The THIRTEENTH COMMANDMENT

by

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DAPHNE GETS THE BIG CHANCE THAT SHE HAS BEEN PRAYING FOR AND AT THE SAME TIME HAS FEARED.

Synopsis.—Clay Wimburn, a young New Yorker on a visit to Cleveland, meets pretty Daphne Kip, whose brother is in the same office with Clay in Wall street. After a whirlwind courtship they become engaged. Daphne goes to New York with her mother to buy her trousseau. Daphne's brother, Bayard, has just married and left for Europe with his bride, Leila. Daphne and her mother install themselves in Bayard's flat. Daphne meets Tom Duane, man-about-town, who seems greatly attracted to her. Daphne accidentally discovers that Clay is penniless, except for his salary. Baynard and his wife return to New York unexpectedly. The three women set out on a shopping excursion and the two younger women buy expensive gowns, having them charged to Bayard. Bayard is furious over the expense, seeing hard times ahead. Daphne, indignant, declares she will earn her own living and breaks her engagement with Clay. Through an introduction by Duane, Daphne induces Reben, a theatrical magnate, to give her a position in one of his companies. Her first rehearsal is a fiasco, but Reben, at Duane's request, gives her another chance.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

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"Well, I never!" he gasped. "And all this trip of your mother's and yours and all the expenses gone for nothing?" was his first doleful thought. He remembered the second mortgage he had placed on one of his properties to get the money for the vitally important wedding festival. And now there was to be no wedding. The son-in-law who was to have assumed the burden of Daphne's bills was banished. Daphne was again her father's own child.

He was glad to have her back, but he could have wished that she had not gone away, since he paid the freight in both directions. And now here was himself in New York and nothing to show for all the spilt milk of time, money and emotions.

At the critical moment Daphne mentioned that the star whose understudy she was would earn fifty thousand dollars that year in spite of the hard times. "Fifty thousand dollars" had a musical sound to Wesley's ears. If Daphne could earn a tenth of that he would believe in miracles.

"Where were you planning to live, honey, while you're acting? With Bayard, I suppose."

"Oh, no," said Daphne; "we've ruined his honeymoon enough already."

"Who with, then?"

"Oh, by myself, I suppose."

"Good Lord! you couldn't do that very well—a young girl like you."

"Why not?" she said.

He turned pale. This was like being asked why babies were found under cabbage leaves. He was an old-fashioned father, and he had never been able to rise to the new school of discussing vitally important topics with the children vitally interested.

"Why, why," he stammered, "why, because nobody does it, honey. Nice girls don't live alone."

Daphne studied him with a tender amusement. He was so innocent in his way, in spite of all he must know. She understood what he was thinking of. She was sophisticated in the manner of the nice girl of her time and she liked to treat submerged themes with clean candor. She thought that prudery was a form of slavery.

"If you've just got to stay in New York and just got to work your mother could stay with you, I suppose."

"But what becomes of you and your home?"

"Oh, I'll get along somehow. I don't matter."

This broke her heart. She cried out: "But you do matter, daddy; you matter terribly. Can't you understand, daddy, that I'm trying to relieve you and make myself useful instead of a parasite? Thousands of women live alone—professional women, art students, music students, college girls, normal-school women, besides the women in shops and factories. It's coming more and more."

"But you're not brought up to a trade."

"I wish I had been."

"Well, that's a new complaint, anyway, but — well — of course you wouldn't do anything wrong; but if you lived alone you'd be misjudged, and men would keep throwing temptation in your way."

"I had plenty of that when I was living at home."

"Daphne!" He cried out in pain at the very thought.

She went on, educating him with a vengeance: "Plenty of temptation and plenty of opportunity, daddy. It wasn't your fault. You gave me all the protection that anybody could, daddy. But you can't protect people all the time. And it was when you trusted me most that you protected me most. People are just beginning to realize that even in penitentiaries the higher the walls and the stricter the guards the more prisoners try to escape. They're sending convicts out to work on roads now with no guards at all. And they do their work and come back. Don't you think women can be trusted as far as convicts?"

"I suppose so," he sighed. But he was convinced of the security of neither the convicts nor of the women under these new anarchies. He was convinced of only one thing, and that was his helplessness.

Daphne took him home in a taxicab. At the apartment they caught Bayard just rushing for his office. He greeted his father with whirlwind affection, but he knew that he would please Wesley better by hurrying on to his office than by neglecting his business for the purpose of entertainment.

Wesley took Leila by storm with his lavish and whole-hearted praise. He had not seen her before. He gathered her to his breast, then held her out at arm's length to praise her and to praise Bayard for bringing her into the family.

