



CHAPTER VII

Champ Fields, managing editor of the Westhaven Clarion, fires Tony Blake, but Barbara West, his secretary, intercedes. Tony saves himself by scoring a news beat and gets a raise in pay. Taking Barbara to dinner and a dance Tony proposes and is accepted. They were married in the church, with Tony's mother and sisters, as well as many friends present. After the ceremony, Nora Fields gave a reception at her home. From there they left by car to spend their honeymoon at Ashbury Park. Barbara becomes impatient because Tony, much like his friends, is always promising to do big things but never gets started. Finally Tony finishes Act I of his long promised play, and asks Gloria Havener, a friend, to come to the house for dinner. After dinner Tony reads the first act to her. Gloria says it needs a lot of going over.

"Nonsense," snapped Gloria. "It's true that plays are not written, they are re-written. With no more experience than you've had in the theatre, you've done a bang up job. What you need is some actual stage work."

Tony made a wry face. "It's a vicious circle," he said. "You can't do a play without experience and you can't get the experience until you do the play."

That brings me to a suggestion," murmured Gloria. "Why don't we put on the first act here at the Little Theatre during Labor Day week-end? Pinkney Law is coming down to see me that Saturday I can get him to the performance, if that means anything."

"But you've refused all along to have anything to do with the Little Theatre group here?"

"Because they are a bunch of nit-wits," remarked Gloria. "I think three weeks work on first act in actual rehearsal will do you more good than six months anywhere else. There's nothing like seeing your lines fall flat for teaching you how to time them."

"I realize that," said Tony humbly. "Good Lord, Gloria, if you would really put this act on for me, I'd be indebted to you for the rest of my life."

Gloria smiled. "It's a bargain. Barbara spoke for the first time. "Don't you think Tony should go ahead and finish the other two acts while he's got such a good start?" she asked uneasily.

Gloria looked at her and raised her eyebrows. "No, I don't think so, but perhaps you know best. After all, I've had only fifteen years in the theatre," she said with elaborate sarcasm.

"You don't understand, kid," Tony said. "An opportunity to work out this first act in actual practice with an actress of Gloria's ability is the sort of chance a struggling playwright dreams of. The Little Theatre group when they heard the news was both piqued and flattered. Gloria Havener had consistently snubbed any attempt to interest herself in the organization. Now that she had suddenly decided to relent, the members could not afford to refuse her overture although among themselves they resented her. For the next three weeks Gloria practically took over the Little Theatre."

Gloria and Tony cast the various parts. Tony would have given them to his friends, but Gloria was quite ruthless. She said Wanda Lytle had no more dramatic talent than a broomstick. Wanda was president of the Little Theatre in Westhaven. Gloria said if she was going to do the play at all she would do it right. Curiously enough she demanded Hank Woods for the comic lead, although he was not even a member of the group. To Hank's utter astonishment, she said he could act. Tony was delighted.

During rehearsals Tony was home barely long enough to catch a wink of sleep. He always expected to be there for dinner, but something inevitably came up. More often than not he telephoned Barbara that he'd only have time to grab a hot dog before rehearsal. "See you at the theatre, kid," he would say. "And after we get through, we'll take a ride and catch a little air. I thought you looked sort of peaked this morning."

Usually it was after midnight and both Tony and Barbara were reeling with fatigue. So they seldom took a ride and finally Barbara practically stopped going to the theatre.

It was so terribly lonely, never seeing Tony, eating her dinners alone, having nobody to talk to at night. She was always in bed, though not always asleep, when Tony came in. He slept till the latest possible moment every morning and then was so groggy that conversation was beyond him.

Barbara's pride was hurt, her confidence badly shaken. She was far from well and the heat was enough to play havoc with anyone's temper. Otherwise she never would have gone out to dinner with Martin Fagg. As it was, it happened accidentally. Martin had bought a new car, a small conservative sedan, the first automobile he had ever owned. He was very proud of it and wanted to show it off. Overtaking Barbara on her way home from work one afternoon, he stopped beside her with a flourish. "How do you like it?" he asked.

"Why, Martin, how nice!" exclaimed Barbara.

"It's not the biggest model,

or the most expensive," he murmured, "but I can afford it and that's more than a lot of car owners can say. Hop in," he suggested, "and I'll run you home. "You ought to see her take a hill," he boasted. "If you have time let's go out the river road a piece and I'll show you how she can step."

"Time is the one thing I have a plenty of," murmured Barbara, thinking of the long hours before her until she could possibly begin looking for Tony to come home.

They went much farther than they intended. Suddenly it was quite dark and they were thirty miles from home. "I bet you're starved," said Martin contently.

"I do feel a bit empty," Barbara confessed.

Martin looked embarrassed. "There's a roadhouse about a mile farther along where they have grand chicken dinners. If Tony wouldn't object, Barbara, I'd love to take you to dinner. It would be like old times."

