

PRUDENCE'S DAUGHTER

By Ethel Hueston

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SYNOPSIS PART ONE

CHAPTER I.—At a merry party in the studio apartment of Carter Blake, in New York, Jerry Harmer, Prudence's daughter, meets Duane Allerton, wealthy idler. He becomes slightly intoxicated, and Jerry, resenting his assumption of familiarity, leaves the party abruptly.

CHAPTER II.—The story turns to Jerry's childhood and youth at her home in Des Moines. Only child of a wealthy father, when she is twenty she feels the call of Art, and her parents, with some misgivings, agree to her going to New York to study.

CHAPTER III.—In New York Jerry makes her home with a Mrs. Delaney ("Mimi"), an actress, who, with Theresa, a painter, occupies the house. Jerry takes an immediate liking to Theresa, and the two become fast friends.

(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

"I—I think it is wonderful, Rhoda. It makes me feel—sorry, like crying. Does—it somehow make you think of Iowa?"

Rhoda laughed gaily. "It does not! Anything but!"

"Yes, but you never met my mother, did you?" Jerry asked, surprisingly, and Rhoda did not understand. The picture was New York, plain and unvarnished, and Jerry was lonely for Prudence.

"They say it really is good. Thank God it's finished! It's a competition you know—a year's scholarship, travel in Europe, everything! I wonder if Theresa is trying for it? Has she shown you her pictures, Jerry?"

"Nothing—not a thing," said Jerry. "She never asks me so much as to look at the easel when she is working."

"Perhaps she thinks you aren't interested. Ask her. She won't mind showing you. She has three or four exquisite things—not finished. She works on a dozen at once, as the mood strikes her. I can't do that—one thing at a time for me—and I eat it, and drink it, and breathe it, and sleep it, until it's over. That's why I'm such a wreck."

While she was preparing a dainty supper on her electric grill, with which she could really work culinary



While She Was Preparing a Dainty Supper on Her Electric Grill, She Explained the Frenzied System of Art She Was Obligated to Pursue.

wonders, she explained the frenzied system of Art she was obliged to pursue.

"You can't make a living at real Art until you're old, and withered, and haven't any teeth," she declared. "I don't care how good you are, you can't make a decent living! Gee, you're lucky, Jerry, that you're not obliged to earn your bread and butter. You can pursue Art for its own sake, and that's all the fun there is in it. Otherwise, it's just grind, grind, grind, like digging ditches, or mining coal, or scrubbing floors. Well, anyhow, I'm one of the grinders. Haven't a cent but what I earn. So I peg along with illustrations, advertising, anything I can get on the side. And when I have enough to pay the rent in advance a few weeks, I jump into something like this, head over heels, trying to attach a few leaves to my wreath of laurel while I have a little hair to wear it on." She gave her brisk bobbed head a defiant toss as she spoke.

After their supper, deliciously cooked, charmingly served, they went uptown to a theater, and after a sandwich and hot chocolate at a corner drug store, returned home, luxuriously, like the plutocrat she insisted Jerry was, in a taxicab.

Jerry felt a... For the first

time, she was quite pleased with her self. She was glad she did not take Art with killing seriousness, as Theresa and Rhoda did. Why, those girls sat up, many times, night after night, until two and three o'clock in the morning, painting passionately away as though their very lives depended on it. There was no sense in such maddening immoderation. Jerry was grateful for her mental balance, her artistic equilibrium. Pictures were all very well, of course, but Jerry thanked heaven that she had been spared a passion that would surely be productive of weary, dark-circled eyes, twitching, nervous lips, and twisting nervous fingers!

She said something of that sort to Theresa one night. It was a night when Theresa, staggering away from her easel, had stumbled, fallen half-fainting to the floor. Mimi had pulled her up on the couch, given her a cup of the eternal tea, and then asked Jerry to sit with her a while, to keep her from working. Mimi herself had an engagement, and was just hurrying away.

When Jerry relieved herself of her opinion on art in general, Theresa looked at her somberly, with her great, dark, weary eyes.

"Didn't you ever sit up all night working over a thing you couldn't get just right?" she demanded.

"Never," said Jerry comfortably. "Didn't you ever forget to stop for your dinner when you were especially interested in something?"

