



# RIVAL WIVES

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AT three o'clock of a sunny, crisp November day Nan Carroll was happy. Not just content, or happy in a pallid, negative sort of way, but happy with that upwelling of the spirit which is akin to ecstasy.

And yet no man, opening the outer door of the suite of three offices—a door bearing the dignified sign, "John Curtis Morgan, Attorney at Law"—and peeping in upon her could have discovered any outstanding reason for her happiness. Just a pretty young stenographer or private secretary, and a busy one at that, he might have thought.

But if it had been a girl who had peeped in and seen Nan's flushed, pretty face, she would have deduced instantly that Nan's happiness was born of the consciousness that she looked extremely well in her new tall dress of russet silk crepe, a simple little slip of a dress whose short skirt dipped demurely just over the caps of rounded, slim knees.

Certainly Nan had reason for happiness over the fact that the russet silk crepe was almost exactly the color of her bobbed brown hair, that the velvet of her narrow brown pumps was subtly matched in the velvet of her round brown eyes. Such harmonies are not accidental, but with Nan they were instinctive, and not sufficient reason for the joy that had suddenly flooded over her so that her small body almost visibly vibrated with it as she sat erect in the narrow-backed chair before her typewriter.

Her ringless hands played rapidly over the keyboard of the machine, as if endowed with a consciousness and intelligence of their own, for certainly there was nothing in the legal document she was typing from shorthand notes to bring that high luster into her brown-velvet eyes and that joy-flush into her cheeks.

"THREE o'clock!" She glanced at her tiny, octagonal white-gold watch as she reached the end of her short-hand notes. With an expert twist of her wrist she took the crackling sheets of legal-sized bond paper and carbons from the machine, sorted them swiftly, combined them with the other pages of the brief, scanned their flawless typing proudly, then added clips from a little box that had its place in the meticulous order of her top desk drawer.

And as always, whenever she touched it, her finger tips caressed the exquisite little boz, which John Curtis Morgan, attorney at law, and her employer for three years, had given her as a Christmas present the first year she had worked for him. He had laughed at her for using it as a clip box, reminding her that he had expected her to add it to her dressing table knickknacks, and she had defended herself lamely, unable to tell him that she had kept it here in the office because her heart was here, rather than in the furnished room she rented by the week.

"He said three o'clock, but that means any time before half past," Nan reflected indulgently, as she added the original copy of the brief to the stack of letters she had typed earlier in the day. Court had adjourned early. That means that the prosecution "rested" before Mr. Morgan expected them to—He'll be dreadfully tired and all keyed-up. Maybe— and oddly enough her eyes sparkled and her flush deepened at the thought—he'll want me to work to-night. So much to do—last minute stuff: witnesses to subpoena; his notes to be written up—

ENTERING the office marked "Mr. Morgan"—the other office of the suite was shared by the middle-aged clerk and the young lawyer who worked for Mr. Morgan on salary—Nan deposited her tray of finished work on the desk, made even straighter a neat stack of unfolded letters received that today; cast a measuring glance at the heavy onyx ink well; blew a few grains of dust from the shining surface beyond the spotless new green blotter; adjusted the window shade so that the slanting rays of the November sun should not strike into the eyes of the man who would soon sit at that desk, held a spread palm over the concealed radiator to make sure that heat was coming up—

She was interrupted by the sound of the outer door's opening and closing. In a flash her small body was across the room, her hand upon the knob of the dividing door.

"Hello, Nan! Blake back yet? Did Preston call?" The very tall, very thin man tossed his hat upon a knob of the "tree" and shrugged out of his gray tweed topcoat. His black hair, winging upward in a natural pompadour from an extremely high and broad forehead, was shot through with threads of silver. Nan never saw a silver fox pelt without thinking, with a sharp contraction of the heart, of that silver-flecked mane of John Curtis Morgan's. His black eyes shone now with the brilliance of fatigue and excitement. Nan Carroll thought—and had thought since the day she first saw him—that he was the most distinguished-looking man she had ever seen.

