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RIVAL WIVES

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THIS HAS HAPPENED
Nan Carroll, finding herself in love with her employer, John Curtis Morgan, lawyer, decides to resign. Her resignation is postponed, however, when she learns Morgan is to defend a supposed friend, Bert Crawford.

Morgan wins Crawford's acquittal. Crawford leaves town at once, followed closely by Iris, Morgan's wife, who writes Morgan she will never return. Reference to Crawford, whom Morgan does not suspect, is cleverly omitted.

Nan saves Morgan from despair by forcing him into his work. For six months she acts as long-distance housekeeper for him, winning the love of little Curtis, Morgan's son, and bringing comfort to a man who ironically thinks only of another.

Morgan tells her he is divorcing Iris and asks her to marry him. They are prevented from going on their honeymoon by the unexpected arrival of a pleading client. Nan urges Morgan to accept the case.

Their farcical marriage continues for three months. Hysterically, Nan prepares to leave, but Morgan intercepts her, confesses he adores her but has believed she married him out of pity.

The next morning, Iris returns, apparently deserted by Crawford. She feigns unconsciousness and illness in an effort to bring Morgan to his knees. Nan, determined to fight, has the doctor remove Iris to a hospital. At the office that day, Nan remembers a letter proving Iris' perfidy—but no, she can not fight that way! In her room that night, she locks the door.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY
CHAPTER XXXVIII
It was 6 o'clock when Nan Morgan, in a temper of unrestrained fury and fear, locked her doors against any attempt her husband might make to bring to her his load of despair and newly revived love for his first wife.

CHAPTER XXXIX
Nan's cold hands gripped each other convulsively against the amber chignon of her lap. "It's come at last. He's going to tell me it was all a mistake, that he doesn't love me, and wants to be free to take Iris back," she told herself dully.

hunched, head lowered, but eyes raised to Iris Morgan's breath-takingly beautiful portrait. How closely kin those two were! Father and son, by virtue of the woman at whose picture they gazed.

Nan was powerless to move to ward them. She was an interloper. It would be indecent to intrude upon their tragic brooding. All fight melted out of her for the moment giving way to a nauseating self-hatred. If she had no "wormer" her way into John Curtis Morgan's home, into his grief, into the affections of his son, so that marriage with her had come to seem inevitable, he and the child would have been free to welcome Iris home.

What did it matter that they had been better off without her? If they preferred sickness to health, misery to peace, Iris to Nan, why shouldn't they have them? People never thanked you for doing things for their good.

"Oh, excuse me, Mrs. Morgan. I didn't know you was there," Estelle apologized as she almost bumped into the frozen little figure in the doorway. "Dinner is served, ma'am."

The two before the fireplace started, the man guiltily. The 7-year-old boy stared at Nan as if he had never seen her before, a strange hostility in his liquid blue eyes. There was a hot flush on his cheeks. Nan's heart contracted sharply with anxiety. Did he have a fever? Why was he staring at her like that? Had Iris already begun to poison the child against her? But why ask? She had known Iris was going to fight with every weapon she could lay hands on, and of course the child would be the most potent, next to the terrific appeal which she had always made to the senses of the man she never loved and had deserted.

"Hello, dear!" her husband greeted her constrainedly, as he came forward to take her arm. "Sorry I couldn't meet you for lunch."

"How do you get on?" Any jurors chosen? Nan asked, with apparently cheerful casualness. "We went to the hospital to see my mother," Curtis cut in, his voice sounding oddly mature and childishly belligerent. "She—"

"Nan asked me a question, son," the father reproved him sternly, he laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Have you seen the afternoon paper, Nan? The trial is adjourned until January 9."

"I'm sorry, Nan," Morgan apologized stiffly, extreme pallor suddenly taking the place of the flush of anger.

Nan nodded dumbly and the miserable meal progressed in silence. Dishes were brought and removed, their delicious contents scarcely touched by either. It came to an end at last and the two who had been so close moved together, but miles apart, toward the drawing room.

For a few minutes they talked constrainedly, unnaurally, about the Blackhull case, then abruptly Morgan introduced the only subject about which either of them could think.