"Certainly not. I just put the brush down, and have my dinner, and then come back to it afterward—or the next morning—or whenever I get around to it."

"But sometimes you can't come back to it," objected Theresa. "You lose the feeling when you stop—you can't come back."

"You just imagine that," said Jerry pleasantly. "You shouldn't let yourself get so excited over things. You wear yourself all out for nothing. I can always come back to it when I am ready." And then she added, fairly, "Not. I must admit, that anything of mine is anything like yours or Rhoda's. Far from it! But I am only a beginner."

"That's what we all are," said Theresa wearily. "Just beginners. And so we shall be all our lives, until we die, and afterward, too, I fancy."

Jerry was beginning to feel a growing impatience with both girls, their intensity, their passionate nervousness, their ardent eagerness. She found it a little tiresome. They were always going about, looking at pictures, each other's, or somebody else's, and then arguing desperately, for hours at a time, over tones, and colors, and values. She found herself wishing there might come a time, just once, when they would sit down, deliberately, for tea, without hovering, poised on the edge of the chair, ready for flight at the first favorable moment.

Jerry thanked God for moderation with increasing fervor day by day. She attended her classes with nice regularity every morning, worked at her easel an hour or two every afternoon, and then she manicured her nails, had a cup of tea and a toasted muffin and went out for a bus ride.

She had been studying Art in New York for over six weeks when Rhoda swept in on her late one afternoon with the happy announcement that they were going to a party.

"Carter Blake's studio, over in Brooklyn," she explained gaily. "I haven't seen him in months. He just telephoned that he has signed a huge contract with International this very morning, and is having a wicked party to celebrate it. And he invited you, most particularly. He's a darling thing, and you'll adore him."

Jerry was properly thrilled, properly eager.

"Now wear your very stuffy-ruffiest party clothes, so they'll all fall in love with you," admonished Rhoda. "He's sure to have some awfully amusing folks, and you'll be crazy about it. You get dressed and come by for me. We'll be rather late. I have to finish a drawing before we go. You come along about ten, and we'll start as soon as I get the darned old lamp in the right place."

"The lamp? What lamp?" "In my drawing. It's a background thing. There has to be a floor lamp, and the lady villain falls under it. There's only one place in the picture it can possibly go, and when I put it there, it throws a shadow where there should be a light. On the lady's face—see? I've been having the devil's own time with it all day. My lamp isn't tall enough, so I'm going to borrow one of Mimi's to take along home, and perhaps it will go better."

"Why don't you let it go until tomorrow?" asked Jerry. "Then you'll be nice and fresh for it. If you work tonight you'll be all tired out. Wait till tomorrow."

"Oh, but I can't work tomorrow. We're going to a party!"

"Another party tomorrow?"

"No, no, this one, tonight. But I can't work tomorrow. I never can work the day after a party."

Jerry dismissed the subject with a shrug of her pretty shoulder. She had long since ceased trying to understand the ways of eager Rhoda and tired Theresa. She was going to the party, too, as well as Rhoda. Jerry was sure she would be at her class as usual the following day.

"Um' on in," she stood aghast, staring, eyes wide, lips parted. "Mimi's tallest, handsomest, rosiest floor lamp stood conspicuously in the center of the room, and on a rug directly beneath it, lay Rhoda herself, in a shimmering evening gown of gold and green, writhing, twisting, squirming, studying herself frowningly in a small hand mirror to get the effect of her contortions.

As the meaning of the curious pantomime burst upon Jerry, she broke into peals of merry laughter.

"Oh, Rhoda, you can't imagine how ridiculous you look," she cried. Rhoda got up. She took Jerry's handsome kolsinsky wrap and tossed it across a chair.

"You do it." She waved a light hand toward the picture on her easel. "See, it's like this. There's the lady. The lamp has to be there. It throws her face into shadow, see? And it's got to be clear and in a bright light. Now, how the dickens—"

Under her insistence, Jerry was obliged, flame-colored chiffon velvet and all, to sprawl out on the rug on the floor—turning this way, twisting that, head thrown backward, tilted higher, while Rhoda stood over her, scowling, criticizing, swearing softly beneath her breath, moving the lamp, now here, now there.

