

HARRIET and the PIPER

By
Kathleen Norris

Illustrations by
Irwin Myers

Copyright by Kathleen Norris

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

—11—

Harriet, presently needed again, was astonished at the emotion of the old lady, who had been genuinely fond of her daughter-in-law, and had always been loyal to Isabelle, as one of the Carters. Madame Carter was greatly shaken, Nina hysterical, Ward agitated, irritated at his own feeling. He had not seen his mother for seven months, she had brought nothing but a certain unpleasant notoriety to her children, yet her death struck both the young creatures forcibly, and they felt shocked and shaken.

"We can't be in the Fordyce tableaux," said Nina in an interval between floods of sobs. "Not that I would want to, now! But I don't know; it seems to me that I am the most unfortunate girl in the world!"

"I think both you and Ward should wear black for a certain period," Richard said to her. He had been walking the floor nervously, stopping now and then beside the great chair where his mother sat silent and stricken, to put his arm about her shoulders, and murmur to her consolingly.

"When my mother died," Madame Carter quavered, with her handkerchief pressed to the tip of her nose, "my sisters and I wore black, and refused all social engagements for one year. We then, I remember distinctly, began to wear white and lavender."

Nina broke in pettishly: "I don't see why I have to wear black!"

"Why should you?" Ward said with bitter scorn. "It's only your mother!" Nina began to cry.

"You and I will go down to Landman's early tomorrow, Nina," Harriet suggested, "and we'll have some one show us what is simple and nice—not crape, you know," Harriet said, with a glance at Richard Carter, "but black, for a few months, anyway."

"I think that would be the least, Richard," his mother approved. "I believe I will go with you," she condescended to Harriet, "after all, Isabelle was my daughter-in-law, and the mother of my grandchildren!"

"And I won't go to California or Bermuda or anywhere else unless Ladybird comes!" Nina burst out, with a broken sob.

"Nonsense!" her father began harshly. Harriet said:

"Bermuda? Is there a plan for Bermuda?"

"I suggested it for a few weeks," Richard said, frowning, "but I don't propose to have Nina invite a group of friends. That isn't exactly the idea."

"We could ask Mrs. Tabor," Harriet said, soothingly; "it is right in the middle of the season, and perhaps she will feel she can hardly spare the time. But I'm sure that if she can—"

"If I ask her, she'll go," Nina said, in a sulky, confident undertone.

Harriet had her doubts, but she did not express them. A month at Nassau, in the undiluted company of Nina and her grandmother, was enough to appal even Harriet's stout heart.

The event proved her right, for while Ida Tabor flew at once to her disconsolate little friend, and assured Richard with tears in her eyes that she would do anything in the world to help him, she weakened when the actual test arrived.

"If just you and I and your dear grandmother were going, dearest girl," she said to Nina, "then it would be perfect. But as long as Miss Field, who is perfectly charming and conscientious and all that, feels that she must accompany us, why—you and I would never be a moment alone, sweetheart, you know that! I don't like to think that it's jealousy—"

"Of course it's jealousy," Nina was pleased to decide, gloomily. "Granny says that we don't need her, but Father just sticks to it that she must manage everything!"

Ida Tabor smiled automatically. "I don't suppose your father sees anything in Miss Field?" she submitted, lightly.

"Oh, heavens, no!" Nina said, studying herself in a handglass. There was a rather steely look in the eyes of her friend Ladybird, but she did not see it. Her smile of pleasure gradually gave place to a pout. "I'm going to ask Father if we need Miss Harriet!" she said.

And that evening she did indeed attack Richard on the subject, although not as decidedly as she had planned. He listened to her interestedly enough,

with his evening paper held ready for his next glance.

"Let you roam about the country with Mrs. Tabor," he said, as the girl's faltering accents stopped. "No, my dear, it's out of the question! In the first place, she is not the sort of companion I would choose for any girl, and in the second place I would never know where you and your grandmother were, or what was happening to you! While Miss Field is in charge I shall feel entirely safe. Of course, if Mrs. Tabor chooses to invite herself, that's her affair!"

"Then I don't want to go!" Nina stormed. But in the end she did go, Madame Carter, Nina and Harriet duly sailed, in the second week of January, and Ward joined them almost a month later, in Nassau. And here Harriet had the brother and sister at their best, free to show the genuine childishness that was in them, to swim and picnic and tramp, and here she indulged Nina in long talks, and encouraged her to associate with the young people she met.

Harriet wrote once a week to Richard, making a general report, and enclosing receipted hotel and miscellaneous bills. His communications usually took the form of cables, although once or twice she received typewritten letters.

