

The Thirteenth Commandment

By
RUPERT HUGHES

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DUANE AGAIN COMES TO RESCUE AS DAPHNE SEES HER CHANCE TO BECOME A STAR SLIPPING AWAY.

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. Through an introduction by Duane, Daphne induces Reben, a theatrical magnate, to give her a position in one of his companies.

CHAPTER X—Continued.

Miss Kemble tried to help. She asked Daphne to step aside and watch while she went through the scene. But she was so unnerved that she forgot her own lines and had to refer to the manuscript, while Eldon waited in acute distress and Daphne, looking on, said: "Oh, I see. I think I understand it now." Then she forgot it all again at the repetition. Somehow the rehearsal was worried through to the end and Batterson dismissed the company with sarcastic thanks. Then he went to Reben to demand a substitute.

Daphne went home, dreading her fate but not knowing what the verdict was. She felt sure that it would be not guilty of dramatic ability. She was worn out with the exposure of her own faults and uncertainty which she feared the more—to be dismissed or to be accepted. The latter meant pending trials.

At the elevator she found Tom Duane. He had just telephoned up to the apartment to ask if she were in. There was a welcome flattery in his frank delight. She asked him up. Tom Duane was electric with cheer. He praised Daphne with inoffensive heartiness and insisted on hearing the history of her progress. She gave the worst possible account of her stupidity. "He would have none of her self-deprecation.

"Everything's got to begin," he said. "Some of the greatest actors are bad at rehearsal, and never get over it. Some of the greatest actresses always are at their worst on the first performance. You're bound to succeed. You have beauty and charm and grace and magnetism up end. Don't worry. I'll speak to Reben and make him restrain Batterson. We'll make a star of you yet."

There was a fine reassurance in that word "we" in spite of its pleasant tang of impudence. It gave her strength to go to the telephone and call up Reben. She came back in despair and collapsed on the divan.

Tom Duane was at her side instantly. "You're ill! In heaven's name, what can I do?" His solicitude pleased her. She smiled palely: "Mr. Reben told me he was afraid I'd better give up the job."

Another silence, then Daphne laughed and choked, "I'm awfully stupid. I've forgotten the line."

Batterson gnashed his unlighted cigar and growled: "Howjado! Howjado!"

"Oh, yes! Thank you. I'm so sorry!" said Daphne, and walked on at the wrong side of the chairs.

Everybody shuddered to realize that she had entered through a solid wall. This miracle was ignored, but there was no ignoring the peculiarly inelegant note she struck when she bowed to the butler and stammered:

"How are you?"

A sigh went through the vast profound and void of the empty theater. Instinct told even the echoes that Daphne did not belong and never could belong. Batterson groaned, tragically.

"Not to the butler, please! Don't say 'How are you?' to the butler. Don't say 'How are you?' to anybody, please. Script says 'Howjado.' Say 'Howjado' to Mr. Eldon there. Say 'Howjado' to Mr. Eldon there."

"How do you do?" said Daphne, bowing to Eldon and speaking with a soulessness of a squeezed doll.

Eldon rose, folded up his imaginary paper, and came forward with a pitying desire to help her. He hoped that the scared little Kip woman would win through the same bitter trials to the same perilous and always endangered success. But he had a fear.

He delivered her his line with benevolent gentleness. He waited, then gave her her line with exquisite tact. She did not repeat it after him. He said to her:

"Don't be afraid; you're all right." He gave her the line again and she parroted it after him. She leaped then to a speech several minutes farther on. He drew her back to the cue: "Pardon me, but I think I have a line before that."

The rehearsal blundered on. It was not Daphne's fright that disturbed the rest. It was her complete failure to suggest the character, or any character.

She lunged herself free. "No, no; I'm an imbecile—I'm no good—that's all." Those big hands were at her shoulders again. That soothing voice was ministering courage and praise: "You are not no good. You shall succeed! I'll make Reben take you back. I've helped Reben out when he was in trouble. I've lent him money and I'll make him give you your chance. I promise that, on my word!"

She stared at him through her tears. They blurred him in dancing flashes of light as if he were a sun god. She caught his hands from her shoulders, but she had to hold them in hers. She was drowning, and she must cling to whatever arms stretched down to her. She must not question those they were till she was safe again on the solid earth.

Duane was laughing now and patting her on the back as if she were a frightened child. She felt no right to rebuke his caresses. They were such as a brother might give a sister. His arm about her was that of a comrade, sustaining another in a battle.

He was the only one in the world who offered her courage and praise and help in her need.

Duane said, with a matter-of-fact briskness: "I'll call Reben up at once. No, I'll go see him."