And after some ten minutes of painful effort on the part of good-natured Jerry, she suddenly found that a bright shaft of light fell directly across the lovely face on the rug. She cried out, joyously, clasping her hands. "Hold it, hold it, Jerry!" she ordered. And caught up her brush to catch the light.

For thirty minutes the room was hushed with a great silence, while Rhoda worked feverishly at the picture, and Jerry, on the floor, almost held her breath in her fear of spoiling the effect.

Presently Rhoda clicked out the brilliant light beside the easel, sighing loudly in relief, and laughed. "Done! That's fine! Much obliged, Jerry. You're the nicest little sport I ever saw."

At eleven o'clock, muffled in heavy wraps, they were in a taxi on their way to Brooklyn.

That was the night of Jerry's first studio party, the night of Carter Blake's "contract soiree," as it was affectionately recorded in the memories of his friends forever after. And that was the night when Jerry, basking warmly in the intoxicating intimacy of Duane Allerton's friendly smile, lost the glamorous illusion of her girlhood's tenderest dream.

CHAPTER IV

When Jerry Gave Up

It was four o'clock in the morning when Jerry reached her little studio apartment on Reilly's alley after Carter Blake's hilarious "contract soiree" in Brooklyn. She went in very slowly, very quietly, and placed her great fur cloak carefully on its hanger in the small closet. And then she set to work, with the minutest care and orderliness, piling together every penciled sketch, every laboriously painted tree and flower, every anxiously outlined face and figure that was even remotely connected with the pursuit of Art. When she had it all in one heap, she wrapped it in heavy paper and tied it with a stout cord. Then she cleaned her brushes with painful painstaking intensity, closing every bottle and tube and jar of paint and oil, wiping them neatly and packing them all in their boxes. These she put away on the top shelf of her closet. Last of all, she released the supports of her easel and let it down, and then, with a great effort, managed to shove it into her bath closet behind the ridiculously small tub.

Jerry did not know why she did these things. She did not even wonder why. She only knew that she must banish every reminder of a dead passion—though really Art had never been a passion with her, but only a pleasant, luke-warm interest. When easel, sketches and paints were gone from her sight, she sighed a little wearily. She removed the flame-colored gown and went to bed.

At ten o'clock the next morning she went up to Theresa, carrying a gaudy tray, on which she had arranged a charming little breakfast with that daintiness which characterized everything she did. Theresa, who kept her door forbiddingly barred to Mimi, and to all the world besides, after the first few days of their acquaintance, had given Jerry a duplicate key.

"Come in whenever you like," she said. "You have an easy way about you that doesn't drive me wild, like everybody else. But don't knock! Just use the key and come right in! There's never any love-making to interrupt here."

Theresa's abhorrence to knocking was a frenzy with her. A state of nerves, Jerry called it, but Theresa, who never acknowledged nerves in any shape or form, denied it, although the slightest tapping started her to such a degree that it was a physical pain.

"Oh, I'm off in the clouds, and it jerks me down to earth; so fast it makes my teeth chatter," was the way she described the sensation.

There was a huge black and white sign on her door which read:

"For God's sake, don't knock. Cough, and I'll let you in, if I want to see you."

fore opening the door, to give Theresa time to adjust herself to company, whether she wished for time or not.

Theresa looked up at her entrance and nodded briskly in greeting. The



There Was a Huge Black Sign on Her Door.

Theresa never said "good morning." She held that a nod meant welcome, and a frown requested your absence.

"Come and eat," Jerry said, without preamble. "You've got on my conscience so I can't sleep nights, thinking of you up here wasting away to a shadow, and for no good reason either. I'm expecting any time to find you've devoured your easel."

Theresa was thinner, wanner, the dark circles shadowing her brilliant eyes deeper and wider than before. She took the tray gratefully and balanced it on her knee.

"You are the nicest kid, Jerry," she said. "I am hungry. I wish I could mess about with a grill the way Rhoda does, but everything comes out burned; or raw, or too much salt. I haven't the knack for it, and it makes me peevish anyhow. The sight of a pan arouses all my evil instincts. I wish I had been born a cave man, and then I could eat my food raw—just catch a bird, and gobble him up."

