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THE DUST

By PETER B. KYNE

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT THE Sawdust Pile the monotony of Nan Brent's life remained unbroken; she was marking time, waiting for something to turn up. Since the last visit of the McKaye ambassador she had not altered her determination to exist independent of financial aid from the McKaye women or their father—for according to her code, the acceptance of remuneration for what she had done would be debasing. Nan had made this decision even while realizing that in waiving Mr. Daney's offer of reimbursement she was rendering it impossible to return to New York with her child. The expenses of their journey and the maintenance of their brief residence there; the outlay for clothing for both and the purchase of additional wardrobe necessitated when with an unreliable good luck, she had succeeded in securing twenty weeks engagement over a high-class vaudeville circuit for her "Songs of the Sixties," had altogether with the cost of transportation back to Port Agnew, so depleted her resources that, with the few hundred dollars remaining, her courage was not equal to the problem which unemployment in New York would present; for with the receipt of Mrs. McKaye's message, Nan had written the booking agent explaining that she had been called West on a matter which could not be evaded and expressed a hope that at a later date the "time" might be open to her. Following her return to the Sawdust Pile she had received a brief communication, stating that there would be no opening for her until the following year. The abandonment of her contract and the subsequent loss of commission to the agent had seriously peeved that person.

The receipt of this news, while a severe disappointment to her, had not caused her to flinch, for she had, in a measure, anticipated it and with the calmness of her desperation, already commenced giving thought to the problem of her future existence. In the end she had comforted herself with the thought that good cooks were exceedingly scarce—so scarce, in fact, that even a cook with impediments in the shape of a small son might be reasonably certain of ready and well-paid employment. Picturing herself as a kitchen mechanic, brought a wry smile to her sweet face, but it was honorable employment and she preferred it to being a waitress or an underpaid and underpaid saleswoman in a department store. For she could dignify a kitchen and she preferred it to cadging from the McKayes the means to enable her to withstand the economic siege incident to procuring a livelihood more dignified and remunerative. Thus she had planned up to the day of her unexpected meeting with Jane and Elizabeth in the telegraph office. On that day, something had happened—something that had constituted a distinct event in Nan Brent's life and with which the well-bred insolence of the McKaye girls had nothing to do. Indirectly old Caleb Brent had been responsible, for by the mere act of dying, his three-quarter pay as a retired sailor had automatically estimated and Nan had written the Navy Department notifying accordingly. Now, the death of a retired member of the Army or Navy, no matter what his degree may be, constitutes news for the service journals, and the fact that old Caleb had been a medal of honor man appeared, to the editor of one of these journals, to entitle the dead sailor to three hundred words of posthumous publicity. Subsequently, these three hundred words came under the eye of a retired admiral of the United States Navy, who thereupon became aware that he had an orphaned grand-daughter residing in Port Agnew, Washington.

As a man grows old he grows kinder; those things which, at middle age, appear so necessary to an unruffled existence, frequently undergo such a metamorphosis, due to the corroding effects of time, that at eighty one has either forgotten them or regards them as something to be secretly ashamed of. Thus it was with Nan's grandfather, his pride and dignity were as austere as ever, but his withered heart yearned for the love and companionship of one of his own blood; now that Caleb Brent was dead, the ancient forgot the offense which this simple sailor had committed against the pride of a long line of distinguished gentlemen, members of the honorable profession of arms. He thought it over for a month, then wrote the child of his dead daughter, asking her to come to him, hinting broadly that his days in the land were nearly numbered and that, in the matter of worldly goods he was not exactly a pauper.

Having posted this letter the old admiral waited patiently for an answer, and when this answer was not forthcoming within the time he had set, he telegraphed the postmaster as to her address. This telegram the postmaster had promptly sent over to Nan and it was for the purpose of

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replying to it that she had gone to a man's passions, with all the caution to be expected in one of her class. It he still loed her sufficiently, following a period of mature deliberation and fierce opposition from his people, to offer her honorable marriage, would she not be a fool to cast away such a priceless gift? How few men knew love so strong, so tender, so unselfish, that they do not shrink from sharing with the object of their passion the odium which society has reserved to avoid starvation, her aristocratic, arrogant, prideful grandfather had seen fit to forgive her dead father and offered her shelter from the buffet of the world; yet, even while striving, apparently to be kind, she knew that the reason underlying his invitation was plain, old-fashioned heart-hunger, a tender conscience and a generous admittance of human selfishness. She smiled bitterly at his blunt hint of a monetary reward following his demise; it occurred to her that the stubborn old admiral was striving to buy that which he might have had for a different asking.

She read the admiral's letter for the twentieth time—and from the thick, white pages her glance went to her child. Would he be welcome in that stern old sea-dog's home? Would his great-grandfather forget the bar sinister of little Don's birth, and would her own misfortune be viewed by him with the tenderness and perfect understanding accorded her by old Caleb? She did not think so; and with the remembrance of her dead father, the flames of revolt leaped in her heart. He had been loyal to her and she would be loyal to him. No, no! She was not prepared to come fawning to the feet of that fierce old man who had robbed her father of his happiness. What right had he to expect forgiveness? She was asking, sans an acknowledgment of his heartlessness?

With a bitter smile she wrote him a long letter, relating in detail the incident of her marriage, the birth of her child, her standing in Port Agnew society and her belief that all of this rendered acceptance of his invitation impossible, if she were to act with deference to his point of view and still remain loyal to the memory of her dead father. For these reasons she declined, thanked him for his kindness and remained his very sincerely. When she had posted this letter she felt better, and immediately took up the case of the McKayes. Until that moment she had not considered seriously the possibility of a marriage with the young heir of Port Agnew as a means of humiliating these women who humiliated her. The thought had occurred to her in the telegraph office and at the moment had held for her a certain delightful fascination; prior to that meeting her resolution not to permit Donald McKaye to share her uncertain fortunes had been adamant. But long and bitter reflection upon the problem thrust upon her by her grandfather had imbued her with a clearer, deeper realization of the futility of striving to please everybody in this curious world, of the cruelty of those who seek to adjust to their point of view that of another fully capable of adjusting his own; of the appalling lack of appreciation with which her piteous sacrifice would meet from the very persons who shrank from the ignominy incident to non-sacrifice on the part of her whom they held in open contempt! Donald McKaye was not unintelligent. He was a man, grown with all

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