



*Joan & Co.*  
By  
*Frederick Orin Bartlett*



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JOAN AND CO. \*\*\*



# **JOAN & CO.**

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JOAN & CO.

ONE YEAR OF PIERROT. Illustrated.

THE TRIFLERS. Illustrated.

THE WALL STREET GIRL. Illustrated.

JOAN OF THE ALLEY. Illustrated.

# JOAN & CO.

*By*  
FREDERICK ORIN BARTLETT



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
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TO  
R. S. B.



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**JOAN & CO.**

# **Joan & Co.**

## CHAPTER I

### DICKY IS SERIOUS

THE New York social season in which Miss Joan Fairburne made her *début* was not more than half finished before the quizzical smile in the dark eyes, half closed above a slightly upturned, dainty nose, which gave her an air of amused boredom at first so fascinating to Dicky Burnett, became, instead of an occasional expression, rather more frequent than befitted a young woman of twenty. Also it was rather too inclusive to be complimentary. As long as it was directed merely in a general way at the assembled company at *thé dansant* or box party or cards or dance, Dicky fell in with it, and, his long legs crossed before him and his arms folded over his chest, he assumed an air of weary submission which he was sure established between him and Miss Fairburne a bond of common lack of interest. But when those same dark eyes with their long lashes began to turn also in his direction, as he made his gay comments intended to cause her to nod sympathetically, but which did nothing of the sort, he grew uncomfortable. It was as if she brushed him into the pile with the others.

It was the more humiliating because he realized that the girl was sincere. She was startlingly and delightfully sincere. He had known her now for two years; first as one of twenty girls at Wellesley when he was a junior at Harvard; then, when he was a senior, as one of a half-dozen; then, in these last few months after graduation, when he was not anything in particular, as one of two or three girls; and finally, within a week, as *the* girl.

She did not know this yet, and every time he made up his mind to tell her he hesitated. This was not because he lacked courage or experience. He had never actually asked any one to marry him, but he had come so near it once or twice on especial occasions—such as certain moonlight nights on that yachting trip he had taken two summers before with Haywood,

and again on a week-end with Benton when he met the fascinating widow—that he realized that only abstention from the easily spoken words had saved him. And always by the next morning he was congratulating himself.

This time, however, it was different; the next morning he was blaming himself. Reviewing the evening before in the luxurious quiet of the suite of rooms which ever since he was seventeen had been set apart for him in his father's home, he thought of all the things he might have said to her and had not said, and damned himself for one who had not made the most of a rare opportunity.

Last night the Devereaux ballroom had been close with the crush that filled it—it was like a room overcrowded with flowers—and she had begged for a breath of fresh air. It was January, but Burnett remembered the way to the little courtyard, and, finding her wrap and overshoes, had led her to the tiny snow-dusted inclosure beneath the white stars. He had taken her arm, and they walked back and forth in the frosty night with the music coming to them muffled. It was a pretty scene—a niche from another world, bounded by a high wall, with the subdued light from the big windows cutting yellow across the snow, and above them the illimitable purple. He had seen her lift her face—her earnest, eager face, her beautiful half girl, half woman face; her tender yet haughty face with its keen black eyes and its fine mouth. She had stood so for a moment very erect like a princess challenging the stars themselves, and breathing deep of some clearer air above. He should have seized her then in his arms. He should have made her listen to his words of love. He should have told her how, with everything else in the world a man could crave, not having her he had nothing. He should have told her how now she stood out among all the women in the world as *the* woman. And yet he had said nothing. He had watched her in awe and said nothing. His heart beating in his throat, he had been as tongue-tied as any freshman. Ass that he was!

Dicky Burnett continued, with variations, to libel himself in this fashion all the while he dressed. To tell the truth, however, he by no means looked the part he assigned to himself. He was rather good-looking from either a man's or a

woman's point of view. Tall, lean, clean-cut, with an intelligent and good-humored face suggesting in the nose and mouth elements of real strength, he was distinguished in appearance above the average of his fellows. Offhand one would have said he would make a good soldier. Men would not hesitate to follow him because he would not hesitate to lead, given a goal he considered worth reaching. Well, he had one now. Then why the devil—

Burnett was shaving himself with a safety razor and yet he managed to cut himself slightly just below the left temple. He touched the scratch with a bit of caustic and enjoyed the smart of it.

At half-past eight he went downstairs to breakfast, which he took alone because his mother always joined his father, who left promptly at eight for the offices of the Burnett Manufacturing Company. There was no need of this early departure, as Dicky regularly informed him; but the latter only affected to scorn this evident truth. He made a sort of hobby of keeping to the old habits that had made his business to-day what it was—the leader in the manufacture of a certain type of patent-leather finish. His idea since he was forty had been, as he informed his traveling men at the end of each fiscal year, “to make the next twelve months the greatest in the history of the company.”

“That's all very well,” his son observed whenever he found the opportunity; “but when are you going to get off?”

“About the time I begin to smoke cigarettes,” Burnett senior answered once, as he lighted a stogie.

Dicky waved responsibility aside with a motion of the hand containing a fresh cigarette.

“Of course, if you're going to be stubborn and not take advice—”

“Advice from who?” the elder demanded, utterly disregarding the rule governing prepositions.

“From me. Hang it, you *are* putting on weight.”

“What of it?”

“Mullen used to say—”

“Who’s Mullen?”

“Mullen is the ’varsity trainer,” Dicky replied imperturbably. “As I was observing, when interrupted, Mullen said that any man who took on weight after forty was running a chance.”

“All right; I’ll take the chance,” Burnett answered grimly.

It was a fact, however, that Dicky really was worried about his father. He had a genuine love for him and an honest respect for his opinion on every other subject except work and health. On the latter subject Dicky actually was qualified to speak with some authority; for although he had never distinguished himself in athletics he had been under Mullen for three years as a member of the second baseball team.

After finishing a breakfast of eggs and toast, Burnett enjoyed his usual walk from his home on Sixty-first Street to the Harvard Club. Here he dropped in to glance at the morning papers, and then took a taxi for the factory, reaching there at about half-past ten.

As second vice-president of the company, he had a desk in an office with Forsythe, the actual vice-president. The latter, an aggressive man of forty, with hair brushed back in a fashion that gave one the weird impression that he was facing a strong wind, always glanced up with an abrupt “Good-morning, Mr. Burnett,” and planned to find business elsewhere the hour or so that Dicky remained. As a matter of fact, there was not much for the latter to do. The smoothly running organization had been built up of men who had learned the business from factory, to road, to office. It was so that Burnett had wished his son to learn it; but, as the latter observed, with some point:

“What’s the use, Dad?”

“The use?” snorted Burnett. “How else will you learn it?”

“I don’t want to learn it.”

“Eh?”

“I’d rather let George do it.”

“George?”

“He being any one who is obliged to do it for the sake of earning a living,” explained Dicky. “I *could* do it, I could go into the factory and wallow around in sticky black stuff, if it were necessary. I could go out on the road and sell and sit round between times in hotel offices. But thank the Lord it isn’t necessary. So what’s the use? You did all those things yourself, I know. But that is just the reason why no one else in the family should have to do them all over again. Besides, there are plenty of men looking for that chance. Like Forsythe; he ate up that kind of work for years, and enjoyed it. Now he eats up all this office, and enjoys it. And you—you ought to be out playing golf—that’s all.”

It was a matter of family pride that led Burnett, in spite of this attitude, to elect the boy a second vice-president; and it was merely the obligation the boy felt he owed his father that made him accept it. And Dicky let it go at that. He came down nearly every morning, and sat around until lunch-time mostly for the sake of seeing that his father did not duck into an alley somewhere and bolt a cup of coffee and a doughnut. At twelve o’clock he broke in upon the sanctity of Burnett’s private office, removed his hat and coat from the hat-rack, and stood by the roll-top desk until his father rose with a scowl and put his arms through the sleeves. Then Dicky led him round the block to a decent hotel, where he made him eat slowly and deliberately a plate of soup, an omelet, and whole wheat bread without butter. With equal insistence he refused to allow him to eat apple pie, squash pie, mince pie, cream pie, or crullers. Dicky generally postponed his own lunch until later.

“Then you’ll go and eat what you please,” his father hinted darkly as he finished.

“Yes, Dad.”

“Why in thunder, then, can’t you let me alone?”

“You aren’t as young as I am. Besides, if you’re going to work as hard as you do, you must look after yourself.”

Burnett senior bit off the end of his stogie with a vicious snap and, lighting it, sat back. He was shorter and stockier than



his son. His features were less finely moulded. It was as though he had been chiseled out of oak with coarse tools, while the boy had been carefully carved with keen-bladed instruments. That was what the mother had done for him. She was a Cleaves of Portland—a fine, gentle soul who in her day had been considered a beauty. She had her days, even now.

Burnett could not help being proud of the boy. When he came into a place like this, he saw people glance at him approvingly. And nothing gave him more satisfaction than to introduce him to some old friend or new business acquaintance with a dignified:

“My son.”

But in the end he generally paid for this by being forced to listen to some such remark as:

“Ah, in business with you?”

As a rule, Dicky himself furnished the reply:

“I have the honor of being a vice-president of the company.”

And the boy did not know a vici dressing from ordinary shoe blacking!

“Look here,” his father said to him on this the 10th day of January, “you’ve been out of college some six months now.”

“Right.”

“It seems as though you ought to be doing something more than just hanging round.”

“I’m thinking of doing something,” Dicky informed him.

Burnett sat up straighter in his chair.

“Now, that sounds better.”

“I’m thinking of getting married,” went on Dicky.

“Married?” exclaimed Burnett.

“Married,” Dicky nodded seriously.

Burnett frowned.

“You haven’t got mixed up with—”

“Nothing of that sort,” Dicky cut in. “You ought to know me better.”

Burnett flushed. He did. He spoke more carefully:

“Who is it, boy?”

“I can’t tell you yet, Dad, because I haven’t asked her. I’m going to ask her to-day.”

“Any one I know?”

“Some one you’d like.”

Dicky leaned across the table and, with his arms folded, talked straight into his father’s gray eyes.

“She’s very beautiful, Dad, with a sort of beauty that—that makes you hold your breath. She’s slight and not very tall; but sometimes she looks so tall that I feel like a kid beside her. And she has dead-honest black eyes that think a good deal. And she makes you feel as though you ought to be a prince or a caliph to be worthy of her. That’s the trouble.”

Burnett had been studying his son. What he saw there now warmed his own eyes.

“What’s the trouble?” he demanded.

“She’s one of the choice things of the world, and ought to be surrounded by nothing but choice things.”

Burnett’s face hardened a trifle.

“You mean you want to buy her some jewels?”

“I wasn’t thinking of that—though she could wear jewels. I don’t remember, though, that I’ve ever seen her with many. You wouldn’t notice them, anyway, if she had them on. I don’t know what you *would* get her that she hasn’t already.”

Burnett threw away his stogie. He had never seen the boy so much in earnest. It put something into the lad’s eyes and mouth that he was glad to find there. He glanced around. There was no one near to observe his weakness, so he reached over and placed his big hand on his son’s.

“Dick,” he said slowly, “you know that what’s mine is yours.”

Dicky Burnett felt something squeezing his Adam’s apple.

“I wasn’t telling you this for—that,” he choked.

“I know,” Burnett put in quickly. “I know. But go after her. Get her. If she’s all you say she is, by God, I’ll make a prince of you, if that’s what she wants.”

Dicky smiled mistily.

“If you were thirty years younger you’d get her yourself,” he said.

## CHAPTER II

### JOAN IS BORED

JOAN FAIRBURNE sat before the long cheval mirror while Henriette did up her rich black hair. If Dicky Burnett could have seen her expression at this moment, he would have known—and felt relieved to know—that whatever was the cause of her boredom, it was not he, because he was not about. In fact, the only person she could see—with the exception of Henriette, who did not count—was herself. The logical deduction, then, was that she must have been bored with herself. Yet if this were true it was some development of the last year. Up to six months before she graduated she had been gay enough, and then—something had happened. Perhaps several things had happened.

First of all, she had a sense of being about to be graduated, and somehow that set her to thinking—really thinking. Probably, too, it was the culmination of the work she had been doing and the life she had been leading; for both in her studies and her associates she had been extremely democratic. At the end of the first year she had escaped from the clique which naturally claimed her for their own and had mingled with all sorts of interesting girls—girls from the West, and girls from the country, and girls who were working their way through, and girls who had just barely enough money to squeeze through and who were looking forward to earning their own livelihood afterward. It was for her like getting into a new world, for until then she had lived as though surrounded by a high wall. It was a very ancient wall and a very beautiful wall and a protecting wall, but it was so high no one could see over it. As long, however, as she knew nothing of what lay beyond—except vaguely that the country roundabout was very dangerous land for young girls—she did not mind her seclusion. Indeed, she was even grateful and followed where her elders led as meekly as a young girl should. It was so her mother before her had done, although instead of going to

college—for young ladies did not then go to college—she had married John Fairburne, one of the old New York Fairburnes. “And that, my dear,” her mother explained, “has been quite the equivalent of a liberal education.”

But Joan was beginning to see that this sort of education had kept her mother all these years behind the same old wall. The area bounded had, to be sure, been considerably enlarged after her marriage and especially after the birth of her only child, but the barrier remained. The Fairburne world was like a little monarchy, or still more like one of those ancient walled cities one reads of in Roman history.

During her first year at Wellesley, Joan believed that the kingdom extended even as far as there. Several girls of her social set entered with her and they quickly found other girls of similar social sets from Boston and Chicago and St. Louis and San Francisco who, except for slight differences of speech, were alike as peas in a pod.

That summer she returned to New York and Newport and the old crowd she had left. But in her sophomore year Joan met Mildred Devons—a mouse of a girl who had been brought up on a ranch in the West, and who had taught school for three years and served as waitress in a summer hotel in order to save enough to come East for this. There had never been any wall around her life and she had seen many strange things.

It was Joan who introduced herself as the two sat studying on the shores of the lake one June afternoon.

“Aren’t we classmates?” she asked.

“Yes,” Miss Devons answered, with an expression of guarded surprise.

“I think it must be because you study so hard that we’ve never met,” Joan continued.

“I study as hard as I know how,” Miss Devons answered seriously. “Don’t you?”

“I’m afraid not. I don’t think I like to study.”

So the conversation began, and as the days went on, and next year as the months went by, each girl revealed herself a

little more fully to the other. And though in all their past, their present, and their future they differed so radically, a curious sort of friendship developed that had its effect upon them both. Somewhere below the surface of things they found a common bond.

When, in her senior year, Miss Devons was taken ill as a result of overstudy and undernourishment, it was Joan who stood by to the end—Joan and a cousin of Mildred from Technology—one Mark Devons. He was a slight, pale-faced young man with eager black eyes and thin lips that came together in a straight line. Joan never met him outside of the infirmary; but there, on either side of the bed, they both did their best to encourage the fragile girl who faded before their eyes.

Joan was with her alone when she died. One evening Mildred reached out her thin hand and sought Joan's.

"I'm going," she said quietly. "I haven't let them tell the folks at home. Will you make it—easy as you can? I guess they—they'll sort of miss me."

"Oh, I shall too," Joan sobbed. "Please—please don't go!"

Mildred's eyes brightened, and for a little while she rallied; but not for long.

When this Mark Devons came that night, it was Joan who met him and told him. His face grew dark, as though in challenge of some mysterious enemy.

"It isn't right!" he exclaimed.

Joan did not understand.

"There are plenty here who aren't needed," he broke out. "Why—"

Joan drew back a little. For a second she felt guilty. Impulsively Devons thrust forward his hand.

"Good-bye," he said simply.

So he went out of her life almost as completely as did Mildred. Yet it was not true that either of them had gone out of

her life.

It was her first intimate experience with death, and at the beginning she had been impressed only with the abrupt finality of it. But when she began to write the letters to those back at home—there was a mother and a sister—she found herself writing, not as of one dead, but as of one still living. And all through the rest of this her last year the strongest vital friendship she had, remained still that of Mildred Devons. When finally she graduated, it was as though Mildred graduated with her.

It was Mildred, with her fine ideals of the future, her eagerness to make herself worth while, who whispered to her when on those long June evenings Joan walked by herself at twilight with a sense of new things stirring within. It was Mildred who whispered that a graduation was not an ending but a beginning. Of what, she did not say; of what, Joan herself did not know. But when one came to full womanhood surely it must mean the beginning of something more than anything she then saw ahead of her.

With this idea she had come back home, and for a little while had tried to make her mother understand and her father understand—looking hopefully first to one and then to the other for a solution. The former merely patted her upon the back and said:

“You’re a Fairburne, my dear.”

The latter had only smiled.

“You’ll find plenty to do soon,” he assured her.

She had passed that summer, as usual, in Newport; and no one there helped to explain her to herself. When she came back in the fall, one thing had followed another so inevitably that she had found little time to think at all. But now she was beginning to steady herself a little and so to think once more.

The high wall was now like a prison wall. Wherever she went, whatever she did, she could always reach out and touch the four sides of it. That was true of her home; it was true of the limousine which took her from place to place; it was true

of each destination. Always the doors were guarded and always some one with credentials stood ready to meet her. She was shot from one to another like a cash box in a pneumatic tube. Sometimes she peered through the plate glass of her car, as she sat by her mother's side or by Dicky's side, at the crowds in the street with an hysterical desire to open the door, jump out, and lose herself among them.

Yes, it was equally true when she was by Dicky's side. She had thought at first she was going to find a friend in Dicky. She had liked him as a clean young boy while he was at college, and she had liked him last summer as she had sailed the open sea with him now and then. At the beginning of the teas and dances and bridge parties this fall she had been glad to have him with her. But of late he had become a little bit tiresome. There was no variety to Dicky. As she saw him one day, so he was the next. That was inevitable, because he himself had nothing from outside of interest to bring to her. His eyes saw only what her eyes saw. They met the same people at the same places and did the same things. It was worse for him than for her. Once or twice she had searched for something deeper in him, but she was quite sure now there *was* nothing deeper. He was a little more wholesome than the others and that was all. She did not particularly blame him for being so negative, because to do that would have been to blame herself equally. And he was very nice. Too nice. He treated her as though she were some fragile thing to be kept in cotton wool. It was this which made her smile even at the moment she was bored. If Dicky Burnett could have had the privilege of reading her thoughts as she thought sometimes in her white bed while staring at the ceiling, he would have been surprised.

In the dark, with all the details of her room obliterated; in the dark, with all the costumes for her silly part out of sight; in the dark, with Henriette and even her mother and father in the background; in the dark, with the world very quiet all about her—it was another Joan who lived in the big stone house. Her room had always been a cloistered place to her, and at night it seemed even more cloistered. With her hair down and her body free, she felt like one released—like one allowed to be for a



little while just herself. It was then she broke her bounds and wandered at large. Dicky might have found it significant that never at these times was he in her thoughts.

Henriette finished her hair and stepped back with an approving look. Mademoiselle was very beautiful, but never as beautiful as she might be were she gayer. It is a light heart that makes eyes bright and brings color to the cheeks. Mon Dieu! if she herself had the opportunities Mademoiselle Fairburne enjoyed—

There was a gown to be donned next—a wonderful gown designed by an artist. Yet Mademoiselle stood like a doll and showed as little interest. It was so, too, of the hat—a dashing bit of daintiness.

At three o'clock Dicky Burnett called for her, looking very spruce in his English cut-away and top hat. It may have been her fancy, but he appeared even a little more solicitous than usual about her comfort. It was a blustering, stormy day, with the snow coming slantwise in gusts. He suggested that perhaps it was too raw for her to venture out—when venturing out meant only venturing from the door of the house to the door of the limousine and then to the covered approach to Delmonico's. She recalled some of those descriptions Mildred had given her of Western winters.

“Dicky,” she said, “I wish we were going to walk.”

“Walk!” exclaimed Dicky, with an unconscious glance at her short silk skirt.

“Don't worry,” she smiled. “We won't.”

He had tried to hold an umbrella above her as she came down the steps; but, in a spirit of rebellion, she strode ahead of him. And all the rest of the afternoon some demon of perverseness possessed her. For a wonder, she chose to dance, and danced not only with Dicky, who was a good dancer, but with Hollister, whom she did not particularly like, and with Diblee, whom Dicky did not particularly like. While the mood to dance was upon her she danced with every one who offered himself as a partner, and there were few who were not glad of the opportunity. Then, when she had had enough, she refused

to dance with any one, but sat, with flushed cheeks, like a petulant princess, not deigning even to talk with Dicky.

Once again her mood changed, and she astonished him with her gayety; but on the instant he tried to join her in it, she sat back in silence.

He had never seen her like this. It was as though he were trying to follow two or three Joans. And yet he had a feeling that always the steady dark eyes of the real Joan dominated the others. Then, too, if she stung him, she also roused him.

Dicky's mouth became firmer than usual before that afternoon was over. If he were given half a chance—

## CHAPTER III

### CHANCE

THE wonder is not that Chance should seem to be the exception to the orderly rule of life, but that except by Chance lives should ever move in an orderly way. If it were possible to make, upon a piece of white paper, a diagram of the goings and comings, the crossing and criss-crossing of all those who move about New York in a single day, the result would prove it to be little short of marvelous that the paths do not cut across each other a thousand times an hour.

In a corner of the city removed in space many blocks from Delmonico's, and separated in other ways by what might be considered an impassable gulf from the lives of either Joan Fairburne or Dicky Burnett, Mark Devons paced the floor of his attic room, stopping now and then to frown at the whirling snowflakes, and then at the letter which he had received in the noon mail. The letter was typewritten and read as follows:

*Offices of Carlow, Reed & Co.  
New York, N.Y. Wall Street*

DEAR MR. DEVONS:

We have delayed giving you a final answer on the proposition you submitted to us to finance your patent No. 4782937 covering a new process for the manufacture of an improved patent-leather dressing at a reduced cost over the present type upon the market, because, to speak frankly, the report of our chemists was so enthusiastic that we felt you had something that really deserved success. We went over the matter several times, but have, however reluctantly, come to the conclusion that other considerations enter to such an extent into the problem of establishing such an enterprise that, with our many other interests, we do not feel justified at present in continuing negotiations. The Burnett

product is so firmly entrenched with the trade, and is backed by such a perfect organization, that any attempt to break through, even with a superior article, would involve more capital and time than we are just now prepared to risk. There is a possibility that at some later date, if you care to re-submit the proposition, we might be willing to undertake it.

Thanking you for your favor and wishing you all success, we beg to remain,

Sincerely yours,  
Carlow, Reed & Co.

MR. MARK DEVONS,  
*Mullen Court, New York, N.Y.*

In another envelope from the same office came a note from Ben Sawyer:

DEAR MARK:

I've just had a talk with Mr. Reed, and he tells me he has turned you down. It's a darned shame, because you have a good thing there. The trouble seems to be that several years ago he had one set-to with the Burnett crowd and got the worst of it. They say Burnett is a bear and would fight to his last cent, and from all I hear there're a good many cents in between. I wish I had the money myself to back you!

Why the deuce don't you drop round and see a fellow? I'm at Wellington Chambers still.

Yours,  
BEN.

Confidential; Reed says that offer Forsythe of Burnett's made of two thousand cash is robbery. Keep away.

B.

It was difficult, on the whole, to find very much humor in either letter; and yet there was one line that brought a smile to

Devons's lips every time he read it. "There is a possibility that at some later date—"

At some later date! To appreciate the humor of that jaunty phrase one had to realize that he had already been waiting several months on a capital of seventy-five dollars. This had been reduced on Monday to ten cents. To-day was Wednesday and he was hungry—hungry as the devil. Under the circumstances the airiness of that suggestion of waiting six months or a year longer might, if one were temperamentally so inclined, be considered in the nature of a jest.

For two months he had subsisted chiefly on a diet of bread, black coffee, and tobacco. That was well enough as long as he had his dreams also. As long as he was able to go to bed at night with visions of a fortune awaiting him on the morrow, bread, black coffee, and a smoke were plenty for dinner. He had enough books with him so that he was enabled to pass not only a pleasant but profitable evening with his studies. If the after-breakfast mail did not bring him his letter, there was another at eleven to look forward to, and more studying with a little dreaming thrown in. So until lunch-time and the three o'clock mail. So until dinner-time, and so through another evening.

Dreams! Dreams! Dreams! A man does not put on weight with them. A man may even lose color through them. And of course plug tobacco in a corn-cob is not altogether wholesome, although it helps the dreaming. But it is surprising how happy a man may keep as long as his plug tobacco lasts.

Devons had stumbled upon his discovery while doing research work on leathers in preparation for the original paper which he offered for his degree. He had hugged his secret close and worked on it all summer in the Technology laboratories. When he came to New York he went direct to Forsythe with it as soon as he had secured his patent papers; and Forsythe, after looking him up, had made his offer to buy it outright.

When Devons indignantly refused, Forsythe only smiled.

"You'll be back," he said.

“Why?” Devons demanded.

“Because, my boy,” Forsythe assured him, “there is nowhere else to go.”

It had looked that way until, quite by chance, Devons ran across his classmate Sawyer, who was connected with a house making a specialty of financing new enterprises. That was when the dreaming began.

It had been glorious while it lasted, because dreams are largely a matter of contrast, and Devons had, in the way of a somber background to put them against, all that was necessary. One of ten children, who had kept his mother lean and his father scrawny from the sheer effort of getting together enough to clothe and feed them up to the age when they were able to earn a pittance for themselves, he had fought his way, as Mildred his cousin had hers, through school. And what he remembered of it was not the hardship itself, but what it took away from him. To do nothing but exist and study he had surrendered most of those things that are the heritage of youth. It was work, nothing but work, with laughter and bright eyes all about him, but beyond him—like mocking fairy voices in the distance. It was work in winter and work in summer for the dollars that came to him so grudgingly and came to others so easily. He made Technology at eighteen as time is computed by mathematics, but he was nearer twenty-five in body.

It had been pleasanter there, because he felt himself to be just so much nearer his goal; but though the authorities advised against work outside of studies, he was at work half the time he should have been sleeping. And he did not have as much to eat as he should have had. Life for those four years had been a treadmill affair for him, and twice he had been upon the point of dropping, but had held himself together by his nerve.

So when he made his discovery it was a good deal as though he had been handed Aladdin’s lamp. For a week he wandered around in a sort of dazed ecstasy. Then he buckled down again and pushed it through.

He had borrowed enough from home to secure his patent papers and lived upon what he had left. The folks had

mortgaged the farm to raise it for him. And one of the very finest of his dreams ran something like this:

Mr. Reed, of Carlow, Reed & Co., came to him at the end of the first fiscal year of the Devons Manufacturing Company and said: “Devons, this thing is going better than we expected. You’ve worked hard, and now you’d better take a vacation. Here’s ten thousand dollars on account. Take it, and go off for a month.”

Ten thousand dollars! It is necessary to know how big a single dollar is before any one can realize how big ten thousand dollars is. A single dollar can be, in size, as big as the moon, and that’s as big as you care to make it; as big as a pie plate, a carriage wheel, a circus ring, or the circumference of the globe. A single dollar can be in value as much as an ordinary fortune, or as much as a Rockefeller fortune, or anything in between. If you’re starving it may be just as valuable as all the money in the world.

To Devons a dollar meant the difference between being hungry and being well fed. It meant the difference between walking with weak legs or riding in a comfortable subway train. It meant the difference, almost, between something and nothing—which is a big difference. Ten thousand dollars, then, meant ten thousand times that.

He had ten thousand dollars—not in a check, but, say, in dollar bills—something he could see, and touch and count in separate units. He had them in two dress-suit cases. The cases were packed tight so that it was difficult to strap them. Green bits of them stuck out. Even then he had enough left over to buy a new suit of clothes and hat and overcoat and shoes and silk stockings and shirts and cravats, and a pair of gold studs he saw in a window once. After this he had enough to buy a new pipe and eat a square meal at Delmonico’s and take a taxi for his parlor-car reservation.

In the next picture he was stepping off at a little one-horse railroad station in the West and shaking hands with his father who had driven up with the big horses in a buckboard.

“Strap those suit-cases on tight,” he said to his father; “I don’t want to lose them.”

So they jogged along for some ten miles, and he inquired after every one and learned that they were all sick or dying or on their way to the poorhouse. At the farmhouse door his mother came out to meet him, looking, as always, thin and hollow-eyed. He took the suit-cases into the sitting-room and handed one to his mother and one to his father, remarking casually:

“A little present.”

Good Lord!—ten thousand dollars! If it meant what it did to him, what did it mean to them? A real ranch with hired men to work it and ease and comfort, and a Ford and—

Now it was all over. The dream had vanished. “If, at some later date—”

Devons scraped round in the bottom of his pocket and found enough tobacco for one more pipeful. He filled his corn-cob and lighted it, but the smoke tasted bitter. That was because he was hungry.

And yet, there was one chance remaining which, if accepted, would at least pay off the debt at home and leave enough to stake him to some sort of job at which he could earn a living. He had only to go back to Forsythe and sign his name to a paper and he would receive two thousand dollars. That was only a fifth of ten and—it was the end. It would, however, pull him out of his present hole and leave him free for a new beginning.

Once again Devons paced his room. If only he alone were involved he would hold on, but he was not alone now. He knew what that mortgage signified to his father. For twenty years the man had denied himself everything except the bed-rock necessities of life to escape this curse of the little farmer. Devons knew that to his father it was like submitting to having a sword suspended above his head. If it fell—if the interest money was not met promptly—it meant disaster. It meant, with the foreclosed mortgage, not a single clean blow which a man might endure, but a long-drawn-out type of torture. The



only alternative open to his father would be to give up his rights as a freeman and hire out.

When Devons reached this point he stopped short and clenched his fists. He could not allow such a thing as that to be. No matter what the sacrifice, he must forestall that contingency. It was getting to be late in the afternoon, but if he hurried he might possibly reach Forsythe.

Devons put on his coat, jammed his old soft hat down to his ears, and started downstairs. On the second landing he caught the smell of coffee from the room of Arkwright, the architect, and paused a moment to enjoy it. The latter swung open the door and saw him.

“Hello, Devons,” he called. “Thought I heard some one there. Come in a minute, can’t you?”

“I’m afraid I can’t.”

“Oh, come on and have a cup of coffee before you go out, anyhow,” he pleaded. “It’s a tough old day.”

He was a big, insistent fellow, this Arkwright, and he stepped to Devons’s side and took his arm.

“Want to show you something.”

Devons followed into the warm room, where over an alcohol lamp a coffee-pot was sending out clouds of fragrant steam. A dark wooden table in the center of the room was covered with drawings. Arkwright poured a cup of black Java and shoved it toward Devons, with a box of cigarettes. The latter hesitated. It seemed almost like accepting charity to take it when he wanted it so much. His hand trembled as he reached for the cup.

Arkwright studied him a second—his brows contracting over sharp gray eyes.

“Look here, Devons, you’re sick!” he exclaimed.

But by then Devons had swallowed his coffee, and it warmed him all the way through—warmed and stimulated him.

“No,” he answered steadily, as he lighted a cigarette. “It’s only a case of nerves. What have you there?” He nodded toward the drawings.

Arkwright’s attention was immediately diverted.

“Come over and see,” he invited. “Here’s something good. When you make your pile you may want it. It’s a gentleman’s country place—to cost, say, around a hundred and fifty thousand; and it’s one peach.”

Passing his pencil lightly over the angles and circles and semicircles that stood for masonry,—it required only dollars to convert them into masonry,—Arkwright elaborated on his plans. He showed the house modeled after the fashion of an English gentleman’s estate, with its big vaulted reception-room and dining-room, and the master’s rooms and the servants’ rooms and the modern kitchen, and the grounds outside with pond and tennis-court and rose-garden, and garage, and Lord knows what. He made it all so vivid that Devons visualized it as though he were actually looking at the finished mansion. As Arkwright rambled on he used the possessive. It was always, “Here’s your dining-room and here’s your library,” until Devons was back again in his old day-dreaming.

“It’s a corker,” nodded Devons as Arkwright finished. “If I had a fortune I’d order it this afternoon.”

Arkwright laughed.

“That’s the trouble,” he answered. “The fellows that ought to have such places can’t get ’em, and those that can get ’em don’t want ’em.”

“Some of us will get ’em yet,” Devons declared grimly.

He put on his coat; but when he went out again it was in a different mood. Forsythe could go hang. Sawyer had spoken once of the possibility of finding him a job—a small salaried job—with Carlow, Reed & Co. He would walk up there and see him and take anything that was offered.

The wind blew the snow into his face and whipped his coat about his ankles as he stepped out. It came like a challenge, and he accepted it. He made his way across

Washington Square to the Avenue and pushed ahead uptown. For the first half-dozen blocks it was easy, but as he went on it became harder and harder to walk. He was weaker, on the whole, than he realized. But he gripped his jaws and went on and on and on. With his head low and his eyes on the ground, he centered every effort on just making his feet go. He saw nothing and felt nothing. He was moving now like an automaton. So he went on and on and on—farther, as a matter of fact, than he should have gone.

He paused once to stare through the snow at the number of a cross-street. He was in the sixties and west of his destination. He turned back dully. Then he staggered off the sidewalk and across the Avenue. Like one in a dream, he heard the distant toot of a horn—then a shout. He felt something strike him, and that was all he felt or knew.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DRIVER AND FATE

THE afternoon at Delmonico's was speeding, and with every passing minute Dicky was becoming more impatient and Joan more willful. She seemed to be taking almost the delight of a coquette in teasing him. Dicky never remembered having seen her more beautiful. It was worth the price of being annoyed occasionally to watch the sparkle in her eyes, little gleams of mischievous laughter like stars struck from steel; to enjoy the heightened color of her cheeks and the quick play of her mobile lips. But back of it all Dicky felt as though there was something serious. Perhaps because back of his own lightness there was something very serious indeed. Before this day was out he meant to be more serious than he had ever been in his life. Had he the opportunity he would have begun right here among the gay couples who to the music of the hidden orchestra hopped in fox-trots over the polished floor. But every time he leaned forward with the words on his lips, either he was interrupted or he found her attention diverted to something else. He could have strangled Diblee, who strolled over and insisted on sitting out the dance which she had refused him. The man talked like an ass, but Dicky derived some satisfaction from the knowledge that the fellow was heartily boring her.

At half-past four she rose abruptly.

"I think I'll go home now," she informed Dicky.

"Good!" he exclaimed.

She glanced up at him, somewhat surprised at his earnestness.

"Why, Dicky," she returned, "it can't be you're getting tired of dancing."

"It isn't that," he interrupted. "But I have something to say to you. I want to see you alone."

They had been skirting the dance floor on their way to the cloak-room, nodding to this one and that; but she paused a moment at this before going on. She looked at Dicky's flushed cheeks and alert eyes and firm mouth. Then she sat down again.

"I'm not sure that it is best you should," she said. "I'm tired. I was going to ask you please not to come with me."

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because," she answered slowly,—“because I have a feeling I want to be by myself.”

"Why?" he persisted.

"I don't know. Perhaps it's only a fancy."

"You're going right home?"

"Yes."

"Then—"

The orchestra had swung into a *valse hésitation*—a slow, dreamy sort of thing, a shadowy air on the border-land of reality.

"Dicky," she said, "something is going to happen to me to-day—somehow, somewhere."

"Eh? You haven't been talking with a fortune-teller!"

She shook her head, remaining serious through her light smile.

"They sound foolish when you put such thoughts into words," she admitted, "and I'm not much given to things of that sort. But all this afternoon I've had a feeling that I was starting on some big adventure. It's as though I were going to sea on a long voyage."

"That's queer!" exclaimed Dicky.

She met his eyes. It was as though he understood; and she had not expected him to understand.

"That," he said a little breathlessly,—“that is what I was going to talk to you about.”

“You?”

“That is why I wished to see you alone.”

“You?” she repeated again.

“You’ll give me a chance, Joan?”

She appeared startled.

For a second she searched her soul. Then she answered slowly.

“I’m quite sure it wasn’t with you—that adventure.”

It was Dicky’s opportunity; and, if it were necessary to take it right here in the crowd, he would take it. If every eye were turned upon him and every ear listening, he would take it.

“It’s because you don’t understand,” he rushed on. “You see, you—you felt what I didn’t have the nerve to speak. I love you. Joan, I love you.”

With a little cry, she reached for his hand beneath the table before which they were sitting.

“Hush!” she pleaded.

But he would not hush.

“I’ve got to tell you now—here,” he persisted. “I’ve waited as long as I can. I know I’m not big enough for you. I know you’re too fine for me. But that would hold true of any man. And I’m ready to give my whole life to making you happy. Joan, dear, I don’t know just what I can do for you. You’re—you’re like a princess. Now I want to make you a queen if I can. I—”

“Dicky,” she whispered again, “you mustn’t talk like that!”

“Maybe—that’s the big adventure you were thinking about,” he breathed.

For a heart-beat she was tempted to laugh—to laugh out loud. It was a demoniacal impulse unworthy of her, because she knew Dicky was in earnest. She knew he was speaking from the depths of him—such as those depths were. So she choked back that devil and tried to think calmly of what she could answer without hurting. But how little he knew her and what she craved! He would make her a queen, he said. He would give his life to making her happy with petting and baubles, and be her slave. Yes, he would do that. He would do it to the best of his ability. He would do it better than any one she knew. And he would call that the great adventure!

It was something from the swirling snow which struck her face when she left the house that had stimulated her imagination this afternoon. The sting had brought back those vivid pictures of bleak, stern hardships that Mildred had painted for her. Out of sheer contrast they had stirred in her a craving for something like that—a primitive craving such as seizes men in the spring and drives them back to forest and stream-side. She wanted to get out and away where life would bite. She wanted, not more of those things she had now, but opportunity to do without some of those things. She wanted a chance to be stripped to herself—a chance to use herself.

“Joan,” he choked, “Joan—you believe me?”

“I do,” she said quickly. “That’s the trouble.”

“Trouble?”

“Oh, I wish you had not spoken!”

“You mean you—this is not—the adventure?”

How could it be? It was no more an adventure than getting into a waiting limousine with him.

“Dicky,” she said, “I told you I wanted to be by myself. I want it more than ever now.”

“Because of me?”

“Because of everything.”

“You don’t love me, then?”

“You want me to tell you the truth, don’t you, Dicky?”

“Yes.”

“Then,” she said slowly and as gently as she could, —“then the truth is: I don’t love you.”

Dicky took it like a man. He neither refused to meet her eyes nor made a long face about it.

“That,” he said, “seems to settle it. Are you ready?”

He escorted her to the cloak-room, and went back and called her machine and found his own coat. Then he waited and helped her in. Uncovered, he stood in the snow before the open door.

“Dicky,” she said, giving her hand, “I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want you to feel like that,” he said. “I’d rather you felt you had some one—always ready—to call on.”

“Oh, I do!”

“For anything you may want within my power to give you!”

“Yes.”

As he stood, straight and slim with a brave face, she thought of him as some story-book prince. For a second it was as though this were some unreal world—a world of romance where princes of that sort could be.

Then he closed the door upon her and the machine started through the blinding snow.

Charles, the driver, took his usual course. If any one had told him that he was in the hands of Fate, he would probably have inquired, “Who is Fate, sir?”

He was a careful driver, who minded his own business and the traffic regulations. This late afternoon he was more than usually careful, because it was with difficulty that he saw three feet ahead. And yet—when a half-dazed figure stumbled from the sidewalk into the road, he could not stop his machine in time to avoid hitting it. He threw on the emergency brake, but it was too late.



Jumping from his seat, he picked up the unconscious man and looked about for help. But the snow came down all around him like a screen.

Joan threw open the door. She saw the limp figure.

“Bring him here!” she commanded.

Charles stumbled forward with his burden.

“Put him on the seat,” she commanded. “Quick! Drive home!”

As the car started on, she bent over the stranger. Then, with an amazed cry, she uttered his name.

## CHAPTER V

### BANDAGED

WHEN Devons regained consciousness there were a great many things he could not understand—a great many things, in fact, that, had he the strength, he would have been ready to argue could not possibly be so. Apparently he was in a big room similar to the one Arkwright had visualized for him in that hundred and fifty thousand dollar house he was to buy some day. Apparently he was in a broad, soft-mattressed bed and covered with dainty white linen, such as one might expect to find in such a home. Apparently all the other furnishings were in keeping—though he did not see them in detail, but rather sensed them as a whole. Apparently at the farther end of the room near a shaded light there was a nurse in uniform, and near her a slight, bearded man, very professional-looking. Neither of them was aware that he was studying them. Apparently they were waiting for something.

Now, manifestly, this was all a grotesque dream on Devons's part. He closed his eyes again and tried to get back to something real. The first tangible fact in the past that he was able to get hold of was of being in Arkwright's room and drinking there a cup of coffee. Then Arkwright had shown him those plans.

After that he had gone out somewhere. He had started for Wellington Chambers. Perhaps this was Wellington Chambers. He opened his eyes again. No; Sawyer was not here. Besides, what were these other two? When he tried to move, their presence seemed more plausible. He was sore all over, as though he had been pummeled. This helped him to recall that mysterious tooting of horns and the curious phenomenon immediately following of an extra heavy gust of wind hitting him as with a cudgel. And that was as far as he could go.

Hearing a sound from the rear of the room, he opened his eyes once more. The bearded man was coming toward him. He

took Devons's pulse and examined the pupils of his eyes and asked him how he felt.

"Sore," replied Devons. "Where am I?"

"In the home of Mr. Fairburne," replied the doctor.

"How did I get here?"

"Never mind that. Save your strength to answer my questions."

So, with the nurse to assist him, the doctor felt Devons all over. In some places it hurt and in other places it did not. The doctor's conclusion at the end of the examination was that he had a dislocated shoulder, a fractured rib, and various odds and ends of bruises.

"How did I get them?" inquired Devons.

"You ran into an automobile," was the politic way Dr. Nichols put it.

"How did the—the auto come out?" inquired Devons, with a flickering smile.

"As usual, the machine got the better of it," replied Nichols.

Still, the machine could not be blamed for the shockingly ill-nourished body that had withstood the blow so feebly. Because the young man seemed of the more intelligent sort, he pursued his questioning a little further, prompted by some curiosity.

"What's been your diet lately?" he inquired.

"Bread and coffee mostly," answered Devons.

"Didn't you know any better?" grunted Nichols.

"Yes."

"Then—"

He caught an amused expression in Devons's sunken eyes.

“Oh, I see,” he went on more gently. “Well, we’ll have to get some real food into you as soon as possible.”

“Is this a hospital?” asked Devons.

“Hardly. Miss Joan Fairburne was in the machine when you stumbled in front of it. She brought you here.”

“Joan Fairburne,” muttered Devons, trying to place the name.