"You're cave man enough," Jerry warned her. "Don't wish for any more of it. Do you notice an improvement in my cooking? Rhoda has been showing me, and it's really rather fun, Theresa. I'm glad that you don't mind my practicing on you."

They sat for a while in silence, Theresa drinking the hot coffee, nibbling the crisp toast, with warm appreciation. The silence was not unusual, very quiet, and Theresa working steadily at her easel. Jerry curled up comfortably on the tumbled couch.

"I'm glad your eyes are blue," Theresa said suddenly, with one of her rare smiles. "I don't mind your staring about. Brown eyes give me the willies."

"Was I staring? I'm sorry." Theresa looked at her curiously. In Jerry's abstraction, she found food for conversation.

"Oh, I don't mind. I wonder if it is because your eyes are so blue that your lashes seem so cloudy, or because your lashes are so dark that your eyes seem so blue?"

"I don't know." Again Theresa swept her a quiet look. "Or perhaps it is the midnight blackness of your hair, and the olive cream of your skin, that effects the subtle combination."

Jerry said nothing. "Have a good time at the party?"

"Oh, yes, lovely."

"You're late for your class. I'm going to report you to the Amalgamated Middle West. You're supposed to be prompt."

"I'm not going to the class."

"Why not? Too much party?"

"I'm not going to study Art any more."

"Why not?"

"Because I can't paint. You knew it all the time, didn't you?"

"Yes. How did you find out?"

"I don't know. It just came to me, all of a sudden. Why didn't you tell me, Theresa?"

"You do very nicely, Jerry—for amusement—for passing away the time, and all that. You just haven't the spark, that's all."

"I wish you had told me, Theresa. Jerry was wretchedly abject in her dependency."

"Why should I? It amused you, and you have money to pay for any amusement that pleases you. If you had gone in professionally, expecting to make a career of it, a living—McDowall would have told you. But you were never really one of us, you know."

"You mean I—I am a misfit."

"Yes, a misfit." Theresa smiled upon her.

"You—you don't like me very well, do you, Theresa?" Jerry's voice was pathetic.

Theresa put the tray on the floor, and Jerry went downstairs.

Jerry expected quite confidently to hear from Rhoda, by telephone at least, to make inquiry as to her safe arrival alone at that ghastly hour! But she neither telephoned nor came. And so, late in the afternoon, Jerry walked the six intervening blocks to her studio. The maid assured her that Miss La Faye was in, and sent her directly up, but although Jerry knocked twice, very smartly, there was no answer. She started down, but as the maid insisted that her friend was certainly in, she returned once more, and used the heavy knocker to such good effect that after a time there came a muffled groan, a flinging about of covers, and presently the shuffling of soft-soled slippers toward the door.

It was a flushed and disheveled Rhoda who confronted her, her usually bright eyes swollen, inflamed and dull. Two grotesque kid curlers, protruded stiffly over her left eye, while the rest of her bobbed hair dangled about her face in free disorder.

"Why didn't you do it all?" demanded Jerry quickly, her eyes on the bristling curlers. "Why such partiality?"

Following the direction of Jerry's eyes, Rhoda lifted a languid hand and felt vaguely about her forehead, coming to a sudden, electrical alertness as she felt the two curlers. She ran to the mirror for a minute inspection.

"For heaven's sake," she wailed, "did I go like that to the party?"

Jerry assured her she did not, and Rhoda sighed in great relief.

"Well, I don't know how it happened," she said, "and I don't care. Bertrande brought me home. Perhaps he did it for a joke. As long as I did not disgrace myself at the party, I don't care."

She tumbled upon the bed again, and Jerry sat down beside her.

"Oh, such a head," moaned Rhoda, lifting her hands to her throbbing temples. "I swear every time I'll never do it again, and then I do."

Jerry took off her gloves, removed her hat, folded her coat nicely over the back of a chair, and went to work. She got out cups and saucers, measured coffee and water into the electric percolator, and connected the switch. "You'd better have it black," she said, "but I'll take cream as usual."

Encouraged by her gentle activity, Rhoda pulled a dressing-gown about her shoulders, bathed her flushed face, brushed out her tousled locks, and then drooped wearily upon the tumbled couch once more.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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