

## DAPHNE ENGAGED

(Continued from page 30)

"I'm leaving here, Jim," she said. "You'll have to get another servant."

Then her heart relented at the sight of his puzzled face. Poor old Jim had never seen her as anything but the younger sister, a little older than his own girls, maybe, able to give a hand about the house, but just a slip of a thing still. His eyes grew troubled as she continued.

"I've grown up, Jim. I grew up years ago, and the girls are growing up, too. There are too many of us in the house now. So I'm off into the world to make my own way, and—please, I want all the money I've got. I have a little, I know."

She ended rather breathlessly. She was fond of Jim. Why, she could even love Peggy and Jill—a hundred miles away.

She got her money, quietly augmented by a cheque from Jim, some of which went in payment for the clothes already bought. She packed her trunks, touching her new possessions reverently. In went the white frock; in went the blue; the green and the foamy black and white had a compartment all to themselves. Jill and Peggy, assisting, were struck dumb with envy. Peggy hadn't a sting left, and both girls treated Daphne with a respect which was altogether delightful.

"But where's she going?" Jill asked Peggy.

That was what Daphne didn't tell them—not till the last. To Jim's anxious inquiries she answered, laughing.

"Don't worry, Jimmy. I'm all right. I know what I'm doing, and I'll write to you soon."

She went off in a taxi—a shining, new car, just the thing to carry a traveller to unknown fields. The others

clustered round to say good-bye—Jim and Clarice, Peggy and Jill.

"Write soon," urged Jill.

Looking at them, Daphne felt a sudden surging of love, which wiped out the bitterness of the past. Even Jill's words were forgotten. After all they were her people, and it was churlish to go without telling them her news—her wonderful news. Perhaps, too, she wanted to make Jill's hair curl naturally, and raise a wave of excitement in Peggy's straight bobbed locks.

"I'm going—" she began. Unfortunately, at that moment, the motor shot forward with a loud hoot. Daphne's voice floated back to the family.

"Fairville . . . engaged . . . Mr. Leslie."

"Oh!" said Peggy.

"Oh!" gasped Jill.

A month, two months passed, and they heard nothing of her. Then, when the furrows were growing pronounced on Jim's forehead, a bulky letter arrived. He read it, looked perplexed, read it again, and visibly excited, prepared for a third perusal.

Peggy and Jill, nearly exploding with curiosity, watched him.

"Well?" asked Peggy.

"Where is she? What is she doing?" demanded Jill.

"She's in Fairville, enjoying herself," answered Jim. He paused a moment, looked at the girls, and then threw the letter into the air. "Bravo, Daphne!" he cried.

"Well?" demanded Peggy, again.

Jim folded up the epistle, and placed it in his breast pocket.

"I suppose Mr. Leslie's in Fairville, too," Jill said, bitterly.

Jim laughed.

"Yes, he's there, too," he answered.

It was some time after this that he

came home one night, and astonished the family by producing tickets for the leading picture theatre of the town.

"They are putting on a new film—the first the new Australian Company have made. I'd like you girls to see it. You'll be—interested."

"Fancy dad going to the pictures," said Peggy to Jill.

The Weekly Gazette, and the Scenic Film, with a lavish display of waterfall, were over when they entered the theatre, Peggy carrying a large box of chocolates which her father, in the exuberance of his feelings, had purchased. They sank into the padded chairs. They had the best seats in the house, Jill noticed.

"What's the picture you're so keen on seeing, Dad?" she asked.

"I—Oh! Look, Peggy! It's Daphne!"

"Aunt Daphne!" shrieked Jill, disconcerting the family.

She stood, dew-drenched, among the pansies, in the twilight, a great bunch of the purple-eyed things in her arms. Suddenly she buried her face in their sweetness, and looked up with a smile, and it was as if an elusive sunbeam had peeped out of the wistful soul of her.

"But—she—why—oh," gasped Jill, incapable of coherency.

"She has a contract with John Leslie, Director of the new Australian Film Company, at five hundred a week," Jim said, unable to restrain himself any longer, and clapping with a vigour which completed what Peggy had begun, and focussed the attention of the house on the party.

"Then she's been all this time at Fairville, rehearsing?" asked Peggy.

"Yes, star parts. Leslie reckons she's the coming star."

Yes, that was it. Providence had led the great Director straight to Daphne Dawn. He had been searching the country for a new star, and

there, among the pansies, he had stumbled on Daphne Dawn.

"Bravo, Daphne! Bravo!"

Jim led the applause. Daphne was launched, and judging from her performance, would soon become one of the most popular screen actresses of the day. Mr. Leslie, who was a shrewd business man as well as an artist, with his finger on the pulse of the great picture-loving world, had not been mistaken when he selected this star for the cinema to delight people with her tender, elusive charm.

Marry her? Who said anything about marriage? She was his ideal picture actress, that was all, a contrast to most of the curled and bobbed film heroines then in the public eye. She was engaged, yes, but only to play star parts. That was all, and Daphne wanted no more.

Anyway, he had a wife and two children already.



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