In mid-April they all came home again, and Crownlands, in the year's first shy filming of green, looked wonderful to Harriet's homesick eyes.

Richard was to join them at dinner; it had been impossible for him to meet them when the boat arrived, but Fox had been there and attended to the formalities. It had pleased them all to make the occasion formal and to dress accordingly. Nina looked her prettiest in a white silk, and the old lady was magnificent in diamonds and brocade. Harriet deliberately selected her handsomest gown, a severe black satin that wrapped her slender body with one superb and shining sweep, and left her white arms and firm, flawless shoulders bare. The firm young lines of chin and throat, the swelling white breast that met the encasing satin, the slippers with their twinkling buckles—she could not but find every detail pleasing, and her scarlet mouth, firmly shut, was twitched by a sudden dimple.

She glanced at the clock, went slowly to the door, and slowly down the big square stairway. Richard and his children were in the lower hall, and they all glanced up.

Down in the soft glow of light came Harriet, smiling as she slipped her left arm about Nina, and gave the free hand to Nina's father. She was apparently cool and unself-conscious; inwardly she felt feverish, frightened and excited and happy, all at once. Richard was in evening dress, too; he looked his best; his dark hair brushed to a shining crest, and his gray eyes full of pleasure.

"Well, Miss Field—" he said, a little breathlessly. "Well! Your vacation hasn't done you any harm!"

"We had to make an occasion of our coming home!" Harriet said, with a nervous laugh, trying not to see the admiration in his eyes.

"You look wonderful!" Nina said.

"Why, you saw this gown at Nassau," Harriet protested.

"Louise—or whoever she was of Prussia, or whatever you call it, turned in the family vault when you walked down those stairs!" Ward said. "Oo-oo—caught you under the mistletoe—oo-oo, you would!" he added, with an effort to envelop her in his embrace.

"Ward, behave yourself!" Harriet said, evading him, and walking toward the dining room with his grandmother, who came downstairs in her turn, and joined them.

Richard Carter watched her, the incarnation of young and beautiful womanhood. Clever he knew her to be, capable and conscientious, but tonight she was in a new role. He liked to see her there at the other end of the table; he realized that she was the center of things, here in his house, and that he had missed her.

After dinner it chanced that Botmley called her to the telephone, and that a moment later she passed the call on to Richard.

"It's Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Carter. He didn't know that you were here, but he would rather speak to you," Harriet said. Richard went to the telephone, and as she moved to make room for him, and gave him the receiver, he had a sudden breath of the sweetness and freshness of her, of hair and young firm skin, of the rustling satin gown, and the little handkerchief that she dropped, and that he picked up for her. He smiled as he gave it, and flushed inexplicably, and his first few words to the bewildered Gardiner were a little shaken and breathless. But Richard was quite himself again in an hour or two later, when he sent for Miss Field, and she came into the library.

"I needn't say that I'm entirely pleased with the way matters have gone, Harriet," said Richard, when she had seated herself on the opposite side of his big, flat desk, and locking her white hands on the shining surface, had fixed her magnificent eyes on him. "Nina seems in fine shape, and

I have never seen my mother better. You seem to have a genius for managing the Carters. I'm seriously considering an offer from Gardiner; he's got to take his boy out to Nevada for his health. Ward wants to go, and would very probably like it when he got there. I hope he will try it anyhow! So that leaves Nina, who is safe enough with you, and my mother, who seems perfectly well and happy. Meanwhile, while you've been gone, we've gotten the Brazilian company well started, so that I shall have a little more freedom than I've had for years.

"You look as if you needed it," Harriet observed.

"You look wonderful," Richard returned, simply. "Wonderful! Is that a new gown?"

"Well, I had it made last November just before I went away. Mrs. Carter gave me the material a year ago." Harriet glanced down at herself and smiled.

"You might wear pearls—or something—with it," Richard said. "Do you like pearls?"

It was astonishing to see the color come up in her dusky skin; her eyes met his almost pleadingly.

"Why—I never thought!" she said, in some confusion.

"I suppose a man may ask his wife if she likes pearls?" Richard said, impelled by some feeling he did not define. He had leaned back in his chair, and half-closed his eyes, as he studied her.

"Oh—please!" Harriet said in an agony. She gave a horrified glance about, but the library was closed and silent. "Some one might hear you!" she whispered. And a moment later she rose to her feet, and eyed him quietly. "Was that all, Mr. Carter?" she asked. It was Richard's turn to look a trifle confused.

"That's all—my dear!" he said, obediently. The term made her flush again. He was still smiling when she closed the door.

CHAPTER XII.