Mrs. Kip did not delay long the assault on Daphne's position. But Wesley said:

"We've had a long talk and I guess she's pretty set in her way. She's a good girl, though, mamma. And she knows her own mind better than we do. Anyways, it's her own mind. Let her have her way and if anything goes wrong she can always come back home."

His wife boiled over. It made her feel as much at home as an old kettle on a stove to have her husband there to boil over on: "Wesley Kip, are you going to set there and encourage that girl to ruin her life and her reputation without doing anything to protect her?"

"Oh, I guess she's not going to ruin anything. After all, the best way to protect folks is to trust 'em."

It was bald plagiarism, but Daphne made no complaint. Wesley got into trouble at once, however, by making the suggestion that his wife remain as a companion for her child. Mrs. Kip took it as a sign that he wanted to get rid of her, and Daphne refused to take it at all.

Wesley sat pondering in silence for a while; then he rose and, mumbling, "Be back in a little while," took his hat and went out.

They wondered what mischief he was up to and what folly he would commit. He came back in half an hour with a smile of success.

"I guess it's all right. I been thinking about all the different things been said. We don't want Daphne living by herself and she don't feel like she ought to trespass on Leila's home; so I got an idea and went down and saw the janitor or superintendent or whatever he is, and I asked him mightn't it be there was somebody in this building wanted to rent a room to a nice girl. And he said there was a young couple felt the rent was a little high and had an extra room. So we went up and took a look at it. Right nice young woman, name of Chivvis or something like that; said she'd be glad to take my daughter in. I was thinking that if Daphne was up there she could see Bayard and Leila when she was lonesome or anything; and she'd be handy where they could keep an eye on her if she got sick or anything."

The three women looked at him in amazement. He had solved the riddle that baffled them all and had compromised the irreconcilables.

"I'll bet the place is a sight and the woman a freak," said Mrs. Kip. "Let's go have a look at her."

So all four went up in the elevator to the top floor. They were about to ring the bell of one of the big front apartments like Bayard's but Wesley checked them.

"It's in the back."

The women exchanged glances and smiles behind the important shoulder blades of Wesley, the manager. He rang a bell and a young woman opened the door. As Leila said afterward:

"She had the whole map of New England in her face, and her middle name was Boston."

But she was young, in a placid, Puritanical way, and she looked exceedingly clean and correct. Her very smile was neat, exactly adjusted between those of the gracious hostess and of the landlady.

Mrs. Chivvis led the way to the room that was for rent. It took Daphne at once. Spotlessness is the first luxury in a rented room and Puritan beauty has a grace all its own. The mahogany bed with its twisted posts, the excellent linen and the honesty of everything won her completely.

She felt a sense of relief from the rather gaudy beauty of Leila's apartment. She felt that Mrs. Chivvis, who showed such fine restraint in her furniture, would be equally discreet in minding her own affairs.

"I'll take it," she said; "that is, if you'll take me."

Mrs. Chivvis said she would. She said it with a New Englandish parsimony of enthusiasm, but her eyes were kindly and Daphne decided that she thought nice things but lacked the courage to say them.

Daphne moved at once into the Chivvis apartment what belongings she had brought on from Cleveland, and her mother promised to dispatch the rest of them as soon as she reached home.

Wesley could not be persuaded to stay over an unnecessary night. His business was in a perilous condition. The mammoth Cowper firm had gone into bankruptcy owing him a handsome sum of money which he was not likely to recover. The failure also closed an important and profitable market for his calculating machines. It frightened his banks as well, and he had wrestled like another Jacob with an almost invisible cashier for money enough to meet his pay roll.

Yet he slipped a large bill into Daphne's hand when he bade her goodby at the station late in the afternoon, and he whispered to her she should have other re-enforcements whenever she called on him.

Daphne reached the theater at seven o'clock and sat in the dark on a canvas rock, watching the stage hands gather and listening to their repartee.

Batterson arrived at length. He was in one of his humane moods. He asked Daphne if she had memorized her lines and she said she had. He told her that he would give her another rehearsal the next day after breakfast. "After breakfast," he explained, was one o'clock p. m.

Next morning Daphne presented herself to Batterson and endured one of his rehearsals, with his assistant reading all the cues in a lifeless voice. Batterson was more discouraged than she was. He showed it for a time by a patience that was of the sort one shows to a shy imbecile.

