HARRIET *and the* PIPER

By KATHLEEN NORRIS

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"PLEASE!"

Synopsis—Harriet Field, twenty-eight, pretty, and beautiful, is the social secretary of the distributor Mrs. Isabelle Carter, of "Crowlands." Richard Carter's wife died when he was a young man—and Miss Carter Ward, twenty-four years old and imperious, devotes herself to the task of his mother's aristocratic ancestry. Richard Carter is the only son of young Anthony Pope, and the youth in taking is very seriously. Pleading over the "Crowlands" summer afternoon, Harriet is proposed to by Richard Carter, who is a junior. Young Blondin Ward, at a tea party in the city, Blondin makes himself agreeable to Nina, and leaves a deep impression. Richard Carter's attitude toward Harriet's opinions over the appearance of Blondin at "Crowlands" is explained by the fact that they had been a disturbing element in the life of the Carter family for some time. Nina is a spoiled and wayward adventurer, living on the gullibility of the rich. He finally persuades Harriet his intention is honorable, and she accepts the engagement of the wealthy Richard Carter. He is a highly desirable "catch," and Harriet is very much in love with him in a sense. In his power, and after pleading with Richard, Harriet achieves control of Nina's future period of neutrality. Harriet visits her family in Connecticut, and is charmed with those who had had contact with during her unfortunate association with Blondin. Nina tells her of all his exasperations. The two women, Harriet and Nina, are the guests of the club, over the future will approximate.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

"So did I!" Harriet said, simply. "Our meeting was entirely accidental. He had no idea of finding me; was as surprised as I was." She stopped abruptly, musing on some subject quite thought. "You wouldn't know him. Little. He is a perfect dynamo. New thought, and poetry, and the occult, and Theosophy and the Russian ballet, and The Russian music; he lectures about them and he has books extremely successful! He wants poetry and red rose and kiss his lady love long, and—well, you never saw women are so wild about him—and his body! He's having dinner with the Christies tonight. I'm thinking that I could only ejaculate an amused:

"Bored Blondin!" And as Harriet merely nodded, in the gloom she added, vigorously, "Why, he isn't a penny! He was always an idiot—he didn't have enough to eat, years ago!"

"Well, he has enough to eat now," Ward told me that he gets three hundred dollars for each of his magazine talks—his 'interpretive musings,' he called them."

"Well, that's Mr. Davenport was still dazed with the shock of Nina's digression. "That realm—" she began, and stopped. "Well, I don't know what being in my life now, nor more than I do in the Sahara, but I'm sorry for the sort of mental minding of our own Blondin."

Then God!" Mrs. Davenport said, fervently, "what a mercy it is that he doesn't still feel—he won't marry Nina, and he won't marry you, and I'm very glad, Harriet's laugh had an undertone.

"He is after bigger game than I am, now," she said.

"Mother Christie once commented on it whimsically. 'I'll be content if she'll only get Richard,' she said.

"All right!" Harriet echoed, lightly. "If Richard doesn't want me, I don't know I love him! All that thing about his hands and eyes and voice—why, twenty—every that I have combed in Nina's life, and I'm sick of it! I was busy and unsatisfied—I loved—but my self-respect!"

And suddenly the bright head was on Linda's lap, and she was sobbing bitterly. Linda, with a great ache in her heart, stroked the bent head, and finding no other way to comfort, she had stroked them a hundred times after the storm had passed.

CHAPTER V.

Harriet slept in the room with Polly and Josephine that night, or rather lowest said she slept, for it was not about two o'clock the wind stopped moaning in the trees, and the first prophetic of rain, and Harriet, wondering about it, was suddenly unconscious. Linda, on the same cot, was sleeping, too, and the next thing she knew, Josephine was over the girl pleased at her discovery, but she could show how. She stuck her head under Harriet's arm, and Linda's alarm clock, hastily snatched, finished the business, and the three girls rose with cheerful color to the accompaniment of bustling activity.

Immediately after breakfast the two small girls started their household duty morning's work with a pink-nosed viper and returned to their places were Fred had hunted away after his hasty meal; the boys were already busy in the backyard, while Pip was expected to mow while he was waiting for his brother.

Harriet's heart ached deeply for them all as she watched the Jersey members from the car window a few hours later. Josephine was to be a boarding school, and little Polly had been accepted an angelic ambition to teach a kindergarten class some day. Nina, at their ages, had her poor, her finishing school, her little silk stockings and her monogrammed ivory toilet set, her trip to England and France and Italy with mother and Aunt Isabelle and grandmother—and now!

Suppose that she, Harriet, was right in suspecting that Ward's feelings was more than the passing gallantry of a light-hearted lion? It would be a one-day wonder, his marriage at twenty-two with his mother's secretary, more than four years his senior. But after that? Harriet knew that they would be nothing to say or do. Young Mr. and Mrs. Ward Carter would establish themselves comfortably, and the elder Carters would visit them. Isabelle absorbed as usual in her own mysterious thoughts, and Richard Carter—

Harriet's thoughts, none too comfortable up to this point, stopped here, and she flushed. She would not object telling Richard that she was to marry his son. Those long eyes would read her through and through, and while Richard Carter might respect her, and see her beauty and charm with all the enthusiasm of a lover, Harriet knew well she must begin an actual campaign for his approval on her wedding day. The promise had an unexpected piquancy. She had little fear of its outcome. She would make Ward Carter a wife for whom his father cannot come to feel genuine gratitude and devotion. There would be fine dress, there would be hospitality and parties and a garden. And Ward should seriously settle down to his business, whatever it might be, and show himself a worthy son of his clever father.

"Why not—why not?" Harriet asked herself aloud as she reached Madame Carter's pretentious apartment house, and was shown upstairs. She was to meet Nina here, and she glanced about her for the high promise of the curb, as an indication that the old lady might be ready to accompany them back to Crowlands. But there was no car in sight. "Could" the maid's first statement was that Miss Carter had gone home with Mrs. Davenport, and that Madame Carter was magnificently into the room.

"Where is Nina? Has she come?" the old lady. Harriet could see that she was pleased about something.

"Gone home with Harriet?" Madame Carter said, delighted. Madame Carter shook hands with her; there was conclusion expectancy in the little embrace. She sank into a chair, and Harriet sat down.

"Ward and his friend, this Mr. Blondin," Madame Carter said, "were very interesting—a most unusual man. A very good family, too—excellent old family, too. Nina assured us that she had met him at your house, and that Ward his innocent instrument, and this Mr. Blondin came last night—not entirely successful! He wants to be famous and red rose and kiss his lady love long, and—well, you never saw women are so wild about him—and his body! He's having dinner with the Christies tonight. I'm thinking that I could only ejaculate an amused:

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then. Oh, Miss Field!" he called after Harriet's discreetly retreating back, "I've been thinking about that Nina theory; I'll run you home in half the time the train takes. I'm playing for the tennis finals, Mother—"

"Not this morning for just a nod and smile, heard no more. But as she entered the lift, the girl said to herself with a passionate sort of gratitude: "Thank God, I'm free!" She only knew one and unselfish and kind-hearted one in the whole world.

She went down to the street, and walked briskly toward the car. The air was drifting himself today. With a great sense of comfort and relaxation Harriet got into it, and was comfortably conscious of its smooth, easy swing, when Richard came down. He smiled at her, and then her got into the car