"But you put me under such obligations. I'm afraid—"

"Never be afraid of an obligation. I'm afraid I can never repay it."

"Then you're one ahead. But you can repay me and you will."

"How?"

"Let's wait and see. Goodbye. Don't worry."

He gave her a hand-grip of perfect good fellowship and went into the hall. She followed him, to tell him again how kind he was. As she was clasping his hand again Lella opened the door with her latchkey.

Now there was triple embarrassment. Tom Duane had paid ardent court to Lella before she married Bayard. Here he was in Bayard's wife's home, apparently flirting with Bayard's young sister.

Lella felt all the outraged sentiments of jealousy and all the indignation of a chaperon who has been circumvented. Duane retreated in poor order. Daphne stammered his explanation too brief and muddled to suffice. Then she went to her room.

There her mother found her when she came in later. Daphne had only a faint hope that Duane could work his miracle twice, so she told her mother that she had failed as an actress. She told her bluntly:

"Mamma, I've been fired."

To her comfort her mother caught her to her ample bosom and said: "I'm glad of it. I'm much obliged to whoever is to blame. Not but what you could have succeeded if you had kept at it. But you're too good for such a wicked life. A person couldn't be an actor without being insincere and a pretender, and my little girl is too honest. So now you come along home with me."

"You're not the only one who can open accounts. I started one for those."

"He took from his pocket a pale brochure and said to Lella: "That allowance we agreed on, you know?"

"Yes, I know."

"Well, instead of paying it to you week by week I decided to open a bank account for you; so I ran over to this bank at the lunch hour and made a deposit to your credit—five hundred dollars!"

Lella forgot her jewelry for a moment in this new pride. She strutted about with mock hauteur, waving Mrs. Kip and Daphne aside and saying: "Don't speak to me. I am a lady with a bank account."

Mrs. Kip sighed in dreary earnest. "That's more than I ever was."

Lella was poring over her bank book, the blank pages in which so many dramas, tragedies and life histories could be codified in bald numerals.

Her first question was ominous: "Do I have to go all the way down to Broad street every time I want to draw out some money?"

Her first thought was already to attack the integrity of her store.

"No, dearest," said Bayard, "there is an uptown branch, right around the corner. But I hope your visits there will be more for a put-in than take-out. Every time I give you anything I want you to put some of it aside. Maybe some day I'll want to borrow

some of it for a while. Maybe you can save me from a crash some day. Anyhow, it will be a great help to me to feel that I have a thrifty little wife at home. A man has to plunge a good deal in business. It's his wife that usually makes him or breaks him."

Bayard spoke with unusual solemnity: "Old Ben Franklin said, 'A shilling earned and sixpence spent, a fortune. Sixpence earned and a shilling spent, bankruptcy'—or something like that. But Moses got ahead of him. When he handed down the Ten Commandments he whispered an extra one to be the private secret of the chosen people."

"What was it?" said Lella with a minimum of interest.

"Thou shalt not spend all thou earnest," said Bayard. "It was well, it was the Thirteenth Commandment. I guess—a mighty unlucky one to break. The Jews have kept it pretty well. They've been the bankers of the world ever while they were persecuted."

Lella shrugged her handsome shoulders and studied the gems.

"Let's not talk about it tonight. Let's dine somewhere and go to the theater. I want to show off my new splendor."

"Fine!" said Bayard, trying to cast away his forebodings and lift himself by his own boot straps. "Get on your duds mother, you and Daphne."

"I can't go," said Daphne. "I've got to be at the fun-factory at half past seven and I've hardly time to eat anything."

While Lella and Bayard and Mrs. Kip were putting on their festive robes Daphne was eating alone a hasty meal brought up tardily from the restaurant.

Before they were dressed she had to march out in what she called her working clothes. The hallman ran to call her a taxicab, but she shook her head. Her humble twenty-five dollars a week would not justify a chariot and from the shop.

She walked rapidly along Fifty-ninth street, but not rapidly enough to escape one or two murmurous gallants.

She found Batterson quarreling with a property man over the responsibility for a broken vase. He ignored her till at length she ventured to stammer:

"Here I am, Mr. Batterson."

"So I see... Well, sit down somewhere."



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Finding a seat was no easy task. Every piece of furniture she selected became at once the object of the scene shifter's attack and she had to take flight.

Members of the company strolled in, paused at the mailbox and went to their various cells.

Eventually Batterson found that all the company was on hand and in good health. He said to Daphne, "Everybody is here and nobody sick, so you needn't stay after the curtain goes up."