“She says she knew you when she was in college.”

He remembered then. She was with Mildred when she died. She had dark hair and eyes. She was very beautiful—very beautiful and very rich.

Nichols had removed his coat in businesslike fashion and was rolling up his sleeves.

“I’ve got to get that shoulder back,” he announced. “Then I’ll fix that rib in place. Better save your strength. I’ll have to give you a whiff of ether.”

The subsequent half-hour was an exceedingly unpleasant one for Devons. He was so weak that Nichols refrained from administering any more ether than was absolutely necessary, and he was both judge and jury on the question. Devons clenched his jaw and stood it, but he could not help his lips from getting white. Whenever that happened, Nichols nodded to the nurse, and she shoved a gauze sponge sprinkled with the pungent stuff beneath his nose. This set his head to swimming and made the room go round in circles.

And all during this process Nichols wound him in bandages until he felt as tied up as a mummy. Whenever they gave him a chance, he protested:

“Look here. Can’t get round in—these things.”

“I don’t intend to have you get round for some little time,” replied Nichols. “Don’t talk.”

Then how the deuce was he going to see Sawyer? How the deuce was he going—?

But it was not possible to keep a thought very long at a time. There were two of them against him, and they did whatever they pleased.

Even when they were all through, he was not any more comfortable than before. He was in a strait-jacket, and the after-effects of the ether were the usual after-effects.

After a while Nichols went off. The nurse remained. He was glad of that. She was the one sane thing in a world grown chaotic.

He must have slept at intervals during the night, because all of a sudden he was aware that it was morning. The shaded electric light had gone out and the room was suffused with the white light of day. The nurse was still there, and when he spoke to her she came over and asked how he felt.

“Punk,” he answered.

He was all tied up, for one thing. He was faint, for another. And he still tasted and smelled ether, for another.

“I’d like a cup of coffee,” he said.

“I’ll get you something better,” she answered.

After an interval out of the room she returned with the something better. Apparently their tastes differed, for it was not better. It was a hot, flabby drink, like gruel. However, he swallowed it, and it took away some of the faint feeling. Shortly he went to sleep again; and this time when he awoke he found that the nurse had grown slighter and taller and had changed the color of her hair. Or maybe it was a different nurse.

“What time is it?” he asked.

“Eleven o’clock,” she replied.

“You’re a new one?”

“I’m the day nurse.”

That was encouraging, because it proved that he was seeing things in a clearer and more normal way. He felt emboldened now to examine his room more in detail. It was an

extremely satisfactory apartment. Everything in it was quite perfect and fresh. The wall-paper had little roses in it and looked as though it had been put on within a day. The bed was of mahogany with a dull finish. The dresser in the corner was new, and all the odds and ends of other things were new also. It looked like one of those windows along Fifth Avenue where such articles are displayed for sale. Only he had the feeling that on these there had never been any price tag. If ever they were paid for it had been done quietly and privately.

The linen covering him was choice. He felt it. It gave him a sense of clean luxury. It sank into him and made him wish he were shaved. If he had his razor with him he would have shaved right then, if he could manage it with his left hand. He put his fingers to his rough face to see if it could be done.

When Nichols came in, Devons asked him if he did not think it could be managed.

“I’ll have them send Jeffrey up to you,” nodded Nichols.

“Jeffrey?”

“Mr. Fairburne’s man.”

“I don’t want to put the family to any more trouble than I have. I could do it myself.”

“I doubt it. Besides, it isn’t necessary.”

“How long am I going to be here?”

“A month. Perhaps longer?”

Devons frowned.

“That’s impossible,” he replied firmly.

“Miss Fairburne is feeling very badly about you. Naturally, she wants to do everything she can under the circumstances.”

“It wasn’t her fault. You’ll tell her that and—thank her for me?”

“Certainly.”

After feeling his pulse and taking his temperature and asking a hundred or so questions, Nichols declared his patient was doing very well.

“Give him within reason all he wants to eat,” he ordered the nurse.

Devons heard him say that, or he would not have believed it. He could not remember ever having had all he wanted to eat—except in his dreams. The time Reed gave him that ten thousand dollars he had gone to Delmonico’s and ordered oysters on the half-shell, a soup, a bit of fish, a big steak with hashed-brown potatoes, and asparagus, and an ice, and concluded with coffee and cheese. Only something happened before it got to him. Probably something would happen this time.

Jeffrey came up with a “Good-morning, sir,” and several towels over his arm and a pitcher of hot water. While Devons lay on his back without moving and with his eyes closed, Jeffrey bent over him and lathered his face and shaved him as he had never been shaved before. Then he washed off the soap and applied hot towels—steaming hot towels that made him catch his breath in the joy of the tingly feeling of them. Then Jeffrey put on cold cream and rubbed it in, and after that dusted his cheeks with a sweet-scented powder. Jeffrey even combed his hair. Then quietly, softly, he stole out, leaving Devons with the hazy notion that it had all been done by magic. Feeling so fine and having nothing better to do, he went to sleep.

It was one o’clock when he awoke, and he was hungry. Now was the time to test if what Nichols had said about food was true, or not. He did not even have a chance to tell the nurse he was ready, because at that point she opened the door and came in with a tray. She placed this near him. It contained eggs on toast, little triangle pieces of toast—and a cup of cocoa with frothy whipped cream on the top of it. He tried for a moment to serve himself with his left hand; but he made such a bungling job of it that the nurse said:

“You’d better let me help you.”

So she did. He had nothing to do but open his mouth like an overgrown robin. It was absurd. Also it was deliciously effortless. And he had enough—all he wanted.

When he was through she brought from somewhere a large vase of roses and placed them on a little table by his head.

“These are from Miss Fairburne with her compliments,” said the nurse. “She hopes you are feeling comfortable.”

“Oh, Lord!” gasped Devons.



## CHAPTER VI

### WHOSE FAULT?

THIS went on for three or four days; and, with nothing to do but eat and sleep and in between whiles to lie at languid ease, Devons grew stronger and stronger, and all the minor sore spots vanished. He was even able to sit up and read. All the magazines he ever heard of were sent to him, and a brand-new book every day. Yet he did not read very much. There was too much here to live.

For the time being he was as well off personally—except for the inconvenience of being half-swathed in bandages—although all his dreams had come true. It gave him an opportunity to compare the actuality with the vision. He resolutely barred his thoughts from the future. He refused for a little while to ask himself how this was going to end, and what was to become of him as soon as he was able to leave. After all, there was not much he could do about that, anyway. There was not even any one whom it was necessary to inform as to his whereabouts. The few at Mullen Court who were aware of his existence would presume that he had gone away on a business trip. They did not worry much there about where men came from or where they went.

The sheer material comforts surrounding Devons were as balm to his soul. There are those who seem able to find on a cot in a garret everything they crave. Arkwright with his drawing set was more or less of this sort, though he had more than some others. Prescott was another—Prescott, the slight young fellow just back from Paris, who lived at the top of the next house across the alley and who used to call to him out of his window. Prescott painted wonderful things in oil, and appeared content with doing that, whether he sold them or not. He went over to see him one night, and in the course of the evening several young ladies in queer, unconventional costumes came in, and by the light of a single candle Prescott read to them from the plays of Maeterlinck. It was a weird

performance, with a great deal of smoke and not much to eat. Yet every one but himself was satisfied. He returned to his room with something of a headache and dreamed of blind children all night.

Frankly he liked where he was now much better. For years he had tried to make dreams, tried to make the future take the place of reality and the present. This, instead of growing easier with passing time, became increasingly more difficult. At Technology he had seen men doing the same work he was doing, and at the same time enjoying the comforts of life to a reasonable degree while they were at it. He had no advantage over them even in dreams. And, after all, clean linen was clean linen and decent garments were decent garments, and good food was good food, and money was a conjurer's wand.

Then there were the others—his father and mother and sisters. But here they did not count. It disturbed him when he thought of them. If only they could come on and be pummeled by an automobile—

He forced himself back to the present. He must avoid even the past. He informed the nurse that he was thirsty and she brought him a glass of milk—rich milk in a glass that sparkled from its many cut facets. It tasted like nectar.

It was on the fifth day, in the afternoon, that the nurse informed him that Miss Fairburne expressed a desire to visit him if he thought he had the strength to see any one.

“I'd like to see her,” answered Devons.

And yet, he faced the prospect uneasily. It made him realize, for one thing, how self-centered he had been. Except remotely, he had not associated her either with the accident or with his present surroundings. The mere fact that she had been in the car when he was struck was an important detail, to be sure; but, not having seen her at the time, it was as vague as hearsay evidence. That he was indebted to her for all that he had recently been enjoying was also an undeniable fact; but as long as she had been embodied to him no more concretely than through the fragrance of the roses she sent him daily, she had

not played a vital part in his thoughts. Now he was a little afraid that with her actual presence would come disillusionment. She would bring him back to actual work-a-day conditions.

The few times he had seen her with Mildred, it had been with a sort of resentment. He had thought of her as having in excess all the choice things of life that Mildred lacked—as completely as he himself did. Even to her physical beauty. It seemed as though if justice had held the balance true, Mildred should at least have been the one to possess that abundant silken black hair, those dark eyes that set a man to wondering, the fine nose and mouth that were so subtly distinctive. In every line and feature she revealed her tender nurture. It was as though she had taken on something from all the beautiful things for which the four corners of the earth had been searched. Beside her, poor Mildred's blunt, irregular nose and mouth appeared plainer than ever. Knowing as he did the woman beneath, he felt something to be unjust there.

But he must remember that Miss Fairburne herself had found the real Mildred and clung to her and been faithful to her to the end. It was Miss Fairburne who had held Mildred's hand at the last—the thin, pitiful little hand—and it was Miss Fairburne whom Mildred had trusted to send home the bitter news. Those few moments when he had seen her in the infirmary reception-room, her eyes moist, he remembered that she had seemed to him like another Mildred. She had been almost like one of the home folks—just an ordinary body who had lost a sister.

Then she had gone out of his mind. His own affairs had preempted all his thoughts. Besides, she vanished shortly into her own world, which to him then was as though she had been whisked to some distant planet.

Yet it could not have been so far that she had gone. Between a sleep and an awakening which to him was no longer than a heart-beat, he had without effort compassed the distance which lay between them. In the old days such things had been done, he knew, with the aid of magic carpets. But he had no such aid. Besides, these were not the old days. He was

living in very modern times and in the most modern of all modern cities.

Glancing up from the bed, he saw in the door, what at first looked to be a framed picture. It might have been one of those old masterpieces with the vague title “Portrait of a Young Lady,” which leaves one eager to know a great deal more about the young lady than history vouchsafes. So she stood for a moment, and then with some uncertainty moved into the room. Devons tried to sit up. He was awkward about it, and she hurried to his side.

“Please don’t!” she exclaimed. “Oh, I’m so sorry for you!”

The beautiful eyes endorsed the assertion. She appeared so genuinely pained that he did not understand.

“For me?” he replied.

The sight of his bandaged shoulder and his helplessness so dramatized the accident that for a second it was more vivid to her than it had been at the moment it occurred.

“I suppose the fact that you’re—you’re alive is something to be thankful for,” she faltered on.

“Well,” he said, “I’m glad to be alive, if that’s what you mean.”

“You’ve suffered a great deal?”

“None at all, to speak of,” he replied.

“Then you’re not uncomfortable—now?”

He smiled a little.

“In most ways I’m more comfortable than I ever was in my life.”

She looked skeptical. It was difficult for her to believe that, with the evidence of her two eyes.

“I’m afraid you’re just trying to take away the blame from me,” she returned.

“Blame—for what?” he demanded.

“For—for the accident. After all, if it had not been for me you would not have been injured.”

“It’s just as true that if I hadn’t tried to cross the street without looking, this wouldn’t have happened,” he declared.

“But if Charles had been more careful!”

“Or if I had been more careful! Or if I had taken a different street! Or if I had delayed anywhere along the route thirty seconds! I wonder if we know any more about such things than that either they happen or they don’t.”

“You feel like that?” she exclaimed, as though she found relief in the notion.

“I haven’t thought very much about it,” he admitted. “But when you stop to figure out the blame you have to go back further than just the second before. And if you do that, where are you going to stop? If something had turned out a little differently for either of us ten minutes before—”

She started. It sent her thoughts back to Dicky. It was he who had detained her at Delmonico’s. Perhaps, then, it was he who was to blame!

“Or an hour before,” he went on. “Or a day or a month or a year. I was born on Friday, but supposing I had not been born until Saturday?”

It was her seriousness that urged him to follow his fancy through to so grotesque a conclusion—her seriousness and a desire to make her accept the situation more lightly.

“That sounds like fatalism,” she said.

“Does it?”

He was unaware that he was unfolding any particular philosophy. He had given little study and less thought to such abstract subjects. His work had all been along distinctly more concrete and material lines.

She had taken the chair by his bed, and her nearness stimulated him like wine.

“At any rate,” he went on, “we might as well call it that and let it go. The major point seems to be that here I am.”

And there she was. Here was another point which until this moment he had not considered. All this while she had been in the house, and he had never given that a thought. She would probably have visited him yesterday had he asked for her.

“Do you ever hear from Mildred’s folks?” he inquired.

It was the expression about her mouth that recalled to him that brief former association with her.

“Yes,” she nodded. “But I have to write at least three letters to get one back. I have a feeling that, merely because I was the one to—to tell them, they blame me.”

“That is possible,” he admitted. “But surely you don’t blame yourself?”

“Sometimes I think I might have done something to prevent it.”

Devons flushed. There had been times when he had thought as much himself. He had wondered why, with all her wealth, she had not relieved Mildred of part of the burden of her poverty. Yet he knew that it was more than doubtful if Mildred would have allowed it—any more than he himself would have allowed anything of the sort from one of his classmates. It had always been said of the Devonses that they would starve before accepting a favor. His father was like that. On his little hundred-acre farm he was as cocky as a lord on country-wide estates.

“You could have done nothing,” he assured her, with a sense of pride.

“But why should she be like that—when I wanted to help?”

“It’s in her blood,” he replied.

“It wasn’t quite fair,” she protested. “She was always eager to do what she could for me. She helped me in my studies.”

“Yes.”

“And when I wanted—in the only way I could—”

She checked herself. His eyes were meeting her eyes.

“What you gave her at the end was what she wanted,” he finished for her. “Your sympathy and friendship.”

“But the other—”

“Money?” he asked bluntly.

“It sounds crude to put it that way,” she objected. “But it might have prevented the end.”

“Perhaps.”

“So—why wouldn’t she let me?”

“It would be difficult to make you understand,” he said. “And yet, if you had been in her place I’m pretty sure you’d have felt exactly as she felt.”

She shook her head.

“Every one ought to be allowed to help every one else in any way one can,” she declared. “I—I don’t know what else we’re living for.”

“I guess most of us don’t ask that. We just plug ahead,” he smiled.

“Have you been in town since you graduated?”

“Since fall,” he answered.

He offered no further details. It was impossible for him to conceive that his personal affairs could be of any interest to her.

“Mildred told me how hard you work,” she went on. “This must have seriously interfered with your business.”

“It hasn’t,” he assured her.

The naked truth was that, if anything, it had been a Godsend to him. What would have become of him in another day? Sawyer might have offered something; but even then there would have been an intervening week before pay-day.

The chances seemed to be that he would leave his bed stronger and more fit than he had been in a decade.

“If you have any business letters to write—won’t you let me write them for you?”

“I haven’t any.”

“You’re—you’re going to be like Mildred?”

There was a curiously pathetic note in her voice. It was almost childlike in its plaintiveness.

“I’m telling you the truth,” he answered quickly. “My plans were at a standstill. They hadn’t worked out as I expected.”

“Are you a fatalist about such things too?” she asked.

He thought a moment.

“I guess I might as well be,” he answered.

Her eye caught the magazines on a table near the bed.

“If I can’t write for you, I can read to you. Have you any reason to offer why I shouldn’t do that much?”

“No,” he replied frankly. “I’d like to have you.”

“Would you like to hear anything in particular?”

“Nothing in particular,” he answered.

So she picked up a magazine and selected a story at random. She read very well, but after all that was more or less beside the point. What he was really interested in was her and the fact that she was sitting here within arm’s length of him. It was quite the nearest he had ever come in personal contact to any one as supremely beautiful as she. And he realized that she was an integral part of all these surroundings he was so enjoying. It was odd that Arkwright had neglected to include something of the sort in the plans for his house. Something of the sort was necessary in the plans of any house assuming to be more than a mere shelter. If it took money to turn the blueprints into masonry, after that it took something like this to turn the masonry into a home. It had been rather stupid of



Arkwright to ignore so important a detail. He must call his attention to it when he next saw him.

Devons watched her eyes, and her moving lips, and the velvet softness of her cheek, and her shell-like ear, and the curve of her neck, and her tender hands. And all those things set him to dreaming along new lines. And the dreams stiffened his lips. And the dreams made him fret a little that he was so tied up.

Suddenly she closed the magazine.

“That was a very good story, wasn’t it?” she smiled.

“A very good story, indeed,” answered Devons. “Thank you.”

“You’d like me to read another to-morrow?”

“I’d like nothing better,” replied Devons.

“Then I’ll come up—about this time,” she promised him.

From that moment he began to look forward to this time to-morrow.

## CHAPTER VII

### A LETTER

DICKY BURNETT called at the Fairburne house every afternoon following the accident, and was informed daily by the functionary at the door, whom up to now he had rather liked, that "Miss Fairburne begs to be excused from seeing any one to-day, sir."

Of course there was nothing further he could do about it, although at the moment he always conceived some such wild plan as knocking down the innocent butler and making his way past him. But in the end he merely left his card and meekly retired.

Joan did not give him a chance. If it had only been a case of scrimmaging his way to her side, or of scaling a wall or surmounting any other kind of natural barrier, he would at least have had the satisfaction of a struggle, even if he failed to reach her. But to be foiled by nothing more tangible than the lady's formal refusal, made still more negative when voiced through a second party (an inconsequential stick of a second party whom he felt perfectly sure he could have thrown down the stone steps), was not to give him a show.

He was willing to admit that she must have suffered a good deal of a shock. It is unpleasant enough at best to run down any one, and to a woman of her delicate sensibilities it must have been unnerving. He understood, however, that it was wholly the fellow's fault. He understood further that the man was not seriously injured, and she had certainly done everything in her power to offset the damage. If the fellow had any sense of appreciation he ought to consider himself fortunate in being established in the same house with her. He would get run over himself for the opportunity.

By the end of the fourth day Dicky felt that she, if not her victim, should have fully recovered. In fact, he was certain of it.

Yet she canceled all her social obligations, and persisted in refusing to see him. That was not like her. And nothing that went before explained it.

He had, to be sure, asked her to marry him and she had refused. But surely she did not think that he was cad enough to make a scene about that. She knew him well enough to know that he was not the kind to wave his arms in the air and make himself disagreeable just because she was obliged to tell him she did not love him. He had hoped up to the last moment. Good Lord, a man who loved her as he loved her could not be blamed for that! When, that afternoon at Delmonico's, he had told her of his love he had told her true. With all there was in him, he loved her. With a great deal more than he had ever suspected was in him, he loved her. Because of this he had hoped to the end, though he knew the odds were a thousand to one against him. They would be that against any man who wanted to marry her. She was too good for them all, including himself.

Looking at the proposition calmly—which meant leaving out of the question for the moment all such personal considerations as the fact that he wanted her, reason or no reason, like the devil—he realized that he could offer her no sufficient consideration that would justify him in expecting that she should want to marry him. Neither his social position nor his prospects held any advantage over her social position and prospects. In fact they were identical. For all those things she might just as well stay where she was. If he were a Rockefeller, or she the daughter of poor but honest parents—but there is not much sense in speculating about what is not. There was just as much chance of his making himself a billionaire as there was of Fairburne going broke.

A man to win her would have to bring her something she did not have already. Offhand the only type he could think of was some foreign duke or lord with a couple of million acres and a chest plastered over with various orders, and a trunk full of crown jewels. But if ever he saw anything of the kind snooping around he would nail him. He would pummel him to within an inch of his life if he went to jail for it. He used to find considerable relief in picturing himself about that task.

Barring the nobility, what in thunder could a man bring her? There were serious moments when Dicky Burnett searched his soul for an answer to that question. With the need of her came the need of doing something for her—the need of making himself of use to her. And the serious part of it all was that he could find no way. That her love should call back to his love—that it should be as simple as this—he never even considered. He was not that worthy of her. She was too fine, too rare, too wonderful to allow an ordinary man to conceive anything so rash. He labored under no delusions about himself. He was decent and he was honest and he loved her. That was all. There were a thousand men who, if ever they had the chance to learn her as he had, could say the same. He was neither better nor worse than these others who in their turn might come along. Any man who did not love her after knowing her would be an ass.

These were some of the things that he wished to tell her. She must not think it was necessary to avoid him; to hide from him like a hunted rabbit. So when, on the sixth day, he called at the house and received his stereotyped refusal, he went back to the Harvard Club, instead of going on to keep his engagement for tea with the Henshaws, and in the seclusion of the library sat down and wrote her a letter. He was not especially skillful at that sort of thing. He wrote bluntly in a bold hand, with his thoughts bent upon what he wished to say rather than any grace of composition.

Dear Joan [he began]: I want very much to see you. Won't you please let me in next time for just a few minutes? If you're afraid because you think I'm going to bother you with telling you some more that I love you—why, I promise I won't. I don't mean by this I promise not to love you. I couldn't very well promise that, because I do. And that goes on just the same whether I see you or not, so it needn't make any difference one way or the other, need it?

I have been wandering round town all alone for pretty nearly a week now, and I'm getting mighty homesick. That's what Hollister says—it is just plain homesickness. Ever have it? You feel like a cat in a

strange garret, and wander around without any stopping-places. Even when I go home, the house has a foreign look, as though a whole lot of things were missing, even though you can't find anything gone.

I guess it's you that's missing at home and everywhere I go. I didn't realize until now how much I must have carried you round with me in my mind. Even dear old dad, who doesn't pay much attention to my affairs because he doesn't think they amount to much, looked up at dinner the other night and said, "Where's Joan?"

I've told him a little about you. I couldn't help it.

And every so often, wherever I am, I give a start myself and say, "Where's Joan?"

I miss not *seeing* you even though I know you're all right. After all, remembering any one isn't like seeing her. I know perfectly well your hair is black and just how it's going to look when I do see it; but that isn't the same. Queer, but it isn't. And that's true of your eyes and nose and mouth and all the rest of you. I want to look at you again and, even if you don't love me, there's no harm, is there? I won't take any of you away by doing that. There'll be just as much of you left.

I want to hear your voice too—even if you tell me things I won't like to hear. And I want—oh, I just want to see you, Joan. Won't you tell his nibs at the door to let me in?

*Please.*

Of all I told you last time, I want you to remember this most! that I'm always within reach if you need me for anything. Lord knows, I can't think of much I could do. I wish I might.

Good-bye, Joan.

DICK.

P.S. If you don't see me to-morrow, I'll believe  
it was you who was run over. D.

It helped some just to write to her.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DICKY CALLS

JOAN had been staying a great deal in her room for the past week. It was partly upon the advice of Dr. Nichols, and partly upon the advice of her mother and father; but it is very doubtful if their superior knowledge would have had quite as much weight as it did if Joan herself had not welcomed the internment. To be sure, the shock had been considerable; but after the first temporary and purely normal reaction came a second reaction, which was not correctly diagnosed either by her parents or the physician. Nichols, looking merely at her heightened color and brighter eyes, feared hysteria. Mrs. Fairburne took it to be disappointment at the many social engagements Joan was forced to cancel. She tried hard not to blame any one for the situation; but upon several occasions she observed darkly to her husband:

“All I can say is that some one was stupid to allow such a misfortune—at the height of the social season.”

The first time he heard this, Fairburne squared his shoulders a trifle, as though considering that he himself might be involved in the general accusation.

“Not you, of course, my dear,” she hastened to assure him; “but some one.”

Yet Charles was not discharged. Then apparently the fault lay between Devons and Fate. Anyhow, it was more or less immaterial.

Perhaps it was just as well for the peace of mind of all concerned that it was not generally known that Joan really was enjoying one of the most interesting experiences of her life there in the privacy of her room. Certainly to have informed Dr. Nichols that she felt every sense to be more alert than formerly would have contributed nothing to science; to have explained to her parents that she was enjoying as a luxury the

privilege of calling her time her own would not have left them any the wiser; to have confessed to Dicky that she felt even a certain relief from him would not have done a particle of good in that direction. Half the joy of her joy lay in the fact that it was a very intimate and personal and secret joy.

As soon as she learned, through Dr. Nichols, that there was not the slightest element of danger in Devons's condition; that in all probability the man, with good care, would leave in better condition than he came, it was as though she had found an opportunity.

"As a matter of fact," Nichols had told her, "you can credit yourself with having saved his life."

"How?" she asked doubtfully.

"The man hasn't been getting enough to eat," Nichols informed her.

"Not enough to eat?" It sounded like an absurd statement.

"He tells me he has been living on a diet of black coffee and tobacco."

"But why should one do that?" she inquired.

"Because," answered Nichols, "it is very inexpensive. Of course he could have invested the same amount of money to better advantage in some other type of food-stuff, but it's doubtful if he would have got as much comfort out of it."

"Then he must be very, very poor."

"I gather he is."

So here, in a way, was the case of Mildred all over again. With a difference. The difference was that Devons—well, it did make a difference that he was—he. At best, there is less opportunity for a woman to be of assistance to another woman than to one of the opposite sex, even in an impersonal way. The response is less keen. It does not touch the same depths.

Not that she was in the slightest sentimental about it. She was absolutely normal. Even the excitement of the situation was normal. Nichols to the contrary, her attitude was not even remotely associated with hysteria, or with mawkish



sentimentality. It had more to do with what she had vaguely described to Dicky at that last meeting as “the big adventure.” It was as though this man Devons had made a breach in the high wall surrounding her and offered her opportunity to venture a little way beyond into the quick life that men and women led outside—the life that treated men and women like men and women and not like daintily dressed dolls.

Devons had gone hungry! There was nothing, perhaps, in that to make any one envy him; and yet, it stood for something. At least, that had intensified the hours to him. He had been like a harp with the strings drawn too taut, drawn almost to the breaking point; but she had been like a harp with the strings sagging. Of the two it would be easier to play the taut strings. After all, it might be better to be hungry than surfeited. The very hour that she had sat with listless interest before the delicacies at Delmonico’s, he had been wandering, dazed and hungry, through the snow. It was a question who was in the worse plight.

That was only a detail, anyway. But how it dramatized the same safe, uneventful streets through which she rode in her snug machine! And how curious that, as though in response to her cry, this should be brought to her in her own home.

Was there some truth in that strange doctrine of fatalism—that our lives are mapped out for us ahead and that, however remote the possibility may seem, we must travel the foreordained road?

Staring from her window at night, she wondered with quickened breath. Looking back, her meeting with Mildred may have been significant. She had come upon her quite by chance, and through her had met Devons. At the time it had seemed the most trivial and commonplace of incidents; yet, if that had not been, it is probable that Devons would have been sent off out of her life to a hospital. She had brought him here and insisted upon his remaining because of Mildred. It was significant, too, that on that very afternoon she had not ridden back with Dicky—that she was alone at the appointed moment.

Poor Dicky! She was rather sorry that it had been necessary to involve him. If only he had not said what he did say, she would have turned to him now. She would have liked to discuss the whole question with him. She supposed it was possible even now; only—well, she was afraid he would not understand. She was afraid it might trouble him. And in a sense she felt responsible for his peace of mind. She should have foreseen what might come of their relations. Only, she had never thought it possible for him to be as serious as he had seemed when he spoke. Even if he imagined himself in love with her, she thought she would recognize it as pure imagination. It was as natural for Dicky to fall in love, in fancy, with any woman with whom he might be thrown in contact any length of time as it was for him to breathe. He had confessed several previous romances to her.

It was probable, then, that this was just another. She should have held to that. But somehow it was difficult. She had not laughed when he told her of his love. If she had given way to her emotions the chances are she would have cried. She had found some new quality in his eyes and his voice. Then she liked the way he stood square-shouldered when she told him the naked truth. And actually, she had felt a sense of possessing something rare and wonderful in the loyalty that prompted him to his offer.

“I want you to feel you have some one always ready to call on.” So the ladies of romance used to receive an oath of allegiance from their knights.

Then to-day a note from him had come which she had read with misty eyes. It was so direct and uncomplaining that it tightened her throat. There was a great deal about Dicky that was likable. She could be with him more than with any other man she knew, if only he would not talk about love; because love meant something entirely different from anything Dicky dreamed. It had to do with life. It had to do with—adventure. It had to do with big, earnest things, with real things, with heart-breaking things, perhaps. All of which Dicky knew nothing about.

But, after reading his note twice, she sent down word to Sparrow that she would be at home that day to Mr. Richard Burnett. If Sparrow felt a certain sense of relief, it would be nothing surprising, because the last time he had given his message to the man he had hesitated about holding the door open as wide as usual.

Dicky did not come until after four, which was unfortunate, because she had a very important appointment at four-thirty, and told him so almost at once.

“You’re going out?” he inquired hopefully.

“No,” she replied with some embarrassment.

He concluded then that a milliner or something of the kind was coming to the house; and that, if one looked far enough ahead, was encouraging, because it suggested that she was preparing to go out again.

So he sat down and talked with her about this thing and that very rationally and good-naturedly, as he might have done a week ago. In many ways he seemed more himself than he had for several weeks, because she realized now that for some time he had not been exactly normal.

Then he gave a new turn to the conversation by observing:

“It must be mighty dull for you to be shut up in the house, Joan.”

And she answered, speaking the truth, “Only it isn’t, Dicky.”

“But what do you do with yourself all day?”

That was a difficult question to answer directly. From his point of view she supposed she was not doing very much, because most of the interest of these days came from within herself. And she could not very well let him into the secret of her thoughts. So she answered:

“I don’t think I could make you understand, Dicky. Only truly it isn’t stupid.”

He looked up with a frown.

“You don’t give me credit for understanding much of anything, do you, Joan?”

“It isn’t that,” she tried to reassure him. “Only—supposing I don’t understand myself very well?”

“I don’t think you do.”

“Then—”

“Oh, we’ll only get mixed up again if we go on like that,” he interrupted. “Tell me something about this fellow you ran over.”

She looked frightened.

“I didn’t run *over* him.” She shuddered. “Don’t make it any worse than it is.”

“Well, you started to.”

“There’s a big difference.”

“I suppose there is,” he admitted. “Who is he?”

“Oh, I hope some day you can meet him. You’d like him, Dicky.”

“Perhaps.”

“He’s a Technology man and—”

“He’s what?”

“Technology.”

Dicky appeared concerned.

“I didn’t know that. Some one told me he was a ’bus driver.”

“Why, Dicky, he’s a wonderful fellow. He has invented something. Only he’s very, very poor.”

“Inventors always are,” he nodded.

“And he has tried so hard to make his way. He—he was almost starving when—”

She did not like to fill in the ellipsis.

“When you partly ran over him,” he suggested.

“It’s nothing to make fun about,” she warned.

“Go on.”

“And I’d met him before. I knew a cousin of his at college.”

“You did?”

“She was wonderful, too.”

“Runs in the family?”

“They are from out West.”

“Anywhere in particular out West?”

“From Montana.”

“Just Montana?”

He was laughing at her now, and she resented it—resented it with more genuine feeling than she would have thought possible. Her lips closed firmly.

“I shan’t tell you anything more about him,” she decided.

“Now, look here—” he protested, making his feet in some alarm.

“No, I mean it,” she replied.

“I was only fooling, Joan. I didn’t know—”

He was studying her face. She was in dead earnest. He knew that. He always knew when she was in earnest.

“Good Heavens, Joan—” he began.

But she had risen too, and was holding out her hand.

“You must excuse me now,” she said. “It is almost half-past four.”

Dicky caught his breath.

“You’re going—back to him?” he demanded.

It was a foolish thing for him to say. He realized it the moment the words were out of his mouth. He saw her toss up her head—saw her look the princess.

“Must I account for my movements to you?” she asked.

“You know better, Joan,” he cut in quickly. “Only—”

“Good-bye,” she insisted.

He took her hand.

“I don’t care where you’re going or who it is you’re going to see; but you’ll let me call again?”

“Do you think you’ve made yourself very agreeable?”

In holding her hand he held an advantage. She could not very well leave until he let go.

“Next time—” he began.

“Oh, all right, Dicky; I’ll try you once more. Please let me go.”

So he let her go, and in an instant she had vanished—none too politely.

Sparrow opened the door. Dicky wondered if it would not be well to inform the man of her promise to admit him again, in case she herself forgot. Then other thoughts crowded in upon him, and he went down the steps in a kind of daze.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE FIGHTING THINGS

WHEN Joan came into Devons's room, she found him propped up on the pillows, staring at the brass clock on the mantel.

"You're five minutes late," he informed her.

It was so trivial a matter to mention that Nurse Ware, who sat in the farther corner of the room knitting and trying to look both deaf and dumb, involuntarily raised her eyes.

"I was delayed by a caller," Joan explained.

Nurse Ware turned to face the window, and from that point on assumed that she was somewhere else. As far as either Joan or Devons cared, she might have been in Jericho.

"It's curious," said Devons, "how the more time you have on your hands the closer you watch the clock. This last five minutes has seemed like an hour."

"You should have been reading," she laughed.

"I was waiting for you to read."

The color came to her cheeks.

"I am ready," she answered.

But it seemed that, after all, neither had anything especial he wished to hear; and so, when she had looked through the table of contents of a magazine or two, Joan found herself, in spite of the original urgency of her mission, sitting back and idly talking. Doubtless a fair explanation of this was that she had discovered that he, as a cross-section of real life, was more interesting to her than any fiction, which at best is merely a reflection of reality. As for him, his experience with at least a dozen heroines during the past week proved positively that the most brilliant of the authors were stupid and clumsy when the work of their pens was put in such close juxtaposition with

actuality as in the present case. Even a poet cannot describe black hair like hers as well as a man can see it—or eyes or nose or mouth. Then there were a thousand other details, and these other details were changing from second to second—changing so subtly that words were powerless to trace the shadings. Sometimes they were scarcely visible, but were rather variations of moods as intangible as his own moods. Superficially, for example, her eyes remained always the same in color and size, and yet they were never the same a minute at a time. Even she as a whole did not remain fixed, because, as with each visit he came to know her better and came to realize how much more there was to know, she developed like a portrait on canvas under the hands of an artist.

His attitude toward her at first had been one of challenge. He had expected a certain class feeling to make itself manifest in her. He was ready to resent any superiority she might express, even unconsciously, as a result of her social position and wealth. He was for a little while the elder Devons with all the latter's pride in his few acres and liberty. But as he found nothing to pit his aggressiveness against he began to realize that after all it was he if any one who was playing the cad. She was more natural and genuine than he. In not accepting her for just what she was, he was unfair.

He was especially conscious of that to-day. And so he allowed himself to unfold to her something of his past. It was at her prompting.

“I envy you and Mildred the chance you've had to travel and see things,” she observed.

“Haven't you traveled?” he asked.

“Only a little, abroad,” she answered.

To him that was the only kind of real traveling there was. The few back home who had been to London or Paris were looked upon with something like reverence.

“Then you've seen more than I,” he declared.

“Of buildings and pictures, perhaps. But always I took my own little world with me.”



“You were lucky to have it.”

“You think so?”

He smiled.

“All this,” he went on, with a wave of his hand about the room, “means—I wonder if you realize how much it means?”

“I wonder if you realize how little it means?” she ventured back.

He glanced up in surprise. Then he smiled again.

“I suppose facts, from a distance, get toned down,” he went on. “But when you have to live them they stay pretty much as they are. You’ve never been out West?”

“No,” she answered.

“It’s a wonderful country—to some,” he said. “To others—my father was born out there. He grew up and married out there. He has worked like a galley slave out there—all within ten miles of where he was born.”

“Tell me about him,” she begged.

“That’s about all there is to tell of him,” said Devons grimly. “I suppose he had some ambition at first, but he stayed where he was. He married early, and had ten children before he was forty. Then he *had* to stay. He just plugged along day after day without energy enough left to look ahead to the next day. Most of his life it’s just been a question of getting enough to eat for himself and the others.”

Her eyes were sympathetic.

“He was honest and decent and worked hard. It doesn’t seem fair, does it?”

“No.”

“I don’t know how I happened to wake up. I guess it was the teacher I had when I went to the district school. She urged me on to the high school, though that meant leaving home. And there I did so well in chemistry that a teacher from the East suggested Technology. I didn’t think I could make it at first—but I did. I got my degree. Then—well, here I am.”

He stopped abruptly.

“What about between Technology and—here?” she asked.

“That’s the story of a dream that didn’t come true,” he answered.

“You’ll tell me about it some day?”

“I think you’d find the stories in the magazine pleasanter,” he returned. “In those the dreams all come true.”

“Perhaps that’s because they go through to the end.”

He was thoughtful a moment, and then he nodded, his lips firm.

“Yes,” he said. “There’s that difference.”

“Why, you—you’ve just begun!”

He met her eyes. He had a curious sense of looking deeply into them. Then she turned away, half afraid of her impulsiveness.

“Just begun,” he repeated.

It was the echo of a new impulse that had been stirring him for the last few days. With the long, restful nights and the nourishing food, his physical strength had fast returned. With that had come a new outlook—an outlook that carried him to such dizzy heights that he had drawn back, suspicious of it. It made all his former dreams seem feeble in comparison.

After all, he had never looked very far ahead into the future because—he faced the truth—because he had been so self-centered. Reed and his ten thousand represented the climax. Even the return home was to be in the nature of a personal triumph. Always he saw himself in that picture as occupying the center of the stage. Then a slow curtain with music.

These new pictures, as yet but faintly sketched in,—the idle pencil movements, of an artist feeling his way,—were different. As nearly as he could make out, he did not, in these, preempt the foreground. Another figure was there. He scarcely dared identify it, except in a very general way.

In a very general way it was evidently the figure of a woman—a very beautiful woman with a hint of luxuriant hair. In the forehead and nose and mouth he caught a general resemblance to some one he knew, though he did not venture to call her by name. Besides, it was not this which so greatly mattered. The fact which counted most was that she—whoever she was—remained always in the foreground.

Yet he himself was not entirely eliminated. Far from it. He was present, but at some little distance, and struggling toward her like a figure in an allegory. Just what the meaning of this was he was not certain. It might be some very broad subject—Youth struggling with Success—like those in Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," except that he was a great deal too intimately identified with it for that. Whoever the woman might be, there was no doubt at all but that he was the man. And with all his might and main he was trying to fight his way closer to her. He did not even know what for, but there seemed to be some acute necessity. It was as though everything in life worth while depended upon his reaching her side. To do that he must accomplish certain things, and this took him back again to those first weeks in New York and to the old hopes reborn. Like all new-born things,—like the day at dawn, like the earth in spring, like a man in love,—these hopes came to him fresher and keener than ever. But here again there was a difference. They did not so much concern him—except as a medium—as Her. They were a feature of the struggle toward Her.

"You've just begun," she said.

It was more than that. He had just been born. The past leading to this present had been merely a period of conception. He thought he had been working hard through all those long years, but it was child's play to what he felt himself capable of now. If he had felt then as he felt now, he never would have gone out desperately to find Sawyer as though that were the end. He would have known it as another beginning. Every day, every hour, no matter what it brought forth, would be a beginning. It is not possible to kill a reborn man. He is immortal. You can't starve him or freeze him. You can't even

run him down. Perhaps that is why he was here; because the rebirth was foreordained.

Her words had brought these scattered thoughts which had for several nights illumined his mind, like isolated rays of light, to a focus. Instantaneously. Yet when he spoke again there was nothing in his words to hint of the momentous truth they covered.

“Perhaps you’re right,” he said.

“Men like you—men out in the world—can always do that,” she ran on.

“Yes,” he answered.

“And women like Mildred,” she continued. “If she had lived, she would have gone right on, beginning fresh every day.”

“And you?”

She hesitated a moment. To answer that involved the confession of rather intimate details of her life. But if one talks of lives at all it involves personalities. And that was what she was interested in. It was just this side of him, that he was a live human being living a quick life, that appealed to her. He was not merely some one like Dicky Burnett, tagged and catalogued, circumscribed by his surroundings, and acting his allotted part in a play. He was Devons. He was a man with his story as yet unwritten.

“And you?” he repeated.

“Every day is so much like every other day,” she answered wearily. “It must be so when most of the things worth doing have already been done for you—years ago.”

“What things?”

“Oh—the fighting things!” she broke out.

He smiled at that. He liked her spirit, but it was the spirit of an imaginative child who wants to go out and hunt Indians. But it whetted the desire in him. He, too, would have liked a few Indians to fight—for her. Those men of the early days who had such opportunities were to be envied. There is something

tangible about an Indian, and when confronted by them a man had something definite to do. His task consisted simply of aiming his old blunderbuss and shooting, or, at close quarters, swinging his good cutlass.

“Grandfather Fairburne was a forty-niner,” she explained proudly.

“And discovered much gold?”

“I don’t know about that. He became a banker.”

“Your father is a banker, then?”

“No,” she replied. “Dad—he—he is only what is called retired.”

She looked as though ashamed of the admission.

“That is the trouble,” she went on.

“The trouble with what?”

“The trouble with the days,” she answered. “It’s why one day is just like another.”

The clock on the mantel struck five. It struck five times very firmly and loudly. Nurse Ware rose and thereby announced her presence. Dr. Nichols had given orders that all visitors should be limited to one half-hour. Considering the fact that Devons had only the one visitor, could not possibly have any other visitor, the regulation appeared to be more personal than is generally the case.

Devons scowled at the nurse.

“Oh, you’re there, are you?” he growled.

“Yes, Mr. Devons. It’s five o’clock.”

“I can count,” answered Devons.

Joan rose hurriedly. She knew what an autocrat Nichols was.

“I’ll try to find something more interesting to read tomorrow,” she promised.

“Don’t,” he warned. “Besides, I’m going to get out of this bed before long.”

“You mustn’t.”

“I must. I want to get to work.”

“But Dr. Nichols says—”

“Hang Dr. Nichols!” cut in Devons. “He doesn’t know what I have to do.”

Nurse Ware rustled forward, her starched skirts sounding like a distant Gatling gun.

“Good-night,” said Joan.