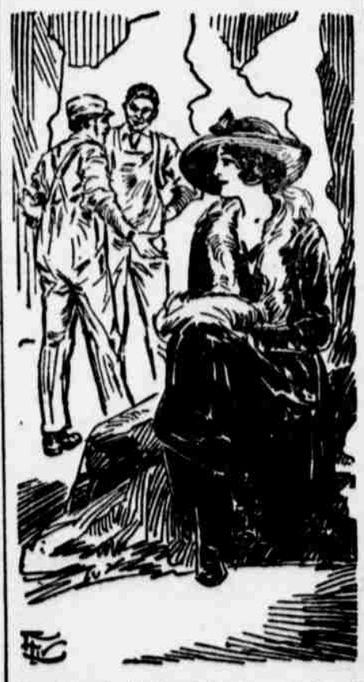
He was so restrained that Daphne broke out for him, "Do you think I am a complete idiot, Mr. Batterson?"

"Far from it, my dear," said Batterson. "You are a very intelligent young woman. The trouble is that you are too intelligent for the child's play of the stage. It's all a kind of big nursery and you can't forget that facts are not facts in this toy game. If you could let yourself go and be foolish and play doll house you might succeed. It's hard even when you know how. But it's impossible as long as you try to reason it out. It's like music and fiction and all the arts. You've got to pretend or you can't feel and you can't make anybody else feel."

And that, indeed, was Daphne's agony. She could not release her imagination or command her clear vision to see what was not there.

Night after night she reported at the theater and left it when the curtain rose. On one of these evenings Tom Duane met her outside the stage door. His apology was that he felt it his duty to look after his client.

He invited Daphne to ride home in his car, which was waiting at the curb. She declined with thanks. He urged



She Reached the Theater at Seven o'Clock and Sat in the Dark on a Canvas Rock Watching the Stage Hands Gather, and Listening to Their Repartee.

that she take a little spin in the park. She declined without thanks. He sighed that it was a pity to lose the moonlight.

She said she would get enough when she walked home. He asked if he might "toddle along." She could hardly refuse without crassly insulting him.

They loitered slowly up the quiet reach of Seventh avenue. He questioned her about her work with all the grateful flattery there is in an appetite for another's autobiography. She found it easy to tell him of her difficulties. He extracted encouragement or indirect compliment out of all of them.

When they arrived at her apartment house she said, "Sorry I can't ask you up, but I have no reception room, and I'm tired out."

"You have wasted enough of your time on me," he said. "I'll see you to the elevator."

As Daphne stepped into the hallway she found Clay Wimburn there, waiting grimly. He sprang to his feet with a gasp of relief. He caught sight of Duane and his joy died instantly.

Wimburn loved Daphne and wanted her for his own. He had counted her his own, and still had neither refunded the engagement ring nor paid for it. Daphne was more pleased with Wimburn's misery than with Duane's felicity.

"Won't you come up, Clay?" she asked.

He murmured, "Can we be alone for a little talk?"

"I'm afraid not. The Chivvises, you know."

"Will you take a little walk with me in the park?"

"All right," she said as she led the way out into the street. "I'm pretty tired, though. I walked home from the theater."

"With Duane!" Clay snarled. "You weren't too tired for that."

Daphne thought of the motor ride and the supper she had declined. She said, "Are you dragging me out here for the sake of a fight?"

"There'll be no fight if you'll cut out that man Duane."

"Am I to have no friends at all?"

"You can have all you want, provided—"

"Let me give you one little hint, Clay, for your own information. Every time this Mr. Duane that you're so afraid of meets me he does his best to help me get my chance and he tells me only pleasant things. Every time you've come to see me lately you've been either a sick cat or a roaring tiger."

She was planning to urge him to help her and make their meetings rosier. But, lover-like, he took umbrage and pain and despair from her advice, and since they were again at the vestibule he sighed, "Good night, Mrs. Duane," and flung out into the dark.

Daphne sighed, and the poor elevator man who saw so much of this sort of thing sighed with her and for her.

CHAPTER XII.

All this while Daphne was kept in readiness to take Miss Kemble's part in case the illness of her child should result in death and in the further case that she should be unable to finish her performances. With the theatrical season in such bad estate and most of Reben's companies and theaters losing money heavily, Sheila Kemble was his one certain dependence. He called her his breadwinner.

Miss Kemble's baby passed the crisis and recovered. And then the mother, worn out with the double strain, caught a little chill that became a blinding, choking cold. She went through the Saturday matinee in a whisper, but the night performance was beyond her.

And now at last Daphne's chance arrived. The Saturday night house was enormous in spite of the heat. There were enough people there to make fourteen hundred dollars—twenty-five hundred for the day.

Daphne, trudging to the theater for her usual stupid rebuff, walked into this crisis of her life.

