

DIANA

VIDA HURST
Author of "THE SNOB"
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BEGIN HERE TODAY

When Diana Farwell's mother overheard talk of love between her daughter and a schoolboy friend, she is told that she will "go wrong" like her sister, Vivian, who ran away from home three years before. She the mother hastens a marriage of Diana with Arthur Kane, some years older, a successful San Francisco lawyer.

Diana is only 18 and goes into marriage believing "Arthur is so different from other men he always will be satisfied with merely spiritual love." He respects her reserve, as a young girl's natural shyness, at first, then after many months of loveless wedded life, he tells her she has wrecked his life. Some time after her mother dies, Diana leaves Arthur and finds a luxurious apartment and preparing for a trip to New York with wealthy Jason Winterline. Diana rents a room at the home of Mrs. Burton, the widow friend of Diana's mother, and enrolls in Seton's school of Acting to prepare herself for the stage.

At the school she meets many young girls, including Beatty and Barbara Babo. Dean, besides the teachers, "Mamzelle," the dancing teacher, Kalswick and Shepherd Seton, proprietor of the school, a former famous actor and a man of eccentric personality.

After she has been attending a month, and has decided to become a contract pupil for a year, she receives a letter from Arthur, begging her return. She is desperately lonely, but realizes that she never will return until she can be the kind of a wife he needs.

Among the men students is Paul Ruthven, a young doctor who is Paul's friend. He and Diana become friendly and begin rehearsing together their parts in their school plays.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XXIV

On the way home, Paul suggested that they stop for something cold. But he ordered hot coffee for himself and drank it with a drawn look that worried Diana. She was remembering the little dancer's explanation.

"A war wreck. Shell-shocked and gassed. He's never been able to practice."

The pity in her eyes was divinely sweet, but he turned from it. Not that! From HER!

"About our practicing," he said later, "I'm afraid it will have to be done at night for a while. 'Experience' is to be put on next month, and rehearsals will start tomorrow. Couldn't we practice 'Anatol' here?"

Diana agreed. Not until she had entered the house did she suspect that it might not please her landlady. Her fears were justified.

"No Diana, I must ask you, for the sake of my girls, not to do your rehearsing in our home. It's bad enough for them to hear you ranting and raving in your room."

"Of course, I realize that a certain amount of that is necessary. But I can't approve of your choice of plays. I glanced through one of them the other day. 'Magda' was the title."

"Your dear mother would be horrified if she knew you were studying the part of a sinful woman."

"My mother was fairly familiar with the classics, Mrs. Burton," Diana said.

"But the constant study of these things can't help but affect one's standards. And I can't have them practiced around my innocent children. Don't ask me to."

"I won't," Diana promised. "Not ever again."

The result was a hurried explanation to Paul. When she had finished, she said frankly, "But I'll practice anywhere else you suggest."

He frowned.

"I'm living alone. Have two rooms up over a bakery. Not much of a place, but it gives me space for my books."

"Shall we practice there?" Diana asked.

"After all, why not? She was sure she had nothing to fear from this friendly, sad-faced young man. That very night he called for her and carried her gently off under Mrs. Burton's disapproving eyes. Diana felt the tang of a great adventure.

His two rooms were truly "nothing much." Two battered leather chairs, a heavy oak desk littered with papers, and an electric toaster, a cot and walls lined with books, faded curtains.

Paul made no apologies, and almost immediately Diana felt a sense of harbor in that quiet room. The rehearsals were going better now. Secretly Diana doubted if Paul would ever make much of an actor.

Certainly the temperamental Anatol was not suited to him. But she managed to put a great deal of enthusiasm into her own varied roles. And the hours flew. They were astonished when it was 11 o'clock.

"We'd better go," she suggested.

"Not yet. We're having refreshments."

He produced a can of milk and made cocoa on the toaster. Diana was delighted. She curled in one of the leather chairs, with her feet tucked beneath her, and sighed, "Oh, isn't this fun!"

"It is tonight. But cooking on a toaster can get beastly tiresome."

She looked about her critically.

"Would you be insulted if I offered to make some curtains for you? Your room needs color—something real gay. I could use Japanese crepe."

"That certainly would be sweet of you," he answered, but his eyes said so much more than she turned away. The memory of their happy evening together put new meaning into their casual greeting before the class. Diana found herself strangely impervious to Mamzelle's sarcasm. Kalswick was compelled to speak to her twice. She was trying to decide which would be the better—orange or yellow curtains?

Only Shepherd Seton was able to force all thoughts of Paul from her mind. A small man, with a restless charm was Shepherd Seton. Not so old as Kalswick, nor so temperamental. The moment Diana entered his studio her attention was entirely his. . . .

One afternoon they cut rehearsal and went to purchase the orange colored crepe. At 6 o'clock they

dined in the crowded seclusion of a French restaurant, and afterward she sewed while he read aloud, looking up occasionally, with devotion in his eyes.

"Paul," she interrupted, "you really ought to fix that chair you're sitting in. It's going to fall to pieces with you."

"I know," he agreed. "I will, what's the matter?"

"Oh, doctah, I stuck my thumb."

She held out her thumb with its bright little drop of blood, and he wiped it off and kissed it.

"Better now?" he asked professionally.

"Yes, thanks."

She returned to her sewing, but suddenly he left his chair and seized her hands.

"Diana, I must tell you. I love you, love you, love you. . . ."

She felt only sympathy and a desire to comfort him, but she said sweetly, "Oh, Paul, you've been so nice to me. I feel happier with you than I have been for a long time."

But he dropped her hands and stood, looking moodily into the lighted street.

"I'm sorry," he said. "Won't you please forget it?"

"No. That has nothing to do with it. Oh, well, don't worry. I didn't take it seriously."

She continued to sew, but her eyes were bright with tears. . . . When they had hung the curtains it was surprising to see what a difference it made in the nondescript room.

"It was awfully good of you to do this for me," he said awkwardly.

"Nonsense. It was nothing at all. I enjoyed it."

Almost silently they went to Diana's home. But when they reached the door he said, "Please don't misunderstand what I'm going to say Diana."

"Don't say it," she begged.

"I must, dear. I think we'd better not practice together for a while."

"But why?" she asked, bewildered now and thoroughly provoked. "I don't see why you have to spoil everything. My heavens, Paul, do you imagine you're the first man who has ever said he was in love with me?"

"It simply goes in one ear and out the other. I have a secret little rule that I must be told at least a dozen times before I begin to take it seriously."

"Besides," she added. "I'm married."

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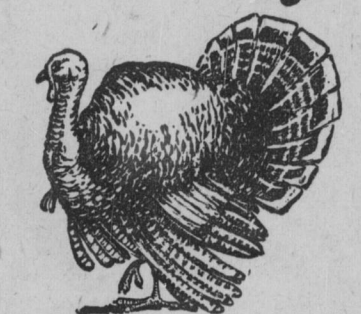
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