## CHAPTER X

### AT HOME

BURNETT SENIOR, one evening early in February, sat in his library after dinner, as was his custom, and, lighting a stogie, adjusted himself comfortably in his big leather chair, picked up the evening paper, and turned to the financial page. His wife sat just beyond him on the other side of a fireplace filled with crackling wood. She was a quiet body with graying hair, and wore a plain gown of black taffeta which emphasized her age. She held in her lap the latest work of an English novelist. In a week she had not succeeded in getting beyond the twelfth chapter, chiefly because she had held it in her lap most of the time that she thought she was reading.

For the last twenty years she had joined her husband immediately after dinner, and sat like this while he read the financial news. And most of the time she spent this hour wondering about Dicky; first, as a baby sound asleep upstairs in his cradle; then as a youngster in his trundle-bed, tired out after his day of romping; then as a schoolboy; then as a young man away at college; and now as a full-grown man at home once again. She had looked forward for four years to the time when he would be back home, as she knew her husband had; and yet, now that he was back, she found herself going over and over again those earlier years rather than the present. For, somehow, he seemed to be slipping more and more out of her life. She blamed no one for that, Dicky least of all, for she realized that his interests were with his own generation. She realized that better than her husband did. The latter was tempted at times to judge the boy harshly and this worried her a good deal.

Dicky, she knew, was in many ways a disappointment to his father—more of a disappointment than the boy understood. Dicky failed to appreciate how large a share of himself his father had put into the business—what an acutely personal matter this business was with him. The boy did not have the

background she had. Her memory took her to the beginnings—to those lean, hard years when Dicky was sleeping peacefully in his cradle in other surroundings than these, while she watched her husband at work over figures seemingly perverse. Burnett was putting in some sixteen hours a day of himself then. Even after the figures began to be more amenable to discipline, there were sudden reverses that made him pace the floor until morning and kept her with her heart in her mouth. It all came out right in the end, of course, but Burnett had left something of himself behind—something in the business. All Dicky had ever seen was the triumphant result. And he had never heard his father talk, as she had heard him talk, of how he looked forward to the day when he should be able to relinquish the reins to “my son” and watch the business respond to the younger life. Perhaps she herself had been more or less at fault for not having repeated these things to the boy, but she had wanted him to have his youth—the youth of which Burnett himself had been in a large measure deprived. So she had said nothing.

Well, Dicky had his youth. He was having it now; and yet, for the last month or so she had felt as though something was going wrong with it. She had seen him getting serious. She had thought at first it was the new responsibilities of the business. She had said as much to her husband one evening.

“Dicky is taking hold, isn’t he?”

“Of what?” Burnett snapped.

“Of the business?”

“If he wasn’t a son of mine I’d fire him to-morrow. That’s how much he’s taking hold,” he replied.

“He—he will some day, Richard,” she ventured to declare in order to pacify him.

“That isn’t even a good gamble,” answered Burnett.

Yet it was a fact that the boy was getting serious. In the last few weeks she had seen him maturing, though she had little opportunity of seeing him at all; often no more than a glimpse of him as he came downstairs dressed to go out. But



last night he had stopped and kissed her. It brought the color to her cheeks. He was seldom as demonstrative as that.

To-night she had not seen him at all. As Burnett put down his paper to relight his cigar, she asked:

“Do you know where Dicky is going this evening?”

“Eh?”

“I haven’t seen him go out.”

“I haven’t seen him since lunch. He wouldn’t let me have anything but crackers and milk to-day.”

Burnett picked up his paper again, and then put it down.

“Anything strange about not seeing him?” he demanded.

“No. Only—”

“Well?”

“I thought he had been looking kind of sober lately.”

“It’s a girl,” grunted Burnett.

“Not—”

“Nothing but a plain fool girl. He asked her to marry him and she refused. That proves she’s a fool, doesn’t it?”

“You know her, then?”

“That’s all I know, except that she’s a Fairburne—one of the four hundred—and thinks she is too good for him.”

“Why—why didn’t he tell me?”

“There, Mother,” Burnett returned, with a note of tenderness one might not have suspected was there, “it’s only because he’s feeling rather bad about it. The worst of it is that *he* is willing to admit she is too good for him. That’s bad business. You can’t sell goods or get a wife in any such spirit as that. If he’d had a little training on the road he’d know it.”

“You’ve seen her?”

“No. But, according to him, she’s a sort of princess.”

“I think, if he really cares, that’s the way he *would* think of her,” said the mother.

“I told him—”

But at that point Mrs. Burnett glanced up with a quick motion of her hand to her lips in warning. For there at the door stood Dicky himself in evening clothes, slowly removing his gloves.

“You look so comfortable here, I think I’ll stay,” he announced.

As Dicky drew a chair to the fire, Burnett tossed aside his paper and his wife let the book in her lap slide to the floor. To them both the situation was unusual enough to appear ominous. Burnett bit into his stogie and waited.

But, after all, there appeared to be nothing to wait for. Dicky merely lighted a cigarette, crossed his legs, and stared into the flames quite as unconcernedly as though this were an everyday habit of his. So they sat a few moments in silence, until Mrs. Burnett broke the tension by asking:

“Is it cold out to-night, Dicky?”

“No,” he answered. “Not very.”

“Storming?” put in Burnett.

“Don’t think so. Wasn’t when I came in at five o’clock.”

“Have you had your dinner?” inquired his mother.

Dicky smiled.

“Now that you mention it, I haven’t,” he answered.

Mrs. Burnett rose.

“You should have told me,” she said. “I’ll see Mary about it at once.”

“Don’t, please,” protested Dicky. “Just sit where you were. I don’t want a bite now—honest.”

“You aren’t going on one of those confounded diets yourself?” demanded Burnett.

Dicky shook his head.

“No need of it yet. What’s the news?”

“Steel is off again.”

Burnett appeared a bit sulky about it. Dicky turned.

“How does that interest you?” he asked.

“Bought a block of it the other day,” replied Burnett uncomfortably.

“How long since you’ve been fooling with the market?” asked Dicky.

“I’m not fooling with it. I had a little spare cash and took a chance, that’s all.”

“On whose advice?”

“Forsythe has a friend, and—”

“Forsythe?”

“What of it?”

“I don’t like the fellow.”

“You don’t know him. He’s been my right-hand man for the last three years.”

“What about his friend?”

“I don’t know anything about his friend except that he’s on the inside.”

“I’d let him stay there,” observed Dicky.

Burnett senior bristled up aggressively—the readier because away down deep in his heart he knew the advice was sound. At the same time he resented being criticized by one thirty years his junior who had not had as much business experience as the average newsboy. It was one thing for Dicky to proffer suggestions on matters of diet, about which presumably he did have some real knowledge, and another for the boy to venture with the same assurance into the field of finance. Burnett was taking a chance, and he knew it; but he did not relish being told about it. That remark about Forsythe

hit a particularly sore spot. Forsythe was doing exactly the work that Dicky ought to have been doing. He was instilling in the firm the snap that comes only of youth.

Besides all this, Burnett, if he lost, could afford to lose. If he won—it was not for himself that he was making the gamble. He had enough—more than enough. He had put fifty thousand dollars into steel for the sake of the boy who now had the nerve to sit there and take him to task about it.

“Look here,” returned Burnett; “just when and how did you acquire your wide experience of the stock market?”

“I don’t know a darned thing about it,” replied Dicky coolly. “That’s why I know so much about it.”

“Eh?” exclaimed Burnett, confused by such apparent nonsense.

“I mean just that,” went on Dicky. “The people who get stung on Wall Street are those who know all about it, or trust to some one else who knows all about it. If you were going it alone, dad, I’d bet on you.”

“Bah!” snorted Burnett.

“I suppose you’ll have to learn your lesson,” concluded Dicky. “After all, that’s what keeps things moving down there. What you reading, Mother?”

“I don’t know,” confessed Mrs. Burnett. “But it’s very good. It was recommended to me.”

With the conversation launched into safer channels, Dicky spent the remainder of a very restful and pleasant evening with his family, and at ten o’clock became sleepy with them. As they rose to retire, he kissed his mother good-night, patted his father on the back, and went off upstairs. But he had no more than removed his coat before he heard a timid tap at his door. He opened it, and found his mother standing there.

“What’s the trouble?” he asked.

“I—I wanted to talk a little with you, Dicky,” she faltered.

“Fine!” he exclaimed. “Come in.”

He found a chair for her, and, sitting on the edge of the bed, waited with some curiosity to learn what had brought her here. She explained at once.

“It’s because I thought you seemed worried, Dicky,” she said.

“Worried?”

“Your father told me that you were caring for—some one. You didn’t tell me.”

“Oh—it’s that!”

And instantly, before her eyes, she saw his face grow serious. It was as though he grew five years older in as many seconds.

“Don’t you want to tell me, Dicky?”

He rose, walked across the room once, and sat down again.

“There isn’t very much to tell, Mother,” he began quietly. “Her name is Joan Fairburne, and she lives here in New York. You know of the family and how prominent they are in a social way. But that hasn’t anything to do with her. I met her when I was in college, and I’ve seen her more or less ever since; but it wasn’t until this winter that I came to realize what she is. We were together a good deal—until about two weeks ago. Then, because I cared so much, I asked her to marry me. And she said she did not care enough to do that. Since then I haven’t been able to see her much. And—that’s about all there is to it.”

“You feel very badly about it?”

He looked up at his mother—then away.

“Yes,” he admitted.

She stole swiftly to his side and put her hand over his.

“I’m—I’m so sorry.”

“The deuce of it is,” he exclaimed, “there isn’t anything much you can do about it.”

“I don’t see why she doesn’t love you, Dicky,” said his mother.

He laughed at that.

“If you knew her you’d wonder I even dared hope she might,” he ran on. “She is different. I don’t think she was meant to be born in New York. She was meant to be born in the Arabian Nights, for a man wearing a scarlet silk doublet and hose and an ostrich feather in his hat and oodles of jewels and an army to do her bidding.”

“Does she say that’s what she wants?”

“Bless you, no. But she looks it. She makes you feel that’s what you’d like to give her. And you can’t give her anything because she has everything she wants. And there you are.”

“I’d like to meet her, Dicky.”

“I’d like to have her meet you,” he replied enthusiastically. “Somehow, I think she’d like you, Mother.”

“Perhaps, then, I could ask her to come here for tea—Thursday.”

“You’re a brick. She hasn’t been going out any lately, but if you’ll send the note I’ll see what I can do to back it up.”

Mrs. Burnett rose to go.

“Even if it doesn’t turn out right, Dicky—” she began anxiously.

“That’s all there is to it,” he finished for her.

He placed a hand upon her shoulder.

“But I want her. You’ll understand how much when you see her.”

Then Dicky gave her his arm and escorted her to her room.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE SILENT PARTNER

AS soon as Devons was out of bed and dressed and able to walk around the house, Nichols found it quite impracticable to enforce hospital rules of any sort. Give a man like Devons a pair of legs, and the only thing to do, if you wish to keep him within certain bounds, is to put him in chains. Nichols had neither the authority nor the chains.

In reply to Mrs. Fairburne's rather pointed question as to when he thought it possible for the patient to leave, he answered:

“Possible? To-day.”

“Then—”

Dr. Nichols shrugged his shoulders.

“Of course he is better off here than he would be wherever he lives. As I understand it, he would not be likely to receive much care in his apartments, while here he receives, if anything, too much.”

“I agree with you,” said Mrs. Fairburne. “Joan seems inclined to make rather a hero of him.”

“It is a characteristic of girls of her age,” suggested Nichols.

“A dangerous characteristic,” snapped Mrs. Fairburne.

“The most common cure is to allow the patient to see as much as possible of her hero,” smiled Dr. Nichols.

At any rate, there appeared to be no alternative. And, truth to tell, neither Mrs. Fairburne nor Fairburne himself, after meeting the young man on several occasions, could put a finger on anything objectionable in him. Of course his past was decidedly hazy (one had only his word for it), and he came absolutely unvouched for,—which was more or less

natural, considering the circumstances under which he arrived, —but those details did not count for as much as they might in view of the fact that he was by no means to be considered as a social guest, but merely a sort of accident. In time he would depart, and that would be the end of him. In the meanwhile it was a comforting thought that he was not as unpleasant as he might have been. Considering how little discrimination is generally exercised in running over people, he might have been an extremely unpleasant character to have about. It was also necessary to take into account the obvious truth that he served to amuse Joan at a time when it appeared impossible for any one else to amuse her.

So Devons no longer had to wait until half-past four arrived to stand a chance of seeing Joan. He sallied forth at all hours,—sometimes as early as mid-forenoon,—and wandered around downstairs until he found her. It was curious how often he found her. Generally it was in the library off the reception-room. There was always an open fire here, and if he sat down in front of it a few minutes she would often appear. She was always just as surprised to see him as he was to see her. He was always just as glad to see her as the day before—perhaps even a little gladder.

This would have been a natural development under ordinary circumstances,—if one continued to meet her over a cup of tea in the afternoon,—but coming upon her at the extraordinary hour of eleven in the morning, and with no distraction even as simple as a cup of tea, the result was to throw them back upon themselves for entertainment. This led to a great deal of talk about themselves—just themselves as they were; just two human beings who had started from different corners of the nation and traversed different paths which had finally intersected. The time of day had a great deal to do with it. A woman is more herself and a man more himself and less a social creature before noon. There are men and women who never get to know each other until the opportunity arrives for them to meet after breakfast. Sometimes this results one way; sometimes another.

It was wonderful to Devons that any one should be interested in his affairs. It was something new to have a



confidante—some one who really liked to hear the details of the days he had worked out alone. At first he doubted just how sincere she was. But as he took her with him through those plugging years at Tech, and saw her leaning forward with quick eyes and heightened color, he doubted no more. So he reached, one morning, that period of his life which marked the beginning of the dream that did not come true.

He had approached it before, but always he had stopped because it seemed of too recent a date and of too intimate a nature for even her ears. To tell her about it was in a way to involve her in it because it extended into the present. The past, up to that point, was done with. So it could be related like a tale that has been told. The other was still of his life. More now than ever before because he was beginning to dream anew and dream more steadily.

Yet at length he found himself telling her even about that—telling her quite simply and unconsciously.

She had asked him what brought him to New York after he had mentioned the fact that he had come knowing only one person—Sawyer, a classmate.

“An accident,” he answered. “My life seems to hinge upon accidents.”

“I hope the other was a happier one than this.”

“I don’t know,” he mused. “After all, an accident may be nothing but a quick and unexpected turn toward a new beginning. It all depends on how it comes out.”

Then he told her of his laboratory work on leather, and of the different ways of preparing it for the market and finishing it for shoes; and, finally, of his discovery of the process that was to make his fortune.

“I felt at the time,” he said, “a good deal as one of the lucky forty-niners must have felt. I was down to my last grubstake and had stumbled upon pay dirt. I knew the value of what I had. At least, I thought I knew, so that the effect was the same. For a week afterward I had a regular orgy of spending imaginary dollars. You see, money meant a lot to me. It meant

being able to do a lot of things I wanted to do. It meant not having to wait another ten years of hard, plugging work. And I thought all I had to do was to come here to New York with my invention and show it.”

He paused.

“Go on,” she begged.

“I worked all summer perfecting it and getting it patented. I had to write to father for money in order to do that, and he mortgaged his farm to get the cash for me. I’d have starved before I’d have allowed him to take that risk if I hadn’t been sure. Then I came on. First Forsythe turned me down, then I laid it before Sawyer, who was with an investment house. He was just as enthusiastic over the possibilities as I was.

“After that came the waiting period. The firm had to test the process and look up the patent papers and all that. I didn’t care how long they were about it, because I was absolutely sure of the result. So I took a room at Mullen Court, and spent my days studying and reading and waiting for the mails. That was in October, and I waited all through that month. Then I waited through November. Then I waited through December. That was almost a whole lifetime in itself. Because—well, my funds were running pretty low by then.”

She looked up and met his eyes—her own brimming with sympathy and pity.

“Don’t think I minded,” he hastened to assure her. “I didn’t. It was the period of dreams.”

“But—you didn’t have enough to eat!” she exclaimed.

“Not any too much,” he smiled. “Still, I kept alive, and after all that was the important thing. And I knew that whatever I did not have then was going to make all the more welcome the things I was sure to have later. Besides, it was exciting. Just to hear the postman’s steps every time he came was enough to make a man breathe quicker. It was all a sort of fight—to hang on.”

She nodded as though she understood.

“Then came the end of it. Sawyer’s firm wrote that they could not handle the process because—they were afraid of the old process. It seems that one man held this particular market—a man they were afraid to compete with. I’d never considered any such development as that. I thought that any new thing which was better than the old would just naturally take the place of the latter. I hadn’t taken into account the business side of it. But the firm would not risk its capital, and I had none of my own—so that was the end.”

“The end?” she exclaimed.

“Almost. I had a vague scheme of going to work on a salary. Sawyer had offered me a job once, and I thought that in time I might save enough out of it to start in a small way. But that took me so far into the future that the prospect was hazy—compared with what I *had* been dreaming. I was on my way to see Sawyer when—”

“The accident happened,” she cut in, unwilling to be shielded from any responsibility.

“Considering the fact it has meant so much to me, I—I don’t like to speak of that as an accident,” he said.

“But you have paid so much for so little,” she protested.

He met her eyes again.

“It’s been worth the cost and more,” he answered.

“Oh!”

They were silent a few moments, but Devons roused himself. He felt these silences to be dangerous.

“I didn’t mean to go into all those sorry details,” he apologized.

“But I asked you to,” she reminded him. “I wanted to hear. It makes me feel as though I’d lived a little of that myself.”

“You?”

“I used to feel that way when I listened to Mildred. It’s something to live a little, even at second hand.”

“But surely—”

“Let’s not talk about me,” she interrupted. “I want to hear more about what you’re going to do next.”

“I must see Sawyer next,” he said simply. “I must go on from where I left off. And I must start soon now. I’m eager to get back.”

“You see!” she exclaimed.

“See?”

“Even you—after just a few weeks here—find it stupid.”

His lips came together. He had allowed her to persuade him into telling of the old dreams, but he must be very careful not to be enticed to tell the new. Besides, he was not very clear about them himself. They were only vague. He must keep them so, even though when he sat near her like this they tended to become concrete. That, however, was against his will. He was not here as her social equal. Even Mrs. Fairburne herself could not have seen that more clearly than he. But what Mrs. Fairburne could not have seen was the possibility he saw that in time these conditions might be changed. Give him a few years as he felt at moments like this and there need be no gulf between them. He rose from his easy-chair before the fire.

“I ought to be back at work now!” he exclaimed. “I must write to Sawyer to-day.”

Only his right hand was still bandaged to his side, and he could not so much as sign his name with his left.

“You’ll let me write for you?” she asked quickly.

He did not like to call upon her for even as slight a service as this, but without giving him time to reply, she stepped to a little writing-desk in the corner, picked up a pen, and held it poised above the paper.

“I’m ready,” she smiled.

It was not easy for him to dictate, because he was not accustomed to it, and because every time he paused for the right word she met his eyes—and then he thought of nothing else for a dizzy second but those eyes. If, in trying to escape these, he turned his gaze to the letter itself, he saw only her white hand. It was soft and tender; he could think of nothing else then but that. When he turned away from her altogether and stared out of the window, her presence so filled the room that he thought of nothing but that. So it was rather a wobbly letter. In it he said scarcely more than that he had been delayed from coming up to see him, but hoped within a week to make it, and that if in the meanwhile he saw any opening for him, he hoped he would write in care of—

He paused, because he did not know his present address. Joan filled it in for him herself and in a very businesslike way read over the letter. Then he told her how to address the envelope, and she did that and put on a stamp.

“It’s a chance, anyhow,” he concluded.

“For what?” she asked directly.

“To earn a living, at least.”

“But what of your invention?” she exclaimed.

“That must wait.”

“Again?”

“For some later date,” he smiled.

“Until you can save enough—”

“Or until Reed cares to furnish the capital,” he interrupted.

He did not like to discuss this with her. He wanted to sweep it all aside now and talk of other things. With that letter written, his stay here seemed for the first time to be coming to a definite end. He realized it with a shock.

“If you could have that mailed, I—I could forget it for a little,” he said.

But her thoughts were centered on something else—something that quite took away her breath.

“Capital?” she repeated slowly. “That’s—just money?”

“That’s all,” he answered.

“Then if you had money—your invention would not have to wait?”

“I’d start manufacturing myself,” he explained simply.

“You need a great deal?”

“Not very much to begin in a small way. In a year or two I might save enough—”

“But if you had the money now you could begin now!”

“Yes.”

“Oh,” she exclaimed impulsively, “if you’d only let me help!”

She paused abruptly—her cheeks scarlet. Then, before he had time to catch his breath, she ran on:

“If you’d only let me get the money for you. I’m sure I could, and it could be a loan.”

She saw his jaws come together. She was afraid of that.

“Or it could be just—a business arrangement. Isn’t there something called a—a silent partner?”

She had risen to her feet and was standing before him now.

He saw nothing but her eyes again, and that made it difficult for him to think.

Yet it was necessary, as never before in his life, for Devons to think clearly. The girl before him had made her offer in all sincerity. To dismiss it with a smile, as one does the impulsive suggestion of a child, though it partook of that nature, was impossible. It would hurt her. But he had only to repeat to himself the proposal to realize its essential absurdity. She was to raise for him the capital to start his business and act as his silent partner. She, who knew nothing whatever about

business, was to assume the risk refused by experienced business men. Considered in cold blood, the proposition answered itself.

But here was the difficulty: it had not been made in that spirit, and could not be handled in that spirit. In cold blood? Good Lord, no one but a dead man could face Joan Fairburne so, as she stood within arm's reach, her face flushed with the excitement of the moment, every sense alert.

"You are wonderful!" exclaimed Devons.

"No! No!" she protested, with a slight frown. "It isn't—that. If anything, I'm selfish about it. Don't you see—it will give me a chance to do something."

"You?"

"It will give me an interest outside. My share in it would be small. Money is such a little thing. All the work—all the fighting to make the business a success—that would be yours. But it would be something to know I'd helped that much. It would be something to be able to look on with a personal interest in the outcome."

"But if it failed?" said Devons.

"Failed?" she asked in astonishment.

And Devons felt ashamed of himself for the suggestion. It was as though Reed had spoken through him. Worse. He doubted if even Reed could have conceived such a possibility standing in his place. With her as a partner, a man could not fail: and Devons knew it. It was not merely money she would put into the firm. In one of those fantastic pictures that flash before one at moments of high tension he saw a prospectus: "The Devons Manufacturing Company; capital, Joan Fairburne, fully paid in and non-assessable." That was worth a million dollars and more. Even now, at this moment, he felt his strength multiplied a thousand times.

"No; I would not fail!" he answered sharply.

"Then it's all settled?" she said in relief.

“Only as dreams are settled,” he answered, getting a grip on himself. “I wish I could make you understand—without hurting you. You don’t know how much just the offer from you means to me. I can go back now with all the enthusiasm of having a partner—even without having one.”

He saw her wince.

“Joan,” he broke out,—using the name unconsciously,—“Joan, all I can say over and over again is that you’re wonderful. Even if you don’t understand. But a man couldn’t do such a thing as you suggest. He’d be a cad and worse. I’m here only by sufferance. You spoke once of the cost. It’s been worth that many times over just to know you. I must tell you that much. I’ll go back now able to do five years’ work in one. If you’ll just keep on being—the sort of partner you are now, that will be enough. Don’t you understand—a little?”

“I want to help,” she said simply. “I want something to do.”

“If you only knew—”

Devons cut himself short. He must be careful. His thoughts were running wild. He saw clearly now the face of the woman of his dreams; it was she; it was Joan; it was this girl who wanted to be his silent partner. And the reason she could not be that was because he wanted more of her than that—many, many times more.

He made for the door. He dared not stay longer with her.



## CHAPTER XII

### JOAN & CO.

LEFT alone, Joan tried to review calmly the situation which had developed so unexpectedly and dramatically. She had acted quite on the spur of the moment. Indeed, looking back upon it she realized that it would have been impossible to have done what she did in any other way. Yet now that she had time to think it over, she regretted nothing. She had done a bold thing and she was proud of having done it. It left her with a sense of freedom. For once she had acted on her own initiative.

Neither, in spite of his attitude, was she discouraged. Of course he would look at it at first just as he had looked at it. That was due partly to the Western pride of which he rather boasted—the pride that made his father prefer to starve than accept a favor—and partly to the fact that he could not appreciate her position. He considered her only as an irresponsible young lady acting, perhaps, in a moment of sentiment. That was natural enough, even though it was disappointing. She had thought the last few weeks would have counted for more than that.

Still she placed a great deal of confidence in his gray eyes. Though his lips had stiffened, she had seen the eyes respond. She had seen them quicken at her suggestion in a way that startled her. Even as he left the room so abruptly she had seen them alive—as alive as the glint of sunlight on steel. It was as though they told the truth against his will; as though they were willing to accept her offer, though the lips refused. And the eyes were the soul, while the lips were merely the man.

They had brought the color to her face—those eyes. She had felt her cheeks burn. She could not quite explain that. Doubtless it was merely the excitement of the moment. It was a big thing she was reaching for—nothing less than a chance to get out of her prison. Leaning forward toward the flames,

elbow on knee and chin in hand, she allowed her thoughts to take their own course for a moment. She saw the business started in some little factory tucked away in a far corner of the city. She was rather vague as to what the business was. That did not matter. All business was vague. She saw Devons at work there with his fine enthusiasm, and saw the little factory grow into a bigger one, and then into a still bigger. But principally she saw the man back of it, and felt the satisfaction of having herself a hand in his success. Perhaps it might even be possible for her to help in some practical way. She might be able to write letters for him. If she could do that—

“Good-morning, Joan.”

It was her mother who interrupted the pleasant reverie. She came in and took the chair in which Devons had lately been sitting.

“You are about early, my dear, are you not?” inquired Mrs. Fairburne.

“Am I?” Joan answered uncomfortably.

“It is only a little after eleven. However, I’m glad you are feeling so much stronger. And this—Mr. Devons—is he not almost himself again?”

Mrs. Fairburne arched her brows as she spoke.

“Yes, Mother.”

“Then?”

“He is going, soon,” replied Joan. “I—I wish you had come to know him better.”

“I!” exclaimed Mrs. Fairburne.

“He has had such a hard time of it all his life. And now —”

Joan hesitated as she saw her mother’s face grow blank. If it had not been for that she could have gone on quite naturally. She had grasped at this opportunity to tell her the whole story. It was still necessary because it was through her she must appeal to her father for funds, but the difference was that she must do it awkwardly and self-consciously now.

“He—he has always been handicapped because he had no money,” explained Joan.

“Really?”

It was surprising what effects Mrs. Fairburne managed to produce by the simple use of monosyllabic interrogations. Just at present it placed her on some distant pinnacle almost out of ear-shot.

“You see I knew his cousin Mildred in college. I learned through her what—it means to be like that. He has an invention—”

“He?”

“Mr. Devons,” explained Joan uneasily. “It has something to do with leather, and just because he hasn’t any capital he can’t use it.”

The girl paused a moment and looked to her mother’s eyes. Mrs. Fairburne merely waited. Yet in spite of lack of encouragement Joan tried to break through—tried because she felt so sincerely what she wished to say.

“So I told him I thought I could do something,” she ran on, quite out of breath. “I told him I’d get some money for him. Mother—can’t you help me?”

“You offered to supply him with funds?” gasped Mrs. Fairburne.

“So that he could get started.”

“And he accepted your offer?”

“No. He hasn’t accepted it. He said he couldn’t accept it.”

“That much is in his favor,” observed Mrs. Fairburne coldly.

“But if we made it easier for him—”

“My dear,” cut in Mrs. Fairburne, “the whole idea is absurd. I trust you will not go to your father with it. Let us keep it a secret between ourselves.”

“That means you’ll not help?”

“Joan! You disturb me. Really you must put the whole matter out of your head at once.”

“Then you think it would do no good to see father?”

“I am quite sure it would only shock him. He was quite against having this Mr. Devons in the house from the first. It was only upon the medical advice of Dr. Nichols that he consented at all. Now if he should learn—but, Joan, surely you are not considering such a thing?”

Joan rose. She shook her head wearily.

“I’m afraid you are right; he wouldn’t understand.”

“This affair has tired you, dear,” said Mrs. Fairburne. “I’m not at all surprised. You’d better go to your room and lie down a little. And I feel that the sooner Mr. Devons is able to leave—”

Joan smiled.

“You needn’t worry about his staying any longer than is necessary,” she observed. “I’m sure he finds us all very stupid.”

With that Joan retired to her room, but not to lie down. She had not spoken in anger. She meant, however, exactly what she said. To a man like Devons how other could her world appear but a stupid little world filled with stupid people? He had been here a month now with an opportunity to study her and her parents in the intimate setting of their daily lives. He had watched them at the petty routine of their complacent and guarded round of dining and card-playing, the opera or the theater. He had seen the uneventful days follow the uneventful hours with the assurance that this would continue indefinitely. In the meanwhile the great live city all about them, the city where men and women grew through struggle, scarcely reached their consciousness. Even when they glanced over their morning and evening papers, they read as at a play. If by any chance the city was brought closer to them—as in the presence of Devons—they resented it as an intrusion.

It was in this life they wished to fix her. They meant for the best. She knew that. For them it spelled safety. But they did

not take into account her great need—the need born of Youth—which is not for the safe things, but the venturesome things. It is only because of Youth that the world dares go on. It is in Youth that men go to sea in boats; that men go to war; that men search the far places. And some part in this is given to women—if only the waiting part.

Looking from her window, Joan felt the call—the call of the bold and the blessed unwise. It flushed her cheeks and stiffened her muscles and bred strange thoughts in her. Once again she was back in the midst of life with Devons, helping him in the clash with reality. It gave new meaning to the little side street in front of her which led to the broad avenue, which in turn led to all the thousand and other streets—big and little—which make New York. Though for the moment it seemed as though she had been balked utterly in her desires, she felt a sense of fresh courage. She had made her proposal to her mother quite without result and knew that under those circumstances it was futile to go to her father. That left her no one to whom to turn—but Dicky.

No one but Dicky! She caught her breath at the inspired suggestion. After all, Dicky was some one. In his way he was very much some one. Whenever she wished to think of him at his best, as she did now, she went back to that picture of him standing by her machine on that eventful afternoon when she left Delmonico's. He had bared his head and said simply:

“I'd rather you felt you had some one—always ready—to call on.”

Though she was never sure in some things that Dicky meant what he said, she had believed with her whole heart that he meant this. As she drove off and left him there, she was very glad he had spoken so, though it seemed scarcely probable then that ever it would be necessary for her to call upon him. She had even wished that it might be necessary because she thought it might please him, and she had desired then as never before to please him in some way.

Now here was her opportunity, and his opportunity, and Devons's opportunity. She knew little about Dicky's business except that he had an office downtown with his father, whom

she had heard spoken of vaguely as a manufacturer. She knew little because it concerned Dicky little and her less. She could not have named the source of income of a half-dozen of her many friends. Some of them went downtown in the morning and some of them did not. It would have been difficult for her to separate them into even this broad division. It was assumed they all had ample means, and she gave no further thought than that to their affairs.

It was assumed Dicky had ample means. That meant he had sufficient to do whatever he wished. So that to ask him for that mysterious symbol of money termed "capital" was not to ask him for anything very much. It involved no great sacrifice on his part and it need be nothing but in the nature of a loan.

She lunched in her room that day because she wished to avoid seeing Devons again until she had something definite to tell him. Then she dressed with a little more care than usual because she knew Dicky had a weakness for such things, and if she was going to ask a favor of him it was no more than right that she should do in her turn what she could to please him. So she allowed Henriette to do as she pleased, and whenever Henriette was given that privilege she produced extremely charming results. This afternoon she chose a crêpe-de-chine of African brown that had touches of orange in the waist and girdle. The skirt of a panier effect went no lower than the top of Joan's trim ankles, affording a piquant contrast of grandmother's time and to-day.

Dicky came at three-thirty, and the moment he laid eyes on her he was conscious of a change in her attitude, which to him was most encouraging. It was as though she were really glad to see him again. When she offered her hand, it was not merely a social convention, but as a friend might offer her hand. He took into account, too, the fact that she was dressed as though ready to go out once more. It gave him the courage to present without delay his mother's invitation.

"Have you any engagement for Thursday afternoon?" he asked as soon as they were seated.

"No," she answered hesitatingly. "I have not been making any engagements at all."

“This is a very particular one,” he assured her. “It is from mother to come to tea at the house.”

“Your mother? It is sweet of her to ask me,” she replied. It brought home to her, as a rather curious truth, the fact that she had never happened to meet either Mr. or Mrs. Burnett. But in the younger set one did not often meet the elders unless they entertained. And unless they had daughters, they did not entertain much.

“You will come?” he asked earnestly.

“Why, yes, Dicky,” she agreed, as though searching for a meaning.

“I told her a little something about you,” he explained.

“There is so very little to tell about me,” she laughed uneasily.

“There’s a great deal,” he contradicted. “More than a man could tell in a book.”

“On Thursday, then,” she concluded as though to check further parley along this line.

But he could not at that moment be checked so abruptly.

“I told her how beautiful you were and—that you would not marry me.”

“You told her that?” she gasped.

Dicky nodded.

“She came to my room and asked.”

“I—I suppose she thinks me horrid, then.”

“No,” he smiled. “Only she does not understand it. That’s why I want her to meet you—so she will understand.”

“Dicky!” she exclaimed with a choke in her voice.

“As soon as she knows you, she will realize how much too good you are for me,” he went on seriously.

“It isn’t so!”

“You will see. She is very wise in her quiet way—that mother of mine. You will like her.”

“I’m sure I shall like her,” she replied.

Then for a few minutes the conversation turned to other things—to trivial things as he tried to be entertaining. As she listened and smiled, she kept wondering if after all it was going to be possible for her to ask of him what she had planned to ask. At one moment it did, and at the next it did not. Though she did not know it, this abstraction was reflected in her eyes, and he, keenly alert to every passing change in her, noted this. So in the end it was he who put the question to her. He paused abruptly in his light talk and asked:

“What are you worrying about, Joan?”

She started. This was her opportunity, and yet she shied away from it.

“I’m not worrying, Dicky,” she answered.

“But there’s something on your mind.”

“Yes,” she admitted.

“Something you don’t want to tell me about?”

“Something I do want to tell you about,” she returned.

“Then—”

“It’s something I want to ask you to do.”

“Fine!” he exclaimed.

“Only I don’t know how to ask.”

“The way to ask is to ask,” he suggested.

“But I’m afraid—oh, Dicky, if you think it queer of me, or if you don’t want to do it, you’ll be frank?”

She leaned forward impulsively with her hands clasped before her.

“I can’t conceive myself as not doing anything you may ask,” he replied.

“No matter how unusual it is?”



“No matter what it is.”

“You’ll promise to use your own judgment and not do it—just because of me?”

“I’ll promise beforehand to do it.”

“Then, Dicky,” she said, blurting it out at once, because the longer she talked about it the less courage she had,—“Then, Dicky, I—I want you to loan me some money.”

It took away his breath for a moment.

“Money!” he gasped.

It was as absurd a request on the face of it as though she asked for bread.

“And,” she went on, “it’s something mother doesn’t approve of.”

Dicky gave a low whistle.

“At least that sounds interesting,” he admitted.

“It’s business,” she explained hastily. “I’m going to be a sort of silent partner.”

“Business?” he asked suspiciously.

He thought of the market. He had heard of women who played stocks on a margin—the easy victims of unscrupulous operators. It was not like Joan to do a thing of that nature.

“How much do you want?” he asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe five thousand; maybe more,” she hurried on.

“Right,” he nodded. “When do you want it?”

“Perhaps within a week.”

He nodded again.

“I’ll get it for you.”

“Of course it’s only a loan,” she said.

And here Dicky thought a moment. He did not want to make it a loan. If she borrowed the money and lost it—as at

the moment it seemed to him more than probable she would—he did not choose to have her left with the worry. On the other hand, he saw no practical way of giving it to her. This brought him to the question of just what her object was, anyway, in wanting to try to make money. Still he did not like to ask her. It was a delicate matter.

“Look here,” he exclaimed, “why don’t you let me in on the deal?”

“You?”

“I don’t want to know the details,” he assured her. “I’d rather not know them. You can act as the promoter and I’ll furnish the capital. Then we can go divvies on the profits.”

“You mean that, Dicky Burnett?”

“Certainly. I’ll be just another silent partner.”

“And you don’t even want to know what I’m going to do with the money?” she asked, with warming eyes.

“No,” he answered. “Then I won’t be tempted to give you good advice.”

“Dicky,” she exclaimed, “you’re—you’re a peach!”

Different people place, of course, different values upon money. But as far as Dicky was concerned, he received right then and there adequate return on his prospective investment. It may have been an expensive luxury and one he could not afford every day, but that had nothing to do with intrinsic values. It was worth the money just to see the honest admiration in her eyes—to grasp the hot hand she impulsively extended to him.

“You’re so good, Dicky,” she added. “You kind of make me ache.”

“It’s a bargain, then?” he asked, with his head swimming before her.

“A bargain,” she agreed.

“Joan & Co.,” he repeated to himself. “Sounds kind of nice, doesn’t it?”

“It ought to be Dicky & Co.”

“No, because it’s your proposition. I have a notion it’s rather going to please Dad to learn I’ve gone into business for myself.”

“He must know?”

“In some ways it’s rather essential,” he admitted. “But he needn’t know any more than that. You—you don’t need a bookkeeper or anything, do you?”

“No,” she answered. “There aren’t any books yet.”

“You might keep me in mind for the position,” he suggested.

“I’d be glad if there was something of the sort for me to do,” she said.

He shook his head.

“You mustn’t let this take all your time. You aren’t going downtown at ten in the morning?”

“I’m afraid it won’t be necessary.”

“If it should be, I hope the company fails.”

“No, no, you mustn’t say things like that.”

She looked so genuinely concerned that he smiled.

“There’ll have to be directors’ meetings every so often, anyway,” he reminded her.

“Yes?”

“Once a week,” he suggested. “I think Delmonico’s would be a good place.”

“All right, Dicky,” she consented.

So within five minutes he secured an extra dividend of at least one hundred per cent. He was beginning to realize that this bade fair to be one of the best investments of his life.

She was still standing, and her eyes strayed often to the door.

“I think we’d better adjourn now,” she said.

“Very well,” he assented. “Until when?”

“Until I tell you.”

“But there’s Thursday.”

“I won’t forget.”

“That, however, is not a business meeting.”

He took her hand again, though he had no particular warrant for it.

“Here’s good luck to Joan & Co.,” he concluded, as he pressed it.

“Especially the Co.,” she smiled.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A CHALLENGE

DEVONS had no business to be impatient because Joan remained below with a visitor three quarters of an hour. Considering the fact that only a few hours before he had rather ignominiously retreated from her presence, it did not seem to be good judgment to begin, almost immediately afterwards, to look forward to an opportunity to place himself again in jeopardy of her eyes. Yet that was exactly what he did.

He was not satisfied with the way he had handled that situation. In the first place, he should have stood his ground and fought through to a finish no matter what the outcome. He discovered this the moment he found himself back in his room. Leaving as he did, nothing whatever had been settled. Sooner or later he must have everything to do all over again.

What the deuce had been the matter with him? Pacing the floor, he tried to review the proposition sensibly. She had offered to furnish him with the capital to put his dressing on the market—to enter into a simple business arrangement with him. She had done this because of a desire to have an active interest outside the petty routine of her present life. He had assumed that this was a risk he was not justified in allowing her to take. But as a matter of fact, was it a risk? Had the offer come from a man he would not have hesitated. He knew what he had—the best and cheapest article of its kind in the world. Even Reed had not disputed that. Reed had been frightened off by his unwillingness to give battle to this man Burnett, whoever he was. And that did not influence Devons in the slightest. It was like a challenge. That was the West in him—the youth in him. Let the conflict narrow down to an individual, and he was at his best. Give him the money to work with, and he would put in the rest—himself. That was what Reed did not have. He had only the money.

Considered, then, purely as a business proposition, he stood unafraid. If the money came from any other source, he would have accepted it. Then what the deuce was the matter with him?

He asked the question, but even as he asked it he knew the answer. Down deep in his heart he knew the answer. It was only a matter of admitting it. Now, suddenly, squaring his shoulders he faced the truth. He had dared allow himself to love this woman. He, Mark Devons, a penniless young adventurer from the West, had ventured to turn his eyes upwards to the stars and stare overlong at the whitest-burning one of them all. Thrust unwarrantedly into her life, he had absorbed so much of it that his head had been turned. For hours after she left him he had permitted himself to feel that he belonged where he was—that she was not impossible. It was only when he saw the inevitable end of it that he realized, and then it was too late. Not too late for her, but for him. If he kept his head steady, it was not too late for her. Thank God, his lips had remained sealed. Thank God, he had given her no inkling of how he felt. He had looked into her eyes and grown dizzy, but he had remained dumb. That covered the present, but what of the future?

Here was where he had certain inalienable rights. Here was where it was his privilege to fly as high and as wild as he chose. Let him get back to his work, and he might hitch his wagon even to such a star as this. Give him half an opportunity, and he would win for her the place to which she was entitled. Starting with nothing, it might have looked like a long path to one in any other mood than this. But in this mood, worlds had been conquered in months. He had read all his life of fortunes made in a few years in New York. It was being done every day. The first thousand, some one had said, was the difficult thousand. After that it was easy to make it into ten; then still easier to turn that into a hundred thousand, and so swiftly to jump to a million. He would need all that for her and more.

If he had the capital to-day! That is what she offered him. And to her it meant so little. Yet because this fight was his fight and his alone, he must refuse it. He should have stood his

ground before her and settled that once for all. He must see her again as soon as possible and settle that. Had he stood his ground before, it would be all settled now.

For a half-hour after he had reached this decision—a decision that left him with his shoulders squared—he was forced to wait his opportunity to see her. He had sent Jeffrey to find her and the latter had reported:

“Miss Fairburne is at present with a guest in the drawing-room, sir.”

“Will you let me know as soon as she is free?”

“Yes, sir.”

But Jeffrey’s services were not needed. As soon as Devons heard the front door close, he immediately went downstairs only to find her coming upstairs to meet him.

“Oh, do come into the drawing-room!” she exclaimed. “Everything is all settled.”

He followed her below and into the big room with the open fire. And if at this momentous conference he had spoken the words that first sprang to his lips, he would have said only:

“How beautiful you are.”

“That was Dicky,” she announced.

The name meant nothing to him. There was no particular reason why he should have immediately disliked it.

“I have known Dicky a great many years,” she went on to explain. Had she been fifty or seventy-five that statement would have been a good deal more reassuring than it was under the circumstances.

“Hasn’t he any last name?” he inquired.