"Why should Tony object?" asked Barbara, her voice tinged with acid. "I think he and Gloria Havener have had dinner together every night this week, either at her house or on the set."

They had a table facing the river. There was a little breeze, sweet with clover hay. The chicken was delicious. She enjoyed talking to Martin, too. At least he did not talk down to her. "You have the levellest head of any woman I know," he insisted. His attitude was calm to Barbara's injured feelings.

"This has done me a lot of good," said Martin when he let her out at her door at nine o'clock. "I wish we could do it again some time."

Barbara glanced up at the darkened windows of the flat it would be midnight at least before Tony came home, probably later, for they were having a dress rehearsal. "Why not?" she asked.

There were to be two performances of Tony's play on Friday and Saturday nights. It was the latter at which Pinkney Law was expected. Barbara sat through the first with her heart sinking lower and lower. Nothing quite came off. The dialogue missed fire at all the big moments, the action sagged. She thought it a dismal failure. Tony thought so, too. She knew the instant she caught sight of him. "Well," he said, trying to grin, "of all the flops!"

"Don't be silly," Gloria snapped. "Of course everything went wrong tonight. Wait till Law is in the audience."

She made Tony go home with her and she mixed him a stiff drink and talked him out of his depression. By the time Barbara and Tony reached the flat, he was as blithe and exuberant as ever.

She thought he was asleep when she crawled in beside him, but he stirred and put his arm drowsily about her. The crowd tried to take me to a ribbing today," he said. "They said that you went driving with Martin Fagg the other night and had dinner with him out in the country. Wanda swore she saw you." Tony chuckled. "As if I'd fall for a yarn like that!"

Barbara stiffened. "It wasn't a yarn, Tony. I did go driving with Martin and we did have dinner together. What do you expect me to do? Sit here in this hot little dump night after night and swelter while you and Gloria Havener go round and round?"

Tony did not speak for a moment and Barbara held her breath 'till he laughed sleepily. "It's all right with me, sugar, if it is with you," he said. The next moment he was asleep.

She was stiff in her manner the next morning, Tony, on the other hand, was extremely gay. "Cut out your tongue again, Mrs. Blake?" Tony asked with a teasing smile.

"My tongue's all right," she snarped. "So what?"

Tony laughed and pinched her cheek. "See you tonight."

Barbara shrugged her shoulders. "After you've seen everybody else."

Tony grinned at her. "You are n't in the world's best humor, are you, sugar?"

"Not that you give a darn," muttered Barbara.

Barbara put in a miserable day she had let her temper get the better of her and she was sorry. She did not know why she felt so cross lately. Martin Fagg came in while she was having lunch and started to sit down with her, but she told him acidly that she preferred to be alone. Martin looked hurt and Barbara tried to smile. "I'm sort of out of sorts today, Martin," she said. Her head ached and black spots kept jumping before her eyes. She hoped that she was not really going to be ill.

The theatre was crowded. The presence of the famous Broadway producer had brought out the whole town. Barbara, thinking she was to have the same place, walked down the aisle, only to find a group of people, among them Pinkney Law and Gloria Havener's parents and sister-in-law, occupying the front row. Her cheeks blazing with humiliation, Barbara went back intending to walk right out the door and go home, but Martin Fagg met her near the exit. "What's the matter with you?" he asked. "Some mix-up about seats?"

"Yes, I—that is, I guess Tony forgot he had a wife."

"Take my seat, Barbara," urged Martin.

"All right," she gasped, "and

thanks, Martin. You're always so thoughtful."

The curtain went up and the lights down in a few minutes. Barbara was grateful for the darkness. She was furious at Tony. She had seen his mother and sisters in the front row. He had taken care of seats for them, all right. Barbara's cheeks burned and suddenly she felt sick. What on earth, she asked herself desperately and then a thought went through her like a knife. Suppose she were going to have a baby! She simply could not have one now. She had to keep her job. She was certain Tony would not want a child, at any rate not for several years, if he ever wanted one. "It just can't be that," she whispered to herself.

After a while the lights came up again. The applause was terrific. Barbara could scarcely hear herself think. People stood up and yelled, "Author, Author!" Gloria Havener took Tony by the hand and led him out on the stage. Barbara could see neither of them distinctly for the blur in her eyes. Tony made a little curtain speech. It was clever and spontaneous and winning. The crowd cheered and cheered. Apparently the play had been a success.

People were crowding up to congratulate Tony and Gloria. Gloria kept hold of Tony's arm. "What do you think of my husband, Pinkney?" she asked the great producer.

Pinkney Law smiled. "You'll hear from me," he said to Tony.

There was an informal reception on the stage. Barbara did not know Martin was standing beside her until he spoke. "Don't you feel well, Barbara?" he asked anxiously. "You're so white."

"I'm all right, Martin," she said. "Just tired."

"You don't look all right," he insisted. "Want me to take you home in my car?"

Barbara shook her head.

