

The Thirteenth Commandment

By RUPERT HUGHES

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THANKS TO DUANE, DAPHNE GETS THE CHANCE TO BECOME AN ACTRESS—IF SHE CAN MAKE GOOD.

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. Clay buys an engagement ring on credit and returns to New York. Daphne agrees to an early marriage, and after extracting from her money-worried father what she regards as a sufficient sum of money for the purpose she 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, Lella. Daphne and her mother install themselves in Bayard's flat. Wimburn introduces Daphne and her mother to luxurious New York life. Daphne meets Tom Duane, man-about-town, who seems greatly attracted to her. Daphne accidentally discovers that Clay is penniless, except for his salary. Bayard 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.

CHAPTER IX.

Daphne bent her head so quickly that his pressed lips touched her hair. She flung backward and thrust him away and broke from his hold.

"Agh!" she groaned. "I suppose I deserve the insult—for trusting you." "I didn't intend it for an insult." He followed her with pleading arms. She backed away and found herself in a corner, flushed, furious, at bay.

"How dare you?" she stormed, and thought with nausea how often the phrase had been used and with what hypocrisy.

It seemed to fall familiarly on his ear, for he laughed comfortably. "How can I help it?"

"If you touch me I'll—I'll hit you." He paused, stared deep into her eyes. "Do you mean it?"

"Of course I mean it." "I'm sorry," he sighed. "But won't you let me explain?"

"You don't have to. It's all my fault for inviting you here."

"Oh, no, I beg you not to think that I'm such a cad."

"Please go!"

"All right!" he murmured, and left the room.

She heard his stick rattle as he took it from the umbrella jar. She thought: "There goes my opportunity—my career! Well, let it go! It wasn't worth the price!"

Duane appeared at the door again to say: "Oh, by the way, that introduction to Mr. Reben. Do you still want it?"

"No, thank you, not from you. Good-by."

He bowed farewell, then changed his mind, entered the room and sat down, and motioned her to a seat as if it were his house.

"Miss Kip, may I say one word to you? I don't pretend to understand you women people. I'm not sure now just how sincere you are, just how much of a ninny you may think me for being rebuffed so easily. Experience is no guide. But—well—anyway—what I wanted to say is this—there is hardly any man that would even bother a woman unwilling to be bothered if he could only be certain that he was really bothering her. Do I make myself clear?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, then, I give up. But I must leave you a bit of advice. You say you want to earn money. If you do,

false it is, or how true; no man can know—but there is a tradition that every woman expects every man she meets to offer her an insult—that's the technical term—as soon as they are alone.

"That feeling is what women are going to run into every time they try to force their way into business. It will die out, I suppose, to a certain extent, as you crowd into our field. It will be one of the last privileges you'll lose. You're already permitted to stand up in street cars and go out after dark alone. By and by you will have to make your advances to the men yourselves in the frankest manner. Instead of subtly as now."

Daphne broke in coldly. "That will be a very welcome day to most of us."

Somehow it did not sound convincing to her. There was grave conviction, however, in his response:

"It will be a mighty welcome day to us poor men, Miss Kip. For most men haven't the faintest desire to spoon with women. It's hard enough for some of them to keep their own sweethearts and wives sufficiently caressed. Then there's another thing—if I'm not boring you—I haven't made as long a speech since I was a school-boy and recited 'Spartacus to the Gladiators.'"

"Go on, please," said Daphne. "A woman doesn't often get the chance of hearing a man tell the truth about these things."

Her sarcasm chilled him a little, but he went on:

"I just want to say this—it's an old man's advice to a young woman going into business: when a man asks for a job he brings references, and they are investigated; or he answers a lot of questions, and he is given a trial. Or when two men meet in a club or elsewhere they shake hands. That handshake itself is a kind of investigation of character. They learn each other's politics and religion and prejudices as soon as they can."

"So when a man meets a woman he is apt to be thrown with a good deal he is apt to say, 'What sort is she?' But the thing that annoys a man most about having to do business with a woman is the fear that he will either compromise her or disappoint her. That's the first problem to get out of the way; and there's nothing easier for a woman to do than to convince a man that she doesn't want him to try to flirt with her—if she doesn't."