“Yes,” she admitted. “But that’s a secret. You will understand in a minute. Dicky is very, very nice.”

That, from Devons’s point of view, was if anything against him.

“So I told him what I wanted.”

Devons frowned. This was altogether too personal a matter to confide in any one else.

“I told him I wanted to go into business, and somehow Dicky seemed to understand,” she hurried on. “I didn’t even tell him what the business was. He said he didn’t want to know. But what he did ask was if he could not share it with me. He wanted—to be a silent partner himself.”

“He did?”

“So he offered to furnish the capital and let me do what I chose with it.”

“As a partner?” questioned Devons.

“Yes,” she nodded. “Only he did not wish to have anything to do with the business itself.”

Devons appeared perplexed.

“It sounds queer,” he answered. “Are you sure you understood him?”

“It wouldn’t sound queer if you knew Dicky.”

“He has a great deal of money?”

“He—he seems to have all he needs,” she answered.

“Then perhaps that explains it,” concluded Devons.

“But I don’t see the need of an explanation of any sort,” she replied with spirit. “And I’m sure if he had more business it would be better for him. He is to bring me five thousand dollars at once.”

“Five thousand dollars!” gasped Devons.

That in itself was a fortune.

“Then as much as we need,” she ran on.

“As much as we need,” he said over after her.

It sounded like one of those stories he used to dream.

“It certainly is mighty decent of this Dicky,” he added thoughtfully.



It was all that and a little something more. A man, no matter how much money he had, was not apt to invest blindly five thousand dollars unless he had a great deal of confidence in his agent—a great deal more confidence than was common in the everyday business venture. In this particular instance it was obvious that this generous trust was not based upon the wide experience of the agent or any reputation acquired by her from past successes. Clearly it was in the nature of a blind faith not usually associated with financial deals. And yet, put himself in the position of this Dicky, and he had a notion it was just the sort of thing he would have done himself. He would have looked upon it as an opportunity. Here was a fair explanation, but it brought him up with a start.

“You aren’t going to think up any more objections, are you?” she asked.

“I seem to be in the minority now,” he answered.

“Then,” she said, “can’t we call it all settled?”

Devons drew a deep breath. He met her eyes a moment, and then as he fought free of them it was as though standing behind her he met the eyes of this man Dicky. And it was as though the latter were smiling a challenge. It was as though the latter said to him this: “Well, will you fight for her, or shall I take her?”

There was just one way. He could not wait a decade now. He must seize this opportunity, however distasteful on general grounds it was—however unusual. Perhaps the man had made the offer in the assurance that he, Devons, would fail, anyhow. The thought acted like a blow on the cheek.

“We’ll call it settled,” answered Devons.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “I’m so glad!”

“But we must work hard—partner.”

Her cheeks grew scarlet. He saw her eyes spring alight.

“As hard as ever we can,” she nodded.

## CHAPTER XIV

### PUMPKIN PIE

THERE was pumpkin pie on the *carte de jour* that Thursday. Offhand one might have said that nothing was less likely to influence the lives of half a dozen residents of New York City. It is very probable that the proprietors of the hotel and the chef who put it there would have denied vigorously having any ulterior design and would, before a court of law, have disclaimed all responsibility. Doubtless they would have been sustained by the judge.

However, there was pumpkin pie on the *carte de jour* that Thursday. As Burnett picked up the card with indifferent interest, his eye fell upon it. He glanced at his son sitting opposite him.

“Your mother used to make the best pumpkin pie in the State of Maine,” he observed.

“So?” answered Dicky.

The waiter was standing at Burnett’s shoulder with pad and pencil ready.

“Give me some of that clear soup,” Burnett ordered.

“And whole wheat bread, sir?”

“Yes,” nodded Burnett.

He hesitated after that.

“The haddock is very good, sir, and not fattening, as you might say.”

“I’ll try some.”

“Very well, sir.”

With that the waiter was for hurrying off.

Burnett stopped him. “I’d like to try a piece of that pumpkin pie, Dicky,” he faltered. “Just to see how it compares

with your mother's."

"Go ahead," consented Dicky.

"A piece of pumpkin pie, John," Burnett ordered grandly.

He actually rubbed his hands together in anticipation, and was immediately in better humor with himself than for a week. That is what counted. That is where the pumpkin pie played its part.

"Forsythe handed me the January statement this morning," he said to Dicky. "Best month in the history of the company."

"Fine!"

"Ought to beat it this month."

"Hope you do."

Decidedly this seemed to be the moment for which Dicky had been waiting.

"By the way, Dad," he began, "I have something I want to talk over with you."

"The girl?"

"Not exactly. It's business."

"Eh?"

"I have a chance to get into something good."

"Look here, my boy, you aren't fooling with the Street?"

Dicky smiled.

"No, Dad. I'll leave that game to you. This is something different."

"What is it?"

"The devil of it is I can't tell you. A friend of mine—"

Burnett raised his brows.

"Not the usual kind of friend," Dicky hastened to explain. "This is a friend I'd trust my life with. She—er—he wants me to go in as a silent partner."

“In what?”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t tell you. But it promises big. It promises to be the biggest thing in my life.”

“Sounds a bit queer,” exclaimed Burnett.

“Yes,” admitted Dicky, “it does. But if I give you my word that it isn’t—”

“I don’t want your word. How much do you need?”

“Five thousand.”

“When?”

“Now.”

Burnett drew a check-book from his pocket and wrote the check. It was done so unhesitatingly, so simply, that Dicky felt almost ashamed to accept it.

“That’s white of you, Dad,” he exclaimed.

Burnett raised a portion of the pie to his mouth and tasted it critically.

“It isn’t as good as your mother’s,” he decided. “But it’s almighty good.”

## CHAPTER XV

### LIKE NAPOLEON

IT was this same Thursday, too, that Joan came to the house to tea. She came at four o'clock looking radiant. It was a proud moment for Dicky when he introduced her to his mother because he knew Joan was justifying in every detail the most enthusiastic description of her he had ever given. It was difficult to understand how it was possible for Joan to grow any younger than she always was, but she looked younger; it was difficult to understand how she could look any fresher than she always did, but this afternoon she accomplished in some way that feat also. For one thing her eyes were wider open than they sometimes were, and instead of merely listening in a half-amused, half-critical fashion, she herself dominated the conversation. This, to be sure, relegated him more or less to the background, but he was content to have it so.

It was quite evident that in some mysterious way the older woman and the younger woman formed an instant liking one for the other. Dicky had expected each to admire the other and, given time, had anticipated a formal friendship, but it was as though in minutes they spanned months. The moment their hands clasped and their eyes met, the two seemed to have come to some sort of an agreement. It puzzled him. Beyond the fact that they were two women and each in her way quite perfect, they had no common bond between them. He had been rather afraid that his mother, in her old-fashioned way, might not be able at once to penetrate to the woman in Joan, and he had suspected that Joan, in her turn, might be at first confused by his mother's quaint frankness. But before he knew it, here they were seated at their tea in front of the fire, talking so directly one to the other that he was more or less on the outside.

This, because of the subject-matter, was more or less embarrassing. There were moments when if possible he would

have fled. Because in less than five minutes his mother had revealed her one weakness and dragged in him, Dicky, and the adventures of his infancy and early youth as the major topic. How it happened, Lord knows. At the beginning he tried to switch her off. It was entirely useless, because it was apparent that she was being aided and abetted by Joan herself. The latter even rebuked him openly.

“Dicky,” she said, when once he endeavored to turn the subject to the weather, “Dicky, it is not polite to interrupt like that.”

“I know, but—”

She turned her back upon him and gave his mother her cue.

“So he came to the head of the stairs in his nighty—”

His mother, thus encouraged, went on. Nothing could have been more puerilely inane than that episode of how Dicky at the age of four came downstairs one evening in that garb and entertained two of his father’s business friends who had come to talk over very important matters. It seems that his father did him up in an overcoat, put him in a chair, and made him an *ex-officio* director of the proposed company.

Of course one such yarn inevitably led to another. Before the close of the afternoon Joan was in possession of a first-hand report of most of the fool things he had ever done up to the time he went to college. The only feature upon which he could congratulate himself was that at this point the narrative inevitably ended, although he could not say as much about all the fool things.

And yet, when it came time to go, Joan actually told his mother with all evidence of sincerity that she had thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon.

“And,” she added, “you’ll let me come again and hear more?”

“There isn’t any more,” put in Dicky.

“I’m sure there is,” she smiled.

“If you keep on I’ll get your mother in a corner some day,” he threatened.

“I’m afraid anything she might tell of me would only bore you,” she returned.

“You don’t know how much she might make up.”

Mrs. Burnett appeared disturbed.

“Dicky,” she protested, “every one of those things was true.”

“I know they were and he knows it too,” Joan sided with her, taking her hand. “Some day soon I may run in quite informally, may I?”

“You’ll always be welcome here,” answered Mrs. Burnett.

There was something in her voice that made the girl look up, not at her, but at Dicky. But he, inhospitably enough, was apparently only anxious to help her leave. So, suddenly, she kissed Mrs. Burnett on the cheek and went out with him.

In the car she proceeded to scold.

“I don’t think you treat your mother as nicely as you should,” she declared.

“You mean I shouldn’t throw her downstairs!” he exclaimed.

“You know what I mean. She is very fond of you, Dicky.”

“You speak as though there was something unnatural about that.”

“And she is very proud of you. At times it was almost as though she were talking about Napoleon.”

“You oughtn’t to blame me for that,” he protested.

“I’m not blaming you, only you might try—”

“She wouldn’t at all approve of me if I were really like Napoleon,” he broke in.

“In some things, perhaps not,” she hastened to admit. “I shouldn’t myself. But in some other things—”

“I am,” he flattered himself.

As though to prove it he drew from his pocket the check for five thousand. He handed it to her with every evidence of satisfaction. She merely rolled it into a little tube and placed it in her muff.

“I shall send you a receipt for this,” she said.

That was all—at a point when if encouraged in the slightest he would have told her by what a nice bit of strategy—the strategy of the pumpkin pie—he had secured this for her. He did not, however, volunteer the story, and a few minutes later he was on the whole glad. He doubted if it would have impressed her as humorous. He doubted next if it really was humorous. After all he had meant what he said and his father had meant what he said, and Joan had meant what she said. It had been a serious transaction.

At the house she did not ask him in as he hoped she might. Instead she merely smiled an *au revoir* to him as they stood in the open door with Jeffrey near her at attention. He might not have thought much about this, if at that moment, in glancing over her shoulder, he had not seen coming down the broad stairs in the rear the figure of a young man with his shoulder in bandages. The fellow met his eyes and paused. So for a second they faced each other, questioning, wondering.

Joan turned from Dicky at the door to Devons on the stair behind her and then back to Dicky, with a feeling that the situation was tense out of all proportion. For a moment she was confused and uncertain. She did not know quite what to do. But Dicky did. His eyes came back to hers and from them it would have been impossible to say if he had seen Devons or not.

“Let me know when you want me again,” he said.

“Thank you, Dicky,” she exclaimed.

With that he turned and went down the steps. With that, swinging his stick lightly, he went down the street and around



a corner.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE DEVONS MANUFACTURING COMPANY

DR. NICHOLS relieved Devons from the burden of most of his bandages on Sunday, and the latter, on Monday, after paying his respects to Mrs. Fairburne, left the house in the same machine which had brought him there. Mrs. Fairburne was with her daughter when Devons took his departure and was forced to admit that Joan conducted herself in every respect like a young lady of good sense and propriety. It was quite apparent that in the end the Fairburne blood triumphed over all sentimentality. Not that deep in her heart she had honestly feared anything, but it was a relief to know that the unusual episode was now ended so happily and definitely. She was sure that her bridge game would immediately pick up.

Charles, the driver, had considerable difficulty in locating Mullen Court. So probably would any one who did not live there. The directions are to go along lower Sixth Avenue until you come to a hole in a wall and—there you are. The hole is not large enough to admit a machine. But the trick is to find the hole.

Charles passed it twice, and might have gone on passing it in both directions all day if he had not stopped and roused Devons from his reverie. The latter, sitting back in the corner of the soft-cushioned tonneau, had been so busy with his thoughts that he did not even glance from the window. When he heard the voice of Charles it was like being suddenly awakened.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but I see no street sign with Mullen Court on it.”

“I don’t believe there is one,” answered Devons.

“Then, sir—”

“We’re there now.”

Charles looked about, bewildered.

“Watch where I go and you’ll see. I shan’t need you any more to-day.”

Charles saw him disappear through an opening in the wall which looked as though it led into nothing but an alley. He made a note of this information and it proved useful later on.

As a matter of fact, however, the opening led into a little courtyard and to a group of three or four houses facing it. Devons ascended a short flight of steps bounded by an iron rail and hurried to the second floor. He paused a moment to rap at Arkwright’s door.

“Come in!” shouted Arkwright.

Devons stepped in. Arkwright jumped to his feet.

“For the love of Mike!” he exclaimed; “Devons or his ghost!”

Devons backed away from the outstretched hand.

“Careful of my shoulder,” he warned. “It’s just out of bandages.”

“Eh? What the deuce has happened to you? Here.”

Arkwright shoved forward a chair.

“Sit down and tell us about it. I thought you must have gone West.”

“I’ve been right here in New York all the time.”

“You’re looking fine, man. A bit of luck?”

“In a sense.”

“Great. I’ve been putting in a lot of time on that house of yours. I’ll show it to you later. Have you come back to join us again or to say good-bye?”

“I’ve come back to go to work,” answered Devons.

“Well, you certainly look fit. I was rather worried about you when you were here last. What’s your prescription?”

Devons grinned.

“I’m not sure it would suit every one,” he answered. “But what I did was to go out and get run down by an automobile.”

“What?”

“You have to use some judgment in selecting your machine,” explained Devons. “I picked out a good one.”

“You’re kidding?”

“Not a mite. I was knocked unconscious and I was pretty well bruised, but as a result of it all I never felt better in my life.”

“Rather heroic treatment!” exclaimed Arkwright. “Did they take you to a hospital?”

“They took me to a palace and treated me like a prince,” replied Devons.

“Now, look here—” protested Arkwright.

“I’m telling the bald truth,” insisted Devons. “I wish you could have seen that house, Arkwright. It reminded me something of the one you’re doing. Miss Fairburne—”

“Miss?” interrupted Arkwright.

“She’s the daughter,” explained Devons. He grew self-conscious beneath Arkwright’s smiling eyes. “What’s queer about that?” he demanded.

“Nothing,” Arkwright hastened to assure him. “In fact it makes the whole story more plausible. She is—er— attractive?”

“She’s wonderful, Arkwright!” declared Devons. “She’s one in ten thousand. I want you to meet her some day.”

“Thanks. I’d like to. Bring her in and let her see my blueprints.”

“I’ll do that—if things turn out right,” Devons promised.

He rose abruptly. It reminded him of the thousand and one details that lay ahead of him.

“I have my work cut out for the next few months,” he observed. “I’ll see you later.”

Arkwright went to the door with him. He liked the spark in the man's eyes; he liked the way he held his shoulders.

“Gad!” he exclaimed. “You tempt a fellow to try the same sort of bracer.”

Devons went on up to his room with the springy step of a boy of eighteen and unlocked his door. He hesitated, however, before going in. It was like returning to the past, and for a second he had an uncanny fear that once within he might be held here by this past. Arkwright had not more than half believed, and Arkwright knew only a fraction of the truth. Here was the same narrow, bare hallway he had left some six weeks before, and once inside he would be facing even more barren surroundings. What if then the whole episode should turn out to be nothing but a flighty dream? It had happened before when he had come back here.

Devons drew back and fumbled for his inside pocket. The proof of the truth, if there were any truth, would be found there. He pulled out two or three letters—an old letter from home and the letter from Reed and the letter from Sawyer. That was all he found. The color went from his face. With trembling fingers he felt in his waistcoat pockets. In the first two he found nothing; in the third he discovered a folded bit of paper. He breathed normally again. Unfolding it he read the mysterious message addressed to a certain national bank.

“Pay to the order of Mark Devons one hundred dollars and no cents.” It was signed, “Joan Fairburne.” She had started an account for the firm before he left and insisted upon advancing him that much for current expenses.

He opened the door without fear now and stepped into the little room. On the table lay his corn-cob pipe where he had left it; on the couch bed were scattered his books, one open at the very page where he had quit reading. Except for a couple of wooden chairs and his old dress-suit-case, that was all the room contained. He crossed to the single window and threw it open and let in the stinging clear winter air.

In contrast to the luxuries he had just left, the place, even with the slip of green paper in his hand, depressed him. For a

moment he caught his breath and shrank back from it. Then he smiled. After all, if he would only let it, this would give edge to all that lay ahead. Because of what was to be he could show her what had been with the greater relish. It was in that spirit men revisited the early scenes of their boyhood hardships.

Besides, he had no time to waste on this or any other kind of dreaming. That was the difference between to-day and yesterday. That was the significance of the check. He was in a position now to act. He had before him certain definite things to do. In the first place, he must find some sort of loft-room which would serve him as a laboratory. Then he must secure a permit to use the type of chemicals that were necessary. Then there were the chemicals to buy and certain apparatus. He had planned these details many times in his mind and now he was to accomplish them.

His scheme was simple. It was to begin manufacturing by himself as soon as he could equip his laboratory, and then, as fast as he had stock enough on hand, take it personally to the small users in town and supply enough to enable them to give it a thorough trial. The small manufacturer would be willing to experiment with anything that promised a twenty per cent reduction in price, besides better results. He had several letters from professors at Tech under whom he had worked which would introduce him anywhere and vouch for his reliability. So there remained nothing to do but to go ahead.

Devons returned to Arkwright.

“Have you an account with any bank near here?” he inquired.

“Such as it is,” admitted Arkwright. “How much do you want?”

“I don’t want to borrow,” Devons answered quickly; “I want to open a little account of my own. I thought you might introduce me.”

“Glad to do it,” nodded Arkwright with a trace of relief. “I’ll go up there now. But say—that doesn’t come of getting run over?”

“Indirectly,” admitted Devons. “Through Miss Fairburne I found a partner willing to furnish me with capital.”

“Believe me,” returned Arkwright, “you’ve certainly discovered a fresh and original way of getting on in New York. Here’s hoping your luck lasts.”

The experience of being introduced to a real live cashier behind a grilled fence was, in itself, thrilling enough. With a brand-new check-book of his own in his pocket, Devons came out feeling as important as though instead of one hundred dollars he had deposited one hundred thousand. There was nothing about the blank leaves to indicate it was not the latter sum. A check-book is the most indiscreet thing in the world. It always politely assumes its possessor is a millionaire.

Devons left Arkwright at the imposing structure which was now his bank and went on to a real-estate office he had privately visited before on one of those idle days when he was waiting to hear from Reed. He had spoken then in rather larger figures than he used now. He wanted, to start with, a small space, but one that offered room for expansion. And he found it there waiting for him as though his coming had been anticipated.

At the very top of a building, off Third Avenue, Dr. Dent had begun the manufacture of a Universal Remedy on a scale which, though justified on paper, did not work out in practice. There being some hundred million inhabitants in these, the United States of America, the company had estimated that at least a thousand bottles a day would be necessary to supply the annual demand. This was allowing about one bottle to every three hundred people. As a matter of fact, however, the demand was considerably less and so a policy of retrenchment became necessary. The firm having rented the entire floor was now ardently desirous of sub-letting a portion of its space with a fair possibility of becoming equally desirous, within six months, of sub-letting more unless the American public suddenly turned more appreciative than it now showed promise of doing.

Devons accompanied the agent up there at once and found it exactly what he wanted. And the price was right!

Under the circumstances it had to be. In less than an hour he had signed a lease for a year and arranged for certain partitions to be erected and for an inscription upon the door to read:

**DEVONS MANUFACTURING COMPANY**

All this was accomplished on the first day.



## CHAPTER XVII

### UPTOWN AND DOWNTOWN

FROM a purely business point of view the letters Joan received from Devons, during the next few weeks, were wholly satisfactory. No promoter could have asked in a new enterprise for better progress upon which to base reports to his clients. The very next morning after he left she received the following note:

MY DEAR MISS FAIRBURNE:

I opened yesterday an account with the —— National Bank and would suggest that you make a deposit there at once of fifteen hundred dollars, so that I may draw on it for payment of lease and for chemicals which I must purchase at once. I have secured most desirable manufacturing quarters at 43 Blank Street and have ordered certain necessary changes to be made there as soon as possible. I hope, within a very short time, to be able to report to you that active manufacturing on a small scale has begun.

Very sincerely yours

MARK DEVONS

Certainly a business woman had no right to quarrel with such progress as this. She had supposed that it would take Devons a fortnight, at least, to recuperate sufficiently to be able even to consider plans for the future. It would seem, then, that instead of being more or less vexed after reading the note which Henriette handed her, with coffee and toast, before she was dressed, she should have been highly elated. It began to look as though at this rate the firm, within six months, would be paying dividends.

Joan ran through the note again. She had never before in her life had anything so impersonal addressed to her. Had it been printed it could not have sounded any more frigidly

distant. He had deliberately put in all the details about which she cared nothing and with equal deliberation left out all that would have been interesting. What she wanted to know was how he had stood the ride and if his shoulder felt as stiff as it did on Sunday after the bandages were removed. He had told her about Arkwright and she wanted to hear what Arkwright had said to him when he came back and what he had said to Arkwright. And she wanted to know if he had found everything in his room all right. Particularly if he found his books about which he had worried. And if there was a letter from home waiting for him. Unconsciously and bit by bit he had made his life in Mullen Court extremely vivid to her in their rambling conversations. It sounded like an impossible place to live in, but interesting. He had left off, inevitably enough, in his narrative of his life there at the point where he had joined Arkwright in a cup of coffee and gone out to see Sawyer. She had looked forward to a description of his homecoming as to a new installment of a serial. And he had not said a word about it. He had cut her off abruptly from everything but the sordid details of the business itself. It was as though in going back into the world he had left her behind.

She sent her check to the bank that morning and waited for the second letter. It was possible, after all, that in the press of business he had not found time to write more fully. She waited three days and received the following:

MY DEAR MISS FAIRBURNE:

Thanks for the deposit. I have been extremely fortunate in being able to secure, without waiting, my raw materials and machinery. I expect to have the latter delivered within ten days. I enclose an inventory of what I have contracted for.

Then followed a page of weird-sounding chemicals and parts of machinery with all the costs itemized. Nothing could have been more stupid. It was as stupid as his close.

Very sincerely yours  
MARK DEVONS

It was stupid even to Dicky when, in a general way, she tried to give him an idea of what was being done.

“We’re getting on,” he nodded indifferently. “It sounds as though we were making patent medicine.”

“It isn’t that,” she assured him.

“Then bombs, perhaps.”

“Nor bombs.”

“Well, here’s hoping, whatever it is.”

That apparently was as much as he cared about his new business. On the whole it was probably better so.

Joan was forced to admit, for one thing, that she missed—really missed—not seeing Devons around the house. That was only natural. For six weeks he had occupied the front room, which was now closed. And for the last few weeks he had occupied a great deal of the rest of the house. Whenever she had come from her own room it was with the prospect of meeting him, either on the stairs or in the library. And always she was glad to find him. Always, too, he appeared glad to see her. He gave piquancy to her everyday life.

Now she wandered all around the house with nothing to look forward to. Her parents and the servants were still about, to be sure, but they involved no expectancy. She met them as unemotionally as her own reflection in the mirror. So she turned back to Dicky and for a week made life for him worth living. She went wherever he asked her to go, picking up her social obligations where she had dropped them, so unceremoniously, many weeks before.

Dicky could not understand the change. He did not try. He accepted it as a miracle and let it go at that. He was coming to be firmly of the opinion that it was not possible to explain Joan. One took her as she was from day to day and played in luck or out of luck according as she smiled or frowned.

Of course, this called for most of his time that week, but it cannot be truthfully said that he begrudged it. Neither for that matter did any one else. For several days he never came

near the office at all, but when, toward the middle of the week, he did drop in one afternoon, his father's only comment was:

"Busy these days?"

"Very," answered Dicky.

"How's the new business going?"

"We're getting on."

"Stick to it," his father encouraged him. "When you start a thing, jump in with both feet."

"You bet."

"If you need more money—"

"Thanks, Dad, I'll let you know."

His father seemed so much in earnest that the next time Dicky met Joan he felt it his duty to introduce the subject himself with a view to showing more real interest. So he did, between the numbers of a concert the next afternoon, to which he accompanied her at some genuine sacrifice. His personal taste in music did not run to the classics as interpreted on the violin by long-haired prodigies. Neither did hers, as far as one could judge by the lack of attention she gave to the successive numbers.

"How is everything downtown?" he inquired.

She appeared at first rather confused by the question, because her thoughts, at that moment, had been downtown, though not particularly in the business world.

"Everything getting on all right?"

"Yes," she answered with a trace of color. "The machinery arrived day before yesterday. We're—we're setting it up."

"Good!" he exclaimed, trying his best to show enthusiasm. "Need any help?"

She shook her head.

"I'm afraid not," she answered.

“Afraid?”

“He won’t let any one help.”

“He—being our partner?”

“Yes, Dicky.”

“Sort of an independent chap?”

“Yes.”

That was in his favor. On the whole, it was a virtue, Dicky was convinced, which should be encouraged.

“Nothing like doing a thing yourself if you want it well done,” he declared.

“Only sometimes it’s selfish, isn’t it?” she asked.

“It’s business,” he insisted.

Dicky thought a moment.

“Maybe most every one is selfish,” he went on.

“Except you,” she smiled.

That was the end of the conference because the long-haired violinist began again. When a little later Dicky attempted to pick up the conversation where it was dropped, he found it difficult.

But he treasured that little remark of hers, even though he was not fully convinced it was justified—treasured it because it was the last thing of the sort he had from her for some time. He took her back to the house after the concert, expecting to call for her again that evening for a dance given by the Devereauxs. He had particularly looked forward to this because it was here the little courtyard was, and if ever again she ventured out there with him looking as beautiful as she had been looking lately—

But there is not much use dealing with “ifs.” Before eight o’clock that evening he received from her a telephone message at the house which read simply:

“Miss Fairburne is very sorry, indeed, but must ask to be excused from her engagement of this evening.”

It sounded ominous. When he tried to get her on the 'phone he received from Jeffrey the curt reply:

“Miss Fairburne is not in, sir.”

It was literally true this time. Shortly before eight Joan had been sitting in her room fully dressed for the evening, looking such a perfect thing that Henriette, in her pride, had taken the great liberty of hurrying below to Mrs. Fairburne, who, herself, was on her way out.

“Madame—you should see. Never has Mam’selle looked more beautiful.”

So Madame Fairburne mounted the stairs and stepped in, and, in her joy, kissed her daughter on the forehead.

“It is charming, my dear,” she said. “Mr. Burnett should be proud.”

“Of the gown?” she had asked.

“Only you could wear the gown.”

Joan shrugged her white shoulders ever so slightly and went downstairs to the library where she used to wait for Devons. Alone she sat before the fire. She had heard nothing from him yesterday, nothing to-day, and she was a bit worried. Considered in connection with machinery this silence might mean almost anything. To her, machinery signified a disordered medley of whirling wheels and noises, which, like some inhuman monster, was ever seeking the limbs and lives of those around it.

Of course, in one way it could not be said that she was seriously disturbed about the remote possibility of his having met with an accident of this nature, but it served as an excuse for worrying about him at all. In many ways not to have had some such concrete explanation of her present frame of mind would have been to admit a fact that might have turned out still more disturbing.

Until now she had heard from Devons every day. The communications were nothing she need be ashamed of. They could have been published in the daily paper without compromising any one. Still they were always in his own

handwriting and to that extent were personal. It was only natural, then, that a lapse of forty-eight hours should seem significant. She rather clung to that word “natural.” When honestly used it may mean a great deal by the process of elimination. It is only the unnatural mental phenomena that need give any one cause for concern.

Then to muse at some length over the possible causes that would lead one’s business partner suddenly to cut all lines of communication was perfectly legitimate—perfectly natural. This much being established she felt free to stare into the flames and day-dream as much as she liked. She dismissed the accident theory almost as soon as she became fully at ease. He did not write because he was too busy and because he refused to associate her with his work except in his idle moments. It was not a flattering admission, but she was not seeking flattery. She was trying to see straight and clear. He refused to take her seriously. He saw her only as Henriette saw her—a dressmaker’s form upon which to hang clothes. She could scarcely blame him for that. If he had walked into the room at this moment, he would have had the evidence of his two eyes. If he had followed her about during this past week, he would have seen her living true to his conception. If—he had gone no deeper than externals. If, on the other hand, he had shared her thoughts—she raised her head quickly at the suggestion as though fearing he might by some chance appear and demand that privilege.

At that moment Jeffrey went by to answer a ring at the door. She sprang to her feet. It was Dicky—earlier than he should have come. She resented this as an intrusion. She was of half a mind to refuse to see him for another hour.

But it turned out not to be Dicky, after all, but a messenger with a note for her.

Jeffrey entered with it on a silver tray and she tore open the yellow envelope. She read with shortened breath:

*8 Mullen Court  
New York City*

MY DEAR MISS FAIRBURNE:

Not having seen Mark Devons for a couple of days, I just went upstairs to learn what had become of him. He lives above me in the same house. I found him in bed and, against his wishes, sent for a doctor. He seemed to be worried because he had not been able to report to you for a couple of days, so I'm taking a chance and am doing it for him. I have a notion he may be in bed for some time if he doesn't take care, and so thought that perhaps for business reasons you ought to know just how he is situated.

If you wish, I could send you a postal now and then, informing you how he is getting on. In the meanwhile if I can be of any other service, I trust you will call on me.

Very sincerely yours  
HENRY ARKWRIGHT

Joan summoned Jeffrey.

"The machine," she ordered.

Then she hurried upstairs to Henriette.

"Get ready to come out with me at once."

She picked up the telephone in her room and notified Dicky, slipped into the wrap Henriette held for her, and went down to the car. To Charles she gave the order:

"Eight Mullen Court."

The information the latter had lately acquired was becoming useful sooner than he had expected.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### BEEF TEA

JOAN sat back in the machine by the side of Henriette, with a feeling of tenseness amounting almost to exhilaration. The thing she was daring thrust, into the background, for a few moments, that for which she dared. In coming at all she had acted impulsively—had obeyed her emotions rather than her intellect. There was nothing in Arkwright's note to justify the belief that Devons was really in any immediate need of her. Rather, if the truth were told, she had seized this opportunity as an excuse for satisfying a certain need in herself. She looked forward to the possibility of actually making herself of some use as a hope—a vague and stimulating hope.

As Charles left Washington Square and cut through to Sixth Avenue, she leaned forward and, with eyes out of the window, stared at the unfamiliar streets with all the sensations of a stranger in a foreign city. She had only to turn a little way to the right or left off any of the ordained avenues to find herself in a New York as new to her as Cairo. Had she been put down alone here, it is doubtful if, without much difficulty, she could have found her way home.

So they crossed beneath the Elevated to the hole in the wall and stopped, as Henriette, with some timidity, exclaimed:

“But, Mam'selle—Charles, he has made a mistake, is it not?”

“I do not know,” answered Joan.

Yet Charles appeared confident enough as he opened the door. What lay on the other side of that wall he did not know, but he could have taken his oath it was here that, not long ago, he had landed Mr. Devons.

He pointed to the opening.

“It's through there,” he said.

“Thank you,” nodded Joan. “You may wait for us.”

Joan herself led the way to the courtyard and she herself found the number eight with her heart in her mouth. There was no bell, so she rapped. Mrs. Roberts, on the first floor, came to the door and directed her up the narrow stairs to Arkwright’s room, and, a moment later, she found herself confronting the big fellow, somewhat at a loss to explain intelligently her presence here, because as yet she had not explained it intelligently to herself. But the moment she gave her name, Arkwright seemed to understand.

“He’ll be glad to see you,” he said quietly.

“The doctor has been here?”

“Yes,” answered Arkwright, “and he said—why, he said the man hasn’t been getting enough to eat.”

“But why not?” she exclaimed.

“It’s his own fault—his own bull-headedness. If he had only come to me—”

“There was no need for him to go to any one,” she broke in; “he had money.”

“He did?”

“We—we are interested in the same business, so I know,” she explained.

Arkwright shook his head.

“I’ll give up trying to find a motive, then. Perhaps he just forgot to eat. Anyway, he did not get enough, and then he caught cold, and then—well, there he is. Want to see him?”

She hesitated. Then she answered steadily:

“Yes.”

So with Henriette by her side she followed Arkwright up another flight and into the little room lighted with a single gas-jet. She had never seen anything like it in her life outside a few dimly remembered scenes on the stage. Even now as she stood there she felt as though in some mad moment she had wandered over the footlights. Then the figure on the bed lifted

himself to his elbow and she saw the haggard face and the two burning eyes, which she recognized as Devons's eyes. Quickly she crossed to the man's side and held out her hand.

"You?" he gasped.

"You should have told me," she answered.

"Told you what?" he demanded.

Arkwright stepped forward a moment.

"It's all my fault," he explained. "I sent her a note."

Devons frowned, and then sank back wearily.

"You shouldn't have done that, Arkwright," he complained.

"Yes, yes. It was all he could do," put in Joan. "And it's what you should have done. I don't understand why—you are like this."

"It's only a cold. I'll be up to-morrow."

Devons was glaring at Arkwright again. The latter retreated out of range.

"If you didn't have enough money—"

"I had money enough," he cut in.

"Then why didn't you buy proper food?"

"You don't think I'd waste the firm's money on myself?"

"Oh, that was it!" she exclaimed, with a catch in her voice.

"If Arkwright—"

"Don't blame him. There isn't much use in blaming any one now. You must get back your strength again. We—we must begin all over."

"I'll be up to-morrow, I tell you. Why, that machinery is waiting for me."

"Yes? Have you been obeying the doctor's orders since he left?"

“You aren’t Nurse Ware,” he objected.

“I’m going to be even more strict.”

She turned back to Arkwright.

“What instructions did the doctor leave?”

Arkwright glanced at his watch guiltily.

“Jove, it *is* time for his beef tea. I’ll go down and make it.”

“I’ll make it—please.”

“All you have to do is to boil some water and add a cube. I—”

“Please show me the range and find the cubes,” she ordered.

The range consisted of an alcohol stove and a tin dipper. Arkwright lighted the wick for her and filled the dipper with water, and placed the cubes convenient to her hand. Then it suddenly occurred to him that he was no longer needed and he retreated somewhat awkwardly to the door. He saw her slip off her wrap as she sat down before her work. The sight of her slim neck and white arms took away his breath; then he met her eyes.

“Thank you so much,” she murmured, as though politely excusing him.

“Only—only too happy,” he stammered.

Devons in the meanwhile was closing his eyes for a moment, then opening them again, then closing them again, because it was only so that he could bring himself to believe that she was really here. If he looked at her steadily for any length of time she grew hazy and he felt there was danger of her disappearing altogether. Henriette, in the rear, served in a way as a sort of anchor, but in the shadow he could scarcely make her out. But Joan was beneath the gas-jet so that if he did not look overlong he was sure of her.

Her back was toward him and he was rather glad of that. Had she faced him he would not have dared open his eyes at

all. For she seemed to him now even more radiantly beautiful than ever before, and before there was nothing whatever beautiful enough with which to compare her. So that though he continued to try to blame Arkwright for his colossal nerve in being the direct means of getting her down here, it was a difficult thing to do consistently, because he was so glad to have her there.

And yet she did not belong here. In the midst of his joy he told himself that over and over again. The moment he removed his eyes from her and looked about at her surroundings she made him feel ashamed. Every sordid detail grew more sordid. The stark paper on the walls and the wooden chairs taunted him. They forced him into a contrast with the clean, good taste of what she had offered him in her home. His battered old dress-suit-case in the corner thrust itself forward as though trying to humiliate him. And remembering the dainty china upon which his meals at her home had been served, he frowned at the tin dipper, before which she sat watching, like a chemist, for some delicate reaction.

Then he saw her rise and remove the dipper of steaming water and put in the cube and look about for a spoon.

“You’ll have to use a pencil,” he said.

She objected to so unprofessional a method, but if he had no spoon there was nothing else to be done. To-morrow she would come prepared. She stirred it carefully and brought it to his side. He rose on his elbow and drank it—as bitter and unpalatable a beverage as a man could well swallow. She had forgotten to add salt, for one thing. It tasted of tin, for another. It was too hot, for a third. But had it been hemlock and she had offered it, he would not have hesitated.

“Now,” she said, “you ought to sleep.”

“With you here!”

“Then I’ll go.”

“Not yet,” he pleaded. “Do you mind just—sitting there?”

She brought the chair to his side and sat down.

“I don’t want to scold you now,” she began, “but don’t you see how foolish you’ve been?”

“There was so much to be done, all at once,” he explained.

“And you tried to do it all by yourself.”

“There was no one else.”

“There was I. Why, I—I’ve been doing nothing all this while.”

“You did your share when you made everything possible.”

She shook her head.

“I can’t claim credit even for that. But please don’t talk. Please—just listen.”

So while he lay there flat on his back cursing to himself the weakness that made it necessary, she told him of her preposterous plan. He would need some one in the office as a sort of bookkeeper, and though she did not know very much about bookkeeping she could learn and perhaps could help in other ways.

“For one thing, it seems to be necessary for some one to make sure that you take care of yourself.”

“If it hadn’t been for this cold—” he started to explain.

“If you had eaten properly you wouldn’t have caught cold,” she cut him off. “There is not the slightest use in the world to argue about it.”

He was at a distinct disadvantage. In the first place, it is difficult to hold your own in an argument when lying prone even if you have all the right on your side. Again, though he was trying his level best to appear normal there was between his eyes a pain so sharp that at moments it made him blind. Finally, it seemed inevitable that, once she made up her mind, she should have her way in whatever she desired. If one were to direct her at all it must be in some earlier stage. He tried to go back a little to find where he was at fault, but that involved too much effort.

Besides, the one big, white fact, that made every other fact appear petty, was that now, at this moment, she was here. Yesterday, last night, and all to-day, until Arkwright had come up, he had lain here alone fretting over lost time in a fashion that threatened to double and treble the toll of wasted hours. And he had thought if only he could see her for a second—just catch a glimpse of her passing on the street—that all the strength would come back into him.

“I think I had better read to you,” she decided. “Perhaps it will help you not to think.”

The only thing she could find was a textbook on chemistry, so she picked up that and began at page one. It was not very interesting, but that was so much the better. She plunged ahead in a low monotone, and mispronounced frightfully many of the words she met. But she kept on, conscious that his eyes were upon her. She kept on and on paying no attention to the meaning of the text—kept on and on, until she heard him breathing slowly and naturally. As soon as his eyes closed, she stopped and waited a moment, ready to begin again if they opened.

Then she rose and moved on tiptoe to the table. She took the pencil and scribbled a note upon a piece of blank paper she found. It read simply:

I shall be here at ten to-morrow.

JOAN FAIRBURNE

She slipped this into the book and placed it on the chair near the bed. Then moving toward the door she beckoned Henriette to follow.

At Arkwright’s suite below, she paused and knocked again.

“I must leave him with you now,” she announced as he appeared. “But I shall be here in the morning. He is to have his beef tea every two hours.”

He nodded and escorted her to the machine. He watched it scoot away beneath the Elevated toward Washington Square.

“Good Lord!” he gasped, “if I thought anything like that would run over me I’d take a chance.”



## CHAPTER XIX

### PRINCESSES

DEVONS awoke at odd times during the night, and every time he did so Arkwright got up from the chair where he was sleeping, lighted the alcohol lamp and brewed a tin dipper of beef tea. Devons protested, but Arkwright only answered, stubbornly:

“That’s all right, old man. Only drink it. I was ordered to see that you had this, so the least said the better.”

Even after Devons consented to swallow the stuff, Arkwright refused to talk, but sank back in his chair, stretched his long legs out in front of him, and went to sleep.

After this had occurred twice, Devons refused to let Arkwright know when he woke up, but lay quietly staring into the dark at the chair, where he could have sworn she had been sitting, in the early evening. He found this such a pleasant thing to do that always he went to sleep again. The last time he awoke it was seven and broad daylight. Arkwright, too, was awake and saw him when he opened his eyes. So once again he rose and made for the alcohol lamp.

“If you give me another dipper of that—” began Devons.

“It’s her orders.”

“Whose orders?”

“Miss Fairburne’s,” answered Arkwright as he lighted the lamp.

Devons rose to his elbow.

“Then she *was* here!”

“Of course, she was, man! Have you been as bad as that?”

“No, only—look here, Arkwright, if you’ll cut out that stuff I’ll eat an egg.”

Arkwright hesitated.

“I’ll eat two eggs,” Devons promised.

“I don’t know.”

“She won’t care. I know she won’t. I’m feeling great this morning.”

His eye caught the note in the book. He reached for it and read it. Then he threw back the covers and started out of bed.

“What you going to do?” demanded Arkwright.

“She’s coming back!” exclaimed Devons. “She’ll be here at ten.”

“What of it?”

“She mustn’t, that’s all. I—I can’t let her see this place in the daylight.”

Arkwright glanced about.

“Does look kind of rowdy, now that you speak of it,” he admitted.

“So I must get shaved and dressed and—and meet her downstairs. I’ll take her to the office—anywhere but here.”

“Steady,” warned Arkwright; “I’m not so sure she would like that. If we dressed the place up a little—”

“It can’t be done,” groaned Devons. “I’ve got to get out before she comes, I tell you.”

“Just a minute, old man. I could wash the windows, for one thing. I have a rug or two and some pictures, and in my trunk some things in the way of table-covers my good aunt sent me. If you’ll just sit tight I have a hunch quite a bit could be done in three hours. When a lady makes an appointment at a certain place, you have to keep it, that’s all.”

“I can telephone.”

“I don’t think I would,” replied Arkwright thoughtfully. “I’d shave and eat my two eggs and keep cool, and watch what your Uncle Dudley can accomplish.”

When Devons came to stand up he discovered that after all he had no other choice. His legs were decidedly weak. By the time he had shaved and dressed and swallowed the eggs, he was quite helpless. But Arkwright took off his coat and went at his undertaking like a man. At the end of an hour he had the place as clean as soap and water could make it, and in another half-hour had stripped his own room of about everything in the way of rugs and pictures and brought them up here. He even included his best chair and an ottoman covering for the bed. Then he stood back and surveyed his handiwork.

“Eh?” he asked with considerable satisfaction.

For the twentieth time Devons exclaimed:

“It’s darned good of you!”

“Not a mite of it,” answered Arkwright. “If fairy princesses *will* call on careless bachelors, the only decent way is to make things as respectable as possible. And then,” he concluded, glancing at his watch, “the next proper thing is to get out.”