It was the gayest spring that Harriet had ever known at Crownlands, for even at her best, Isabelle had been socially an individualist, devoting herself to one man at a time, and to no-



"That's All—My Dear!" He Said Obediently.

body else, and the whole family had necessarily accepted Isabelle's attitude. Richard had been too busy to notice or protest, the old lady helpless, and Nina a child.

But now there was a beautiful and gracious woman in Isabelle's place, and long before the world knew that Harriet Field was really Harriet Carter, there was a very decided change in the social atmosphere. Richard began to bring his friends to the house; he was proud of his smoothly running establishment, and proud of the charming woman who neither flirted with nor ignored the men he brought home.

Always beautiful and always busy, constantly in demand on all sides, she went about his house like a smiling worker of miracles, and Richard watched her. When she went home to her sister for a day or two he missed her strangely, and wandered about the empty rooms with a desolate sense of loss.

She was presently back, and amused the young people at the dinner table with a spirited account of her sister's move into a new house—"really an old house," that she and her family had been watching for years.

Nina and Amy and Ward had rushed from the dinner table to an early dance at the club, and Richard, after a talk with his mother on the terrace, had wandered about with a vague hope of finding Harriet somewhere with her book. But she was not downstairs.

He went back, and presently accompanied his mother to her door. The old lady stopped outside of Nina's

open door, from which a subdued light streamed.

"Oh, Miss Field—" said Madame Carter.

"Yes, Madame Carter?" The rich, ready voice responded instantly. Richard hoped she would come to the door, but his mother's message was deferred too quickly to make it necessary.

"You're waiting up for Nina?"

"Oh, yes, Madame Carter!" Harriet answered. The two exchanged good-nights Richard loitered into his mother's room, left her in her maid's hands, and went back into the dimly lighted, spacious upper hall. He felt oddly stirred; there were letters downstairs, his usual books and amusements, but he felt curiously impelled to try for one more word with Miss Field.

He opened the door of Nina's room, and went in, and knocked on the half-open door within that connected it with Harriet's room.

"Come in. Is it you, Pilgrim?" the pleasant, quiet voice said. Richard stepped to the doorway.

Harriet, seated in a square basket chair, under the soft flood of light from a basket-shaded lamp, rose precipitately, and stood looking at him with widened eyes and parted lips, without speaking. She was plainly frightened, though she made herself smile. The beautiful room was full of shadows; at the wide-open windows thin curtains stirred in the cool night air.

"Frighten you?" Richard said.

"Is there something—?" Her eyes were those of a deer that is afraid to turn.

"Why, I wanted to suggest that we tell our little piece of news to the family," Richard suggested, after a momentary search for a suitable subject. "I came very close to telling my mother, just now. Is there any good reason for further delay?"

"Why, no, I don't—I don't suppose there is!" Harriet stammered. "There will be talk."

"I suppose so," he answered, simply. "But what we do is our own affair, after all. I shall explain to my mother that for us both it seemed a practical and a—well, not unpleasant solution. There need be no change here, but you will simply have a more assured position—"

She had been watching him, with all June in her face. But as he went on the color slowly drained away, and about her beautiful eyes a look of strain and even of something like shame gradually deepened. When she spoke, it was as if the muscles of her throat were constricted.

"Yes, I see. Certainly, I see. We will have to let them talk. This is simply the best arrangement possible under the circumstances!"

"It is an arrangement that a man perhaps has no right to ask of a woman," Richard said. "Love means a great deal in a girl's life, and I suppose there is nothing else that makes up for the lack of it. But you are not an ordinary woman, and I assure you that in every way that I can I mean to prove to you how deeply I appreciate what you are doing for us all."

"Thank you!" Harriet said, almost inaudibly.

"Simply change your name on your cheeks," Richard said, thoughtfully. "I shall have Fox step into the bank with the authenticated signature. And if there is anything else, use your own judgment. Perhaps, if I tell my mother, you would like to write to certain friends—? You can continue to draw on the Corn Exchange, that's simplest, and I hope you'll remember that you have a large personal credit there," he added, with a smile. "It occurred to me tonight that you—you mustn't let your sister worry about that new house. If you want your own car—"

"Oh, good heavens, Mr. Carter!" Harriet said, suffocating.

"Ask me anything that puzzles you," the man said. And with a brief good-night he was gone. Harriet, who had dropped back into her chair, sat absolutely motionless for a long, long time. Her eyes were fixed on space; she hardly breathed; it almost seemed as if her heart was stopped.