"Mr. Blake isn't here yet," Nan answered eagerly, her eyes sweeping over him and noting every sign of fatigue. "He telephoned from the sheriff's office, where he's waiting for Buck. I telephoned Mr. Preston when I had not heard from him by 12 o'clock, and made an appointment for you at half past four—here," she added triumphantly. "I knew you would be tired."

A humorous smile zigzagged across Morgan's thin face, twitching the wide, sensitive mouth, and settling in his deepset eyes. There was tender, teasing friendliness in his deep voice as he answered.

"Good girl! I don't know how you do it. I honestly believe you'd make Cal Coolidge come here if I happened to want to consult him about something. A busy, important man like Preston—Oh, this is splendid, Nan! I didn't think you'd have time to finish this brief before I got back. That clears the decks for us to work on this mass of stuff I brought from court. Brainerd sprang two surprise witnesses on us this afternoon, and didn't call three I thought he was banking on. Rested at half past two and caught me not ready to open—"

Nan followed him into his private office, her small round face alight with excitement. "I'll bet he didn't call Barker and that Fleming woman. I told you he wouldn't! He didn't dare! Of course you're going to subpoena the Fleming woman yourself and make her talk—"

"Am I?" Mr. Morgan laughed, but his tired eyes shot her a glance of respect. "I suppose I'll have to, if you say so. Tell Blake to attend to it, when he comes in, won't you? Now, to get down to work," he sighed, a long, thin, sensitive hand reaching automatically for the stack of new mail on his desk.

"Not quite yet," Nan corrected him briskly. "You just sit there and rest for a minute. Shut your eyes and don't dare think of a thing until I get back."

She paused at the door, to make sure that her commands were obeyed. The long figure relaxed in the big swivel chair; with a deep sigh, as if he were expelling the poison of fatigue, John Curtis Morgan closed his eyes, but his wide mouth twitched humorously.

IN less than a minute Nan was back, stepping softly, and carrying a tall glass of milk on an octagonal plate of pale green glass, which also bore a stack of crisp raisin biscuits.

"Drink every drop and eat every crumb!" she commanded, with a greater show of assurance than she felt. "I'll bet my next week's salary you didn't eat a bite of lunch. It's a crime the way you neglect your health."

John Curtis Morgan stared at her blankly for a moment, then broke into a series of delighted chuckles.

"Funny little Nan!" he giped at her fondly, but he reached for the glass and drank half of the milk before setting it down again, drank eagerly, hungrily, so that Nan almost hugged herself with delight at the success of her latest scheme for her great man's comfort.

"I've ordered a pint of half-and-half a day for you—half milk and half cream," she confessed. "You need it, really you do, Mr. Morgan. You work so hard and forget to eat



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until someone shoves food at you—. Now, tell me what Brainerd did today. I'll get my note book and we'll get your notes on his witnesses into shape. I'm crazy to hear what Brody testified."

A minute later they were hard at it, Morgan's sensitive hands hovering over his scribbled notes, his deep voice recanting in detail the story of the day in court. He was defending a young girl, formerly the switchboard operator of a fashionable country club, indicted on a charge of blackmailing members of the club. The board of directors believing in the girl's innocence, had retained Morgan to defend her and, incidentally, to vindicate the management of the club in the eyes of the public.

"It's an ugly mess," the lawyer frowned. "Cornell looks as if he could kick himself from here to Jericho for ever having brought the charges, and Brainerd is up against a stone wall himself, trying to get a bunch of witnesses to testify that would rather be shot than be dragged upon a witness stand. But it looks pretty black for Grace, Nan. I wish I were sure—"

"I'm sure she's innocent," Nan interrupted vehemently. "I wouldn't have begged you to take the case if I hadn't been positive. There's something big behind this scandal, Mr. Morgan! That Fleming woman—listen! When you get her on the stand, ask her—"

She was off then, reviewing the evidence from memory, her pencil tapping on her points excitedly, her eyes glistening with zeal, her cheeks carnation-bright, and the man on the other side of the pulled-out leaf of the desk listening with flattered concentration, his own pencil making an occasional note.