“Look here,” protested Devons, “there’s no need of that.”

“Anyway, I want to smoke.”

“Can’t you smoke here?”

“Certainly not,” declared Arkwright. “You have to make your sacrifices for princesses. Good luck.”

With that he went out and left Devons alone, whereupon the latter immediately began to believe that she would not come, anyway. He took that stand, not because it was what he wished to believe, but, perversely, because it was very much what he did *not* wish to believe. He sat in a chair with his eyes fixed on the door and felt his heart jump like a startled rabbit at every sound he heard below. It was disconcerting how much he wished her to come. It took him back to those few moments before the open fire when he had been forced to run in order not to speak the words that surged up hotly clamoring for speech. He had been glad ever since that he had remained dumb. But he knew that never again would it be as easy as it

was then, though then it had not been easy. He knew that every time he saw her it was going to be harder. This is why he had kept away these last two weeks and confined himself merely to business notes. He must keep in mind always the fact that this was with her purely a business proposition. She and that other, whoever he might be, were his silent partners, that was all. So they must remain until he had won his success and repaid his debt and stood free and clear with a bank account of his own big enough to be worthy of her. When he was ready to take her to Arkwright and show her those blue-prints—then, and not until then, would he have any right to speak.

“You have to make your sacrifices for princesses,” Arkwright had said jokingly.

But that was true in a larger way than Arkwright had meant.

At five minutes of ten Devons heard steps coming up the stairs. He sprang to his feet and tried to stand steady. The steps paused at the landing below and then came on again. They came on to his very door. Then it seemed an eternity before he heard the rap of a gloved hand.

With his heart in his mouth he crossed the room.

It was she, Joan, and behind her Henriette, and behind Henriette, Charles with a large wicker basket.

“You may put that down here,” she said to Charles, “and wait outside.”

Then she turned and saw Devons where she had expected to see Arkwright.

“Why are you up?” she demanded ominously.

“Because—because I am feeling so much better,” he stammered.

“That is the beef tea,” she decided.

“It is in spite of the beef tea,” he replied. “Please to come in.”

She turned to help Henriette with the basket, and he instinctively made his way past her to take the burden himself.

And he could not lift the thing. Actually he could not. He was obliged to stand by and see the two women stagger into the room with it. Humiliated, he was forced to watch his princess do the thing he should have been strong enough to do. It gave him further proof, if any were needed, that he must keep his lips tight closed.

He heard her exclamation of surprise as she passed over the threshold.

“What have you been doing here?” she asked.

“Nothing much,” he tried to answer carelessly; “Arkwright has been fixing up a little.”

“But it isn’t the same room!” she exclaimed, as though in disappointment. “It isn’t your room!”

“It doesn’t always look as badly as it did last night.”

“I liked it as it was,” she insisted. “Except you *should* have a spoon, of course.”

Now it was Arkwright’s room—anybody’s room. Half the dramatic contrast was gone. Even Devons himself, now that he was shaved and up, no longer made the urgent claim upon her sympathy that had so roused her as he lay prone and unkempt in his bed. Not that she analyzed her emotions to this extent, but she was aware of a certain disappointment. It was as though she were no longer needed quite as much as she had been needed last night.

But that feeling passed when she saw the man totter a trifle as he tried to keep his feet. She took his arm and led him to a chair.

“I had Henriette pack a basket with some things I thought you might need,” she explained. “You might take them out, Henriette.”

Henriette brought forth from that basket a linen tablecloth with an embroidered “F” in one corner; a collection of china with which Devons was familiar; a monogrammed silver knife, fork, and spoon; a crystal drinking-glass; several aluminum cooking-dishes which he was sure the Fairburne chef would have to account for some day; and then a cold chicken, some

dainty biscuits, a box of fresh eggs, and several different kinds of jellies and jams, and finally a bottle of milk.

“I didn’t know whether you could get fresh milk here or not,” she explained. “Dad has this sent in every day from the country.”

“But why,” he exclaimed, “should you do this?”

He saw her cheeks color.

“Why shouldn’t I?” she challenged.

“It has put you to so much trouble.”

“It hasn’t done even that!” she exclaimed. “But if it had?”

Then she should not have undertaken it, is what he had meant, but he did not say it. Instead he said:

“If Charles is still about he might take us down to the factory. The machinery ought to be unpacked to-day.”

“Are you strong enough to go?”

“Certainly,” he answered steadily. “It’s only a matter of directing the men. I arranged for two of them to come to-day. They are probably waiting for me.”

She hesitated. But he rose and reached for his hat.

“I must go,” he said earnestly. “It will save a whole day. We—we could come back here for lunch.”

“I told mother I should need Charles until evening.”

“Then come on,” he insisted, with something of his old-time spirit.

If she had been thinking of him alone, it would have been against her best judgment to permit this, but she was thinking also a little bit of herself. To spend part of the day with him there would be a beginning. At the moment his thoughts were less upon her than the business in hand, so that he would be scarcely conscious of whether she was about or not.

So with a nod to Henriette to follow she went down the stairs with him and to the machine. Five minutes later they were in the elevator leading to the twelfth story and soon were

standing before the door to which he pointed proudly. She read the inscription “Devons Manufacturing Company” with a glow of enthusiasm.

“It sounds very important,” she smiled.

But it looked decidedly more like a real business from the outside than it did on the inside. Here she found herself in a large room containing nothing but several large packing-cases and odds and ends of smaller bundles. These, like the door, were all marked impressively, “Devons Manufacturing Company.”

The sight of them seemed to inspire Devons. They brought back the color to his cheeks and strength to his legs. He offered her a seat upon one of the smaller cases and stepped into the next office to telephone to his men. When he came back he took a jack-knife from his pocket and began to cut the strings on the bundles. Instantly she jumped up.

“Please sit down and let me undo them,” she requested.

“You may help,” he condescended, “but be careful of the ones marked ‘glass’.”

Soon from the chaos of excelsior and brown paper, measuring-glasses began to appear and large bottles containing mysterious liquids. Then, when the men appeared, they attacked the big cases. Even Henriette caught something of the enthusiasm and began to pick up the loose papers and smooth them out and fold them.

But the fact Joan noticed was that within half an hour—as soon as the big mixing-kettles began to emerge—Devons forgot she was there. There was not much then left for her to do. She stood around rather helplessly, spending most of her time trying to keep from underfoot. Often he stood by her side as he gave his orders, but if she ventured to speak to him then he only answered vaguely, “Eh?”

He was Devons of the Devons Manufacturing Company and none else. He might almost have been stenciled like the boxes with that label. She had planned not to allow him to do

too much, but she found herself powerless. He neither heard her nor saw her.

So he worked for two hours, and so he might have gone on working until night if left to himself. It was clear enough to her now why at the end of ten days he had been forced to his bed. With a smile of satisfaction it was clear enough to her now in just what way she might be useful.

At twelve o'clock the men had stopped for lunch, but impatiently he had urged them on.

"I'll pay you double to put this through," he promised.

At a little after one, one of the three big kettles was in place and the men moved toward the second. It was then that Joan stepped forward to Devons and insisted upon being heard.

"Come," she said.

"Eh?"

She put her hand upon his arm.

"Come. We must go back to lunch now."

"You and Henriette run along," he said; "I'll have something sent up."

"No, you must come too."

"But I can't!" he broke out nervously. "If I get this done to-day I can begin work to-morrow."

She shook her head.

"If you keep on like this you won't begin work for a month."

"You don't understand."

"I do understand. Come."

"I—"

"Come."

She found his hat for him and placed it on his head, while he went on giving instructions to cover the time he would be



away. He glanced at his watch.

“I’ll be back in half an hour,” he told the men.

“I doubt if that is quite accurate,” she contradicted.

“But, Joan—” he began.

He had used the name often enough to himself, but as it slipped from his lips so unconsciously the sound of it checked him. He met her eyes. She was smiling.

“Yes?” she answered.

“There is so much still to be done,” he finished.

“I know, but there is to-morrow and after that another to-morrow and after that—”

His lips tightened.

“It’s those to-morrows I want to do away with,” he replied. “I want to get into the now.”

“Come,” she repeated.

Reluctantly he followed her into the elevator and to the machine and let himself be whisked back to his room—back there in the middle of the day. It was absurd. Yet the moment he was there he realized it was well. He sank into a chair quite done up.

Arkwright came up and offered his apartment to the ladies as a dressing-room, and as soon as they went out turned to Devons.

“You been at it again so soon?” he demanded.

“Got a bully start,” nodded Devons. “Machinery all unpacked and some of it set up.”

“You’d better go slow.” Arkwright shrugged his shoulders. Then his eyes caught the array upon the table.

“Some style,” he observed.

“She did it,” nodded Devons. “It’s an improvement on your darned old beef cubes.”

“Right! The doctor came, by the way, while you were gone. He allowed you were crazy.”

“Thank God, I was out. Tell him I’ll see him a month from now. Stay to lunch with us?”

“Thanks,” answered Arkwright thoughtfully. “I don’t think I will.”

But he remained a few moments just to watch Joan as she helped to set the table. Had it been possible for him to make himself invisible he would have liked to stay longer, but as he weighed two hundred pounds there seemed to be no practicable way for him to accomplish this, so he backed out.

He should have remained and seen how deftly Henriette mastered the same problem. To be sure, she had some advantage in the matter of size, but this was partly offset by the fact that she served as waitress, though there was not very much for her to do, except to make a cup of tea for her mistress. Everything was so compact and convenient here that really it would have been possible to do away with servants altogether.

It was no time before Devons forgot she was in the room. Only Joan was here—opposite him. It might be said with equal truth that in no time he forgot there was any one else in the world but Joan. Yet there were quite a number of other persons in the world. In this city alone there were some four million. One had only to refer to any book of statistics.

He was aware of her eyes and her smile and the dainty curves of her fingers as she lifted the teacup to her lips, and looking at these it was almost as though the to-morrows had really gone and the Now was here. It was rather a dangerous delusion to labor under. To enjoy it fully he was forced to watch himself carefully.

This was difficult because with her the temptation always was to speak from within as one thought—to talk direct to the center of her big, clear eyes. But if he had done that, there were moments when he would have leaned across the table and said to her:

“I love you.”

He would have said no more. Just that—bluntly.

But he had no right to say that. It took away his breath every time he thought of it and left him white about the lips. It was at one of these moments, after they had finished their lunch and Henriette had cleared away all the things and they were just sitting on, that she suddenly rose.

“You must rest,” she said. “You look tired. I don’t think you had better go back to the factory to-day.”

“But—”

“No,” she insisted firmly; “I will stop there with Henriette on my way home and tell the men to go for the day. I shall lock the door and take the key.”

“Then,” he asked helplessly, “how shall I get in to-morrow?”

“I will be there at nine and unlock the door for you,” she smiled.

And before he fully recovered, she went out and left him sitting alone like a blind man who has had his cane removed.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE FASTER GAME

BURNETT SENIOR sat in his office leaning forward in his chair and drumming nervously on the desk. Every now and then he glanced at his watch, then uncertainly toward the hat-rack, and then with an effort turned to the letters in front of him. But in the end he always found himself again drumming nervously on his desk.

It was eleven o'clock and the Stock Exchange had been open for an hour. Already he had twice rung up the office of Toole & Co. and received the report that the market was strong and the trading brisk. Apparently it was going as yesterday Toole had predicted it would. Already several issues in which he was interested had advanced from a quarter to a half. Figuring roughly it made a difference of four hundred dollars to him in that first hour. This was not much compared to the profit he had taken last week on steel of five thousand, but one never knew what the next ten minutes might bring forth. That was what made the game interesting. There was no waiting for monthly statements or semi-annual balances. There was no sitting around for the maturing of carefully thought-out plans. It was possible to do a year's business in a week; sometimes in a day; sometimes in an hour. Even if a man invested only in a small way, as he was doing, it added zest to life.

Until a few weeks ago he had never been inside a broker's office. Forsythe had then introduced him to his friend Benton, and it was through the latter that he had bought steel and through him had sold it again—clearing up in a month the amount he had loaned Dicky. He liked the idea. It left Dicky free to lose the money as soon as he wished. A day or so later Benton had taken him down to the Street one noon hour and introduced him to Toole. A very agreeable man Toole was. He was a big fellow, physically, with pleasant manners. They had lunched together not long after this—rather heartily. Toole had offices overlooking the street—pleasant offices. Burnett had

sat around there for an hour watching the board and listening to the odds and ends of gossip that circulated through the little gathering. He had gone several times since then. In a good many ways he found it a relief from the routine of his own office. There was an atmosphere of tension there which was stimulating.

If, at the beginning, he had felt the slightest bit uncomfortable, like a man visiting for the first time a race-track, he had partly quieted his conscience by the thought that after all he was playing with his own hard-earned money, and that win or lose he was entitled at his age to a little amusement. With his own business running as smoothly as it now did under Forsythe, there was every day less and less need of him in the office. If Dicky were about it might be different. Then he would have had as his ambition the training of the boy. There were certain plans for extension—the foreign field, for instance, was almost untouched—which with Dicky's help might have acted as a fresh spur to effort. But if the lad had no taste for such schemes, why, that was the end of the matter. Projects of that sort were for Youth—Youth with the long years ahead. He himself, lately, craved a faster game. And in a sense that desire went back to Dicky too.

The day the boy had told him of his princess, Burnett had begun an inventory of his estate. The result had left him thinking. As long as he looked at it only from his own point of view, it was satisfactory enough. He had his business which on the basis of its earning power represented a value of two hundred thousand; he had his house worth in the neighborhood of seventy-five thousand; and he had a surplus in various sound securities worth around seventy-five thousand. Besides this he kept an account of forty or fifty thousand in cash. Considering the fact that he had started with nothing, this was a good deal to have accomplished in thirty years. If at twenty-one he could have looked forward to any such reward he would have felt fully satisfied.

And yet, as Dicky talked, four hundred thousand seemed little enough. It was, of course, all a matter of comparison, and Burnett knew that most of the boy's friends belonged to families who reckoned their fortunes in millions. And he was

proud that Dicky had been able to make such friends. He was proud, too, that although his own fortune was so much less, it had always been sufficient to allow the boy within reason to hold his own among the others. In college he had always had the best. Since then there had been enough so that he could still follow his fancy. If at this point Burnett winced a trifle, it was when he was alone. He must remember that it was only natural that circumstances should make a big difference in the point of view. In fact that was just what was happening to himself.

Burnett had looked up these Fairburnes, and what he learned made his own little fortune sink to insignificance. And it helped him to understand what Dicky meant when he said, "I don't know what you can get her that she hasn't already." Burnett had four hundred thousand to hand over to his son, and Fairburne could match every fifty thousand with a million for his daughter.

Even Toole, so he understood, could match him two for one and had made this on the Street within ten years. And Toole told him of others. At odd times and quite incidentally the talk had run to fortunes made quickly. It was always an interesting topic and Toole had a fund of such stories.

"Why, I had an office boy," he said one day, as he offered Burnett a cigar, "a little chap by the name of Windsor. The rascal saved some five hundred dollars from his wages and began to trade on margins. He got a tip somehow on R and M, bought, and began to pyramid. He cleaned up ten thousand on that deal and jumped into a curb oil stock. The stuff advanced from five to forty in two months, and he came out of that with a profit of seventy thousand. He quit me then, but I'm told that to-day he is worth three million."

Three million in five years! And he, Burnett, had sweat blood to roll up a paltry four hundred thousand in thirty years! It was merely a matter of comparison.

Yet Burnett did not lose his head altogether. That thirty years of business experience counted for something. Once back in his office again he was able to smile at many of those stories. But as a result of them he worked out this scheme: he

would take that fifty thousand and fool with it—merely fool with it. If he lost, well and good. At least he would have had some entertainment. He would pay for that and quit. Certainly that amount would not break him.

On the other hand, if he won! Here was where he let his imagination loose. Windsor, a mere office boy, had made three million out of five hundred. It was elementary arithmetic to figure what the youngster might have done had he started with one hundred times that capital. Discounting the story fifty per cent and admitting that such a case was one in a thousand, a man was still left an ample margin for day-dreaming.

Supposing that when it came time for Dicky to marry the girl, Fairburne should send for him and somewhat scornfully demand what prospects he had to justify such a course. There was not much doubt but that Fairburne would take the precaution to look up the Burnett rating in Dun and Bradstreet, just as Burnett had looked up the Fairburne rating. He would find him in the quarter-million class. Dicky probably would be considerably disconcerted and doubtless indignant as well. He might even consider the question beside the point, though he himself had admitted that she deserved a fortune. At any rate, the boy would have to come back for information, because he did not know any more about the family finances than a stranger. He had never asked. He had never shown the slightest interest.

So some day he would stroll into the office and repeat the question. He might quote Fairburne in some such statement as

—  
“What is a paltry quarter-million for a Fairburne?”

Then Burnett senior would smile. He would reach to one of the cubby-holes in his desk and take out his account-book with Toole & Co. He would hand it to Dicky. It might show one million, or two million, or three million. It depended a good deal on his mood how much he made it. At any rate, it was always enough to satisfy Fairburne.

“Go back and tell Fairburne that Dun and Bradstreet don’t always know everything,” he might say.

And Dicky would get up and slap him on the shoulder, with his face alight. Possibly he might in some good-natured way rebuke him.

“You deserved to lose for taking any such fool chance. But it’s one on Fairburne.”

But the boy’s face would be alight. That was all the reward he wanted.

Burnett senior stopped drumming on his desk and pressed a button, summoning Forsythe. The latter responded instantly. He was as alert as electricity. He came in with a pencil behind his ear and his hand full of papers.

“I’m going out for a little while, Forsythe,” explained Burnett, without looking at the man.

“Yes, sir.”

“Anything you want to see me about?”

“No, Mr. Burnett.”

“I don’t know when I’ll get back, but if you want me, telephone Toole & Co. I may drop in there a little while.”

“Yes, sir,” answered Forsythe.

“And if my son comes in—just say I’ll be back soon. You—er—you needn’t say where I am.”

“No, sir,” he answered. “But I’ll call you up if he seems too curious.”

“Right, Forsythe.”

Burnett waited until Forsythe left before he put on his hat and coat. Then when he did go out, he appeared more or less apprehensive until he was clear of the building.



## CHAPTER XXI

### A CONFESSION

IT was obvious to Joan that it was no more than fair and right that her mother should know what she had undertaken, and yet, secure as she was in her own mind, it was both a difficult and unpleasant thing to talk about with her. The latter was sure to misunderstand—possibly to misinterpret. In either case she would object and that meant acting against her wishes.

She did not want to do that. It was against her instincts. All her life she had been so obedient that even to-day she felt in her mother's presence like the school-girl with braided hair. It was so, she was convinced, her mother saw her. That was the trouble. That explained the gulf that during these last few years had widened between them. Her mother expected her still to think and act like a school-girl—like a grown-up school-girl, to be sure, but nevertheless as one not yet entitled to decide for herself. That privilege would not be granted until after marriage, and then only to a limited degree. After being a dutiful daughter she must be a dutiful wife. It seems that her duty must always lie to some one else rather than herself.

In the present instance, then, she was proposing to act from a purely selfish motive. That was the logical deduction. In undertaking to give her time and thought to the Devons Manufacturing Company she was actuated, then, by no other desire than to develop her own soul by enlarging her life through service? It was a fair question and she put it to herself. But it turned out to be rather a confusing question. Certainly her original idea had been nothing more than this. Here was a fellow human being struggling alone, and she had stepped in and in her limited way had done what she could to help him. That help was still needed and the joy of the enterprise lay in that fact. Her joy lay in that fact. To that extent she was selfish. But somehow that did not account for all her emotions. The way she disposed of these, however, was merely to hold her head a little higher and challenge her conscience, or whatever

it was, to explain why she was under any obligation to account for them at all. She had some rights of her own.

It was in this spirit that Joan went to her mother as soon as the latter came in from an afternoon of bridge. Mrs. Fairburne furnished her the opportunity by inquiring:

“You lunched with Mr. Burnett to-day?”

“No,” Joan replied without equivocation, “I lunched with Mr. Devons.”

“Devons?”

The eyebrows went up and the mouth became set.

“Yes, Mother. He—he has been ill. I took Henriette and went down there with some proper food for him.”

“Down where?”

“To Mullen Court.”

“I am not familiar with Mullen Court,” answered Mrs. Fairburne in a tone that suggested this was something to be thankful for.

“No, Mother, dear,” Joan replied steadily. “It is not far from Washington Square.”

“One of those artist places?” she asked suspiciously.

“I—I don’t know.”

“Yet you—”

“Please, Mother,” broke in Joan, “will you let me tell you in my own way?”

Mrs. Fairburne sank into a chair.

“Go on,” she submitted resignedly.

“A friend of his, Mr. Arkwright, wrote me he was ill, so I had Charles drive us down. I found him in a little room—oh, a pitiful little room at the top of the house. He was ill for lack of food. I had Pierre pack a basket and I took it to him.”

“But did that necessitate your stopping for lunch?”

Joan crimsoned.

“I stopped because I wished to.”

“Joan!”

“Because I had business with him.”

Mrs. Fairburne started from her chair.

“Please—just a minute, Mother. I want to tell you everything. It is your right to know what I’ve done and what I’m going to do. I told you once how he needed money to start in business.”

Mrs. Fairburne admitted this with an expression of annoyance.

“I asked you to help and you did not approve.”

“Certainly not.”

“So I told Dicky and he gave me the money.”

“You asked Mr. Burnett for money?”

“He was very nice,” nodded Joan. “He gave me five thousand dollars.”

“Joan—are you losing your mind!”

“I wanted to take it as a loan, but he would not consent to that. So he came into the business with us as a silent partner. Now we are all ready to start. And,” she concluded rather hurriedly, “I’m going to keep the books.”

Mrs. Fairburne had difficulty for a second or two in catching her breath. It was while she was in this helpless condition that Joan moved swiftly to her side and put an arm around her.

“Mother, dear,” she pleaded. “I know how strange this all sounds to you. But I’m in earnest. I want something to do and here is my chance. I’ve wanted something to do ever since I came home from college. If you had known Mildred and heard all she did—”

The mother looked up.

“You are such a child,” she murmured.

Joan met her mother's eyes.

"Not any longer," she answered. "That is the trouble, isn't it? You forget I have grown up."

There was something about the girl's mouth that told her this was the truth. But it frightened her. She roused herself.

"Joan, dear, what you propose is impossible. It would break your father's heart if he heard. You must put the whole Quixotic plan out of your head. We—we will take a little trip to the South or Bermuda—"

"No, Mother," she put in gently. "As for Dad—is there any reason why he should know if it is going to disturb him?"

"He would never forgive you—never forgive me."

"Why should he feel like that?"

"The whole idea is so unusual."

"With thousands of girls working for their living?"

"But they—they are not Fairburnes."

"No—they are not Fairburnes. But I don't like to think they are better than Fairburnes, Mother."

"Joan—I really think I should call Dr. Nichols!"

"Nonsense. Now you come up to your room and get ready for dinner. I'm sure that by to-morrow you will look at it differently."

"Will you call Louise?"

"Let me help you—please."

Mrs. Fairburne took her daughter's arm and allowed herself to be helped to her room. And once there Joan was still reluctant to summon Louise.

"Let me do your hair to-night," she pleaded.

So she unfastened her mother's hair and let it down over her shoulders and combed out the fine strands that were beginning to show silver.

"It is beautiful!" exclaimed Joan.

## CHAPTER XXII

### A SALE

THE thing Devons had evolved was a patent-leather finish at least fifty per cent less liable to crack than any on the market, produced at four fifths the cost of the Burnett product. But it was one thing to claim this and another to prove or even to get a chance to prove it. At the end of a week he had enough to allow a manufacturer to give it a fair trial. Armed with letters he had from his professors at Tech—letters intended for the benefit of teaching staffs rather than business men—he left Joan in charge of the office one day, looking very important with this new responsibility, and crossed the city in search of the manager of the Doggett Shoe Company. He waited two hours in an outer office after filling out the slip giving his name and business, and when finally ushered into the presence of A.E. Hartley found the man still too busy even to glance up from his desk as he entered. It was not an encouraging reception, and Devons had not had sufficient experience to accept the situation calmly. He had ventured forth with an enthusiasm which he expected to find reflected in every one he met, without stopping to consider that this was rather an unreasonable presumption in view of the fact that the world at large knew as yet nothing about the Devons process, and probably if informed would care scarcely more. The case of Hartley, however, was different. He should have been immediately interested, though, perhaps, it was not fair to expect him to get excited before he heard of it.

Devons studied the man behind the desk—a man of fifty with a square, non-committal face. He had a short, iron-gray mustache and a square jaw, a sharp nose and well-set eyes. With his head on his hand he was figuring rapidly. Finally he pressed a button, to which a boy responded instantly. With a quick, nervous movement he handed the lad a sheet of paper with the single word:

“Henderson.”

Then he looked up at Devons.

“Well?” he inquired, as though resenting the interruption.

Devons felt his heart leap to his mouth. He was as excited as he had been when he stepped before the examiners for his oral examination.

“I understand you use considerable patent leather in your factory.”

“Yes.”

“I have perfected a new process—”

“Not interested!” snapped Hartley.

Devons flushed.

“You won’t even let me tell you about it?”

Hartley, who had started about his work, looked up again. There was a note of such deep disappointment in Devons’s voice that his attention was attracted once more. It was quite evident that he was not dealing with the professional salesman.

“Who do you represent?” asked Hartley.

“Myself.”

“If your time is valuable, let me tell you this: we purchase our entire supply of the Burnett people.”

“Yes, sir. All I was going to ask was that you give my process a trial.”

“We have no time to experiment.”

“The experimenting has been all done. I have some letters —”

Fumbling in his pocket Devons produced them. Hartley indifferently unfolded the first.

“Tech?” he asked.

“Yes, sir.”

Devons named his class.

As it happened, Hartley had preceded him at the same institution fifteen years before. He had been under this same professor who testified as to Devons's ability.

"Bring up a chair and sit down," Hartley invited him as he finished the letter.

Devons hastily complied.

"Now, tell me about it."

Hartley sat back in his chair with the tips of the fingers of his right hand matched against the tips of the fingers of his left hand. He listened without comment of any kind as Devons began at the beginning and sketched his early laboratory work leading him to his later task.

"I saw that the older the oil the more perfect the result. It seemed that some change took place in the maturing process. I experimented to discover what that was and found out. Then I devised a way of maturing the oil more rapidly and more completely. This allows the skin to absorb more of it. That's all."

"That's enough," smiled Hartley, "if you've done it."

"You mean you doubt it?"

"I admit I'm skeptical. My boy, I've looked into at least fifty such claims personally. I've spent at least twenty thousand dollars right here trying to achieve that result. Burnett has spent five times as much, and every manufacturer of patent leather in the country an equal amount. An uncrackable patent leather has been the dream of manufacturers from the first."

"I don't claim it is absolutely uncrackable."

"Merely fifty per cent better," nodded Hartley. "It is well to be modest. If you could show me something only ten per cent more pliable I should feel repaid."

"I can," declared Devons. "Will you give it a trial?"

Hartley considered a moment.

"State just what your proposition is," he said cautiously.

“That you let me furnish enough of the dressing for your test.”

“You are not asking for a contract of any sort?”

“If the process makes good, that won’t be necessary, will it?”

“No,” admitted Hartley, “if the price is right.”

“I haven’t worked that out carefully yet, but I figure it should be less than the present product.”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Hartley: “how do you get that result?”

“Less oil,” answered Devons.

Hartley shook his head skeptically.

“Send it on,” he concluded; “but frankly I don’t believe it.”

“Carlow, Reed & Co. tested it.”

“Then why didn’t they buy it?”

“They were afraid of Burnett,” Devons answered.

He had the letter with him and handed it to Hartley. The latter read it through carefully and returned it.

“Well, I’m not afraid of Burnett,” was his comment. “Send the stuff down to-morrow.”

“I’ll have it here to-night,” answered Devons. “Good-day.”

“Good luck, my boy,” answered Hartley.

Not counting the wait the interview had not lasted ten minutes. When Devons came out on the street again he drew a long breath. If he had seen a taxi at that moment he would have been tempted to get in. Any other way of getting back to Joan with such news as this seemed clumsy and tedious.

But if he had only known it, Joan herself had not been idle in the meanwhile. She had done quite an unexpected and brilliant stroke of business on her own account. Devons had



not been gone from the office a half-hour before the door opened and a middle-aged man entered, glanced around, caught sight of her, and removed his hat. His hair was swept back from his forehead as though he were facing a strong wind.

“It said Devons Manufacturing Company upon the door,” he explained, as though to account for having entered so unceremoniously.

“This *is* the Devons Manufacturing Company,” she assured him.

The chemicals and kettles bore out the statement which, considering the young woman herself, he would still have been inclined to doubt. Either she was out of place here or the kettles were.

“Is Mr. Devons in?”

“No,” answered Joan. “He may be gone several hours.”

Forsythe studied his watch a moment, and then raised his eyes and studied the girl another moment.

“I’m sorry,” he ventured as though feeling his way; “I wanted particularly to see him this morning.”

“Is there anything I can do?” inquired Joan.

“I don’t know,” smiled Forsythe. “May I ask if you are associated with the business?”

“I’m the bookkeeper,” she announced.

“I see. Then you are in charge of the plant?”

“Until Mr. Devons returns,” she admitted with a trace of color.

“Perhaps, then, you will do quite as well,” suggested Forsythe. “All I wanted was to inquire a little more fully into his product. I wonder if you yourself are posted enough to tell me.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know much about it except that it is very wonderful. If you could come back this afternoon, I’m sure he’ll be in then.”

Forsythe shook his head.

“I only have an hour.”

He turned eagerly once more toward the laboratory end of the office.

“He makes it over there,” Joan informed him.

“I see.”

He stepped nearer, and Joan sensed his unspoken question.

“If you’re interested, you might look about,” she suggested graciously.

He took advantage of her offer instantly.

“Thanks. I will.”

He appeared to be very much interested in every detail, even to the extent of investigating all the labeled bottles of chemicals and some that were not labeled. He removed the corks from these and smelled the contents, and once even poured some out into a graduating glass and held it to the light. Occasionally he asked her a question, but without any very satisfactory results.

So he came to several jugs of the finished product, and this appeared to interest him most of all.

“I don’t suppose that as yet he is ready to put this on the market?” he inquired.

“Why, yes,” she answered quickly; “that is just exactly what he is doing. He has gone to-day to try to sell the little he has ready.”

“This?” inquired Forsythe.

She nodded.

“There isn’t very much of it. We have only just started.”

Forsythe straightened.

“Then if he had happened to be in I could have bought some myself,” he said. “I only want enough to give it a trial.”

“Can’t you come again?”

“Possibly. But there is nothing like taking advantage of the present. If you could let me have—say this much.”

He held up a jug.

“But I haven’t the slightest idea how much he asks for it.”

“I’m in the business myself, so I can tell you roughly. Ten dollars would be an extravagant price. But for safety’s sake I’ll double that.”

She met the man’s eyes. She had no reason for doubting his word.

“If you are quite sure, I don’t see why you shouldn’t have it,” she replied.

“I’m quite sure my price is right,” he answered. “If Mr. Devons can sustain it his fortune is made.”

“Oh, you think so?”

“There is no doubt about it,” he nodded gravely.

Then he took a wallet from his pocket and presented her with two ten-dollar bills.

“I pay cash,” he said.

She accepted the bills eagerly.

Then with a smile Forsythe picked up his jug and went out leaving her staring a little breathlessly at the money. It was the first cash transaction made by the Devons Manufacturing Company.

She hurried to her desk in the corner and opened a brand-new ledger book which she had bought only the day before. In her very best handwriting she made this entry:

“By one jug dressing \$20.00”

She wished there were some way she could reach Devons by telephone. It was difficult to wait for him with such news as this.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### NO TIME TO WASTE

DEVONS reached the office shortly after twelve and swung open the door with the announcement:

“I did it.”

Thereby he beat Joan by at least ten seconds, which is a wide margin when one stops to consider that races are often won by the fraction of a second. She had sprung from her seat behind the ledger as she heard his footsteps in the corridor, but he was so enthusiastically abrupt that it took her a few seconds longer to recover her balance. In his excitement he had seized her hand and that somehow or other only added to her confusion.

“Hartley was all against it at first,” he ran on. “But before I left he agreed to give it a thorough trial. I’m to take down to him to-day what I have in stock.”

“What you have in stock,” she replied vaguely, with a sudden sinking of the heart.

“There’s just about enough for a preliminary trial,” he answered. “It’s a great chance, Joan. This company is one of the largest users in the city, and if I make good with them—well, I won’t have to sit in any more outer offices.”

“How much did you have?” she stammered.

“About four gallons. But—what’s the matter?”

“I—I sold some of it.”

“Sold some?”

She went back to her desk and returned with the two ten-dollar bills. Her fingers were unsteady as she held them out to him.

“What’s this?” he demanded.

“It’s what he—he paid me.”

“Who? For what?”

“Oh!” she exclaimed, trembling back from the look in his eyes. “Did I do wrong?”

“I don’t understand yet just what you did do,” he answered with a swift glance around the laboratory.

He took her arm gently and led her to her chair behind the desk.

“Sit down,” he said. “Now—you didn’t sell any of the enamel?”

“All that was in the jug,” she nodded.

She pointed to the ledger. He saw the entry in her firm handwriting. Even then he was not fully convinced, but it was necessary for him to pause a moment before he went on. He tried his best to hold himself steady because she looked so frightened—so frightened and so adorable. Even in the midst of the worst he feared he could have stooped and kissed the top of her head and called it square—if in that way matters could honestly have been squared.

“Tell me from the beginning what happened,” he said.

“He—he came in—”

“Who came in?”

“I don’t know who he was. He wanted to see you.”

“Can you describe him?”

Ordinarily she could, but she was finding it difficult to think.

“He was a man about forty. His hair was brushed back.”

“He was rather stout and smooth-shaven?”

“Yes.”

It was uncanny how from so vague a description the picture of Forsythe stood out before him.

“Go on,” he urged.

“He—he wanted to look around, so I let him.”

Devons leaned back against the desk and gripped the edge of it with his fingers.

“Go on,” he repeated.

“He went over there and seemed very much interested. Then—then he wanted to buy some—for a test. He offered me this.”

She held out the bills again as though going back to them for justification.

“He—he went away with what you sold him?”

She nodded. Then she leaned forward.

“Oh! Did I make a mistake? Shouldn’t I have let him have it?”

Devons was trying to think it out. If it had been any one else but Forsythe, it would not have been so significant. But he had never liked the man from his first interview with him. That, however, was not important one way or the other, except as it might help explain the present incident. Of course, no decent man would have taken advantage of a woman like this to pry into laboratory secrets, so it seemed a fair deduction that he intended nothing legitimate with the enamel he had made off with. Yet, looking at it calmly, what was it possible for the fellow to do? The process was amply protected by patents. Against an unscrupulous man, however, patents sometimes do not count.

She was looking up anxiously.

“I made a mistake?” she trembled.

Then Devons took hold of himself. He stepped free of the desk and, looking down into her eyes, answered with a smile.

“It makes it a bit awkward about Hartley, that’s all,” he said. “But you couldn’t foresee that. And you sure charged a good stiff price.”

“You think it was enough?”

“Little woman,” he answered, “if we can get that price for all I make we’ll pay dividends within a month.”

The expression of relief that came into her eyes was worth something.

“I was afraid. You—you frightened me,” she said.

“I had no business to do that under any circumstances,” he answered. “So let’s take our twenty dollars and go out to lunch and forget the whole episode.”

She shook her head.

“You mustn’t lunch with your bookkeeper and you mustn’t be extravagant with the first money the firm has made,” she objected.

“But this is an especial occasion. Can’t we celebrate a little?”

“No,” she answered firmly.

“You aren’t a bookkeeper, anyway,” he objected. “You’re a partner.”

“Not during office hours.”

“Then I’ll give you an afternoon off. Will that make it right?”

“Not for me to lunch with you, but if you don’t need me I—I think I’d like to go home for the rest of the day.”

“You’re tired?” he asked anxiously.

“From all the business I’ve done?” she smiled. “No, it was rather exciting, but that isn’t the reason. Mother telephoned. I don’t think she is quite used to my new position yet.”

“I don’t wonder,” he answered. “I’m not either.”

“But I help a little?” she asked.

“A lot,” he hastened to assure her.

“You couldn’t go off and leave the office alone, could you?”

“Impossible.”

“Then—”

“I couldn’t get along without you,” he broke in.

“Oh!” she exclaimed.

She turned quickly to put on her hat and coat. It was just as well. It gave Devons time to think and so to check himself.

“Is Charles coming down?”

“At one,” she nodded.

It was now five minutes of one, so he went downstairs with her to the waiting limousine and helped her in. She turned before the door closed to ask:

“You’re going to lunch now?”

“Soon,” he nodded.

“I’ll be here at nine to-morrow,” she assured him.

He stood on the walk until the machine disappeared from sight. Then, turning quickly, he hurried back to the office. He locked the door and threw off his coat. He had no time to waste on food. If he was to deliver the proper quantity of enamel to Hartley by to-morrow, he had his work cut out for him, not only for the rest of the day, but the whole night. If everything went right he could do it in eighteen hours. Everything *must* go right. To a man like Hartley a promise was a promise.

Devons strode to the rear of the laboratory and turned on the electric switch that heated the big kettles.



## CHAPTER XXIV

### A VACATION

DICKY BURNETT left about the middle of March for Palm Beach. It was his father's suggestion, and Dicky fell in with it principally because it would give him a legitimate excuse for writing to Joan. If he could not see her, he had much better be a thousand miles away than in the same city. It would be less of a strain. Of late he had been doing nothing but search the crowds for her like a private detective hunting for a lost person.

In the office he was impossible. He was in fact a good deal of a nuisance both to Forsythe and his father. He particularly interfered unconsciously with the latter's freedom of movement. By degrees Burnett senior had turned over to Forsythe practically all his own work because of lack of time to attend to it himself. In many ways his habits resembled a good deal those of his son. He still reached the office early, but he was out again by ten and seldom returned until after three. By then he was too tired to do much more than attend to the routine matters requiring his signature.

At Palm Beach Dicky did his best to enjoy himself, and every one, including the hotel management, did his best to help him. He ran across Diblee, who introduced him at the country club, and a group of very agreeable people who were succeeding extraordinarily well in forgetting that such a city as New York existed. As far as he could judge, nothing in particular remained in their consciousness but blue sky and palm trees and green grass and music and pleasant drinks and laughing eyes. There was one especially nice girl whose name was Constance—Constance Shirley. She was slight and young and seemed to divine at once his unhappiness. She had big blue eyes and danced like a bit of thistledown, and was always seeking the air after each dance. And she had a way of tempting a man to talk of what was deep within him at such times because she gave the impression that she would

understand. Not only understand but comfort a fellow. It was surprising how often her soft hand accidentally brushed his and what opportunities she offered him to talk of matters of sentiment.

Yet always at the speaking point Dicky paused. It seemed like sacrilege to discuss Joan, even indirectly, with any other woman. With her always uppermost in his mind it seemed like sacrilege to discuss even abstract problems of sentiment. So generally he lighted a cigarette and drifted into silence by the side of this Constance, staring dreamily and alone at the wonderful Southern night sky which is as fickle in its sentiment as a rondeau of François Villon. It urges a youth to love with the nearest. Love is love and a man but a man and woman but a woman. If tender lips and warm hands are near, a man is a fool to ignore them, for life at best is short and youth but a brief portion of life.

Yet Dicky always paused even when the nights were fairest. The girl by his side was baffled and stung and made eager by those long silences. Covertly she studied the sadness about his lips which came to her like a challenge.

One night she said to him boldly, "Mr. Burnett, I think you're in love."

He was startled, but he answered only, "So?"

"Are you?" she insisted.

"I'll leave you to guess," he replied.

"I guess you are."

"Why?"

"Because you are sad."

"Does love make one sad?" he asked.

"Either very happy or very sad."

"Perhaps both," he suggested.

"At the same time?" she laughed.

"It does sound absurd," he admitted.

But that night, when in relief he found himself back alone in his room, that seemed as fair an analysis of his present mood as any. As miserable as he was he would not, as the price of happiness, have surrendered his love for Joan. Hopeless as now he felt that passion to be, he clung to it as the greatest joy in his life. So he felt he always would.

He had telephoned her before he left and asked to see her, but she had answered that it was impossible that morning.

“I may have some good news for you soon,” she said.

When he pressed her for an explanation, it turned out to be nothing but good news concerning that fool business scheme of hers. It only emphasized how lightly she thought of him.

She had written twice since then—the sort of letters one might expect from a private secretary. He had written at least a dozen times—the sort of letters that might be expected to make a private secretary’s cheeks burn. Yet he doubted if they accomplished even that much.

In this fashion, then, he frittered away a month without improving either his physical condition, which did not need improving, or his mental condition, which did. At this point he received a letter from his mother which further disturbed him. She ran on for a couple of pages about nothing in particular, like warning him again to be careful not to get drowned if he went in bathing, and then said:

“I’m a little bit worried about your father. He is not sleeping well and is losing weight. He blames it on his diet and I wondered if perhaps he was not carrying it too far. He is very apt to do that unless some one watches him. If you wrote him that he might, under the circumstances, eat a little pastry, I think it might help him. However, use your own judgment. He won’t weigh himself, but I am sure he has lost at least fifteen pounds since you went.”

When Dicky read that he sent the following wire to his father:

Don't overdo the thing. Have some pumpkin pie.

But in spite of this action he was not fully satisfied. All through the rest of the day he kept thinking over that paragraph in his mother's letter. While diet might account for his father's loss of weight, which was good for him, it did not account for his sleeplessness. That was more apt to be caused by worry. This helped him to recall several peculiar incidents which had occurred preceding his departure, when he had not found his father in the office and had received anything but a satisfactory explanation from Forsythe. At the time he had not thought much about these things, because at night he found his father so normal that he always forgot to inquire further into them. But now that he was in search of symptoms he went back to them.

The upshot of the matter was that he said good-bye to Constance that evening—a curiously easy thing to do—and took the train the next morning for home. He reached New York at six o'clock in the afternoon of the next day and went direct to the house, where he found his father at dinner. He was startled by what a month had done for him. Offhand he would have said the man had lost twenty-five pounds and taken on almost as many years. His eyes looked heavy, and he sat listlessly at the table as Dicky came in. He tried to rouse himself, however, but it was manifestly an artificial attempt.

“What the deuce you been doing to yourself?” demanded Dicky as he took his hand. By the side of his lean, browned son he looked worse than ever and was conscious of it.