Daphne cried, "In heaven's name, tell me how it's done."

"The way to convince him is to be convinced yourself. If you're sincere he'll know it."

"But I was sincere with you, and you didn't know it."

"I didn't know it at first, but I soon did—I think—and now that what I'm driving at all this long while. If you're going into business competition with men, play fair. Every now and then one of them, as soon as he finds himself alone with you, will be polite enough to insult you. But the average man will let you alone if you'll let him alone. Suppose he does make a mistaken advance, if you could be sensible enough not to get mad, not to feel besmirched, but just take it as a matter of course and say frankly: 'No, thanks, I'm not interested. I understand you perfectly, but you needn't bother, or something like that, and say it honestly, the rest would be plain sailing.'

"And now, if you'll forgive me for talking your arm off and if you'll prove it by letting me help you, I'll promise never to kiss you or try to till—till you ask me to."

Daphne laughed refreshingly at his impudence, and he laughed, as well as he might. And they shook hands with comradeship.

"And may I arrange for you to meet Reben?"

"I hate to ask you now. I've no right to trouble you. But I'm terribly anxious to get a job."

"And I'm terribly anxious to get you one."

"You're awfully kind," she said, and led him to the telephone.

She felt that it would be indelicate to listen, and went back into the living room of the apartment. There Duane joined her in a few moments with the terrifying news that Reben

had said that he might have a chance to place her at once if she could come to his office without delay.

Opportunity bouncing out at her like a jack-in-the-box alarmed her. But she faced it pluckily. She put on her hat with trembling hands and went down in the elevator with Duane.

They went up in an elevator at one side of the lobby of the theater and stepped out at Reben's office door. A number of somber and despondent persons of a theatrical complexion were waiting there also, the wretched Lazaruses of art.

Duane spoke to a respectful office boy, who disappeared through a door and returned to beckon him in. With heart bounding high and bubbling at her throat Daphne entered the theatrical world by one of its most gilded portals.

The great Reben sat bulkily behind an ornate table-desk and dismissed a still more ornate stenographer with a nod as he rose to greet Duane.

Duane did the honors: "Mr. Reben, I want to present you to Miss Kip, Miss Daphne Kip."

Reben greeted her with suavity and his eyes were even more enthusiastic than his words. Daphne was at her superlative degree and anxiety gave her a wistfulness that was appealing to Reben. Women's charms and wistfulness made up a large part of his wares in trade.

"Have you had any experience?" "None."

"Studied elocution?" "Never. I never spoke a piece in my life."

"Good! Amateur theatricals?" "Never. I never seemed to care for them."

"Better yet! What makes you think you want to act now?"

"Money. I want to earn money—get rich."

"I see," said Reben, and fell into a profound meditation, studying Daphne searchingly.

Duane seized the opportunity to rise and say: "Well, I'll leave you two together to talk terms. It would be indelicate for me to know just how rich Miss Kip is going to be."

He had no sooner gone than Reben's manner changed slightly and Daphne's courage vanished. Reben paced the floor as he talked. His path kept slowly closing in around her like the walls in Poe's story.

"You look like Miss Kemble," he said. "You have somewhat the same temperament. You like her style of play. That may be your line. I can't tell. Of course I don't know how well you can act. Perhaps you never could. Kemble is great, but she comes of an old theatrical family. Of course you have one great capital—your beauty; for you are very beautiful, Miss Kip, very. Let me see your eyes!"

He had a right to ask if he were going to hire her eyes, but she looked up cravenly, for the burly satrap was leaning over her. His left hand was on the arm of the chair, his right on the back of it. His left hand was gradually enveloping hers. It was a fat, hot hand, and his face was so close that it was blurred in her vision.

Then she remembered Duane's words. She controlled herself enough to put them to the test.

She pretended to look coldly into Reben's face, and she said, with a brave show of calm: "Mr. Reben, I didn't come here to flirt with you and I don't intend to. I came here for a job as an actress. If this sort of thing is a necessary part of the job I'll go somewhere else."

