

RIVAL WIVES

by Anne Austin
Author of
The Black Pigeon

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THIS HAS HAPPENED
NAN CARROLL, secretary to JOHN CURTIS CRAWFORD, the local lawyer, is in love with Morgan. His wife, IRIS, sleeps with a family friend, ERIC CRAVEN. When, for Morgan, Iris recently won an acquittal, Morgan does not suspect Crawford and cast into utter despair.

Though he does not realize it, Nan is indispensable to Morgan both in his practice and in his home. For six months she acts as long-distance housekeeper for him, bringing comfort and health to his wife, Iris, and their 6-year-old CURTIS. Morgan breaks the news to Iris that Iris' husband has been arrested and is being held in a hospital.

Curiosity has continued three months when Iris, bitten by Crawford's desire to have Nan, goes to bring Morgan to his knees. Nan, heart-broken, determines to fight and save her BLACK. To this end, she goes to see his mother daily. She feeds him forbidden sweets. He awakens Christmas morning with an attack of the grippe, but Nan, though his diet must be watched closely, though she knows she is powerless to prevent it, stays with him. Iris, however, goes to LIL TODD to dinner. He is a former suitor of Nan's. When they are alone, Iris asks him to tell her all about her fort. Her placing his arm about her shoulders, Morgan finds them thus.

Now GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XLII (Continued)
"No. She gave a fake name at the hospital, but she took poison in the taxicab which the club manager forced her into after he led her out of the club. The taxi driver took her to the address she had given, and when he started to help her out, he found her unconscious. Took her to the hospital, of course, and told his story which the papers printed. I checked upon the apartment house address and found that they'd been living there as Mr. and Mrs. Chatfield. I wasn't just prying, however. I wanted the information for you, in case you ever needed it, as I had a hunch then you might. And now you do need it. Use it."

Nan shook her head drearily. "No. How could I? I can't blackmail Iris, no matter what she does to me. And I would rather die than report that horrible story to John Curtis Morgan. It might disgust him with her, but it would undoubtedly kill all his love for me. No, I can't fight that way. But I'm glad you told me, Willis. It makes me all the more determined to save my two menfolk."

"He still doesn't have an inkling about Crawford?" Willis asked.

"No. Sometimes I've been tempted to show him that letter from Crawford to Iris, but—I'd rather lose him than hurt him that way."

"Darling, quixotic little Nan!" Willis Todd said huskily, as he put his arms about her shoulders and pressed her cheek against his. "Do you wonder I'm not able to love any other girls?"

"And that was the tableau which John Curtis Morgan interrupted.

CHAPTER XLIII
IF NAN CARROLL MORGAN had not been so completely in love with her husband, she would have fallen in love with Willis Todd, out of sheer gratitude for the way he met what might have been a very embarrassing situation. Rather, it was not what Willis did, but what he did not do which Nan, even in her confusion, recognized as the height of tact.

Willis did not remove his arm from about her shoulder; he did not apologize; he did not try to explain to the husband who had halted uncertainly on the threshold of the drawing room. He did not feel guilty. He had done no wrong; Nan had done no wrong. He simply refused to put himself in the wrong by acting like a guilty lover caught by a betrayed husband.

"How's the boy, Mr. Morgan?" he called out, with just the right amount of sympathetic interest. "I'd like to run up and speak to him, if he's awake. You know I used

to be at the radio cabinet and Willis Todd was relaxed in a big wing chair before the fireplace when Morgan re-entered the room. With a deep sigh, whether of worry or contentment Nan could not know, he dropped to the couch and stretched his long legs toward the crackling flames of the wood fire. "Music, John? Or would you rather just talk?" Nan called.

"A sandwich—music, talk, more music. Some carols, if you can find any in the air," her husband answered.

How many times must I remind you that you're only the junior partner in this firm?" Morgan scolded her. "I want you to have a decent fur coat, young woman. I was tempted to choose it myself, but didn't dare assume the responsibility."

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