“I guess I ought to have gone with you,” he faltered.

“I should say so,” nodded Dicky. “What's he been up to, Mother?”

“I'm afraid he's been working too hard,” she ventured.

“Hang it all, I thought you were old enough to be left alone,” exclaimed Dicky.

“Don't you worry about me,” growled Burnett with a trace of his old-time spirit.

“We won’t,” answered Dicky, “but believe me, we’re going to do something about it. You’ve got to get out of that office more. Golf is what you need. I saw a lot of the old boys down there on the links and it put new life into them.”

“Golf be hanged.”

Once or twice before Dicky had threatened golf, and everything considered it appeared a worse punishment than whole wheat bread.

“In the meanwhile, until the links are opened, we can get into condition by walking home every day. We’ll begin to-morrow.”

“Eh?”

“To-morrow. What’s the earliest you can leave the office?”

“Not until after three,” exclaimed Burnett nervously.

“I’ll be there at half-past, then,” declared Dicky.

## CHAPTER XXV

### DANGER

FORSYTHE found awaiting him one morning two letters which afforded him anything but pleasant reading. One was from Hartley, brief and to the point:

*Doggett Shoe Company  
New York, N.Y., April 3—*

BURNETT MANUFACTURING COMPANY

NEW YORK, N.Y.

DEAR FORSYTHE:

I beg, herewith, to cancel our order for all future deliveries of enamel leather dressing.

Sincerely yours  
E.A. HARTLEY

The other was from Craig, chief consulting chemist of the firm. It was a detailed analysis of sample number 8472, forwarded on March 8th. The most significant line was this:

“The oil used appears to have undergone some process impossible to analyze, which makes it particularly adaptable for this type of work.”

It was a process of manufacture, then, rather than any concrete formula. As such it lay beyond the scope of Craig’s keen eyes and laboratory equipment.

Forsythe leaned forward, opened a little drawer in his desk, and took out a sample of enamel leather. He studied the smooth, glossy surface, crushed it in his hand, and studied it again. He twisted it around his finger and studied it further. It remained exactly as before. It was the finest bit of enamel he had ever seen in his life. There was no doubt about it. He had to face that fact—and many others.

The best organization in the world could not buck any such superior article as that in the open market. That is—by any ordinary method. But an extraordinary situation called for extraordinary methods. Here is where Forsythe sat back in his chair and squinted at the bit of leather on his desk.

The future of the Burnett Manufacturing Company was at stake, which was not so important as the fact that this involved Forsythe's own future. He had put in here, not only the best end of his life, but his money. Only last January Burnett had sold him a small portion of the capital stock as a reward for his faithful services—stock that could not have been bought in the open market at any price. And that had not been the end of his plan. He had expected to buy more later—a great deal more later. He was prepared, if at any time Burnett should need money badly, to buy as much more as he wished to sell.

If Burnett should need money badly—there was the nub of his far-sighted scheme. It explained his motive in having introduced young Benton, of Toole & Co., to Burnett—Benton, who had furnished the inside information that had netted Burnett five thousand in steel on his first venture in stocks. If Forsythe had observed Burnett correctly for twenty years, that was the spark which would kindle the flame. The man was disappointed in his son and craved, to offset this, some more exciting game than the conduct of a business that was running itself. So Forsythe had urged and so it appeared to be working out. He had heard that Burnett had been plunging more and more heavily this last month. The latter had hit it right once or twice, but give him time and he was bound to lose. Now this young whipper-snapper of a Devons had come along.

Forsythe caught his breath. This new complication completely altered the situation. If on top of Devons, Burnett went broke, he would drag down with him the whole business and every one connected with it. The only possible avenue of escape now was to buy out this new-comer. That would take money. It might take a lot of money. Every day he waited it would take more. This letter from Hartley was but the beginning.

Again Forsythe squinted at the ceiling. Only two courses were open; either he must buy out Devons, or break him. That was easier said than done. So was everything for that matter. What the deuce had that girl been doing in Devons's office? She did not belong there. She had called herself a bookkeeper, but she was no more a bookkeeper than she was an office boy. Whoever she was she did not belong there, and when a woman is where she doesn't belong there are always interesting possibilities. Forsythe had never seen her before, but she was of a type with which the society columns of the Sunday papers had made him more or less familiar. There was something about her nose and mouth and the poise of her head which placed her there.

But this Devons had come out of the West. Was he some modern Lochinvar?

Forsythe turned to the telephone and called up his friend Moran, of the "New York Journal."

"If you aren't busy come down to the office," he said.

"What's new?" questioned Moran.

"Nothing much. I may be able to give you a line on a good story."

"Right," replied Moran; "I'll be there in half an hour."

He was acting on a slim chance, to be sure, but at least Moran would find out for him who the girl was. If she turned out to be no one, that at least would throw some further light on Devons.

The next thing to do was to get hold of Burnett. Here was an even more difficult problem. He must find some way of working him out of the very danger he had led him into. Burnett's danger was now his own danger.

Moran came in with a cheerful expectancy that irritated Forsythe. He selected a chair, lighted a cigarette, shoved back his hat a trifle, and inquired:

"What's on your mind?"



It produced on Forsythe the same effect as the solicitous inquiry of an undertaker as to one's health. This time, however, Moran had the advantage. He had been sent for.

"Nothing very much," answered Forsythe cautiously,—"only—well, my curiosity has been aroused, and I thought you might satisfy it and at the same time get a lead you could use yourself."

"Let 'er go."

"I have a young friend who has just started in business. I drifted into his office the other day and met his bookkeeper. I want to find out who she is."

"Then what?"

"That's all," admitted Forsythe. "She doesn't belong there. Looks to me as though she belonged somewhere along Fifth Avenue instead of in a loft building."

"Society girl?"

"Possibly."

"Pretty?"

"All of that."

Moran nodded.

"Sometimes they are all of that and live off Sixth Avenue."

"Sometimes, but I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut this one doesn't."

"What's the address?"

Forsythe supplied it. Then he leaned forward.

"See here, Moran—if you dig up anything, I want you to come back to me first."

"I get you."

"I'll make it worth your while."

"I've no objection," answered Moran, "but honest it doesn't sound to me like very hot stuff."

“I’m not saying it is. But—have a smoke?”

Forsythe drew a cigar from his pocket and handed it to Moran. The latter took it automatically and slipped it into his pocket.

“I wish you could get after that to-day.”

“I’ll drop around some time this morning,” agreed Moran.

Forsythe saw young Burnett pass the door with his father and rose abruptly.

Dicky came in a few moments after Moran had left.

“How’s everything?” he asked pleasantly.

“I didn’t know you were back, Mr. Burnett,” replied Forsythe.

“Blew in yesterday. Any mail?”

“I don’t think so.”

Forsythe glanced toward the private office of Burnett senior. The door was closed. He had never considered Burnett junior as of being of any possible use in this crisis, but suddenly an idea came to him. It might be that the easiest way to reach the father was through the son. Dicky had moved to his desk and was carelessly poking about among the various trade circulars which Forsythe always tossed over there after he read them.

“Have you noticed any change in your father since you went away?” began Forsythe.

“He’s lost weight,” nodded Dicky.

“It seemed so to me.”

“Been working too hard.”

“You think so?”

Dicky glanced up.

“What else?”

“He hasn’t had as much as usual to do here,” answered Forsythe.

“Eh?”

“I’ve tried to take as much as possible off his hands, but he’s been out of the office a good deal for the last month.”

“Out of the office?”

“Leaves here sometimes at ten and doesn’t get back until three.”

Instead of looking surprised, as Forsythe expected, Dicky sat down in the chair before his desk and appeared uninterested. The reason for that was that he did not like the idea of discussing his father’s affairs with his office manager. As a matter of fact, he was considerably disturbed.

“Those are stock-brokers’ hours,” suggested Forsythe.

“So?”

“I’ve been wondering—”

Dicky looked up, and Forsythe paused.

“Of course, in a way it isn’t any of my business,” Forsythe explained.

Dicky nodded as though agreeing fully with that statement. Forsythe flushed.

“But in another way it is,” he went on.

“How?”

“Your father was good enough to allow me to buy a small block of capital stock.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“So we’re partners in a sense.”

Dicky frowned.

“In this particular business. But what has that to do with my father’s personal affairs outside of this business?”

“This,” replied Forsythe with more spirit; “we’re up against a new kind of competition that may call for a good deal of extra capital in the next few months. If your father drops too much on the Street—”

“You know that he *has* been dropping a good deal on the Street?” interrupted Dicky.

“I know he has been putting in most of his time down there, and I know he’s only a lamb at the game.”

“This competition you speak of?” inquired Dicky.

Forsythe reached into his desk drawer again and pulled out the sample of enameled leather he had lately been examining.

“Look at that!”

Dicky took it in his hands and felt of it. “Well?”

“It’s the best thing that has come on the market in ten years, that’s all,” explained Forsythe. “We’ve got to meet it or go out of business.”

“How do you propose to meet it?”

“Buy the process if possible. If we can’t do that—”

“Yes?”

“We’ll have to think up some other way.”

“What other way?”

“I’m not sure yet,” answered Forsythe, “but we’ve got to do something pretty soon. And it’s going to take money.”

He handed Dicky the letter from the Doggett Shoe Company. Dicky read it through.

“He was one of our best customers,” explained Forsythe.

“Has Mr. Burnett seen this yet?”

“Not yet. I was going to talk it over with him this morning.”

“Well, I wouldn’t,” said Dicky.

“The sooner he understands the situation, the better,” declared Forsythe.

“I’m not so sure of that,” returned Dicky. “At any rate, I don’t want him bothered with this for a day or two. In the

meanwhile, can't you make some sort of a proposition to this crowd?"

"I've got something started already."

"That's the stuff. Let me know how it comes out."

He rose.

"In the meanwhile," he concluded, as he went toward his father's office, "keep your shirt on and don't mention this to Mr. Burnett. I'll take over his share of this new responsibility."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A NEW STENOGRAPHER

THE plant of the Devons Manufacturing Company was running to capacity, such as that was. Devons was working twelve hours a day trying to fill his orders—orders that came in unsolicited. And Joan was trying her best to keep up her end of the work, though, as the correspondence increased, this was becoming more difficult. She had rented a typewriter, and, though by exceeding care and close application, she could in the course of an hour pick out with fair, if wobbly, success whole practice sentences, she still found it considerably easier to write her letters in long hand. The result in a way was effective, because there were few men who did not instinctively select first from their mail envelopes addressed in her bold, feminine handwriting.

The bookkeeping, too, had become considerably more complicated since she made her first entry, and not all the new customers were as eager to pay cash as Forsythe had been. Then she had to keep another book for the supplies purchased, and they developed daily into a longer and longer list. Take it all in all, she had enough to do.

From Devons's point of view she had too much to do. Whenever he had a minute to glance in her direction he found her scowling over the ledgers like a worried school-girl. Sometimes he had to speak two or three times to call her attention to the fact that it was the lunch hour. Had he not kept track of it himself, there would have been days when she would not have lunched at all. Neither would he, had he only himself to consider. It was an effort to stop, but, hang it all, he was responsible for having got her down here and the least he could do now was to take care of her.

Not that this was by any means an unpleasant duty. Rather was it a disconcertingly agreeable task. When it is necessary to observe a thermostat to the fraction of a degree,

watch in hand, and keep in mind at the same time sundry other details marking the difference between success and failure, it may be pleasant enough to have in the rear of the office quite the most beautiful and adorable and altogether the most wonderful woman in the world; but not to be distracted by that fact requires a degree of self-control that in time amounts to a strain. Scientific laboratory processes are not supposed to be involved with dark eyes and a pretty mouth unjustly disturbed by a set of books concerned with figures. Whenever he saw her puzzling over a column, or whenever he heard the timid click of the typewriter as she laboriously strove to strike the right key, he kept saying to himself that she did not belong there. She was not meant to be disturbed by anything. Because she was, he felt guilty.

Even when his thoughts took a pleasanter course and ran ahead to what the future promised, to keep track of the temperature of a kettle of linseed oil at the same time got on his nerves. Whether the stuff became too hot or not hot enough appeared an indifferent matter as soon as he indulged in the pastime of multiplying the profit per gallon by the number of gallons he was manufacturing at present, and multiplying that again by the number he could legitimately look forward to, based on the increase of orders this last week. And that was not touching the wide market beyond this single city. It was enough to make a man dizzy in and of itself. Translate that income into terms of what it meant to him for her—she being at that very moment within calling distance of his voice—and the wonder is that he succeeded in doing anything at all.

Yet he held himself amazingly steady. Day after day she came into the office in the morning like some breath of spring, and though the man within him leaped to meet her with eager, unsatisfied kisses,—there were moments when he had to hold himself rigid not to venture after not having seen her since the day before,—he merely nodded a curt good-morning and went on with his work. It was not easy. Nor was it easy, when at noon he went out to lunch with her, to remember that after all she was only loaning herself to him for a little while. Contingencies might arise at any time that would sweep her entirely out of his life again. To be sure, he felt more and more

secure as the days went by, but he never allowed himself to be over-optimistic. As his process bade fair to supersede the old, another process might appear to supersede his. It was too soon to feel secure. But when that time arrived, and he could look her fair in the eyes and bid her come with him back into the world in which she belonged, then—it was a heady dream. It sounded at times like an impossible dream. Yet if you multiplied the profit per gallon with the number of gallons—

He had been looking around for the last few days. The doctor in the next office had spoken to him about a very good stenographer and bookkeeper whom he was afraid he must soon let go. If Devons could use her, he would find her an exceptionally efficient girl. It was not the nine dollars a week that made Devons hesitate—he would take that much out of his hide if necessary to relieve Joan,—but it was the fear that if she did not have something to do here she would not stay at all. His ideal would be to have her come in during the forenoon of every day and just stay around for an hour or two.

“Is the work getting too hard for you?” he asked her one day.

“No,” she answered unhesitatingly.

“I don’t want you to get all tired out,” he said solicitously.

She laughed at that. “Do I look tired?”

He was forced to admit that she did not. On the contrary, she seemed to be vitalized by a new alertness. She entered the office in the morning with a quicker step and a fresher glow in her cheeks. This was partly explained by the fact that now she walked some of the way downtown, generally leaving Charles at Third Avenue and Thirtieth Street, and continuing the remainder of the distance on foot. This necessitated arising a little earlier, but that was no hardship, because she found herself waking at seven. With no evening engagements she retired by ten, which gave her a longer rest than she had enjoyed for five years—or at least a different sort of rest. She woke up refreshed in body and soul. She sprang from bed with the zest of an athlete, and, forgetting that such a person as Henriette existed, completed her own toilet in half an hour. To



be able to do this was in itself no small luxury. It was good to be alone in the early morning with all the world about her fresh and noiseless. It gave her a feeling of intimacy with herself and her surroundings. This was her room and these were her things in the daytime as before they had been only in the dark at night. She felt herself a part of the day now—a part of the big, stirring city which she knew was also awakening at this hour. She was one of the hundred thousands that came to life like Nature with the rising sun—that took their part in the day's work, and so, in a sense, became an integral part of the universe. It gave significance to details which had been merely negative. Her little four-posted bed became a positive factor in her life because it offered her rest after the day's work; the dimity curtains at the window, the paper on the wall, the rugs on the floor, became associated with the personal side of her because they were there when she came in with her mind still active with the finished business of the day just gone, and greeted her in the morning when she rose with all her thoughts of the work which lay ahead. They did not mean anything when she came in listless or merely physically tired. It is doubtful if before she could have described minutely any of these exterior things. Now she could have sketched with accuracy the pattern in the rugs.

It was to a less extent so downstairs. She had her breakfast alone in the big dining-room, and she came to know that room—to feel at home in that room just because it was helping to make her ready for the tasks ahead. Breakfast itself ceased to be merely a concession to nature. She enjoyed her toast and coffee and eggs. She ate with a relish that caused Jeffrey to temper in his own mind the verdict of madness with which in the kitchen his mistress was being accused. To be sure, it was most unusual for a young lady to rise at seven and dress herself unassisted; it was most unusual for a young lady, not starting on a journey, to leave the house shortly after half-past seven; it was most unusual for a young lady to remain at home after dinner night after night. But if such a strange procedure not only improved the young lady's appetite and color, but her spirits as well, it was going a bit far to hint that she was losing her mind. Stranger methods than this were

resorted to in search of just such results. He had heard of barefoot walking at dawn in the parks, to mention only one.

It was when Joan left Charles at Third Avenue and hurried on alone, that the color in her cheeks deepened. It was curious how, to so tiny an adventure, she responded. But until these last few weeks it is doubtful if ever she had walked alone three blocks in New York City, and then only upon the one avenue. The other avenues were but numerical facts lying either side of Fifth, made necessary by Fifth, as of course one may not have five without one, two, three, and four, or, counting backwards, one reaches fifth again through ten, nine, eight, seven, and six.

But this Third Avenue was now taking on an individuality of its own. It seemed to have nothing whatever to do with Fifth. It was almost like a street in another city. She was surprised by the number of other girls she met and with whom she walked shoulder to shoulder in silence—all hurrying into buildings similar to the building she now called hers. Many were of her own age, and in time there were some she felt as though she knew. They were in a way like Mildred—like sisters of Mildred. She would have liked to speak to them if only to say “Good-morning.” Sometimes she met their eyes and sometimes she smiled back into them, but more often than not they turned away without response, as though refusing to admit her as one of them. At first she did not understand this. It was a trim, confident little body from the next office, whom she met several times in the elevator, who gave her a hint by staring one day overlong at the sables she wore. She never wore those down here again because she noticed that none of the other girls wore sables. After that—it may have been merely an illusion—she thought the girls became more friendly.

It was at about this time that the elevator boy began to call her by name in the morning. It was always, “Good-morning, Miss Fairburne.”

And she answered, “Good-morning, Jimmy.”

She did not know how he learned her name or where she learned his name. There seemed to be some vague bond of brotherhood among those who met on their way to work in the

morning. It was a little bit like on shipboard, where somehow people come to know each other before the end of the voyage even without formal introductions.

All these things Joan appreciated. These new faces and interests enlarged her world as, to a lesser degree, did all those unknown people with whom she corresponded in the name of the Devons Manufacturing Company. They all helped to take her out of herself.

Just as Mark Devons did. She never thought of herself—her old self—in connection with him. She did not associate him any longer with that room he had occupied in her own home. Since the evening she had visited him in Mullen Court he had always remained there in her thoughts—there and in the office. It was much pleasanter to think of him in his own surroundings. They were part of him and he a part of them. In their simplicity and unconventionality they typified him. She liked the directness of the life they stood for. They emphasized the man rather than his trappings. In remembering the little attic room with its refreshing bareness, it seemed as though he could not possibly live anywhere else.

Here in the office he wore the long olive-green laboratory coat he had used at Tech. It buttoned to his chin and came to his feet, and was all stained with oil and burned full of holes by acids. It neutralized all of him but his hands and his face, so that one was never conscious of his dress. She liked him so. And she liked to watch him at work when he was not aware of her gaze. She had to be careful about this because every now and then he looked suddenly. Once or twice he had caught her, and then she was never able to control the rush of color to her cheeks. After she turned back to her work, she was sometimes left quite breathless for a full minute or two.

Yet it was difficult not to admire the confident way in which he went about his tasks. He was so sure of every movement of his steady hands. He was so coolly accurate, so alert, so intense. This business was an expression in him of his desire to do, to accomplish, to play his part in the big, vibrant world of doers about him.

And she in her little way was playing her part also. As yet she could not do very much and that little clumsily, but she thought she saw every day an improvement in her typewriting. Doubtless the girl in the next office would have laughed could she have seen her stabbing erratically with her forefingers at the keys, forgetting very often to strike the space bar at all between words. Doubtless the girl in the next office could have done the same work better in one half the time and with half the effort. She was a very capable-looking young lady of a sharp, precise type. Joan had overheard the doctor recommending her highly to Devons.

“She is quick and accurate,” he had said, “but if business doesn’t pick up I may have to let her go. If I do, you’d better grab her.”

“Thanks,” Devons had answered; “I’ll keep her in mind.”

For a day or two Joan had felt more or less piqued by that conversation. Devons had not replied as she expected him to reply. He seemed to admit that in the future this other might be a possibility. She applied herself more industriously than ever to the sentence, “Now is the time for all good men to rally to the aid of their country,” with the result that she cut down her slips from ten to six and in the process almost forgot Miss Manning entirely.

Then, coming in one morning a little later than usual, she found Miss Manning sitting in her chair, behind her typewriter, busily opening the early mail. Dazed she looked swiftly about the office for Devons. He was not there.

“This is Miss Fairburne?” inquired Miss Manning.

Joan must have answered, though she was not conscious of it.

“I am Miss Manning,” the girl informed her. “Mr. Devons asked me to give you this note.”

Joan took the note and for a moment held it in her hand.

“Where is Mr. Devons?” she asked.

“He has gone out.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Perhaps the note will explain,” suggested Miss Manning indifferently.

Joan tore open the envelope. The note was brief.

“Dear Joan,” it read, “please to go home. I will try to get in touch with you there some time to-day.”

## CHAPTER XXVII

### REAL NEWS

THE story Moran had run into was bigger than he anticipated. As a rule the layman's conception of what makes good reading does not measure up to professional standards, but in this case it was necessary to give Forsythe credit for having the real news instinct. A daughter of the Fairburnes working as a stenographer was essentially good stuff. Moran had the word of the society editor that the Fairburnes were the real thing and had been for a couple of generations. One had only to read a list of Fairburne's clubs if skeptical.

But even so the story would have had considerably less value had not the girl been so good-looking. To be sure, the story would have been headed just the same, "Beautiful Society Girl, a stenographer," even if she had been red-headed, cross-eyed, and snub-nosed, but it added a great deal to its worth to be able actually to come across with photographs to justify such a statement. And an eye for the dramatic value of pictures was Moran's specialty. He did not bother Joan herself because he did not care to run the risk of frightening her away. He merely followed her to her home one afternoon, and thereby learned her name and address. The society editor and the graveyard supplied certain other details, and the elevator boy at the loft building unconsciously revealed her business habits.

"She gets down here about eight every morning," he informed Moran.

At half-past six the next morning Moran had Bill Somers, one of the staff photographers, stationed opposite the Fairburne house to snap her as she stepped into her waiting limousine to go to work. It would be difficult to beat that for a picture. They then followed her to the point where she stepped out and proceeded on foot. Another corker! Finally they took her as she entered the building off Third Avenue. He found in

stock, to serve as an effective contrast, certain pictures which had been taken of her at the time of her début in an exquisite gown from Paris which revealed the beautiful curves of her neck and arms.

Armed with these and a half-column story which, though somewhat vague in details, was still adequate to carry the pictures, Moran appeared before Forsythe late one afternoon.

“I want to run this Sunday after next,” he informed Forsythe.

“Steady,” Forsythe warned. “Remember I have an option on these.”

He looked them over with satisfaction. The job could not have been better done had he done it himself—which was a good deal for a man like Forsythe to admit. A little more might have been made of Devons, but he could write that in himself. He rose.

“Leave these to me.”

“Eh?”

“If I can use these as I think I can, I’ll pay you big.”

Moran looked uncomfortable.

“I’m risking my job.”

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” replied Forsythe sententiously.

“I know, but—hang it all, you aren’t going to try to hold up the girl or anything like that?”

It was a strange speech for Moran to make. He had never spoken to the lady in question and never seen her except at a distance, but somehow she had made a hit with him. He liked the way she carried herself. She was not only good-looking but something more—a whole lot more. She looked like a good sport—the kind a man doesn’t like to hurt. Besides, he might occasionally have done a thing or two in his life that was not strictly professional, but he had never before been involved in anything such as Forsythe’s eyes suggested. Had it been

possible he would have pulled out of the whole affair at that moment.

Forsythe scented danger. He forced a smile.

“It’s the man I’m after,” he explained. “It’s sort of one on him, that’s all. Don’t worry.”

“I’ll be back for those to-morrow morning,” said Moran uneasily.

“Right,” nodded Forsythe. “Good-day.”

Moran went out reluctantly. No sooner had the door closed behind him than with a cautious glance toward Burnett’s office, Forsythe picked up the telephone and called up the Devons Manufacturing Company.

It was the girl whose picture he held in his hand who answered him.

“Mr. Devons, please,” said Forsythe.

After an interval Devons responded.

“My name is Forsythe,” he announced. “Yes—of the Burnett Manufacturing Company. I want to see you to-night on a very important matter. No, I can’t tell you over the telephone. Yes, partly business and partly personal. If you’ll come into the Waldorf lobby I’ll pick you up near the desk. At eight. You understand this is really important? At eight, then, to-night, near the clerk’s desk at the Waldorf. Good-bye.”

Forsythe hung up the receiver. His forehead was moist. This was an unusual piece of business even for him. He hoped it would not be necessary to carry it through, but if it were—well, in a crisis it was every man for himself.

Forsythe entered the hotel at seven, and in the next hour drank several cocktails. This in itself was enough to prove that the work ahead of him was unusual because he had not drunk as much as that in the last five years. But the effect was to give him considerably more confidence of a certain swaggering kind. After all, a man who has worked as hard as he had for ten years had certain rights. One of these rights was to protect himself—by fair means if possible, but if that were not



possible, then by any other means he could find. Business in a certain sense was war. He had seen worse things done than he proposed, in both war and business.

Yet if Devons had not come in fifteen minutes early, the chances are that Forsythe would have needed another drink. The effect of the stimulant did not last long. The sight of Devons almost undid the efforts of the last hour. He extended his hand and Devons took it with a trace of reluctance. Forsythe found a couple of vacant chairs in a corner and led the young man over to them.

“I wasn’t sure that you would remember me,” began Forsythe. “You came to me last fall.”

“I remember you perfectly,” replied Devons, “I think you’ve been to my office since then.”

Forsythe started.

“That’s so,” answered Forsythe with an awkward laugh; “I guess I was one of your first customers.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t in at the time.”

“Your stenographer proved very capable. I take it she is your stenographer.”

“No,” answered Devons, “she isn’t.”

“Really?”

He waited as though for an explanation; waited as though an explanation were necessary.

“She’s my partner,” Devons informed him.

Forsythe raised his brows.

“She’s a mighty attractive partner if I may say so,” he replied.

“I don’t see any occasion for your saying so,” Devons replied sharply.

“Is there any harm in it?”

“It’s beside the point. I don’t suppose you called me down here for that.”

Forsythe's face hardened. He resented the impudence of the youngster.

"Yes and no," he replied. "Let's go back a little. You came to me last fall with a proposition to buy your new enamel."

"Which you turned down," Devons reminded him.

"Yes."

"With a warning that I'd come back."

"Did I? I'd forgotten. Perhaps you'll come back yet."

"I doubt it."

"At any rate, I'm ready to make it worth your while. I've had time since then to test it a bit. Frankly it has turned out better than I thought it would."

"I'm glad you can recommend it."

Forsythe flushed.

"Are you still in the market?" he demanded.

"I can't accept any more orders just at present," replied Devons.

"That isn't what I mean. Are you still ready to sell the patent rights?"

"No."

"I'm ready to make you a generous offer."

"I'm not ready to listen to any offer."

Forsythe leaned forward.

"Look here, my boy," he went on earnestly, "don't lose your head. You have a good enamel there, but I've been long enough in this business to know that's only half the game. A plant and organization back of your product is the other half. You'll find out that as you go on. Maybe you can handle your orders now, but you're only scratching the surface. Why can't we pull together on this new proposition—say on some royalty basis? Believe me, you need us more than we need you."

“You’re coming to me: I’m not going to you,” Devons reminded him.

“That only proves you’re not as experienced a business man as you might be,” snapped Forsythe.

“Perhaps.”

“I’ll venture to say that on a ten per cent royalty we could make more money for you in a month than you will be able to make in a year.”

“So?”

“Because we have the plant and organization to cover the market quickly and thoroughly.”

Devons nodded.

“You’re right about your plant. You aren’t in the market with that, are you?”

“What?” gasped Forsythe.

“I’ll have to have more room before long. If you’re in a position to make a reasonable price—”

Forsythe smiled—a wicked smile.

“You certainly have your nerve with you,” he cut in.

“How?”

“Are you ready to pay a quarter of a million?”

“Are you?” Devons parried instantly.

“Is that your price?”

“I might consider that much cash.”

Forsythe was still smiling. “That’s too much,” he answered quietly; “couldn’t you take off the matter of two hundred thousand or so?”

“Not even a dollar. I’m not trying to sell.”

“That’s quite clear. I think I could do better with your—partner.”

“We’ll leave her out of the conversation.”

Forsythe reached in his pocket.

“That reminds me. I told you my business was partly personal.”

He drew out a package of papers and photographs.

“I have a friend in the newspaper game,” he explained as he held them in his hand. “He came to me to make inquiries about you. He showed me these and I asked him to hold up the story until I showed them to you. You may find them interesting.”

He handed them to Devons.

“These are copies,” he observed as the man took them.

Forsythe sat back in his chair where he could watch the young man’s face. If it had been a question as to just how effective a weapon he had, the moment Devons caught sight of the pictures it was no longer a question. He saw Devons first flush and then grow pale.

“What the devil are they?” Devons demanded.

“They explain themselves, don’t they?” queried Forsythe.

Devons went over the pictures and read the typewritten manuscript. He read it with skin afire. Probably he had glanced through half a hundred such stories about other people with indifferent interest before now. But this—this was sacrilege. It was nothing short of that. It was holding Joan up to the public gaze as shamelessly as though he were parading her through the streets behind a brass band. It was something that would maul her sensitive soul; something that she would shrink back from with her arm over her eyes. And all through the narrative her name had been linked with his in a way that by subtle innuendo left those so inclined to read between the lines what they would. Then there were the blatant pictures—including one of him which he recognized as having appeared in his class album. Underneath it had been scrawled “Mr. Mark Devons, manager of the Devons Manufacturing Company.”

It was as though this were written in red ink. It was as though it were an accusation of some sort.

He turned upon Forsythe. He spoke slowly. His fists were clenched.

“You damned yellow dog,” he breathed.

“Easy, my boy,” returned Forsythe; “that doesn’t strike me as the kind of language to use to a man who is trying to do a friendly act for you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I took the trouble to show you this before it was printed.”

“Why?”

Forsythe shrugged his shoulders.

“Do you want it printed?”

“You—you wouldn’t dare do a thing of that sort!”

“It isn’t my affair.”

“It must be stopped. It—it would kill her.”

“Well?” inquired Forsythe.

“Let me see the man who wrote it.”

“These were given to me in confidence.”

“Then you—Good Lord, Forsythe, you wouldn’t do this to a woman? She’d take anything like this hard. It’s unfair to her. It would hurt her unjustly.”

“Why mix me up in it?” Forsythe broke out impatiently. “It’s the business of a newspaper man to print a good story where he finds it. I didn’t write it.”

“You mean it can’t be stopped?”

“I didn’t say that. Of course, I’m willing to do what I can. But under the circumstances there is no particular reason why I should, is there?”

Devons gripped his jaws.

“Forsythe,” he said, “if we were out in the open I’d take a chance on pounding you to a jelly.”

Forsythe's own jaws came together.

"Besides the fact that it is not at all a certainty you'd succeed, it wouldn't do you any special good."

"It would do me a lot of good—a lot of good," nodded Devons.

"Admitting that, then, would it do the girl any good?"

Devons winced. Obviously it would not. The story would go on just the same. It would take its regular course until it shrieked itself forth some Sunday morning to amuse a few hundred people for five minutes after their breakfast. But the memory of it would last much longer. They would point at her on the street. They would recognize her in the theater. Her friends might shun her.

It could not be, that was all. It began to dawn on him what Forsythe was about. He turned once again to the man.

"What's your price?" he demanded.

"Who said anything about price?" Forsythe answered cautiously.

"What—what do you want me to do in order to interest you in stopping this?"

"Let's separate the two things," Forsythe suggested. "Let's go back to the subject of business. I came down here prepared to offer you twenty-five thousand dollars in cash for your patent rights. I'll make the offer now."

"You mean that if I'll accept that you'll—"

"Steady," warned Forsythe, "don't confuse the two propositions. My offer to you is strictly business. Naturally I'd be willing to assist a business friend in any personal way open to me. However, that is merely incidental."

"The man who—who wrote this stuff would tear it up at your request?"

"He is under certain obligations to me," admitted Forsythe.

"What assurance would I have?"

“You could close your plant for one thing, dismiss your charming employee—”

“Damn you, Forsythe!”

The latter rose.

“So the little romance would be ended and the story would lack point. But I’m not going to sit here and listen any longer to such language as that.”

Devons took him by the sleeve—with his thumb and forefinger as one might handle something unclean.

“Wait a minute, Forsythe. You’ll give me a little time to think this over?”

“I’ll give you until eleven o’clock to-morrow.”

“Eleven to-morrow,” repeated Devons.

“I’ll be at your office with a contract.”

“At my office,” repeated Devons automatically.

“I expect to decide the matter there in ten minutes. Good-night.”

Forsythe started through the lobby, but until he was out on the street he kept turning around as though in fear.

Devons had settled down in his chair and was staring at the toes of his boots.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE BIG HOUR

IT being a fair, clear day with a touch of spring in the air, Dicky took his father's arm and escorted him on foot half the distance to the office. As a consequence they did not come in until after nine, which, while early enough under normal conditions, gave Forsythe as uneasy an hour as he had ever spent in his life. He had been pacing the floor since eight. Even then it was ten minutes before Dicky came to his desk and Forsythe had a chance to speak to him.

"You remember the matter I spoke to you of the other day?" he began abruptly.

"I'm not sure," drawled Dicky.

"Then you didn't realize its seriousness," snapped Forsythe. "I was telling you about the new enamel process which has just been put on the market."

"Right. I remember now."

"And I told you that if we were not able to corner it in some way, it would come pretty close to putting us out of business."

"Yes."

"Well, I've—I've got an option on it."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Dicky.

"It expires at eleven o'clock to-day."

"Snappy work!"

"It calls for twenty-five thousand dollars in cash," said Forsythe with a little more emphasis; "I must have that within an hour."

"That's a lot of money," returned Dicky.



“In one way. But if you’re getting something worth two hundred thousand—”

“Eh?”

“To us,” put in Forsythe quickly.

“But how in thunder did you do it?” questioned Dicky with interest.

“That isn’t important,” returned Forsythe. “The important thing is to have a certified check ready.”

“That ought to be easy—if you’re sure of yourself.”

“Do you think I’d go through what I’ve been through if I wasn’t sure?”

“I don’t get you.”

Forsythe took out his watch.

“It’s now quarter of ten. Shall I see Mr. Burnett or leave it to you?”

“Leave it to me,” answered Dicky. “I’ll go in now.”

Forsythe handed him the sample and several letters.

“Show him these,” he advised.

Dicky took them, and feeling, on the whole, rather important with the weight of business now on his shoulders, hurried into his father’s office. Half a minute later he was back again to Forsythe.

“That’s darned curious,” he said. “Dad isn’t there. His hat and coat are gone too.”

Forsythe sprang to his feet.

“Call a taxi,” he ordered. “Get down to the offices of Toole as fast as you can make it. ’Phone me from there.”

Burnett senior had hardly swung his swivel chair up to his desk that morning before he received a message from Toole. It was brief.

“There’s going to be something doing in steel this morning. You’d better be here.”

“You mean—”

“Come down and I’ll explain. It’s important.”

So Burnett had put on his hat and coat again and tiptoed out with his heart beating faster than it should. He was quite sure his physician would have advised against any such excitement. But if all went well, this would be the last time. It was to this end that he had taken on yesterday a heavier load than he ever had intended. It was to this end that he had broken his rule about margin trading. It was Toole who had suggested this. He reminded him that the five thousand he had made before on an outright purchase might just as easily have been fifty thousand with the same amount of capital invested on a ten-point margin. After all, this was not much different from the ordinary real-estate transaction where one paid a per cent down and mortgaged the property for the balance. The method, too, saved time. One was able to condense a year’s transactions into a day. And time was important.

Dicky had bothered him a good deal in the last few days. How much he suspected and how much he knew it was difficult to say, but it was certain that in the end Dicky would find out everything and put a stop to it. He had been around the office more than usual, ever since he came back from the South. Whatever was to be accomplished must be accomplished soon.

And in the last month he had dreamed larger and larger dreams for the boy. At first he had been content to double his four hundred thousand, but no sooner had the latter figures become established in his mind than he wanted to double those. After all, when one was about it one might as well. It appeared childishly easy. It only took a little nerve. There was the tangible evidence of all his speculations so far. He had made five thousand dollars which might just as well have been fifty thousand.

Dicky was troubled. He saw it in a dozen little ways. Once or twice he had tried to draw him out, but without much success. The lad was not the kind to whine over what could not be helped. There was no doubt, however, but what it had to do with this girl—the girl he had spoken of as a princess. If as the

last big act of his life Burnett could make her a real princess—that was worth a risk. Dicky himself did not know how. He had had no training. That was not his fault. The father was beginning to realize that now. He had made his son what he was—had led him on to expect every wish to be gratified—up to this latest wish, the biggest one of all.

Perhaps this new reasoning was only born of the need of further justification of the course he was pursuing. If so, he did not realize it. He was honest with himself.

And, after all, it was something to have one's heart pounding a bit faster. It took him back twenty years to the days when it pounded like this naturally. He called a taxi and leaned back with his thoughts racing off at all sorts of angles.

His mood was a form of intoxication. All his senses were for the moment sharpened. The sunlight appeared more golden; the sky bluer. He was like a young man upon an adventure. Strictly speaking, it was Dicky's adventure and he was taking it for him. He was daring for him what he would not dare for himself. By three o'clock it might be concluded and the day won.

So he speeded to the offices of Toole & Co.—magnificent offices presided over by Toole the magnificent. He passed through the crowd beginning to gather in the outer rooms and went direct to the sacred inner room. Toole, big and optimistic, rose to greet him.

“Good-morning, Mr. Burnett.”

The first quotations were already coming over the private ticker and Burnett picked up the tape.

“How is she opening?”

“Steel is off a fraction,” replied Toole. “If I were you I'd follow it down.”

“Eh? I'm in pretty heavy now.”

“I know it, but—well, I've been informed the bears are going to raid the stock to-day.”

“Supposing I sit tight?”

“You can do that, but—of course you have enough on hand to bolster up your margin account?”

The ticker reported a sale of six thousand shares—off a half. A second sale of two thousand followed—off another eight.

“What the deuce does that mean?” demanded Burnett.

Toole shrugged his shoulders.

“The big ones are up to something,” he answered.

“I’ve a good mind to get out from under,” scowled Burnett.

“Then you’d better be quick about it,” advised Toole.

The next quotation was off a full point and the sales on that doubled. If he sold now it meant a loss of five thousand—all he had made up to date. It came like a challenge.

“Buy five hundred at the market,” he ordered.

Toole pressed a button on his desk and a boy jumped in.

“Five hundred steel at the market,” he repeated. “Better come back here and stand by, Mr. Burnett.”

Burnett signed the order slip and the boy went out.

That was the beginning of the Big Hour—the hour when Burnett condensed into sixty minutes almost a lifetime. Steel continued down, and he followed it while Toole studied him, making, casually, little figures on a pad in front of him. At the end of half that time he called for more margin, and Burnett signed a check and sent a messenger to the bank with it. At the end of another ten minutes he called for still more, and Burnett in a daze did what Toole asked of him. Steel went down three points, six points, ten points. Still, it could not go down forever. There must come soon a point where it would stop and start the other way. Then—

In the meanwhile a young man had stepped into the outer office of Toole & Co. He wandered around the board room a few moments, looking over the crowd as though seeking some

one. These were all strange faces. He stepped up to a clerk and asked if Mr. Burnett was here.

“Don’t know him,” replied the clerk.

He was very busy. Every one was very busy. There appeared to be a great deal of excitement hereabouts.

He finally stopped another clerk.

“I’d like to see Mr. Toole,” he said.

He handed him a card and the boy went off. He returned in a moment with the report that Mr. Toole was very sorry, but he could not see him to-day.

Dicky considered a moment. There was something about the atmosphere of this place he did not like. There was something about the name of Toole and the fact that he was too busy to be seen that he did not like. He drew from his pocket another card and scribbled across it this: “I understand my father is here. I must see him on a very important matter.”

He called the clerk again and sent this in to Mr. Toole. He waited five minutes. This time Mr. Toole himself appeared—Toole the magnificent. He was smiling.

“This is Mr. Burnett?” he inquired as he extended his hand.

Dicky hesitated somehow about accepting the hand. It was large and soft and white.

“Yes. I came to see my father.”

“Just so,” answered Toole; “don’t you find him?”

He looked about the room as though joining in the search.

“He isn’t here,” said Dicky, “but I suppose you have private offices?”

“Why, yes, we have private offices, but—well, they are private.”

“Is Mr. Burnett in one of them?”

“He may be or he may not be,” replied Toole. “At any rate, it is the policy of this firm not to interrupt our customers.”

“You understand he is my father?”

“I have your word for it,” smiled Toole.

“You understand I want to see him on an important matter?”

“I have your word for that, too.”

“Then,” said Dicky, his face hardening, “take my word for it I’m going to see him.”

“That is assuming he is here.”

“Is he here?”

“I refuse to answer.”

“Then—”

Toole leaned closer to the young man’s ear.

“I wouldn’t make a scene. This is a private, not a public office. If your father is here, you may be sure he received your message and exercised his right to see you or not.”

Dicky glanced at his watch. It was half-past ten. After all, Forsythe might have made a mistake. At any rate, the safe thing to do was to go out and telephone and make sure.

“Thanks,” replied Dicky; “I’ll see if Mr. Burnett has returned to his office. If he hasn’t I’ll be back.”

“I wouldn’t bother,” replied Toole.

Dicky hurried to the nearest telephone and got Forsythe on the wire. The man sounded excited.

“I know he’s there. Insist on seeing him. Good God, you must see him!”

“Right,” answered Dicky; “if you don’t hear from me in half an hour ring up police headquarters because there may be a good-sized row develop in the office of Toole & Co.”

So Dicky went down with his face set this time and his eyes grown hard. It was almost eleven! He called the clerk once again. This time he scribbled on a card this message for

Toole; “I’ve come back to see my father. If I don’t get to him in five minutes, I’m going to start a first-class rough house.”

As the clerk went across the board room and toward the inner office, Dicky followed him. He waited just outside for his reply. Once again Toole came out smiling.

“I’m sorry—” he began.

Dicky lowered his head a little as for a line plunge and bolted past him. His shoulder took Toole in the pit of his rotund stomach, which was perhaps why the man made no immediate reply. He saw his father slumped down in a chair near the ticker, his head in his hand.