Tony's mother kissed Gloria. "I can't tell you how grateful I am for what you've done for my boy she murmured.

Gloria smiled wryly. "You can teach a canary to sing," she said, "but he has to be a born canary."

Lily smiled rather sourly. "I hope when you get to be a celebrity, you won't forget us, Tony. We've seen so little of you lately. But I suppose your wife takes up all your spare time."

(To Be Continued)

The farm mortgage debt is at the lowest point in 30 years. Farm economists say it is a good time to pay up loans and not make any long commitments.

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Accomplishments In Legislature

From Office of Gov. R. Gregg Cherry—Prepared by John Tarden, Secy. to Governor, Raleigh, N. C. — As the North Carolina Legislature enters its eighth week members of the Tar Heel lawmaking body can look back at four major accomplishments.

Already provision has been made to pay the state's debts; the budget has been approximately balanced, with increases provided in the salaries of all state employees; a contingent bonus has been set up so that state workers will get additional pay as the revenue provides it; and a \$20,000,000 nest egg has been set aside to cushion the post-war economic period that promises some economic headaches.

Members of the legislature, state officials, and veteran observers are pleased with the progress that has been made in the current legislative session. Action has followed the outline as laid down by Governor R. Gregg Cherry in his inaugural address.

The Governor has insisted that the spending pattern remain within the revenue income of the state and not contemplate future indebtedness. A major portion of attention has been given to the schools of the state and the teachers that staff these schools. The school system, traditionally getting more money than any other of the state's agencies or operations, will get \$10,000,000 more next year than the system had last year.

In this connection the teachers of the state have been given what amounts to three pay raises by the current legislature. The bonus of last year was incorporated into and made a part of the base pay to give the teaching force its first raise. Then the base pay for teachers was increased to a point above the old pay schedule plus the bonus, with a starting base pay of \$125.00 a month giving first year teachers approximately an eleven per cent raise and graduating up to an approximate for and a half per cent increase for other teachers. And finally a \$10 per month contingency bonus will apply in keeping with the revenue collected and will be paid at the end of the fiscal year in full or in the proportion that tax collections will permit.

The legislature had been in Raleigh less than a week when it put Governor Cherry's recommendation to pay the state's debts into law. Both houses unanimously adopted a bill which appropriated \$51,585,000 to the sinking fund to provide for payment of all the state's general fund indebtedness.

The Joint Appropriations Committee has reported favorably a general appropriations Bill, which provides general fund expenditures for the two year period from July 1, 1945 to June 30, 1947, amounting to \$131,086,261. This is by far the largest appropriations bill which has ever been reported to the General Assembly but it adheres to the Governor's policy of keeping current appropriations within current revenue. Since the finance committee has not concluded its deliberations, it cannot yet be determined whether or not the budget is entirely in balance but from present calculations there would seem to be less than one-half of one per cent difference in the amount of the appropriations and estimated revenue.

The Appropriations Bill has made revisions for correcting in a large measure conditions existing in the various State Hospitals for the insane and feeble-minded, but does not provide any permanent provision of improvement in these institutions.

The salary increases for all of the state employees and teachers are illustrated as follows: A teacher holding an A-0 certificate whose base salary is \$98 per month, will receive a permanent salary increase of \$27 per month. A teacher holding an A-9 certificate whose permanent salary is now \$135 per month, will receive a permanent salary increase of \$27 per month. A state employee, whose base salary is now \$100 a month, will receive a permanent salary increase of \$18 per month.

In addition to the permanent salary increases the Appropriations Bill also provides for a contingent war bonus of \$10 per month for each state employee and teacher whose annual salary is under \$3,600, teachers being paid on a twelve month basis. The contingent feature of the bonus hinges on whether revenue is sufficient to meet the appropriations provided in the Bill and is in excess of estimates made. It will be paid at the end of each fiscal year in the amount of \$120 to each employee, in accordance with the amount of the funds available.

The contingent war bonus insures a balanced budget, and makes provision for increased salaries in the event the money is available. Thus, if revenues continue to pour in at a high rate the conditions which bring this about will also bring about higher living costs, making salary increases for state employees and teachers necessary. On the other hand, if the revenue declines, it is probable that living costs will also decline and the necessity for increased salaries will be somewhat alleviated. Governor Cherry's supporters point out that his program keeps faith with the employees of the state, and also insures a sound fiscal policy.

In addition to making provision for retirement of all the state's general fund debt, and reporting the largest appropriations bill in the state's history, there remains in the Treasury \$16,000,000 of the \$20,000,000 post war fund

established in 1943. If current revenue estimates are realized this fund will again have a \$20,000,000 balance at the end of this fiscal year. Governor Cherry and the Legislature are jealously guarding this fund for the purpose of making provisions for Veterans and permanent improvements to Caswell Training School, State Hospitals, and many other needed permanent improvements, which must be undertaken when the war is over.

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