Reben backed away and stared at her. He was rendered foolish by her rebuff and he stammered, "Why, I— I meant no harm."

She went on with the Duane system of treatment: "I know you didn't. You meant to be polite, but you don't have to be so polite to me. I don't expect it and I don't like it."

"All right, all right!" Reben growled, pacing the floor again, but in a constantly receding path. He did not speak. He felt that he had made a fool of himself, and he was embarrassed.

Daphne was so frightened with her success that she got to her feet, saying: "I suppose this means that you don't want me to work for you. It's true, then, what they say about the stage."

"Nonsense! Of course not! Rot! I never see most of my people except at rehearsals or performances. I've never spoken to three-quarters of 'em. If you want a job you can have it, and no concessions are necessary. You don't have to make love to me. You make love to the audience, and if you can capture that you can slap my face every time you see me."

Daphne was astounded. She was engaged! She was exultant and thrilled with gratitude to Duane for introducing her to this marvelous opportunity and for the wisdom of his counsel.

Reben said: "The general understudy of the Kemble company has grown tired of waiting for a chance to appear in public. She's quitting me this week for a small part in a road company. You can have her place if you want it. Do you?"

"You bet—er—indeed I do. How often does an understudy play?" "As rarely as possible."

Daphne's joy turned to lead.

Reben added: "But we don't pay by performances. I'll pay you twenty-five a week. You wanted money. There's a little of it for a start. Do you want it?"

"Will it lead to anything better?" "It might."

"Am I to understudy Miss Kemble?" "Yes, and all the other women roles."

"And when do you suppose I'll get a chance to play Miss Kemble's part? Soon?"

"Never, I hope."

"That's encouraging!"

"If Miss Kemble fell ill we'd ordinarily refund the money, because she's the star. But sometimes we might have to give a performance at short notice. Chances in the other parts might come any day."

"And you'll give me a better chance when you can?"

"Indeed I will. If you have the gift, the sooner I find it out and the harder I work it the more money I make. The more you earn the more I make. I'd like to pay you ten thousand a week."

"I'd like to have you. All right, I'll try."

He pressed a button on his desk once, then twice. The office boy appeared, followed by the stenographer. Reben said to the boy: "Is Mr. Batterson here? Send him to me." To the stenographer he said: "Fill out a contract for Miss Kip—Miss—What's the first name? Miss Daphne Kip. Salary, twenty-five. Make it a three-year contract."

Reben motioned her absently to her chair and said, rather to Duane's sake than for hers, she felt: "Sit down, won't you, till the contracts come? and pardon me if I—"

He finished the phrase by the deed. The office routine went on and Daphne might have been the chair she sat in, for all the attention he paid her. She felt rather ungallantly ignored. Still, she had asked to be treated on a business basis. He was taking her at her word.

Before the contracts were ready Mr. Batterson appeared. He was one of Reben's stage managers, a worried, emotional little man, worn to shreds with his task of stimulating and correcting the emotions by which others earned their wages and fame.

Reben introduced him to Daphne and explained her new office. Batterson seemed none too well pleased with the news that Daphne was ignorant of stage work to the last degree. He had found it hard enough to make the experienced actors read their lines as they must be read and keep on reading them so. To teach this dramatic infant how to walk and talk was an unwelcome labor.

He took Daphne into his office and pulled out a set of parts. When she stumbled over them he cast his eyes heavenward in his swift impatience. He explained them with a vinegary gentleness. He talked to her of the cannons of interpretation. He walked through her scenes and spoke her lines for her again and again and yet again. But somehow he could not teach her.

He tried everything but beating her. He flattered her, wheedled her, parodied, satirized, rebuked her, and occasionally he cursed her. She did not rebel even against his profanity, because she had no confidence in herself to support her resistance. She felt that she was far worse than he said she was when he said she was worst. She used all her funds of resolution in keeping from throwing down the part and running away in tears. She had none left for asserting her right to politeness.

Once Daphne was out in the street again and released from the ordeal of pleasing Batterson, youth and ambition brought hope back again. Broadway at twilight was athrob with enthusiasm and she caught zest from the crowds. She was going home to study, carrying her little set of textbooks like a schoolgirl. But she felt the wings of conquest fledging at her ankles or the wheel of fortune spinning under her toes.