"I—Nan, we'd better face this thing, hadn't we? I've got to talk to you about Iris."

CHAPTER XXXIX
Nan's cold hands gripped each other convulsively against the amber chignon of her lap. "It's come at last. He's going to tell me it was all a mistake, that he doesn't love me, and wants to be free to take Iris back," she told herself dully.

"Yes, John," she agreed aloud, in a voice that sounded flat and cold to her own ears.

They were seated side by side on the small sofa, whose back was turned upon Iris' portrait above the fireplace. Morgan had chosen the seat. Nan felt his eyes upon her in a swift, appraising glance which she could not bring herself to meet. After all, it was up to him. There was nothing for her to do but wait.

The man cleared his throat nervously, then suddenly she felt his hand, big and warm and comforting, close about her own.

"I must go to Curtis now," she said hastily. "Then I think I'll go to bed, John. I'm tired. I'll say good night now."

She was about to walk away from him without offering him even her hand when she heard him spring to his feet. His arms closed about her, held her close against his breast. But to save her life she could not relax in his arms, although every nerve in her body clamored for her to forget pride and cling to this man whether he loved her as much as she loved the other woman or not.

"Dear little Nan!" he muttered huskily, his lips against her hair. "You're wonderful. . . You'll be patient with me, won't you, dear? I—need you—"

Why didn't he say, "Nan, it's you I love. I'm sorry for Iris, but I love you. You're my wife." Since he hadn't said those words or anything like them, Nan's body remained stiff and unyielding. "Of course, John," she answered in a voice that sounded impatient. The man's arms dropped as if she had struck them from her.

"Good night, Nan dear," he said slowly, heavily, like a man weary unto death.

"Good night, John. You'll call the hospital again tonight to see how Edgar is, won't you? It would be terrible to have him die, when he could help young David so much."

His low-voiced "Yes" followed her out of the room, up the stairs, its weary sadness nagging at her ears, knocking at her heart.

She found the door of Curtis' room locked, or rather bolted, for the key had not been trusted with a boy, lest he lose it. She knelt down, after trying the door, and called softly through the keyhole.

"I'll be right in my eyes, naturally." She felt his eyes sweep over her again, questioning, appealingly. But still she could not meet them, was afraid to face the despair she was sure they held. Oh, why couldn't she be supremely generous, tell him he was free?

"I had thought," Morgan floundered on, regardless of her obvious desire not to know the details—"that a \$400 monthly provision of—say, \$400 a month. . . She has been used to a degree of luxury, and has no judgment at all about money—"

"Anything you say," Nan interrupted firmly, as she rose from the sofa. "Now, I think I'll go up to Curtis. He'll be ill if I don't get him calmed down before his bedtime, poor darling. . . By the way," she added, with every appearance of casualness, "has—his mother asked that he be given to her?"

She felt rather than saw that Morgan flushed darkly. His voice was thick and low as he answered: "At first, of course. She was—quite liberal about it. But—this afternoon she was much more reasonable. In fact, she agreed that it would be better for the child not to be taken from his father. Under the circumstances, she thought I could do more for the boy than she would be able to do."

"And you swallowed that whole," Nan reflected, with bitter disgust. "Can't you see what her game is? In the first place, she doesn't want to be bothered with taking care of the child, and in the second, she knows he is a much more potent weapon against me in this house than he could possibly be in hers."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Morgan bow his head upon his breast. "Yes—she knows that. But if she insisted, I would let her have him, Nan, no matter how much I should suffer from losing him. A child and his mother should not be parted."

"She left him," Nan could not forbear reminding him. "She admits that," Morgan said heavily. "We—mustn't be too hard on her, dear. She has—paid pretty high for her—mistake."

Nan turned sharply so that he should not see the cynical smile which twisted her childish mouth. After a moment she was able to say, with genuine feeling: "I'm glad she has been generous about Curtis. It would break my heart to lose him now."

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E. F. Dupray and Roger Foley, at now established in the office formerly held by Stevens, Henderson & Noland, in the Clark building.

A. J. Schur, attorney, has moved into the suite formerly occupied by Dupray and Foley. Judge Foley plans to hold court in the largest room of the suite into which he has moved.

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