When she paused for breath, Morgan nodded slowly. "I believe you're right. Of course I wouldn't have taken the case if I hadn't believed, beyond a reasonable doubt, that she was innocent. I've never yet defended a crook and I'd rather starve than begin. The afternoon papers are going to say that Brainerd's got the case sewed up in a sack but I'll be damned if he has! That Fleming woman, as you say—"

"You'll bust his case wide open!" Nan boasted staunchly. "Remember the jury half believes in her innocence to begin with, just because John Curtis Morgan is defending her. Every voter in the county knows that you turned down a hundred thousand dollar fee to defend those pavement contractors just because you knew they were a gang of crooks, and that you told Havemeyer that all his millions couldn't buy your services when he was trying to keep his son out of the pen. You know what, John Curtis Morgan?" she challenged him.

"What?" he teased her, obviously pleased but trying to pretend a vast preoccupation with the notes on his desk.

"When you've won this case—as you're going to do!—the papers are going to begin calling you the greatest criminal lawyer in the state, and that's a pretty big honor for a man only 36 years old to have won! Why, most men your age are still fiddling around hoping for a junior partnership in an established firm!"

"Oh, Nan, Nan!" he admonished her humorously, shaking his head. "You're seeing me too big, much bigger than I am! And if I don't watch out you're going to give me such a swelled head that I'll be laughed out of court. But, seriously, Nan," and his voice changed, became simple, direct and sincere, while his eyes held hers unwaveringly, "if I have gone a little further than I had any right to, it's been because I've had the breaks, and—the best secretary in the country. I'm not such an egotistical ass

that I can't see how much you've helped—"

ABOVE the pounding of blood in her ears Nan Carroll heard a quick, imperious tattoo upon the door. That particular knock had a peculiar magic of its own, for instantly the two people within the private office were transformed. Happiness, which had glowed in Nan's eyes like twin candles on an altar, was snuffed out, leaving her round, childish face pale and taut. In that instant she became the model secretary, or, rather, the model secretary as that part of the world unfamiliar with the comradeships of the office pictures her. She became "Miss Carroll," a little prim, very impersonal, subservient, remote. Her back stiffened and automatically she poised her pencil above her notebook in the respectful attitude of a secretary awaiting dictation.

And in that instant John Curtis Morgan, attorney at law disappeared. It was the eager voice of a lover-husband who called out joyously, welcomingly: "Come in!" It was an ardent boy, in spite of 36 years and a silver-fox pelt, who sprang to his feet, forgetting Nan Carroll, forgetting Grace Cox, forgetting his fatigue, thinking only of the woman who had knocked imperiously upon his door.

"Come in, darlin'! Oh, hello, Sonny-Boy! Out shopping

wore his name as nonchalantly and insolently as she wore the clothes he paid for.

AS Iris Morgan rested picturesquely in the high-backed chair her six-year-old son leaned, just as picturesquely, against her knee, as if he were subconsciously obeying his mother's command to fit into the picture. Nan thought, with fiery contempt, that Iris Morgan would never bother to be seen with her son if he were not that handsomest of all the ornaments with which she decked her beauty. But since little Curtis Morgan was, in his way, as beautiful as his mother, she had worn him, from his babyhood until now, as another woman might wear a corsage of orchids, or lead a prize-winning Pekinese upon a leash.

The child's eyes were large, liquid-black, fringed with such lashes as a chorus girl would sell her soul for, and curiously mournful, even when he was being his most devilish. Nan had watched him develop from a fragile baby of three to fragile little boyhood, and she loved him, in spite of the faults which his mother seemed to delight in encouraging, loved him because there was so much more of John Curtis Morgan in him than of Iris Morgan. Loved him, too, because Morgan adored him and because Iris, for all her lazy indulgence of his constant irritable demands, did not truly love him, was merely proud of him because he was an ornament to her beauty.

The child was urging a demand upon his mother in a low, whining singsong: "I wanna see the dog in the picture show, Moth-er-r. I wanna police dog just like the movie dog, Moth-er-r! I wanna—"

Iris' blue-green eyes swept him with amused indifference. "Mother's going shopping later. Curtis's going to stay with Nana, like a good boy. He loves staying with his Nana Carroll, doesn't he?" And she rumbled the silky black crest of his hair—so like his father's—and smiled lazily at Nan.

