you, Mr. Carter," she faltered. "I couldn't sleep very well. I've been down at the shore. But later—any time will do!"

"You couldn't sleep!" he exclaimed with quick sympathy. He looked from her about him, as if for a shelter for her emotion. "Here," he said, "come down the steps a bit. I was going down to the court for a little tennis; Ward may follow me, but he won't be dressed for half an hour yet. Sit down here; we can talk."

They had come to the marble bench on the terrace, where Isabelle and Anthony Pope, sheltered by these same towering trees and low brick walls, had had their talk a year ago. Harriet, to her own consternation, felt that she was in danger of tears.

"I—I hardly know how to say it," she began. "But—but you know how ashamed I am!"

"I know—I know how you feel!" Richard said with a sort of brief sympathy. "I'm sorry! But you know you mustn't take this all too hard. I didn't—I was thinking of this last night; I didn't ask you for—well, any more than you gave me, in this marriage of ours. Your divorce was your own affair—"

The girl's tired eyes flashed.

"There was no divorce!" she said, quickly.

"No divorce?" he echoed with a puzzled frown.

"I want to tell you about it!" she said. But the tears would come again. "I'm tired!" Harriet said, childishly, trying to smile. "I've been up—walking. I couldn't sleep!"

The consciousness that he had been able to forget the whole tangle, and sleep soundly, gave Richard's voice a little compunction as he said:

"You don't have to tell me now. We'll find a way out of it that is easy for every one—"

"No, but let me talk!" Harriet, in her eagerness, laid her fingers on his wrist, and he was shocked to feel that they were icy cold. "I want to tell you the whole thing—I want you to understand!" she said, eagerly. Richard looked at her in some anxiety; there was no acting here. The rich hair was pushed carelessly from the troubled forehead. She was huddled in the enveloping coat, a different figure indeed from his memory of the superb and angry girl of last night in the library lamplight.

"Mr. Carter, I never knew my mother—" she began. But he interrupted her.

"My dear," he said, in a tone he might have used to Nina. He laid his warm, fine hand on hers, and patted it soothingly. "My dear girl, if you feel that you would like to go to that motherly sister of yours—if you feel that it would be wiser—"

"Oh, I am going to Linda at once!" Harriet said, feverishly, hurt to the soul. "I had planned that! But—but won't you let me tell you?" she pleaded. She had framed the sentences a hundred times in the long night; they failed her utterly now, and she groped for words. "I was only three years old when my mother died," she said. "Of course I don't remember her—I only remember Linda. I was shy, my father was a professor, we were too poor to have very much social life. I lived in books, lived in my father's shabby little study really; I never had an intimate girl friend! Linda was always good—angelically good—talking of the Armenian sufferers, and of the outrages in the Congo, and of the poor in New York's lower East side—she never cared that we were poor, and that we hadn't clothes!"

"I know—I know!" Richard's eyes were smiling, as if he knew the picture, and liked it.

"Well, Linda married when I was ten, and Josephine came, and then Julia came. I still lived for books and babies. But, unlike Linda, I cared." Harriet's whole face glowed; she looked off into space, and her voice had a longing note. "I cared for clothes and good times!" she said. "I adored the children, but I dreamed of carriages—maids—glory—achievements! I knew that other women did it—"

"I remember feeling that way!" Richard commented, mildly, as she paused.

"Well," Harriet said, "I met Royal Blondin one night. He lived in our town—Watertown. He had a dreadful, artificial sort of mother. My sister didn't approve of her at all. A friend of his named Street was an artist, and he had a nice little wife, and a baby, and they lived in a big, barnlike sort of studio. It seemed wonderful to me. They loved each other, and their baby, but they were so free! They would have the whole crowd to dinner, twenty of us, bread and red wine and macaroni and music and talk; it was wonderful—or I thought so! It was so different from Linda's ideas, of frosted layer-cake, and chopped nuts, and Five Hundred. I loved the studio, and they—they all loved me, and he—Royal—loved me especially. He used to talk about Yogi philosophy and Oriental religions and poetry, and after awhile it was understood among them all that he loved me, and I him. And we were engaged. Of course Linda suspected, and there was opposition at home, but in the studio, helping the Streets get their suppers, it seemed so right—so simple! Royal said he did not believe in the orthodox ceremony of marriage. He argued that no one could live up to its promises, and I believed him. Miriam Street, the artist's wife, was a poet, and she wrote the ceremony by which we were married. We had a big supper, and they were all there, and this poem—this marriage poem—was beautiful. It was published in a magazine, afterward, and called 'A Marriage for True

"I Remember Feeling That Way!" Richard Commented, Mildly, as She Paused.

Lovers.' It had a part for the woman to say, and a part for the man, and Royal and I said those, and then it had a part for the woman's friend, and the man's friend, and for all their friends. And then there was a promise that when love failed on either side, the two were free, to keep the memory of the perfect love unstained by the ugly years."

She paused; Richard did not speak. She had told him this much in a simple, childish voice, a voice that was an echo of that old time, he knew. Presently she went on:

"There was music, and then they all kissed me, and we had supper, and they drank our health. I went back that night to my sister's; Royal stayed with his mother. We planned to go away on our honeymoon the next day. I did not tell Linda and Fred that I considered myself married. I knew they would not understand and would try to interfere.

(To be continued.)

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