Her very first effort had succeeded. She was a woman with a salary. She would be no longer a parasite on any man. She had a career and a business as well as the best of them.

Her mother was at home alone. Lella had gone from that tea party to another to which Mrs. Kip was not invited. Daphne's mother greeted her with relief. She told her news with a gush of enthusiasm. It left Mrs. Kip cold, very cold.

She was a pious, church-going woman, Mrs. Kip. She had always looked upon the theater as a training school for the still lower regions. She went to plays occasionally, but usually with a feeling of dissipation and worldliness. Besides it was one thing to see plays and another to act them.

Daphne tried to reason her mother out of her backwoods prejudices, but she only frightened her the more. Mrs. Kip retired to her room to write an urgent telegram to her husband demanding that he come on at once and

rescue his child. She always called on him in an emergency and he always responded.

Lella came home eventually full of gossip and triumph. Her Dutilh gown had made a tremendous success; the other women wanted to murder her.

Mrs. Kip broke in on her chronicles with the dismal announcement of Daphne's new insanity. Lella was almost as bitter in opposition as Mrs. Kip had been, but from quite another motive. Lella had aristocratic impulses and looked forward to social splendors. She would gain no help from the fact that her husband's sister was a theatrical struggler.

Daphne escaped an odious battle with her by referring to the need of close study, and retreated into her own room, locking her mother out.

She stayed there, repeating her lines over and over and trying to remember the action that went with them as Miss Kemble had played it. She had a quick memory, but the intonation of the lines gave her extraordinary difficulty.

She remembered one of Miss Kemble's most delicious effects. She came on the stage unannounced and, pausing in the doorway, smiled whimsically and said, "How do you do?" That was all—just "How do you do?" But she

uttered it so deliciously that a ripple of joy ran through the audience. Daphne tried to master the trick of it but with no success. She said "How do you do?" in dozens of ways, with no result except to render the phrases meaningless gibberish.

Daphne flung down the part she was studying and flung away ambition, and went out to tell the family that she agreed with them.

She was confronted by Lella in a role of despair. Bayard had telephoned that he could not get home for dinner. He would not be home in time to take Lella to the theater as he had promised.

Lella was in a frenzy. She had nothing to do but wait for her man to come and take her somewhere. Daphne understood the tragedy of the modern wife: dowered with freedom, pampered with amusements, deprived of the blessing of toil, unaccustomed to seraglian torpor, she must yet wait on the whims or necessities of her husband.

Daphne reconsidered her decisions. Better all the difficulties and heart-aches of the actress-trade than this prison loafing of wifely existence. She had something to do.

CHAPTER X.

The next day Batterson telephoned her that he had called a rehearsal with the company. Daphne went to the theater in terror. The stage looked utterly forlorn with the actors and actresses standing about in their street clothes. Under the bright lights with the people made up and the audience in full bloom, like a vast garden, there would be impersonality and stimulation; but the present scene was as dolorous as the funeral of an unpopular man.

Courage was largely a matter of her superstitious forcing her reluctant feet forward. A soldier ordered to leave a bombproof shelter for an advance, a playground of shrapnel, has just the struggle with his vaso-motor system that Daphne had with hers.

With the kindest smile an amiable wolf ever wore Batterson invited the fluttering lamb to come to the stream and drink. Daphne came forward in a trance and heard Batterson say: "Ladies and gentlemen—Miss Kip, our new understudy. Give her all the help you can."

Miss Kemble had graciously chosen to be present for that purpose, though the result was only to increase Daphne's embarrassment. An imitation in the presence of the living model was a double load to carry.

Daphne's hopes of becoming a great actress receive a rude shock, but she is given a chance to show what she can do, and again it is Duane to whom she owes the chance. She is afraid of the obligation under which she is placed, but Duane assures her that she can repay him in the end.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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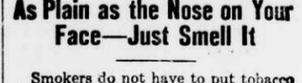
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"And I'm terribly anxious to get you one."

"You're awfully kind," she said, and led him to the telephone.

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