Dismay and anger flooded Nan Carroll, as they had flooded her heart a hundred other such miserable times in the last three years. "Nana!" As if she were a nursemaid! So she was to take care of him again, while her employer's wife shopped in untrammelled freedom! Was Morgan going to permit the outrage, when he knew as well as his secretary that there was enough work to be done to keep them both busy until nine or ten o'clock, if the lawyer was to go to court the next morning properly prepared to defend his client? But—why ask? Of course he was! He had never in his life denied his wife anything she wanted, whether it was a mink coat or the services of his secretary.

"We're pretty busy," Morgan deprecated. "That Grace Cox case, you know, darling. The prosecution rested today, but of course," he hastened to reassure Iris, whose eyes were flashing green-blue fire at him. "Curt will be very good. Won't you, Sonny-boy?"

"Don't wanna stay with Nana," the little boy protested, his great black eyes mournful, his beautiful mouth silky.

"Be sweet, lover, and Mother will give you a great big piece of chocolate cake with your ice cream for dessert to-night," Iris promised in her lazy, sweet voice as she accepted her husband's check without thanks.

"She's ruining his stomach with her 'great big pieces of chocolate cake, and all the candy he wants,'" Nan thought disgustedly. "And she doesn't care! It's less trouble to her to indulge him than to discipline him. And I believe she actually likes for him to be thin and frail, because he's prettier than red-cheeked, robust children. Oh, I hate her!"

Aloud she said, in a flat, even voice which she scorned to make coaxing: "Come along, Curt. I'll let you write up your own special typewriter. We'll both be busy. Nan's got an awful lot of work to do, and so has your father."

"You're such a good little thing, Nan," Iris thanked her carelessly, in a tone Nan had frequently heard her use toward Curtis' nurse.

AS Nan left the private office, with Curtis' hot, dry little hand in hers, she told herself despairingly, contemptuously: "She doesn't even know you hate her, you little fool! And she doesn't hate you at all. She rather likes you, in your place, and your place, Nan Carroll, is in her estimation, that of an efficient upper-class servant. And as long as she's in the office, that's the way HE thinks of you, too, because she makes him."

"She blights him, blights me, takes all of our real worth and significance away from us, so there won't be anything of importance in the place but her beauty. And he doesn't know what a fool she makes of him, doesn't know anything when she's around except that he's mad about her and that she's the most beautiful woman in the world. But what do I care?" She blinked furiously at the tears in her brown eyes.

She was establishing a whining, dictatorial child at a table on which she had placed an old typewriter reserved for the purpose when Iris Morgan came out of the private office, adjusting her smart black hat at an enchanting angle, so that red-gold curls were pressed against the cream and rose of her cheek.

"I'll call for my two boys at six, Nan," she announced, with superb indifference to the fact that Nan was supposed to be free at five. "Be good, sweetheart, and Mother will bring you something nice."

"Want stuffed dates with lolsa nuts," Curtis specified threateningly.

Iris laughed from the doorway. "Greedy little pig. It's a wonder you don't get disgustingly fat. But I suppose no child of mine could be fat," she added complacently, glancing down the long, slim lines of her body—the kind of figure for which modistes design "confections" and "creations," not mere dresses.

"And oh, Nan, dear, please get me a couple of matinee tickets for Saturday. 'The Constant Lover' with the original New York cast—so the advertisements say, though they're sure to be second-rate huns, worse luck!—is at the Woodleigh this week. Don't let my bad child bother you, or Jack will blame me if he loses this scandalous Grace Cox case. Why he can't be a corporation lawyer and be respectable is more than I can see! Just vanity, I think! He adores ranting before a jury and saving murderers from the gallows. But I mustn't get off onto my pet grievance or the shops will be closed before I get a thing bought. Good-by, lover." She blew a kiss to the child and was gone.

After five minutes of bored pecking at his typewriter keys, Curtis was at Nan's elbow, joggling it impatiently, so that she struck a wrong key—a tragedy to Nan Carroll, who prided herself on pages of finished work which had never been insulted by the rasp of an eraser.

"Want paste and scissors and colored crayons," the

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