Richard went downstairs, surprised to feel still vaguely unsatisfied. He had had his word with Harriet, had said indeed much that he had not expected to say. However, it was much better to let the world know their relationship; he was perfectly satisfied to have it so. But still, as he settled himself to an hour's reading, the plaguing little impulse persisted. He would like to go upstairs again; he missed her companionship.

There was something very appealing about this woman, thought Richard, suddenly closing his book. Her beauty, her silence, her complete subjugation of her own interests to his, he found strangely fascinating.

"By George, she has made a most interesting woman of herself!" Richard decided, opening his book again. "She ought to be right in the middle of things, that girl!"

A day or two later Madame Carter came out to the terrace at eleven o'clock, beautifully groomed and gowned, and with an imperative hand arrested Harriet, who was rumbled

and sunburned from the tennis court and was going toward the house.

"Just a moment, Miss Field," said she, magnificently. Harriet obediently stood still, and watched Madame Carter's magnificence settle itself slowly in a basket chair. The old lady fixed an eyeglass ribbon deliberately, straightened a ruffle, laid her magazine beside her on a table. "There was a little matter of which I wished to speak to you," she said, suavely, bringing her distant glance to rest passionately for a moment upon Harriet's face.

Harriet waited, amused, annoyed, impatient.

"I understand," Madame Carter said, "that you and my son—for some reason best known to yourselves—have entered into a secret marriage?"

"Your first object, my dear, is not to antagonize his mother!" Harriet reminded herself. Aloud she said mildly: "You have no reason to disbelieve it, have you?"

"No reason to disbelieve my son!" his mother echoed, scandalized. "Why should I have! Mr. Carter is the soul of honor—absolutely the soul. Upon my word, I don't understand you!"

"I said you have no reason to disbelieve him," Harriet repeated. "You said that you understood that we had been married. It is true!"

And she looked off toward the river with an expression as composed as that of Madame Carter herself.

"I suppose you know that old saying: 'A secret bride has a secret to hide!'" the old woman pursued, pleasantly.

"I never heard it. I did not play much with the children of the neighborhood when I was a child," Harriet answered. "My father was very anxious to protect us from picking up expressions of that sort!"

There was a silence. Harriet, beginning to be ashamed of herself, did not look at her companion.

"A girl of your age has a great deal of confidence when she marries into a family like mine," the old lady said, presently, in a tone that trembled a little. "My son is a rich man—he is a prominent man. He has used his own judgment, of course. But I confess that in your place I should not carry myself with quite so much an air of triumph! It seems to me—"

Harriet determinedly regained her calm, and taking the chair next to the enraged old lady, quietly interrupted the flow of her angry words.

"I hope I have shown no air of triumph, Madame Carter," Harriet said. "You yourself—and most wisely—pointed out to us a few months ago that the arrangement here was unconventional—"

"Every one was talking, if you mind that!" the old lady snapped. But she was slightly mollified, none-the-less. "But upon my word, you'd think marrying into the family was something to be done every day—!" she was beginning again, when Harriet interrupted again.

"No—no," she said, soothingly, conceding the last words an amused smile that itself rather helped to placate her companion. "It is, of course, the most serious step of my life! But the secrecy—as of course you will appreciate—was because there has been so much terrible notoriety this year! Why, Mr. Carter tells me that never in the history of all the Carters—"

This fortunate lead was enough. Madame Carter launched forth superbly upon a description of the usual Carter weddings, the ceremony, the state. In perhaps twenty minutes she was blandly patronizing Harriet, giving her encouraging little tips with her eyeglasses, warning her of mistakes that Isabelle had made with Richard. Harriet knew that before three days were over her terrible mother-in-law would be telling the world just how wise, under the trying circumstances, the whole thing was, and just how clearly she had foreseen it. She was still listening respectfully, if a trifle confusedly, when Ward bounded from the house, and gave her an effusive embrace.

"Hello, Mamma!" Ward said. Harriet laughed, as she pushed away the dial arm. Hardly knowing what she said or did she made her way to the house, and up to her own room.

But here, in Nina's room, were Nina and Mrs. Tabor, and from their eyes, as she came in, she knew that they knew. Nina got up, and came forward with a sort of sulky graciousness.

"I hope you'll be very happy, Miss Harriet—I suppose I oughtn't to call you Miss Harriet any more," Nina said, with an effort to smile that Harriet thought quite ghastly. She gave Harriet one of her big hands, and hesitated over a kiss. But they did not kiss each other.

At luncheon everything was exactly as usual; Richard had gone to the city, not to return for a night or two, and several social engagements distracted the young people from the contemplation of their father's affairs.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Florida Woods.

The forests of Florida contain 175 different kinds of wood.

A rifle bullet takes about two seconds to fly 1,200 yards.