Reben himself knocked at her dressing room door where Miss Winsor was helping her with her make-up. He implored her to be calm, and he was so tremulous that he stuttered. He told her that if she made good he would let her play the part till Miss Kemble got well. He would pay her a handsome bonus. He would put her out at the head of a number two company next season.

Batterson came at last and ordered him off the stage. Reben obeyed him. Then Batterson talked to her. He told her that there was no reason to fear the house. A Saturday night audience was always easy. It wanted its money's worth! It would help to get it.

"I see," said Daphne. "I'm not afraid of the audience."

"Then what on earth are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid of me!"

Batterson laughed scornfully. "Oh, you! You're going to score a knockout. You're going to make a big hit!"

"Yes," said Daphne, "so you've always told me."

The curtain rose. Miss Winsor and the young man skipped onto their job; the butler stalked; Eldon entered and made his exit. Mrs. Vining spread her skirts and sailed on, then Eldon went back. Finally Daphne's cue came.

She was startled a little as Batterson nudged her forward. She went to the door and opened it on her new career to make her public debut with the all-important "How d' you do?"

She saw before her the drawing room in a weird light. Beyond it was a fiercely radiant fog and beyond that an agglomeration of faces—the mass of tomato cans that she was not going to be afraid of.

And she was not afraid. She was curious to study them. She was eager to remember her lines. And she remembered them. Then cues came more or less far apart and each evoked from her mind the appropriate answer. She made never a slip, and yet she began to realize that Mr. Eldon seemed unhappy.

At length she realized that the audience was strangely quiet. A sense of vaulty emptiness oppressed her. She went on with her lines. She understood at last that she was getting no laughs. She was not provoking those punctuating roars that Sheila Kemble brought forth. The audience had evidently had a hard week.

She decided that she must be playing too quietly; she quickened her tempo and threw more vivacity into her manner. She moved briskly about the scene, to Eldon's bewilderment. He seemed unable to find her.

She went through to the bitter end and spoke every line. But the audience was not with her for a moment. She used all her intellect to find the secret of its pleasure, but she could not surprise it. She tried harder and harder, acted with the intense devotion of a wrestling bout, but she could not score a point.

The company looked worried and fagged. The audience would not rise to anything—humor, pathos, thrill. When the play was over everyone seemed to avoid her.

She rubbed off her make-up and resumed her mufti. As she walked out

"Go Home and Get Married."

on the darkened stage she saw Batterson. He tried to escape, but she checked him.

"Tell me frankly, Mr. Batterson, what was the matter with my performance tonight."

"Come to the office Monday and we'll have a little talk."

"And I'll get my notice."

"I didn't say that."

"What would you honestly advise me to do?"

"I understand that you don't have to act. Go home and get married."

"I won't."

"Then go home and don't get married."

"I won't go home."

"There's one other place to go. Good night."

He walked off and she was left alone. She had the stage to herself. She stood in the big void and felt alien—forever alien. She shook her head. This place was not for her. She had been tried in the balance and found wanting. She wondered if there were anywhere a balance that she could bring down.

She dreaded the forlorn journey home to her dreary room. As she stepped out of the door someone moved forward with uplifted hat. It was Tom Duane. He looked very spick and span. His smile illumined the dull street and his hand clasped hers with a saving strength. It lifted her from the depths like a rope let down from the sky.

Daphne would have been more content if Duane had been Clay Wimburn. It was Clay's duty to be there at such a time, of all times.

Of course he did not know that this night was to be crucial for her, but he should have known. Mr. Duane knew. It never occurred to Daphne that Reben had warned Duane of the debut of his protegee and had invited him—in fact, had dared him—to watch the test of her abilities.

All she knew was that Duane was proffering homage and smiles and the prefaces of courtship. Daphne might have failed to gain the hearts of her audience, for all her toil, but here was a heart that was hers without effort.

Perhaps Duane was her career. He was at least an audience that she could sway. And she was miserably in need of some one that would pay her the tribute of submission.

So now when he said, "Won't you let me take you home in my car?" she could hardly snub a heaven-sent messenger.

She said, "Thank you—you're very kind—but—" Oh, all right!" And she bounded in.

When Duane said: "You must be hungry after all that hard work. Aren't you?" she said, "Yes, I guess I am—a little."

When he said, "Where shall we eat?" she answered, "Anywhere."

"Claremont?" he suggested.

This startled her, gave her pause. Yet there was something piquant about the proposal.

Her theatrical career cut short, Daphne turns to Clay. They plan to get married and live in some fashion on Clay's meager salary. The next day a new blow falls. The future again looms dark and uncertain before the discouraged lovers.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)