Burnett senior made his feet unsteadily.

“Dicky,” he trembled, “Dicky, they’ve got me. They’ve cleaned me out.”

“So?” answered Dicky. “Then take my arm. I guess it’s time to get out of here.”

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A STRAIGHT TIP

JOAN obeyed the message she had received at the office from Devons to the extent of going back home and waiting there two hours for him. She spent most of this time in her room within arm's reach of the telephone, expecting every second the jangling bell to summon her. But the thing remained silent—ominously silent. Then, unable to control herself further, she ventured to ring up the office. It was Miss Manning who answered with the businesslike announcement, "The Devons Manufacturing Company."

"Has Mr. Devons come in yet?"

"No," was the curt reply. "Do you wish to leave any message?"

"I think not," replied Joan.

She replaced the receiver on its hook with a snap.

It was foolish of her to be irritated. For the last few days she had struggled with a correspondence that had served her fair notice that it was getting beyond her mediocre ability. Down deep in her heart she had anticipated the necessity of turning over part of the work to more experienced hands. But not the whole of it. An assistant was the most she had contemplated. And now Devons had ordered her home like a discharged clerk and without consultation had filled her place. She was entitled, at least, to the customary two weeks' notice. She felt humiliated. She had been trying very, very hard to make good—harder than Mark Devons suspected. As the first really serious undertaking of her life, she had felt as though her success or failure were in the nature of a test.

Going back to the beginning she had some reason to feel proud. It had all been new to her! He should remember that. Until she entered the office of the Devons Manufacturing Company she had never been inside a business office. The



financial world had been as vague as the Government world designated by the initials U.S.A. on mail pouches and uniforms. It existed she knew, and she had once taken a course in civil government so that she was not wholly ignorant, but it went on year after year without in any way involving her. In the same way men and women went downtown to their various tasks in the morning without in any way interfering with her private life.

Suddenly she had joined those who went downtown in the morning and had done her level best to learn what they did and to fulfill her own little function among them. She had done this joyously, proudly, and little by little with more experience, and always with the feeling that the man in the long linen duster spattered with acid holes was fully appreciative of her efforts.

To be sure, he did not say very much. That was not his way. He attended to his business and left her to attend to hers. That was how he could praise her best. He turned over to her absolutely the responsibility of the books and the typewriting. And sometimes he glanced up and smiled as though in encouragement.

Here in her room she felt her cheeks crimson at the memory of his eyes upon her. It was as though he said at such times, "Well done, partner."

Of course, there was nothing personal about their relations. That is, she was quite sure there was nothing personal. She tried, at any rate, to keep that quite strongly in mind. Perhaps at this moment it was more necessary than ever. But she wondered if he was not going to miss her out of the office as—well, as she had to admit she was missing him. This subject of personal relationships was a broad one and, of course, in their case it did differ somewhat from the usual employer and employee type. He had been here in her house, for one thing, and she had seen him as a man first rather than as an employer. He had been just Mark Devons for several weeks before he became president of the Devons Manufacturing Company. It was she who had helped him to the latter position—she and Dicky.

For a moment her thoughts switched off to Dicky. She had not heard from him for a week or more—not since in her last letter to him in the South she had informed him that she was too busy to reply at length to his letters. She wished, almost, he were back in town. She would rather like to see him. And yet if he learned of her discharge he might laugh. Her brows came together and unceremoniously and altogether unjustly she proceeded to thrust him out of her mind.

After all, she was assuming too much about her present position and Miss Manning, considering that she had not all the facts. It was as if to emphasize this conclusion that at this instant the telephone rang. Yet it was neither Miss Manning nor Mark Devons who called for her. It was a strange voice.

“This is Miss Fairburne?” he inquired.

She answered almost as curtly as Miss Manning herself might have done.

“Yes.”

“I rang up the office for you and was told I would find you at home.”

“Yes?”

“I won’t give you my name because it wouldn’t mean anything to you. But I’m a newspaper man.”

She waited. She associated newspaper men with scandals and tragedies.

“I just wanted to tell you that if any one tries to use unfairly a story I wrote about you—”

“A what?” she gasped.

“Something I wrote for the Sunday paper. If any one tries to put anything over with it, just tell ’em you’ve talked with me and that it won’t go.”

“But I don’t understand.”

“You needn’t understand anything more than that. How long you been away from the office?”

“All the morning,” she answered.

“Then if I were you I’d get back there. And, remember, just say the man who wrote the yarn is going to kill it.”

“Please,” she trembled, “can’t you tell me more?”

“That’s enough. Get back. You’re too good a sport to hurt.”

“But—”

“Good luck.”

With that the receiver was hung up.

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When Joan swung open the office door and stepped in, it was like a scene from a melodrama. Devons and Forsythe, both pale and evidently very much excited, were facing each other. They were as tense and alert as two wild animals about to spring at each other’s throats. Unconsciously Joan looked about for Miss Manning, as though seeking support. She was not there. The two men were alone. They both swung toward the door in challenge of the intruder. Then quickly Devons strode forward.

“Joan!” he exclaimed, “what brought you down here?”

“You were to telephone me and you didn’t,” she answered.

“I know, but—in an hour. You’ll go back to the house now?”

“I think I’d rather wait here,” she decided.

“You mustn’t. This man”—he spoke as though he meant “this thing”—“I must see him alone.”

“Why alone?”

“He has some business—some very confidential business with me.” He took her arm as though to escort her out.

But she resisted.

“If it’s business, haven’t I a right to be consulted?” she asked. She turned to Forsythe. “Mr. Devons and I are partners,” she explained.

“So I understand,” he nodded.

“So you see what concerns him also concerns me.”

She closed the door behind her and moved to the center of the room. In a silent appeal Devons lifted his eyes to Forsythe. What the latter saw gave him a sense of advantage. If he, too, had at first resented the interruption, he now saw it in a different light. Speaking directly to Devons he said:

“We had nearly finished, had we not? There was some unfortunate delay about the check, but surely you will trust me until to-morrow. In the meanwhile, if you will sign the contract it will enable me to leave at once.”

The last few words were what Devons snatched at. Forsythe would leave at once if the contract was signed. At the moment any price seemed small if it would clear the room of the man. Standing there with his eyes upon Joan, he magnified a hundredfold the hideousness of what Forsythe had just threatened. It was as though the latter in his own person represented that American public who would feast with ghoulish eyes upon those pictures of her in the Sunday paper. The evil smile about the man’s coarse lips would, if he did not act now, be multiplied soon into a hundred thousand such smiles. He would have struck Forsythe down at this moment would it have done any good. But if he killed him he would be extinguishing only one of those smiles—only one out of thousands. Worse—it would only add further point to the story. It would seem to justify it and give it an importance that would send it speeding over the whole wide world. He must keep himself very steady.

“Let me have the paper,” said Devons.

Eagerly Forsythe drew it from an inside pocket and handed it over. At the same moment he produced a fountain pen and unscrewed the cap.

“Miss Fairburne will serve as witness,” he suggested.

“Certainly,” she agreed. “Of course I may read the paper first.”

Before Devons was aware of her intention she took it from his nervous fingers and stepped a little away. He followed with an exclamation:

“It isn’t necessary for you to read it.”

She held it behind her back, meeting his eyes steadily.

“I’m quite sure it is. Dad has often told me never to sign a paper without first reading it.”

“But you are to be only a witness.”

“To what?”

Devons turned back again to Forsythe.

“It’s merely a contract for a sale of the business,” he tried to assure her. “Mr. Devons appreciates the fact that a larger organization is in a better position to handle—”

But without listening further she broke in:

“Sale? You are selling the business, Mark Devons?”

“It—it seemed the best thing to do.”

“You are selling—our business?” she repeated.

“If you understood!” he exclaimed.

“I think I’m beginning to understand,” she returned. “But it doesn’t seem fair to make me fumble around in the dark.”

“It’s a simple business proposition,” broke in Forsythe.

“I wonder,” she replied. She turned away from him. “You said nothing of this yesterday, Mark.”

“No.”

“Then your decision came suddenly?”

It was Forsythe, whose mind seemed to be working more nimbly than Devons’s, who supplied the answer.

“Only because the offer came suddenly,” he said. “It’s one of those things where quick action is necessary.”

But she in her reply ignored Forsythe entirely.

“Tell me a little more about it,” she pleaded.

“He—he made me a cash offer and I accepted it,” he answered. “That’s all there is to it except that the sooner I sign the contract, the sooner we are rid of him.”

“How much was his offer?” she asked.

Devons hesitated, but there was no escaping from her eyes.

“Twenty-five thousand,” he answered slowly.

“But that’s absurd!” she exclaimed.

“There were other considerations,” put in Forsythe hurriedly.

Devons started. He turned toward Forsythe with clenched fists.

“And these were?” inquired Joan.

“I find myself in a position to do him a certain service.”

“It must be a very valuable service, indeed.”

“I think he will agree with me that it is,” returned Forsythe.

“You will tell me what that is, Mark?” she asked.

“No, no—I can’t.”

“Then you will, Mr. Forsythe.”

“If you do,” breathed Devons, “so help me God—”

Joan placed her hand upon Devons’s arm.

“Steady,” she warned. “I think I know already a good deal about it. You are both referring to a newspaper article—”

“Then he *has* told you?” demanded Devons.

“Mr. Forsythe? No. I learned about it—quite by chance. But now I demand to be allowed to see it.”

“Impossible!” gasped Devons.

“I demand it as my right,” she repeated steadily.

Forsythe smiled again—viciously, cynically.

“It might save us from further delay, Devons,” he said.

“Joan,” pleaded Devons, “don’t ask to see it.”

“It is my right.”

She was magnificent. More than ever now she looked like a princess. Her head was up and her clear eyes challenged the world. Her lips, like those of a child, were firm like those of a woman. But just because of this it was necessary for him to stand firm by her side and save her from hurt.

“If you will let me sign,” he urged, “then I can tear up the other. So it will be as though it had never been.”

“It will never be like that until I have seen it,” she answered. She held her hand toward Devons. “Let us have it over with,” she said.

It was like an order. It was like an order from the throne. It was as though he were deprived of all further choice in the matter. It was her affair now—not his. She demanded as her right and he dared not refuse. The moment she learned of the existence of this manuscript it became hers—like a letter that has been mailed. And yet he would have gone back to the day when he had stumbled out of Arkwright’s room hungry and alone, to have warded off the blow. He would have wiped her out of his life as though she had never been, to have saved her from this. As much as she meant to him now—as much as the future meant to him—he would have done that.

“I am waiting.”

It was her voice again. He drew the photographs and typewritten manuscript from his pocket.

“Some day,” he said,—“some day I’ll make the men who did this suffer.”

She took the packet from him and opened it. Forsythe, his eyes squinting, watched her. He saw the color spring to the girl’s cheeks; saw her breath come faster; saw her, as he thought, cringe. And yet her fingers remained steady. He did

not like that. When she finished, she raised her eyes first to him—then to Devons who had half turned away from her.

“This is all of it?” she asked.

“Good Lord! Isn’t that enough?” choked Devons.

“It’s sort of a silly thing,” she said.

Devons snatched it from her fingers. He tore it across and then into little bits.

“Now let me have the contract,” he ordered. “I want to get this done with.”

“That was only a copy,” Forsythe reminded him.

“I have your word that the original will be destroyed, too?”

“I will do my best.”

“Then—” began Devons, reaching again for the contract she still held in her hand.

She moved a little back and, as he had torn the manuscript, tore the contract—once across and then into little bits. She did it quite unemotionally and facing the two men. Forsythe was the first to recover. He stepped toward her.

“You did that in ignorance—just plain fool ignorance,” he growled. “It will cost you big.”

“I doubt it,” she answered. “But if it’s necessary to pay, I will pay, Mr. Forsythe.”

“You mustn’t listen to her,” cut in Devons. “She—she doesn’t know. This is between you and me, Forsythe. You will make out another contract and I’ll sign it.”

“If you do I shall consult my father’s lawyer,” she answered. “Surely I must have some interest in the business. If so my signature is necessary, too. Remember we are partners, Mark.”

“You have partnership papers?” demanded Forsythe, paling a little.

“That is our affair,” she replied.



“If true, it would add interest to the news story,” suggested Forsythe.

The phrase served its purpose in arousing Devons once more.

“We have no agreement in writing,” he answered.

“Then,” smiled Forsythe, recovering some of his former assurance,—“then I don’t see why we can’t finish our business without the help of Miss Fairburne. I can write out a little memorandum that will serve until we replace the formal contract which the young lady destroyed.”

He stepped to the desk in the corner—her desk. Devons followed.

“Mark,” she called.

He turned.

“You are letting him make a great deal out of nothing,” she said. “I do not see that any great harm would be done if the story were printed. I don’t like to allow him to think I stand in fear of any such trifle. But—it won’t be printed.”

“What!” exclaimed Devons.

“Before I came down here I had a telephone from the man who wrote the article. He promised that if any attempt were made to use it unjustly he would tear it up himself.”

Forsythe struggled to his feet. “I don’t believe you,” he choked.

Devons made for him with a lunging blow. But before he could follow it with a second, Joan had reached him.

“He isn’t worth it,” she pleaded.

Devons held himself with difficulty. Joan turned to Forsythe. “Perhaps you had better leave at once,” she suggested.

“It isn’t true,” repeated Forsythe. “You’ll make a mistake if you believe her, Devons.”

But at the same moment he began to edge toward the door. As he reached it he paused.

“It’s your last chance,” he trembled.

“Not his but yours,” she answered. “I—I can’t hold him much longer.”

Then Devons made for him once again and Forsythe disappeared.

## CHAPTER XXX

### BANKRUPT

DICKY led his father through the outer office of Toole & Co. and out to the street. The man bore heavily on his arm. In spite of that Dicky said, "I guess we'd better walk a little." So he led him for the matter of a block or so in the noonday sunshine before calling a taxi.

"It's a good day for golf," said Dicky. "If it's like this tomorrow I guess we'll have to take our first lesson."

Burnett senior lifted his heavy head a moment. "Son," he said, "did you understand what I told you?"

"Sure," answered Dicky. "You said they had done you up."

"I've lost everything—everything and more."

"Well, forget it," replied Dicky cheerfully. "It was only a question of time, anyway. Just as well to have it done quickly and over with. I'll bet Toole has a sore spot in the neighborhood of the pit of his stomach."

"But, Dicky—you don't understand yet," faltered Burnett.

"You played and lost— isn't that all there is to it?"

"I drew all I had from the bank, I tell you. And I'm short two hundred thousand."

"Just so. We'll have to raise that on the house and business. I'll attend to that later. The thing for you to do now is to come home and see mother. You've done enough for one day."

Burnett cringed.

"What can I say to her!" he exclaimed.

"Tell her the truth, that's all," answered Dicky. "You don't need to worry about her."

Burnett stumbled.

“Put your weight on my arm,” said Dicky. But at the same time he raised his finger to a passing taxi, and as it drew up to the walk helped his father in. The man slumped into the corner like some lifeless thing.

“Come,” warned Dicky, “this won’t do. We can’t let mother see us like this. She’ll think something really serious has happened.”

Burnett groaned.

“It—it will kill her.”

“What will kill her?” demanded Dicky.

“Good Lord!” snapped Burnett, “don’t you understand yet? I’m bankrupt, I tell you.”

Dicky placed his hand gently on his father’s shoulder.

“That’s the stuff,” he encouraged. “You got some of the old ring in your voice that time. Buck up and keep it there. There’s a good old sport down deep in you and that’s the man we’ve got to show mother. I’ll miss my guess if she cares two straws whether you’ve lost your money or not, but if she finds you’ve lost your nerve—she’ll take that hard. She’s come sort of to depend on that.”

Burnett pulled himself together and sat up. He met his son’s eyes.

“Forty years of labor gone in a forenoon. It’s a whole lot lost, son.”

“A whole lot of money,” nodded Dicky. “They certainly trimmed you good. But after all, they didn’t get the best part of that forty years. Even Toole couldn’t reach that. It’s up to you to save the rest.”

“The rest?”

“The fun you had piling it up—even the fun you had gambling with it.”

“Eh?”

“You had your hour,” grinned Dicky.

“It pulled the heart out of me.”

“I don’t believe it. Just now you’re feeling the reaction. But you’ll get over that in a day or two, and it may be the making of you. You’ve been working too hard for a year. The business has been taking out of you little by little all that makes life worth living. It has been eating into your health and your time. Now old Dr. Toole has remedied all that. Sort of heroic treatment, but maybe that’s what you needed. You wouldn’t listen to anything I said.”

“You—you mean about the pumpkin pie?”

“That’s one thing,” admitted Dicky. “Then about golf—”

“Damn golf!” growled Burnett.

“Steady there,” warned Dicky. “You’re going to have time now for that—you and mother. I have a notion it would do her good too.”

“How do you figure I’m going to have time?” demanded Burnett.

“With no business to attend to—”

“Eh?” choked Burnett.

“If you’re in as bad as you say you are, you’ll have to cash in all your assets, won’t you?”

“The business?” Burnett’s fists clenched. For a second his old fighting face came back. “We’ll have to pull that out somehow,” he said, as though to himself. “Good Lord! Why, Dicky, what would become of you? I built that up for you. I—I tried to double what I had for you—for you and for her.”

Dicky turned swiftly.

“You what?”

“It was for you and the princess,” said Burnett. “I—I wanted to make you worth while for her.”

Dicky caught his breath.

“For me and the princess,” he repeated. Then in the cab he felt for his father’s hand. “You took that chance for me and her?”

“You said you weren’t worth enough for her. So—”

Dicky had to gulp hard once or twice. Then his fingers closed over his father’s fingers.

“You old brick,” he trembled. “But I—I didn’t mean it that way. If I had forty million it would be just the same. But it’s worth to me what you lost to know what you lost it for.”

“Only if I’d won!” exclaimed Burnett.

“We might all be worse off than we are now,” declared Dicky. “Anyhow, that chance has gone and so—” The cab had stopped before the door. “The thing for us both to do is to be good sports before mother. Are you game?”

“Right,” nodded Burnett.

It was the clasp of the boy’s hand that had given him a new lease of life. He had expected the latter to take it hard, but instead of that he had seen a flash of something in his eyes he had never seen there before. He went into the house still leaning heavily on Dicky’s arm, but with his head up.

The mere fact that the two were returning home to lunch was in itself enough to arouse Mrs. Burnett’s suspicions. But she did not need even that clue. Her quick, tender eyes had studied her husband’s face too many years to be fooled by any acting he might attempt, or any acting Dicky might attempt either. She came down hurriedly from upstairs the moment she heard their voices and confronted them at once with the question, “What’s the matter?”

“Dad and I just thought we’d surprise you by coming home to lunch,” replied Dicky.

“What’s the matter?” she repeated.

“Why—er—”

It was easier said than done, this telling her the truth. Dicky turned to his father, but the latter only raised appealing eyes to him. She looked very frail at that moment.

“Something has happened!” she exclaimed. “Tell me, Dicky.”

“Why, it isn’t anything to get frightened over.” Dicky stumbled on, “Dad here—well, he took a shot at the market and lost.”

“Everything,” put in Burnett, as though anxious to make a clean sweep of it at once.

Mrs. Burnett relaxed instantly.

“Is—is that all?” she answered. She stepped to her husband’s side. His head was beginning to droop again. “Why,” she exclaimed, “I thought it was something terrible. I thought you had had a shock.”

Dicky grinned as he slapped his father’s back. “What did I tell you?” he demanded. “Isn’t she the old sport?”

“Mother,” said Burnett, “they cleaned me out.”

“Didn’t leave him a shoestring,” nodded Dicky. “Can you beat it?”

Shyly she tucked her hand within her husband’s.

“As long as they didn’t take you, Joshua,” she trembled.

“I guess it would have been better if they had,” he answered.

“Hush,” she whispered as she led him into the sitting-room.

And Dicky with a load off his shoulders backed her up now enthusiastically.

“It’s going to leave him time to enjoy life a little, eh? As soon as you begin to get out and exercise, you can eat all the pumpkin pie you want, Dad. It’s the men who sit around in offices that have to be careful of their diet. If you could have seen the way at Palm Beach some of those old codgers fed up after a round of golf in the morning, you’d have envied them. Got anything to eat in the house, Mother?”

“I guess we can find something,” she smiled.

“I’ve had a strenuous morning,” he explained. “You take care of dad while I go upstairs a moment.”

He went up the stairs two at a time, and entering his room was careful to close the door behind him. Then he sat down before the telephone and called up the offices of the Burnett Manufacturing Company.

“I want to talk with Forsythe,” he announced. He scarcely recognized the man’s voice as he answered. “I just wanted to tell you to hold off on that new deal for a day or two,” he began.

“I wanted to talk that over with your father at once,” answered Forsythe. “It didn’t go through the way I thought it would. Where is Mr. Burnett?”

“He’s at home,” replied Dicky. “He’s going to stay at home for a while.”

“Can I see him at the house?”

“No,” said Dicky.

“But look here—this is serious. I spoke of twenty-five thousand. It looks now as though we might have to raise four times that.”

“Eh?”

“We’ve got to buy that new process, no matter what it costs. If we don’t we’ll be put out of business in six months.”

Dicky passed his hand over his forehead.

“That so?”

“I’ve got to talk it over with your father, I tell you. Every day we wait is going to make it harder.”

“A hundred thousand dollars, you said?”

“Perhaps more. The point is, we’ve got to have it.”

“Look here, Forsythe,” began Dicky, “that’s a lot of money under the present circumstances.”

“The present circumstances?” inquired Forsythe.



“The fact is, dad has got in kind of bad on the market.”

“Good God!” choked Forsythe.

“I’m going to see his lawyer as soon as I can get away, but, to speak frankly, it looks bad. Your friend Toole led him into deep water.”

“You mean—”

“It will take about all he has to square himself. I haven’t been able to go into details with him yet, but I guess there isn’t much doubt he’ll have to scrape together every cent he can raise in and out of the business.”

“He—he’s bankrupt?”

“Practically.”

“Then he’ll drag us all down!”

Dicky resented the tone of his voice.

“Whom do you mean by all of us?”

“You and me and—why, he was a damn fool!”

“Look here, Forsythe!”

“I mean it,” Forsythe ran on wildly. “If he had held off another week—”

“I’d cut out that kind of talk if I were you.”

“I backed him with every cent I had in the world. I have a right to talk. I—”

But at this point Dicky quite unceremoniously hung up the receiver. There was not much use in talking over the telephone to a man in his condition. And to tell the truth, he was not in the slightest sorry for him. He had never liked the man. The way he wore his hair was against him, and his friends Toole and the others were against him.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### DISCHARGED

AS soon as Forsythe went out, Joan closed the door and stood with her back against it facing Devons.

“Now,” she said, “can’t we forget the whole incident and go on with our work?”

Devons looked up at her. He was breathing a little rapidly and his face was flushed.

“It isn’t right for you to be mixed up in such miserable affairs,” he answered.

She smiled a little.

“I didn’t mind,” she assured him. “It was rather exciting. It was a little bit like a play, wasn’t it?”

“With you as the heroine,” he said. “You fought him single-handed and won. Only—don’t you see I can’t let you take the risk again?”

“I don’t think he will come back again.”

“Not Forsythe, perhaps, but there are others. The city is full of them—of men and women eager to give an evil turn to situations of this sort. I didn’t think of it until Forsythe opened my eyes. I can thank him for that much. You see, Joan,—you don’t belong down here. That’s the truth and every one knows it.”

“Mark!” she cried.

“You’re a Fairburne,” he ran on. “Your mother reminded me of that once, and it didn’t mean very much then. We from the West are apt to laugh at names. We’re apt to scorn them, because out there a lot of us haven’t names that mean very much. But here it’s different. New York isn’t the West, after all. And a name like yours gives you certain privileges and demands certain obligations. It’s sort of a sacred thing to be

guarded. And a man—if he thinks a great deal, a very great deal of the woman back of the name—has to shoulder those obligations. Joan—don't you understand?"

He had stepped closer to her. His eyes were on fire.

"This doesn't sound like you," she answered.

"Because," he went on breathlessly,—“because I'm saying things now I've fought back for weeks—fought back because I had no right to say them. But this last hour has changed everything. You have been so magnificent—so wonderful, Joan. I was ready to sell out to Forsythe—to take the little he would give me, cancel my debts, and go back home with my share of what was left. It was all I could do to save you from the danger I'd led you into. That meant leaving you and forgetting you. I had steeled myself to that. Then you came, and made that unnecessary. You gave me another chance. For now, with Forsythe out of the way, it's going to be easy. You saw how badly he wanted this. He'd have committed murder, I think, to get my process. That means it is going to sweep everything before it. A few months more of hard work and the business will be doubled, trebled—there is no end to it. That's what I see ahead of me—a fortune and then, perhaps—you.”

He seized her hand.

"You mustn't," she protested.

But he could not be stopped now.

"You," he repeated. "I love you, Joan. Day after day I've fought against it, knowing that I wasn't worthy of you. 'Way back in those days at your house, I knew. I dared love you then when I wasn't anything but a penniless outcast. The beauty and gentleness and grace of you crept into my soul. I lay there while you read and marveled at you. And I gripped my jaws and swore that if I got my strength back I'd go out into the world and win for you the things you deserved.”

"Please!" she broke in.

The words hurt her. They were almost the same words Dicky had used. They sent her thoughts back to those few

moments at Delmonico's when he had leaned over the table and spoken. She had answered him that she was starting on a great adventure. So she had, and now—

“That's what I swore,” he continued, “and that's what I mean to do. It's almost within my grasp now, if you'll wait just a little while longer, Joan. You'll do that?”

His eyes were burning into her. She turned her head to escape them. She felt the power and the earnestness of them, but they only frightened her.

“For—for what?” she asked hopelessly.

“Until I have a right to go to your father and claim you. Until I can give you all the things I've dreamed of giving you. It sounds wild to you? But I know now what I have here. Not New York City alone, but the whole State—the whole Nation—shall bring me tribute so that I can lay at your feet the treasures of the world. I'll have ships sailing to India for you and other ships sailing to the land of pearls for you. They'll come back laden with presents for you. Ah, Joan—wait a little while for me.”

And all the answer she made was this:

“Then you don't need me here any more?”

“No, thank God. The drudgery will soon be over. But the typewriter there in the corner—” He smiled. “I shall put that away. I shall buy a new one for Miss Manning and keep the other sacred.”

“She's to take my place?”

“I've engaged her to take over the bookkeeping and the correspondence. There will be a great deal of it soon.”

“So—”

“So you're to remain safe at home.”

He raised her fingers to his hot lips. Then he threw back his shoulders and faced her with the pride of a conqueror. It was like this that Miss Manning saw him as she opened the door and came in.

Joan went back to the house as she was bidden—went back with so much of the joy gone out of her that when she came in to lunch, much to her mother's surprise, the latter appeared distinctly worried.

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Fairburne; "I trust nothing serious has occurred."

She spoke as though she were in a frame of mind to expect most anything to happen.

Joan smiled weakly.

"To all intents and purposes I've been discharged, Mother," she replied.

"You are not going down to—to that place any more?"

"No. I'm not wanted."

"Then I shall be forced to admit that I am under a certain obligation to Devons," declared the mother.

"How?" inquired Joan.

"For having sense enough to appreciate the fact that you were entirely out of place there."

"But you don't understand. If I had made myself essential, this wouldn't have happened. He—he has found some one to do the work better—for a few dollars a week. To fail isn't anything to be proud of, is it?"

"It's something to be thankful for if it keeps you at home," replied Mrs. Fairburne.

Joan lowered her head. "I'm ashamed," she said. "Thoroughly ashamed."

For a moment the mother studied her in amazement. It was evident the girl was sincere. That was quite the most peculiar feature. In some way her daughter was hurt—humiliated. In the end she gave up trying to explain it and crossed to her side.

"There," she attempted to comfort. "This has been from the first an unfortunate incident, but if it has ended as well as it has, let us be thankful."

“I tried—I tried so hard.”

“Yes, dear.”

“And I was doing better every day.”

“Yes, dear.”

“If he had given me another month—”

It was the mother heart which spoke now.

“Cry a little, dear,” she urged. “Then it will be easier to forget.”

So Joan cried a little, though in the end she smiled through her tears at her foolishness.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### GOLF

IT was the office boy who found Forsythe. When the lad came in that morning to perform his usual tasks he saw the man in his chair leaning forward with his head on his desk as though asleep. He tiptoed about his work in order not to wake him. And then—in passing closer to the desk—he saw something crimson like red ink spattered over the papers upon which the head rested. Then he saw the clasped hand and the revolver.

Holding his breath, as though more than ever anxious now not to awaken the man, he stole out. In the corridor he began to lift his voice in a panic.

“He’s shot himself!” he cried.

Dicky answered the telephone that rang wildly that morning at seven, and at the news said quietly:

“Notify the police. Don’t ring up here again. I’ll be right down.”

He was out of the house fifteen minutes later and at the office at half-past seven. Already the officers were there, but after feeling of the cold dead pulse they ordered the man left where he was until the coroner arrived. Dicky took one look at him—at the stiff figure and the brushed-back hair and went on to his father’s office. He sat down in the old swivel chair and called up Wentworth, his father’s lawyer. He got the man out of bed.

“I wish you could come down right away,” he said. “There’s the devil to pay all round.”

“But, my dear fellow,” protested Wentworth, “a couple of hours from now will do quite as well.”

“Oh, come on,” pleaded Dicky. “I’m all hollow in the pit of me.”

“Then I’d suggest a good breakfast.”

“Come on, will you?” shouted Dicky. “There’s a dead man here and I don’t know what’s coming next.”

He hung up the receiver without further identifying the dead man, which perhaps is what brought Wentworth down there within an hour. But he was needed to answer the thousand questions the reporters put, if for no other reason. And after that, when things were cleaned up a little and the two were alone, Dicky in his father’s old swivel chair and Wentworth opposite him, the lawyer began to go to the heart of the matter.

“Tell me all you know,” he demanded.

Dicky told him, but, everything considered, it was not much.

“I guess dad has been cleaned out all right enough,” concluded Dicky.

“But this Forsythe—where does he come in?” inquired Wentworth.

“He owned some stock in the company,” answered Dicky. “He was all worked up trying to put through a deal to acquire a new process which he thought was going to put us out of business. When I told him what had happened to dad he seemed pretty well worried, but—Holy Smoke! I didn’t think it would lead to anything like this.”

“Perhaps there was something else,” suggested Wentworth.

“Not that I know of.”

“Your father might know. I think I ought to see him.”

“Now, look here,” protested Dicky. “Let’s leave him out of this. He has troubles enough as it is. What I’d like to do is to clean this all up without bringing him into it.”

“If I know him, that’s going to be hard to do.”

“I think we can manage it. I’m going to break him into golf this afternoon, and I have a notion that when we get back he’ll be so dog-tired he won’t be able to think.”



“But, my boy, you haven’t the authority to take over his business.”

“Then I’ll get it. Can’t you make out some sort of paper?”

“He could give you a power of attorney, of course.”

“Then fix it up and I’ll have him sign it. In the meanwhile you can go ahead and find out where he stands with Toole & Co., can’t you?”

“I suppose the firm will let us know that. There is probably a letter in his morning mail.”

The mail was on the desk. Dicky ran through it and picked out an envelope with a Wall Street address in the left-hand corner.

“Here it is,” he nodded.

He tore it open. It was a cold-blooded statement of yesterday’s transactions and showed a debit of two hundred and ten thousand dollars.

“That’s going some,” he observed as he handed it to Wentworth. The latter glanced it over in amazement.

“What has he got to cover this?” he asked.

“Hanged if I know,” answered Dicky.

“You’d better find out right off. Accounts of this sort aren’t allowed to stand long. I’ll make out the power of attorney for you and then you’d better call in an auditor to make an inventory. The sooner we begin, the better.”

“Right. And the sooner we get through it the better. It looks as though I’d better be hunting around for a job somewhere.”

Burnett senior was inclined to rebel at this arbitrary method of being relieved of his business.

“I’m not dead yet,” he protested.

“Far from it,” agreed Dicky. “The point of this new arrangement is to keep you from being dead for a long while to come.”

“But what in thunder do you know about the business?” inquired Burnett.

“Not much,” admitted Dicky. “However, I’m willing to learn. Besides, in this present emergency I’m turning things over to Wentworth. When he gets through, we’ll hold a war council and see what comes next.”

“Yes—Wentworth is a good man,” nodded Burnett.

Dicky was further aided and abetted by Mrs. Burnett, so that in the end Burnett signed the power of attorney. Armed with this, Dicky went back to the office and gave Wentworth *carte blanche* to go ahead and do whatever he pleased. It was then noon, and he rang up Hastings at the Harvard Club and reminded him of an invitation he had frequently extended to take him out to the Dale Country Club whenever he had a half-day.

“I want you to give my father his first lesson in golf this afternoon,” he informed Hastings.

Whatever the latter’s emotions were upon receipt of this news, he politely concealed them and generously offered to do his best.

Dicky sat on the club piazza drinking ginger ale with his mother while his father started around the course. Two hours later his father came back perspiring. He had made one half the holes in three hundred and forty, but it must be remembered that his nerves were not in the best of condition.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE BIG CHANCE

IT was Hartley's proposition. He rang up Devons and asked him to drop in at the office that afternoon. There had been a delay in the last consignment of enamel, and this had set Hartley to thinking—this and a rumor, following the death of Forsythe, that all was not well with the Burnett Company. The report did not come as a surprise to Hartley. Indeed, he did not see how the new Devons process could do otherwise than cut into the Burnett business. The youngster had something that had only to be tested to prove its superiority. Still he had given Forsythe credit for being able to handle the competition in some better fashion than putting a bullet through his head. It would not have surprised him any to have seen the man manage to absorb the new invention. Forsythe was both shifty and nimble-witted. The youngster was lucky to escape him in so simple a way.

But with this danger removed, Devons was not handling his business as he should. He had a gold mine there if he only knew it and took advantage of his opportunities. One of the most obvious opportunities was that which now lay before him. If it was true that Burnett was in financial difficulties, here was one of the best plants and organizations in the country waiting for him at his own figure. Why in thunder did not Devons jump at it instead of fooling around in his little two-cent laboratory and botching his orders? Hartley had been holding up a big lot of shoes for three days now waiting for enamel. That was not business. Devons could spoil the best thing in the world if he kept this up long. He had written and telephoned, and the only satisfaction he had been able to get was that the stuff would be shipped as soon as possible. That was not soon enough as business was conducted to-day.

There was the possibility, of course, that Devons lacked capital to finance the purchase of the Burnett plant. That, however, was not a valid excuse. Any man half awake could

raise what money he needed on such a good thing as this, if he knew how. Perhaps the difficulty lay here. He had sent for him to find out. Under the proper conditions, he himself might be willing to put in some money.

Devons did not find it necessary to wait this time in the outer office. He was admitted at once.

“I’m sorry to have kept you waiting on that last order,” he began.

“You couldn’t help it,” Hartley finished for him. “However, that doesn’t make it any the less awkward for me.”

“I know it, Mr. Hartley, but I’ve been bothered more or less lately. I expect soon to get straightened out.”

“How?”

“I’m going to have more room and try to find an assistant.”

“One?”

“To start with.”

Hartley swung his chair clear of his desk.

“Man, you need twenty. Have you heard any stories going the rounds about Burnett?”

Devons started.

“You mean about his general manager—Forsythe?”

“Forsythe’s death was only a symptom. They say the firm is in a bad way.”

“I hadn’t heard anything about that.”

“Burnett has been playing the market and lost heavily. Besides that, you are cutting into his business and are bound to cut in more every day. I’ve been wondering if this wasn’t your chance.”

“In just what way?” asked Devons.

“To take over his plant.”

“But Forsythe was trying to buy me out!” exclaimed Devons.

“That shows he knew the value of what you have. It’s none of my business, of course—but did you make him a figure?”

“I did not,” answered Devons. “He tried to blackmail me into selling.”

“That’s Forsythe,” nodded Hartley. “The only surprising thing is that he didn’t succeed.”

“If I didn’t have just the kind of partner I have, he would have succeeded,” Devons admitted. “But she—”

“She?”

Then on the impulse of the moment Devons told the whole story. Hartley listened, both interested and amused.

“She was a good sport, all right,” he exclaimed when Devons had finished. “And now—Good Lord, man, you have the whole thing in your hands! If I were you I’d get to Burnett as soon as my legs would carry me. Get an offer out of him. It wouldn’t surprise me if you could put it over for around seventy-five or a hundred thousand dollars.”

The figures took Devons’s breath away.

“Where in thunder could I get that amount?”

Hartley leaned back in his chair and thought a moment. When he spoke again it was cautiously—as though feeling his way.

“Devons,” he said, “I believe in your process. I think you have a fortune ahead of you if properly managed. I wonder now if you would care to consider letting me in on this in return for financing the proposition for you?”

Devons sprang from his chair.

“Would I?” he exclaimed.

“Steady,” advised Hartley. “It won’t do any harm to do a little figuring on it, anyhow. Pull your chair up nearer the desk.”

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It was fortunate that Hartley was a man who could safely be trusted to do the decent thing, because Devons in his enthusiasm at the prospect of having a partner with the former's wide and sound business experience was ready to agree to anything. Furthermore, Hartley stood for success. He looked and acted it. To have him connected with any enterprise was insurance. And so while the latter discussed this thing and that with him for the next half-hour, Devons did scarcely more than nod his approval. Incidentally, however, he did talk enough to give Hartley a clear idea of just where Miss Fairburne stood in the deal. She had raised the initial five thousand for him, and Devons considered that she had an equal interest with him in all rights and profits.

"We share and share alike," he concluded briefly.

"I see," smiled Hartley. "I might almost consider you as one then."

Devons flushed.

"There is that possibility," he admitted. "But I don't think I'm justified in letting you put it just that way."

"Well, from all I hear of her from you I should say you are to be congratulated."

In the end Hartley's suggestion was that in return for a one-third interest he would undertake negotiations with Burnett, furnish the capital, and without at present giving up his position with the Doggett people undertake in his spare time active management of the business.

"I know a young man I can put in to carry out my ideas and do the routine work," he concluded. "He's a Tech man and has had training under me. Starling is his name. You will like him. But of course you'll want to think this over for a day."

"I don't see why," answered Devons. "It sounds right to me. I'm willing to sign an agreement to that effect as soon as you can make out the papers."

“What about your silent partner?” inquired Hartley. “She may have opinions of her own.”

“I’ll see her right away, but I know she’ll be with me.”

“We’ll leave it like that, then,” concluded Hartley. “But the sooner I’m in a position to act, the better.”

Devons left the office walking on air. This new arrangement promised to accomplish in a few months all that by himself he might have been years in bringing about. With a modern plant and a man like Hartley to oversee it and organize the selling, the whole country could be covered as quickly and as easily as it would have taken him to cover the city alone. It was like a gift from the gods. And it brought Joan just that much nearer. It brought her so near that as he walked out into the May sunshine the world became suddenly vibrant. As with quickened pulse he strode along to carry to her this wonderful news, the city became touched with magic. The very air tingled and the humdrum old buildings of wood and brick which he passed took on a romantic beauty like the buildings of some strange Old World city. He was walking on a different level now. His feet no longer clung to the surface, but were tipped with wings that raised him to some rarefied stratum. He sensed the same exhilaration as one walking upon a great height.

He took the Tube to the Hudson Terminal, and instead of at once getting into the uptown Elevated he came to the surface again. Hartley had spoken of the need of haste, but even at the risk of an hour’s delay he must enjoy this hour. So he threaded his way through the downtown crowds and past the giant buildings. Both the people and the buildings used to awe him—almost humble him. Now he faced them with a smile and a conscious power. As he went on, this grew into something akin to a feeling of superiority. He had met this city and conquered it. He had come out of the West a poor boy, and with naked hands had fought and won from it the choicest of its gifts. It was the moment before possession, and that sometimes brings keener reactions than actual possession. The past was still vivid enough to afford its full contrast to the future. He went back, gloating over the climax, to his hard

luck when he staggered cold and hungry and penniless and friendless along streets similar to these—to that time when the city seemed to be on top. He remembered the indifference of the passers-by. He might have dropped dead among them and they would scarcely have turned to see him drop. Now in a few months, possibly in a few weeks, they would watch him go by with envious eyes.

He was on the threshold of success. He stood before the door which had reluctantly swung open admitting him to the sultan's palace. Within lay all the treasures of the world—everything that money could buy. And a little way farther in lived the princess waiting for him.

His thoughts flashed back to his father and mother and brother and sisters plodding along the dull routine of their lives on the Western farm. He had not written for several weeks. He had wished to wait until he had something definite to tell them. Now—when he wrote again—how he would make their eyes open. He could go back with his suit-case bulging with ten-dollar bills. Actually that was no longer a fantastic dream. He *would* do it. He would do just that. Only he would not go alone. He must wait until Joan could go with him.

Joan! Joan! Joan! How the name sang to him! He allowed it to sing to him. He had suppressed the music long enough. He was going a great deal farther than he had any right, but with the right so near he could hardly be blamed. It was as though she were by his side now.

A little way farther he mounted a Fifth Avenue 'bus and climbed to the top. He could see better up there. And the elevation fitted better into his mood. He could look down on the streets—look down with Joan by his side. It was almost as if they were in their limousine together—the limousine he meant to buy. For he meant to buy for her all the choice things of the world.

To be sure she had most of them now, but they were not his gifts. That is what was going to make the difference. She must leave behind her all she had now and let them come fresh from him. What jewels she now had would count for nothing against the jewels he would buy for her. And her gowns and



her hats and her dainty shoes—from head to foot he wished them all to come from him. Only by giving could he express in tangible, concrete form his love for her. Only by buying. He was no poet. He must get beautiful stones and silks and satins to express his sonnets for him.

This was possible only through the medium of money—through a king's fortune. And that was now almost within his grasp. There were those who affected to scorn money, but they did not know what he knew. He recalled with a certain uneasiness one of his gentle-souled professors who had given his life to the investigation of abstract theories—to pure science. The man had taken an interest in him during his first two years at Tech and had sometimes asked him to his rooms at night. There he talked wisely and encouragingly to him. One evening as he was leaving the professor had placed his hand upon his shoulder and searched his eyes.

“Devons,” he had said, “there is a great future ahead of you. I wish I might look forward to seeing you take up my work where I shall be obliged to leave it.”

Devons had looked around the barren bachelor quarters crowded with books and had not answered. Here was a man who did not need money—who found a full life within himself and his work. But Devons wondered then and he wondered now if the man had any such past as his own.