But she wanted to learn her trade, so she loitered about, feeling like an uninvited poor relation. The members of the company came from their lairs,

looking odd and unreal in their paint. They seemed to be surprised that Daphne was still in existence. Eldon gave her a curious smile of greeting. She heard the call boy crying "Overture" about the corridors. She heard the orchestra playing "the king's piece." Then it struck up a march that sounded remote and irrelevant. There was a loud splash which she supposed to be the curtain going up. An actor and an actress in white flannels with tennis rackets under their arms linked hands and skipped into the well of light. They banded repartee for a time.

Eldon, speaking earnestly to Mrs. Vining, suddenly began to laugh softly. He laughed louder and louder and then plunged into the light.

A little later Eldon came off the stage laughing. He dropped his laughter as he crossed the border and resumed his anecdote. "As I was saying—"

"But Mrs. Vining interrupted: "There comes my cue. How are they tonight?"

"Rather cold," said Eldon; "it's so hot."

"The swine!" said Mrs. Vining. Then she shook out her skirts, straightened up and swept through the door like a dowager swan.

One of the box lights began to sputter, and Batterson dashed round from the other wing to curse the man in charge. He ran into Daphne, glared, and spoke harshly: "You needn't wait any longer."

Daphne swallowed her pride and slunk out.

CHAPTER XI.

She woke early next morning. It was just six o'clock. She remembered that her father would be arriving in two hours. She decided that it would be a pleasant duty to surprise the poor, old, neglected codger by meeting him.

At the Grand Central Station Daphne found that she was nearly an hour too early for the train. It amused her to take her breakfast at the lunch counter, to clamber on the high stool and eat the dishes of haste—a cup of coffee and a ham sandwich. It was pleasant to wander about alone in this atmosphere of speed, the suburban trains, like feed pipes, spouting streams of workers, the out-bound trains drawing their passengers to far-off destinies as if by suction.

At length it was time for the train. Daphne went to the rope barrier opposite the door of entry and waited in ambush for her father.

At length she made out a rather shabby man carrying his own luggage. It was her father. He looked older and seedier than she remembered. He did not expect to be met. He was looking idly at the new station. He had not been to New York since it had been thrown open.

She ran to him. He dropped his old suitcase on the toes of the man following him and embraced Daphne with fervor. He devoured her with his eyes and kissed her again and told her that she was prettier than ever. All about them there were little groups embracing and kissing. There was a wonderful business in reunions.

When her father said, "I haven't had my breakfast; have you?" she lied affectionately, "No."

"Let's have some breakfast together."

"Fine," said Daphne. "We'll go to the Biltmore."

"Kind of expensive, isn't it?" he asked anxiously.

"It's my treat," she said. This amused him enormously. "So you're going to treat, eh?"

"Yes," she said.

"Where did you get all the money?"

"I'm a working lady now."

He laughed again and shook his head over her.

"What did you mean by saying you were a working lady?" said Wesley when they were seated at the table and breakfast was ordered. "Your mother wrote me something about having a little disagreement with you. She seemed to be right worried, so I thought I'd better run on to see if I couldn't sort of smooth things over. I'm glad you came to meet me. We can talk without interruption for once. Tell me all about it."

She told him the whole story of her decision to join the great social revolution that is freeing women from the slavery of enslaving the men. Her peroration was her new watchword: "I don't want to take any more money from you."

"Why, honey," he protested, "I love to give it to you. I only wish I had ten times as much. I couldn't dream of letting you work. You're too pretty. What's that young Wimburn cub mean by letting you work?"

"Oh, he's bitterly opposed to it, so I gave him his ring."

At last Daphne gets the chance that she has hoped for and at the same time has dreaded—the chance to gain a place that will give her the independence she seeks. What Daphne did with the great chance when it came is told in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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NERVOUS PROSTRATION

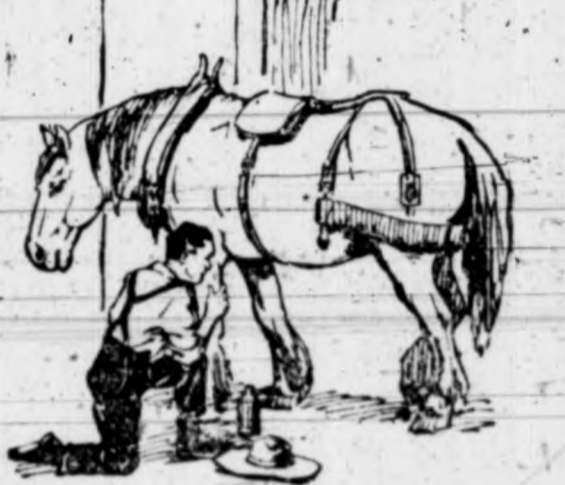
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