All his life Mark Devons had seen money stand for the difference between a full life and an empty life. In the West it stood for the difference between some one and no one. The stature of a man was reckoned in terms of his fortune. That standard had been bred in him. He had seen it exemplified in his father's life. He accepted it. He was forced to accept it. In and of itself money meant nothing, but interpreted in life it meant everything. In his own case it meant Joan.

It meant Joan! Once again his thoughts swirled dizzily about her. They were speeding along upper Fifth Avenue—past shop-windows laden with the choice things of the world for those with money. The world had been scoured to bring them here. Most of them were for the women—for the men to buy for their women. Here was the one opportunity for men who

were not poets to materialize their thoughts for the women they loved. In a few months now he would be in a position to do just that.

He climbed down and jumped off the 'bus and made his way to the house he had not visited since that day he drove away from it. He had been humble then. But now he held his head well up and walked boldly. He would not be afraid to meet Fairburne to-day. He would not be afraid to meet Mrs. Fairburne.

Jeffrey at the door recognized him and greeted him with a respectful smile. He thought Miss Fairburne was in. If Mr. Devons would step into the drawing-room he would make sure. Devons stepped in. The room had not been changed in any detail. It was as familiar as his own home. There was the fireplace before which he had sat so often with her—where he had fought back the thoughts that flooded in upon him. But he could think them now as much as he pleased. He stood with his hands behind his back and smiled with satisfaction. He took note of details. In his new home he must duplicate as nearly as possible what he saw here. He could vary them in color and design, but here was a standard.

In the midst of this pleasant pastime she came in. She seemed somewhat disconcerted, but she was always at her best when startled out of her calm self-possession. It gave alertness to her eyes and color to her cheeks and eagerness to her sensitive lips. In her way she was as suspicious at having him appear in mid-afternoon as Mrs. Burnett had been to see her men-folk at this time. She paused halfway to him, but he was at her side in two strides.

“Joan!” he exclaimed, “it’s business this time—for the last time, I hope.”

“I know,” she nodded. “You’ve sold after all, then.”

“Sold?” he exclaimed. “I wouldn’t take a million dollars for the process to-day.”

She moved away from him and sat down. She felt safer sitting down. He went back to his position before the fireplace.

He stood there so confidently, almost with such an air of proprietorship that she feared.

“Well?” she inquired.

“Hartley sent for me,” he announced, as though that in itself were something to be proud of. “I’ve told you of Hartley.”

“Yes.”

“He—he wants to go into partnership with us.”

“With us?”

It was as though she failed to connect herself at all with the “us.”

“With you and me. He made an offer to undertake the full management and furnish capital, for a one-third interest. Do you realize what that means?”

She considered a moment and then replied, “I’m afraid I don’t, Mark.”

“It means success!” he exclaimed. “With a man like him with us we can accomplish in weeks what it would take us months to do alone. Why, he has a scheme in mind already to buy the Burnett plant—”

She raised her eyes quickly at that name.

“The Burnett plant?”

“They were our big rivals,” he explained. “Forsythe was with them.”

She frowned at the recollection.

“Now Burnett has lost his money in the market.”

“I—I hadn’t heard anything about that!” she exclaimed.

“There is no reason why you should, is there? Hartley told me. The man is practically bankrupt, and we expect to buy it in at our own price.”

“This is Joshua Burnett you are talking about?”

“It’s Burnett, of the Burnett Manufacturing Company. I don’t know anything more about him than that. But Hartley says it’s our great opportunity. He is willing to put up the money provided we’ll take him in. He sent me up to you to get your consent.”

“I—I don’t see what I have to do with it,” she answered.

“You? Everything,” he ran on. “Why, we’re partners, you and I. I can’t put through any deal without you. I told Hartley that we each held a half interest. Without you I couldn’t even have made a beginning. And now that success is within our grasp, why, we’re going to share that, too.”

She was leaning forward, staring at the floor.

“You—you don’t seem as glad as I thought you’d be,” he complained.

She roused herself.

“I was thinking of Burnett,” she answered. “It—it seems sort of hard on him.”

“If he speculated and lost—that isn’t our fault, is it?”

“No, Mark.”

“And after what Forsythe attempted—”

“But Mr. Burnett had nothing to do with that,” she protested.

“I only know he needed my process and tried that way to get it.”

“It was Forsythe,” she cut in.

“You know this Burnett, then?”

“I have met his wife,” she faltered. “And I have met his son. Forsythe must have acted without their knowledge. I am absolutely certain.”

He glanced impatiently at his watch.

“Well, we’ll admit as much,” he concluded. “I must get back to Hartley. You give your consent?”

“I—I don’t know anything about what to do,” she stammered. “You must act upon your own judgment.”

“Right,” he nodded briskly. “Then I shall accept the offer. And now,”—he stepped nearer her,—“I hope I won’t ever have to bother you again with such details. They disturb you. I’m sorry to have had to come to you to-day. I’ll be glad when I shan’t have to be bothered myself. Hartley is going to take over just those things.”

She was sitting back in her chair a bit rigid.

“You don’t know what this means to me, Joan,” he said.

“I’m glad if it makes you happy.”

“It won’t make me completely happy until I’m able to make you happy.”

She rose now.

“Me? Please not to worry about me.”

“The next time I come it won’t be as your business partner,” he whispered. “The next time—”

“We mustn’t look forward to the next time,” she warned.

He frowned.

“What do you mean?”

“Things happen in such a queer way,” she replied.

When he found himself again outside the house he was repeating that last sentence to himself.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### A BUSY MAN

FOR a week Joan tried at odd times to get hold of Dicky, but as near as she could make out, there was not a busier man in New York. In just what way he was busy she could not discover. He was never in when she telephoned, and in reply to a note he answered only that it took so much time trying to see that his father did not play too much golf that he was left with scarcely a minute of his own. Under those circumstances, and some others, she was glad enough when her father proposed a couple of weeks at Atlantic City. So they motored down there and stopped at the Traymore. It was just before the season, so that the Board Walk was not yet too crowded to be unpleasant and one could still sit on the hotel deck in decent seclusion. Here she relaxed and baked herself in the sun or listened to the band concerts on the Pier, gazing out to sea. It was an indolent, hazy existence, and was undoubtedly just what she needed.

The one disturbing factor was the long letters she received every morning from Devons. He was glad she had left town. He saw now that the strain of the last month had told on her, and he blamed himself for that. He should not have allowed her to undertake anything so arduous. She was not accustomed to anything of the sort. She was not hardened to it as Miss Manning was. The latter made no effort and left the office at night as fresh as when she came in. She was proving very satisfactory.

When Devons talked of her like that he was repeating almost the very words of her mother. He was quite as blind as the latter had been—quite as narrow. He had failed utterly to realize what these months had really meant to her. It was not the work which had worried her, but his attitude toward it. And from him she had looked for something different. She had expected him to understand her—to see the facts her mother and Dicky had missed. She had been happy—supremely happy—with the joy that comes of service. That is the only

happiness that lasts—that can perpetuate itself. For a little while she had felt herself useful, and it was this that had given significance to those days. To be sure, she had done a very little, and perhaps had not done that little as well as Miss Manning was doing it. But that little—he had permitted Miss Manning to take that little away from her. There was nothing left. That is what she felt as he wrote to her. There was nothing left between them to give point to his later letters.

For the next few days he talked only of Hartley. He admired the man. He stood almost in awe of the way he was taking hold of the business and pushing through the negotiations with Burnett.

“Hartley is a genius,” he wrote. “And his man Starling shows the result of training under him. The two are putting in ten hours a day and I am spending most of my time with them. I’m turning out only just enough enamel for Hartley to use because it seems a waste of time to putter around in a small way after listening to the plans they have ahead. And the letters are coming in every day clamoring for the stuff. I tell you, Joan, we have a market bigger than I ever realized. We’ve got them going.

“There isn’t much doubt but what we’ll get the Burnett plant. The only question is one of price and Hartley is driving a sharp bargain.”

And so on and so on and so on. Those details did not interest her in the slightest. She frowned at every mention of the name of Burnett. There were times when she felt as though involved in some plot against him—and against the little woman she had met who was so proud of Dicky and against Dicky himself. She wished Dicky would write to her. She had dropped him a note saying that she was going to Atlantic City and hoped to hear from him. But she did not hear. At the end of a week she was going through her morning mail looking for his boyish handwriting with an eagerness that surprised her. When instead of that she found the businesslike scrawl of Devons, she was always brought up with something of a shock. It was odd, but down here the whole affair with Devons was fast becoming more and more a detached episode. It was

probably due to the fact that it began so abruptly and ended so abruptly and had so little to do with her present existence, while Dicky went back in her life several years. Then, too, one could not imagine Devons here without spoiling him. On the other hand, this was just the sort of place into which Dicky would fit. He would like nothing better than to sprawl out in a steamer chair beside her with a rug over his knees and talk of nothing in particular. She would like to hear him talk again of nothing in particular.

Then when finally the deal was consummated—Devons sent her a wire the day the purchase of the Burnett plant was made—he began to write an entirely different sort of letter. She had anticipated this. She had dreaded just this. Her cheeks burned as she read the first one—burned with shame as though she were reading another woman's letters. It would have been better had he told her these things. With his eyes back of the words and his vibrant voice they would not have sounded quite so—so crude. They would have seemed more personal. Besides, she could have checked him then at the beginning. As it was, he had his own way—taking everything for granted. Even when in her replies she did not reply at all, he retained his confidence. It was as though he assumed her consent to all he wrote. Once she tried to write him what she felt, but it sounded as crude as his own letters, so she tore it up. She felt quite helpless, and in this emergency turned in her thoughts again to Dicky—of all men. It was, under the circumstances, rather absurd.

In the end it was Dicky rather than Devons that brought her back to town. She had begun to get worried about him. In the two weeks she had been away she had not heard a single word. This was unlike him, for even when she had treated him most badly he had never ceased to keep her posted about what he was doing. He had written her daily from Florida at a time when she had been so occupied with other matters that she had not deigned to reply at all to most of them. But it had not been because she did not like to hear from him. Even when he was most foolish she had not objected to reading his outpourings. There were a great many things Dicky did not understand, but now that no one in the world understood that seemed less



significant. He, at any rate, was consistent. And whatever it was now that prevented him from writing, she had no doubt whatever but that if she could see him she would find him exactly the same old Dicky. It was with an unexpressed desire to prove this that she came back to town instead of remaining another week as her mother urged.

She had not intended to tell Devons of her plans, but meant to have a day or so to herself. That morning, however, he called her up over the long distance just as she was starting, and insisted upon seeing her that afternoon.

“I want to take you all over the new plant,” he said. “We are fairly well installed now, and you must see for yourself what progress we’ve made. It will open your eyes.”

It was the last thing in the world she desired to do, but she knew that if she refused now it would be only to postpone the inevitable, so she consented. He was to call at the house for her at three.

When he stepped into the drawing-room she felt as though he had undergone some metamorphosis. It was almost as though he had changed physically. He was quicker in his movements—more aggressive in his attitude. He carried himself like a nervous man of affairs. But perhaps these peculiarities were given undue emphasis by his dress. She had never seen him except in the old pepper-and-salt suit he had first worn and the somewhat battered gray felt hat. They had to her grown to be a part of him. These had now been discarded for a new blue serge that fitted perfectly and a new Panama. She noticed, too, that his low shoes were new and that he was wearing gloves. It was a conventional enough costume, but it made him over into a modern young New York business man of a type. Much that characterized him as Mark Devons had vanished. To be sure, all this was superficial, but it had its effect.

It was clear that he was impatient to show her at once the tangible result of his success, and so after scarcely more than commonplace greetings they started in the waiting taxi in which he had driven up. On the way it was of Hartley again that he talked—of Hartley and the prospect that lay ahead.

“It’s like a fairy story coming true!” he exclaimed. “I can hardly believe it yet. It is only a few months ago that I was wandering around these streets on foot and penniless. And now —”

He turned to her as though this were the first time he had seen her since her return.

“You’re looking very much better,” he said abruptly. “The rest has done you good.”

“Yes?”

“At the rate things are going now, I ought to be able to get away myself for a little while this summer. If it’s possible I’d like to get home for a week.”

She tried to show some interest.

“They’ll be glad to see you.”

“They will when they see what I bring them.”

The cab had stopped before a fair-sized building. As she stepped out he pointed to a freshly painted inscription. It read

**DEVONS MANUFACTURING COMPANY**

“I wanted to make it Devons, Fairburne & Hartley,” he explained. “But Hartley thought this was the better trade name. Every time I look at it I’m half afraid it’s only an optical illusion. Read it for me.”

She repeated the words, “Devons Manufacturing Company.”

“That’s it,” he nodded. “Some different from the one crowded room we started with, eh?”

“It looks very imposing,” she answered.

“We’ve taken over two or three standard kinds of blacking Burnett was making. But as soon as I get time I’m going to try to improve on those. I believe I can do it.”

“I believe you can,” she said.

He led her in as proudly as he might have escorted her into a palace. After all, it stood for that. From this old building

was coming the wherewithal to build the Arkwright house which was to be his real palace. He took her into the general offices where Burnett used to sit and introduced her to Starling—a clean-cut young fellow.

“One of the partners in the firm,” he explained.

Starling, with a batch of letters in his hand, paused long enough to be decent, and then stepped over to Miss Manning who sat behind her machine in a corner of the office. In another minute he was dictating and she was watching Miss Manning’s quick fingers taking down the letters in shorthand. Devons was forced to call her twice to get her attention.

“We’ll begin at the ground floor and go up,” he announced. “I want you to see it all.”

So they went down again to a big room filled with kettles where a half-dozen men stained with black, sticky stuff were about their tasks. It was difficult to distinguish one of them from another, but as she watched them one of the men lifted his head. His face was that of a negro minstrel. She caught her breath as her eyes met his. He, too, appeared taken aback for a second and then he grinned. He paused only long enough to nod and turned to his work. She clutched Devons’s arm.

“That man—over there?” she questioned.

She pointed him out to Devons, but the latter only shook his head.

“I don’t know one of them from another,” he answered. “Some of them are Burnett’s men, and I believe Starling has taken on one or two new ones.”

“But that,” she said,—“that is Dicky Burnett.”

“Don’t know him,” he answered indifferently and started on.

But she left his side and hurried over to Dicky Burnett and touched his arm as he was bending over his work.

“Dicky!” she cried.

He looked up.

“Hello,” he answered.

“You—what are you doing here?” she demanded.

“I’ve taken a job—to learn the business,” he replied, unabashed.

“But you—surely that wasn’t necessary?”

“It was,” he answered.

“I don’t understand. You must come and tell me about it. You must come this evening.”

“I’m afraid—”

“No. I insist. You will come this evening.”

“Very well,” he consented. “Only—”

“I shall expect you at eight. You promise?”

“Yes.”

Devons in astonishment had reached her side. She turned back with him.

“You know the fellow?”

“He is Mr. Burnett’s son,” she answered. “I—oh, it’s all so topsy-turvy I want to go home.”

“But you haven’t seen half.”

“I’ve seen enough,” she pleaded. “I want to go home.”

## CHAPTER XXXV

### LOVE

WHEN Dicky strolled in at eight, his old immaculate, nonchalant self, it was hard for her to believe that he was the same man she had seen a few hours before smudge-covered and in greasy overalls. As she came forward excitedly to greet him, her big eyes were full of questions.

“Tell me,” she said eagerly, “from the beginning.”

His own eyes took fire at the beauty of her. In all the years he had known her he had never seen her look fairer. She was all she had ever been at her best and something more. It was that something more that puzzled him. It was as though all her superficial charms had suddenly grown deeper—as though her eyes, always deep, had now become like one of those bottomless lakes in the mountains, and her lips, always tender, had taken on the infinite tenderness of a mother. He had come prepared to put all the past behind him, and he found it intensified.

“I’d rather forget it all—with you,” he answered.

“Why?” she asked directly.

The reason was that he felt a man ought never to come to her except with tales of success—with reports of good fortune. A lady does not care to hear from her knight of reversals. And yet as he looked into those new depths he found it difficult to express this in any way that would not hurt her.

“It isn’t pleasant reading,” he replied awkwardly.

“You are ashamed?” she asked in astonishment.

“No,” replied Dicky quickly. “Not that.”

“Then tell me.”

He sat down opposite her and leaned forward with his hands clasped over his knees. He wanted to make the recital as

brief as possible.

“After all, it’s an old story,” he said. “Dad took a turn at the market and got cleaned out. It was necessary to cash in everything to pay up. That left us broke so we moved to a flat in Brooklyn and I took a job with the new firm to learn the business. Now tell me about yourself. How did you happen to drift in there?”

“I came in with Mr. Devons. Don’t you remember him?”

Dicky squinted his eyes a moment.

“Seems to me I saw him somewhere once.”

“He was at the house. He is the man I—I almost ran over.”

“Good Lord, is that the fellow?”

“He is the man for whom I borrowed the money. Why, he’s a partner of yours, Dicky.”

He looked puzzled.

“A partner of mine?”

“When I took the money I agreed to make you a silent partner. So you’re a partner of mine and a partner of his. You and I have between us a one-third interest.”

Dicky rose to his feet.

“Well, I’ll be hanged!” he exclaimed. “Then I’ll be able to pay back that five thousand to dad!”

“You went to him for it?”

“I had no other place to go.”

“You can pay back that and a great deal more besides. Why, Mark says—”

“Mark?” he interrupted.

The color came to her cheeks.

“Mr. Devons,” she explained. “He expects to make his fortune on his share.”

“Then dad ought to make half a fortune,” he nodded.

“Only it’s really yours.”

“Mine? I’d have a nerve to claim it. Why, it was all on account of me that he got into the hole.”

He had said too much and realized it the next second when she pressed him to go on.

“Somehow,” he faltered ahead,—“somehow dad thinks a lot of me. I’m sort of a weakness of his. One day I got to telling of something I wanted a whole lot—something I wanted more than I’d ever wanted anything. So what does he do but try to get it for me. He figured it would take several million, and had it all worked out on a pad how he could get that. Only he didn’t get it. Instead the other fellows got all he had. I guess it’s up to me now to return what I can.”

“Was what you wanted—as valuable as all that?”

“If dad had made all he set out to make and then doubled that, what I wanted would have been worth it and more if I could have got it,” he answered earnestly.

“But what—”

“The chance has passed, anyway,” he concluded. “But I want to get back to him and tell him about this. He’s worried and that interferes with his golf.”

Apparently he had recovered his old good-humor.

“You ought to see dad playing golf,” he smiled. “He has taken off fifteen pounds already. It’s doing him a world of good, but I couldn’t see how I was going to manage it much longer on twelve dollars a week. But if he’s going to get dividends—why, he thought I lost that five thousand the first week!”

“And you?”

“I thought so, too,” he admitted.

“You—you didn’t have much confidence in me, Dicky.”

“Not as a business woman,” he confessed. “And here you come out ahead of the whole crowd of us.”

He met her eyes a moment.

“Joan,” he trembled, “if you go ahead and reveal any more talents or anything, I won’t be able to stand it.”

“Stand what?” she demanded.

“You. Just your wonderful self. You make a man dizzy.”

“But, Dicky—” she began gently.

He turned away from her.

“Good-night,” he said abruptly. “I must go.”

It’s a pity that he did not look once again into the depths of those eyes, for there was something in them at that moment it would have done his soul good to see.

And it remained there as she sat on alone long after he had gone. As the realization of what it was seeped to the very heart of her, it quickened her pulse and glorified her face until she felt as though suddenly she had stepped out of the shade into the full beat of the living sun. For a little while she gave herself up to the sheer magic warmth of it without daring to look about—without daring to give it a name. So one awakens sometimes in the month of May, scarcely venturing to awaken fully lest the celestial chorus of bird songs and blossom fragrance and the springtime radiance of golden light vanish. But insistently the word she tried to suppress—the word that expressed it all—worked its way through her consciousness to her lips, until finally, very gently, she whispered it. Such a tiny word it was to mean so much. Such a soft, tender word it was to harbor such creative power. Love! One could pronounce it between heart-beats on the tag end of a breath. A sigh took more effort. And yet, when once pronounced, how it sent her blood to racing—how it put her in touch with the stars in their firmament, how it made her one with the eternal verities of life, even of death!

She rose and faced him where he had been. With her head back and her two arms stretching out unconsciously, she whispered, “Dicky!”

That was all she said, and yet it meant as much as that other word. The two words meant the same. Love was one



word and Dicky was the other. And they meant the same thing. They stood for the same thing. They were synonymous.

But as soon as she admitted this her cheeks turned a flaming scarlet and she looked about as though afraid of being seen. She raised one hand to her lips as though cautioning them to be careful. Because in a way she had no right to utter his name as she had. He had said nothing of love. He had come at her bidding and hurried away as soon as he could. Once, a few months back, he had spoken, but she had silenced him. Much had happened since then. Much had happened to them both.

Her thoughts went back to Dicky as he had lifted his face all smudged when she came upon him in the factory. He was in greasy overalls. He was so disguised that one would have thought she could not recognize him, and yet it was at that moment she seemed to pierce externals to the heart of him. With only his eyes to look into, she had looked so far into them that she had come upon the man himself. Once before she had glimpsed this man—when uncovered in the snow he had stood by the door of the limousine and sworn her allegiance. The two men were the same. The man who had been with her this evening was the same.

So the burn left her cheeks and she raised her head again.

To herself she said:

“Dicky, I can’t help it. Dicky, I—I love you.”

It was a pity he was not there to hear.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### THE DAY COMES

UNDER the spur of Hartley and Starling, Devons found himself working as hard as he had ever worked in his life. In the flood of new orders that came in there was no help for it. As yet, no one had been trained to do his work, so that it meant for him actual supervision of the process during its various manufacturing stages. Hartley was as merciless with him as he was with himself. Ten hours, fifteen hours, even twenty hours a day meant nothing. As a matter of fact, at the end of two weeks they had a night shift at work, and Hartley often remained at the plant until one in the morning. So did Starling and so did Devons.

“We want to break into this market with a rush,” said Hartley. “A little later, when we are firmly established, we can lay back on our oars.”

This left Devons little time for Joan, but with the assurance that came each day at the nightly conference with Hartley, who went over in conference with him the new business of the preceding twenty-four hours, it seemed less and less necessary to see her. Always she remained in the background, and he rested content in the knowledge that hour by hour he was strengthening the guarantee of a success that in the end should make her his. He had given up his little attic room and taken an apartment in a rather pretentious hotel more convenient to the plant. On the salary of one hundred dollars a week that Hartley had suggested was fair for his services, there was no reason in the world why he should not make the change. This gave him a living-room, a bedroom and bath. In what time he could spare from the factory he thoroughly enjoyed the luxury of these new quarters, and in a few days found himself consistently living up to them to the extent of dropping into the hotel barber shop for his morning shave, and naturally enough strolling from there to the hotel dining-room for his breakfast. It was costing him as much a day as formerly

it did a week, and yet he had considerably more left over. Some of this he deposited in the bank and some of it he converted into crisp new dollar bills which he locked up in his dress-suit-case. For, though he smiled a little at it now as a bit of eccentric foolishness, he still clung to his original idea of going back home with his bulging bag of money. He could have put it more conveniently in the form of a check, but the effect would not have been the same. A bit of paper bearing a signature was neither as impressive nor as dramatic as crisp new bills. Silver would have been even better because there was a ring to it, but it was not so easily handled.

The strain of the long hours began to tell on Devons at the end of a couple of weeks. He held on grimly and without complaint, but the past had drawn heavily on his physique and the unusual mental excitement kept him awake nights. Often he came back to his apartment at two in the morning only to lie awake until four with his brain running riot over Joan and home and the figures that to Hartley served merely as a tonic. Then a fitful sleep of three hours and he was up again.

Hartley did not understand what those figures meant to Devons. To him they remained merely figures. He did not translate them into terms of life. Even when he saw in them the prospect of doubling his income, that meant scarcely more than a fresh problem of reinvestment. With his wants already well cared for, there was a pleasant satisfaction in piling up a larger reserve, but it was nothing to grow breathless about. As they increased, the dollars became more and more abstract.

But Devons was still in the concrete stage where every dollar stood for something tangible. To see them come flooding down in the form of things for her, in the form of an increasing number of bills in his suit-case, in the form of constantly increasing additions to his own comfort, was a type of intoxication.

He held on during the long days of June until toward the end he found the kettles and the thermostat begin slowly to revolve so that he was forced to cling to something to keep himself upright. He held on when at night he heard Hartley's voice coming as from a distance and found that he

remembered nothing of what he said. He held on when at odd moments he found himself seized with uncontrollable fits of laughter. He held on until one evening he reeled and fell in front of Hartley.

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Devons recovered in a few minutes, and Hartley escorted him to his apartments and sat up with him the rest of the night. Devons protested, but Hartley sat on and listened to his hysterical chatter and watched him. In the morning Hartley gave his verdict.

“What you’ll do will be to take a month’s vacation,” he determined. “Get out of the city. Go back home.”

“I’ll be all right by to-morrow.”

“You won’t.”

“But I can’t leave. I—”

“You can leave as well as not,” answered Hartley. “Starling is in a position now to go on with your work with the help of the men you’ve trained. You’re going, that’s all there is to it. You’re going to-morrow. I’ll make out a check for a thousand dollars and send it round to you. Don’t you dare step into the factory again until you come back.”

Coming from Hartley this was in the nature of a mandate. It left him nothing else to do. So, in relief, he turned over and slept intermittently the remainder of that day and night. He woke the following morning considerably rested and with a sense of exhilaration. In his mail he found his check and a brief note from Hartley.

“Dear Devons,” it read. “Forget the plant and have a good time. Everything went along swimmingly yesterday. The best of luck to you.”

He was on a vacation—the first vacation for ten years. All day long he had nothing to do except what he wished to do. And he was going home—going back with his dress-suit-case

almost filled and enough on hand to quite fill it. And he was going to see Joan!

The day had come. There was no reason now why he could not go to her and claim her. Even on the basis of the unfilled orders the firm had at present, there would be ten thousand dollars coming to him at the end of the year. The chances were that this would be doubled. In the meanwhile it might be possible to worry along on his present salary as long as there was the assurance of the future dividends. The Arkwright house might have to wait another year or two, but this would give them time to select a site and perfect details.

He wanted her to come home with him on his first visit. Never after this would conditions be the same. If, in addition to the tangible evidence of his business success, he could bring her—then he *would* arrive as a conqueror. He was thinking of himself—not of her nor of the home folk. Always he occupied the center of the stage. Perhaps this was not much to be wondered at. He was hungry for this sort of thing. For ten years he had been starved of all the little minor successes that come to most men—that lead up to the final big success. He had been in the background watching enviously those at the fore. Now it was his turn and he was going to make the most of it.

He dressed carefully that morning and gave the barber *carte blanche* to do what he wished with him. Then he strolled into the dining-room and ate a leisurely and rather elaborate breakfast. It was the beginning of the day of which he had so long dreamed. After this he strolled uptown and made several purchases—among them a box of flowers which he ordered sent to her. He did not dare telephone until eleven, and then he begged her to lunch with him. She tried to avoid the engagement, but he was insistent.

“I’m on my vacation, Joan,” he said. “I’ve looked forward to this a long time.”

There was a note of pathos in his plea that won her. So she consented to be ready at one.

During the next two waiting hours he walked slowly downtown and back along Fifth Avenue as far as Washington Square. He walked proudly, swinging a light stick with an air. There were many who turned to look at him. He made rather a striking appearance in his smart tailored clothes. To many he passed as a bridegroom. There was an atmosphere of confidence and prosperity about him that made him seem to embody something of the spirit of the June morning. To the young men he established a sort of standard and to the young women he stood for a dream.

At one he drove up to the Fairburne house, feeling buoyant after his walk and showing hardly any effect of his illness of the day before. In the magic of his new hopes he had thrown it off.

She had dressed a little for him in honor of the occasion and was more like her old self.

“I’m so glad you’re to have a rest,” she greeted him.

“I guess I’ve earned it,” he answered.

She nodded.

“Where are we going?”

“You’re to follow me to-day,” he replied. “I’m going to make one more dream come true.”

“I’ll do what I can to help you,” she agreed.

Yet she frowned a little when the taxi stopped before Delmonico’s. Most any place he might have chosen would have been preferable to that. Still she was willing to humor him even to this extent. After all this was his vacation, and she must do what she could to start him on it happily.

But as she went in by his side the whole place became tensely reminiscent of Dicky. They had come here together the last time they had gone anywhere together. They had been here many times before that. It had become so associated with him that she felt almost disloyal in coming with any one else. And somehow Dicky fitted better here than this man now with her. For the life of her she could not tell why, but Devons appeared slightly out of place. As they moved on to the dining-room she

studied him and wondered why. As far as his personal appearance went, he was a little better-dressed than others at the tables. Perhaps that was it. She almost expected to hear his shoes squeak.

That was a ridiculous thought—so ridiculous that it made her smile.

He was quite serious about ordering the lunch and consulted her taste in everything. Personally she desired nothing but a salad and tea, but he was insistent upon making it as elaborate as possible.

“This is part of the dream,” he reminded her.

So before he had more than begun his order he had converted the waiter from an indifferent bystander into a most attentive and obsequious servant. If the latter had been asked to characterize his guest, he would have done it in a sentence.

“Ranch-owner from the West on his honeymoon.”

This was at the moment when Devons was flattering himself that he was the embodiment of New York.

During the lunch, of which she ate little, he talked again of the factory and of Hartley and the details of the last month. Then he ran on to the possibilities of the future, which led him up to Arkwright.

“You remember him?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“It was he who helped fix up my attic for you,” he reminded her.

“Oh, the big fellow?”

He nodded.

“He’s an architect. Did I ever tell you about the house he designed?”

“No.”

“It’s a wonderful house. ’Way back in the winter he told me he had done it for me. It was a joke then, but it begins to

look as though it might turn out serious.”

In detail he described it to her, watching her eyes to see if she responded. At least she appeared attentive.

“That’s part of the dream, too,” he concluded. “Some day I’m going to build that. Where do you think we ought to put it?”

She started.

“It sounds very grand,” she answered. “Would you really enjoy that sort of house?”

“With acres of land around it.”

“Oh, dear,” she smiled. “It will be quite a royal estate.”

“Yes,” he answered soberly. “It must be that—for you.”

“For me!” she cried.

“Didn’t you understand that?”

“No, no,” she said quickly.

“Who else did you think I was going to build it for?”

“I—I don’t know. You—we mustn’t stay here any longer.”

The orchestra began to play a *valse hésitation*. She looked about in alarm—as though in search of Dicky.

“I came here just to tell you these things,” he hurried on. “I—I thought you would be pleased.”

“It’s all my fault!” she exclaimed. “I shouldn’t have come. I—I should have written you the truth from Atlantic City.”

“The truth?”

“When you wrote me as you did. I won’t pretend. I knew then you were coming to care for me—in a way that was impossible. Only I didn’t want to hurt you. I thought that if I said nothing you would see.”

“See what?”

“That—” she hesitated.



“That you don’t love me?” he put in.

She hung her head as though ashamed.

“Yes,” she answered.

He leaned forward.

“After all these months that I have been working for you?”

She raised her head at that. She met his eyes.

“You thought you were working for me, but—but after all is that true?”

“For you!” he cried fiercely. “For you alone! From the first week you were so kind to me it was that and nothing else. It’s been part of the dream—the biggest part. I’ve looked forward to taking you home with me. You were coming back to the little farm as my wife. I was to be so proud of you. It’s true! It *must* be true!”

“You—you dreamed those things all by yourself,” she warned.

“Because I had no right to share them with you until I had made good. I—I couldn’t talk about such things in an attic, could I?”

She thought a second.

“No,” she answered. “And yet if you had—”

“They would have sounded absurd,” he broke in. “I had to wait until I could give you all the things you deserved. I had to wait until now.”

“And now,” she answered, moving back her chair, “we mustn’t talk about them any more.”

“You mean you won’t marry me?”

“It’s impossible,” she answered. “I—I don’t love you.”

“But if I wait a little longer—”

“It would make no difference.”

She was firm now. She was direct. She felt this must be over with at once.

“Don’t go yet,” he pleaded as she rose.

But she stood where she was as he paid his check. Then she started for the door. He took her arm—holding it so tightly it hurt.

“Joan,” he choked. “You’re spoiling the dream.”

“I’m sorry,” she answered. “I’m very sorry.”

“Then come with me. Oh, I’ll make a princess of you. I’ll work all my life to get you things. I want so to buy you things.”

“You only make it worse,” she replied.

They had reached the coat-room, and he would have gone right on talking like that had she not warned him of the eager listeners. Then they were outside again and she felt freer, though he was still holding her arm. She herself motioned for a cab.

“You mustn’t leave me like this,” he muttered.

She held out her hand as she had held out her hand to Dicky. But he refused to take it.

“This isn’t right!” he cried.

“It is necessary. You are making it more necessary every minute.”

“I? It’s you. This isn’t fair of you.”

His face showed both fear and anger. She had never seen him like this. She was sorry to have to remember him like this.

“Mark,” she whispered, “I wanted to keep you as a friend.”

He laughed harshly.

“Friend? After what I’d planned! But I might have known!”

“Yes,” she answered quietly, “you might have known. Good-bye.”

She stepped into the cab and closed the door. He reached for the knob, but she gave a sharp order to the driver. She closed her eyes and leaned back. It was not so Dicky had left her.

Where was Dicky? She needed him now.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### BACK HOME

DEVONS went from Delmonico's direct to the ticket-office and engaged his ticket and parlor-car accommodations for that night. With a vicious relish he took an entire drawing-room. Joan had cheated him of much, but she should not cheat him of all the rest. He would make his home-going all that he had planned with the exception of her. He still had before him his grand entry, and he would let the world at large know of his success.

He took a cab back to the Avenue and stopped many times to make for himself some of the purchases he had intended to make with her.

He bought extravagantly for many of those back home he had scarcely thought of since he left. He took a fierce delight in spending his money, in converting it into tangible things for them as long as there was no one else. There was a Marion Thompson who had been a classmate of his in the district school and who was now teaching in that very school. She was a subdued sort of girl with dreamy, brown eyes. Until this moment he had almost forgotten her, but now he bought for her a gold necklace just because it occurred to him that it would become her. He paid for it as much as her salary would amount to in six months.

Then he went back to his apartment and packed his new trunk with his new clothes and his old suit-case with the rest of the new bills which he had stopped at the bank to get. He had pretty nearly a thousand of them. And all this time he tried to put Joan entirely out of his mind, although she kept coming back. And every time she came back she stung him anew and left him with a sense of martyrdom. The phrase he used over and over again was that she had not been fair to him. She had turned him aside exactly as though he were still nothing but a penniless vagabond. She did not appreciate all that he was

about to do for her—closed her eyes to all the fair dreams he had for her. But he did not intend to let that spoil his holiday nor the days after. She would see when he came back. She would see and possibly regret.

He would do his best to make her regret. Here was something to look forward to. He would build his house exactly as he had it in mind. People should talk about it as the “Devons Estate.” She should hear of it. He would make it even more pretentious than he had planned and she should hear of it.

He knew how the eyes of those back home would pop out when he told them about it. Here was something more to look forward to. When it was done he would have many of them come back to see it. He would pay their fares and give them a holiday they would remember—a holiday they would talk about the rest of their lives. Here was something pleasant to think about. Only if he were taking her home with him, there would be something for them to talk about at once. If he could have brought her back into his father’s house on his arm, if he could have taken her through the town by his side and through the county town, then—

He was forever sliding back to her. He must keep her out of his mind entirely. It would be easier as soon as he was started. So he paid his bill and went to the station with his baggage two hours before train time.

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Devons wired ahead from Chicago, and at the little one-horse station where he stopped he found his father there with the buckboard to meet him. The elder Devons was a tall, spare man with rounding shoulders. He hesitated a second before coming up to shake hands with the prosperous young man who strode toward him.

“Hello, Dad,” said Devons.

“Hello, Sonny,” answered Devons senior uncertainly.

The two men gripped and the awkward moment was passed. The older man shouldered the new trunk and Devons brought up the suit-cases.

“Strap the old one on tight,” he said. “I don’t want to lose that.”

Then he got on the seat with his father and hitched up his trousers to preserve the crease, and they started over the prairie road. It was hot and dusty and the old buckboard was hard riding after the Pullman. The father said little, but Devons inquired after every one and listened to the old familiar stories of hard luck about them. They continued in an endless cycle through one generation after another.

“Marion Thompson—you remember Marion?” said his father.

“Surely.”

“She’s teaching school and boarding with us.”

“Has she changed much?”

“Dunno’s she has. People round here don’t change much.”

“In New York they change in twenty-four hours,” remarked Devons with a frown.

“I s’pose so. You’ve done pretty well there, sonny?”

“You bet,” replied Devons with satisfaction.

They reached the old farmhouse at last. Devons shuddered as he saw it. It looked even more like a hovel than when he had left it. His mother was at the door—thin and hollow-eyed. She came out and kissed him dumbly. If he had not seen her like this all through his youth, he would have said she did not have a week to live. Behind her came his sisters and his brothers, and behind them, timidly, a slight girl with dreamy brown eyes. This was Marion. She was prettier than he expected. She was in a simple calico dress that hung straight over a slender body. As the children crowded about him he looked over their heads and met her eyes. She blushed and

shrank back a little. It gave him a sense of power. It was evident she was terribly afraid of him.

They all made their way into the tawdry sitting-room which showed the effect of a very recent and thorough cleaning. Here Devons unfastened his dress-suit-case, spreading it open upon the center table. He stood back exactly as he had dreamed.

“A little present for you and father,” said he to his mother.

She stared open-mouthed at the crushed green bills. She clasped her hands over her breast and stared.

“There’ll be more later,” said Devons. “There’ll be plenty for you all the rest of your lives.”

“Mark!” she choked, “be they real?”

He went to her side and placed his arm about her.

“Lord bless you, yes,” he assured her.

There was a lump in his own throat. He knew—well he knew—what that meant to them.

Then to break the tension he unstrapped his trunk and brought out what he had for the others. As he handed his brothers and sisters each his present there was an excited cry of joy and amazement, but through all the confusion he saw always that slip of a girl in the rear who, big-eyed, looked on as at a drama.

He kept his present for her until the last. When finally he stepped to her side she could not believe her eyes. She undid the box with trembling fingers and drew out and held up the pretty gold chain.

“This is for me?” she gasped.

“Let me put it round your neck,” he answered.

With her cheeks a deep crimson she allowed him to do as he wished and he clasped it. His fingers brushed her warm skin and he found his cheeks almost as hot as hers.

“There,” he concluded, “if you had been with me I couldn’t have selected anything more your own.”

“It is beautiful,” she murmured. “Thank you.”

There was a mirror on the side of the wall.

“Come here and see how it looks.”

She obeyed. He stood behind her and in the mirror their eyes met. He saw in them both wonder and admiration. It was very satisfying. It was quite the most satisfying feature of his home-coming.

That evening, after all the children had gone to bed and a little later father and mother had followed, he found himself sitting on the steps with Marion by his side. Together they looked far across the level country and at the stars above it—so very far above it. There he found himself telling her the story of these last ten years—telling her because she leaned forward tensely and listened as children listen to a stirring tale of adventure. In contrast to the gray routine of her own life his narrative was as colorful as a Turkish rug. She grew quite breathless about it. So he covered the years up to the new developments in his business. There he paused. He loved the telling of it. As he rambled on she helped him to forget all the dull places and dramatized for him all the joyful spots. But he was afraid at length that he was tiring her.

“Go on,” she pleaded.

“I think you would like New York,” he said.

“Tell me about it.”

In her voice there was something that made him feel he was talking of ancient Bagdad.

“It’s a queer city,” he said. “Either it gets you by the throat and crushes you back to the pavement or you get it by the throat and make it give up the choice things of the world.”

“And you—you got it by the throat.”

“I have now,” he answered. “I wish you had been with me as I went up and down Fifth Avenue before I came away. You would have known then. And when I get back—”

He found himself telling her of the Arkwright house. Only he elaborated still more upon it. He embellished it with a



dozen new features he thought of on the spur of the moment sitting there by her side, looking over the prairie. She responded to them all with a little gasp.

“It’s wonderful!” she exclaimed. “It’s like magic.”

“When it’s done I want to have a house party and bring you all on to see it,” he exclaimed grandly.

She laughed a little at that.

“I can’t believe I’ll ever do it,” she answered.

“Why not?” he demanded.

“I’ve gone on day by day so long that I can only think of day by day.”

“You’d like to get away from here?”

She rose. Her arms were tense by her side.

“That’s like asking if one would like to get out of prison,” she answered.

In the deepening dusk of the night her plain gown became blurred. He saw only her girlish figure, and as she lifted her face to the sky her soft lips and cheeks. She was so slender and eager and responsive! Here was one who would add fresh pleasures to all he had. Here was one whose eyes would stay big day after day with the sights he could show her. Here was one upon whom he could spend his money and receive his reward in palpitating enthusiasm. Here was one who stood ahungry for all he was in a position to give. She would make every dollar seem like ten. By that much she would multiply his fortune by ten. That other—ah, here was one who might make even that other envious.

She turned toward the house. He took her arm. Seized with a sudden passion he spoke her name.

“Marion!”

She turned back, startled.

“Marion,” he cried, “come back with me! I want you with me to share all these new things. By to-morrow or next day I’ll

have to go. I thought I should stay a month, but I want to get back. You'll come with me?"

"You—you mean—"

"I want you to marry me. The next three weeks we'll spend in New York on our honeymoon. We'll start on the house."

"But, Mark—" she trembled.

He took her in his arms. He kissed her lips.

Breathless, like some captured bird, she felt her heart beat against his.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE LAST ACT

IT was at least a novelty for Joan to find it impossible to get hold of Dicky when the desire seized her to talk with him. Under ordinary circumstances she would have found it humiliating to be forced to accept excuse after excuse in response to her messages—excuses that were none too adept. It began to seem almost as though he were deliberately avoiding her. But even in that she blamed herself and justified him. After all she deserved very little of him. In the hour when he had needed her, she had turned away from him, and now in her hour of need he was repaying her in kind.

For she did need him very much. Her mind was all topsy-turvy, and at this moment he seemed to be the only one who could help her straighten it out, because somehow her thoughts all revolved about him. She found herself awakening in the morning to thoughts of him. Every day since Devons had left had begun that way. Whether the sun was shining and the world in tune with the singing of birds or whether the sky was dark and the rain beating down, she felt that she must see Dicky in order to get a fair start. It was as though her life were marking time for him. There was no especial point in getting up, but neither was there any especial point in lying in bed. Without him the forenoon had no particular significance, neither had the afternoon and evening. It was a frame of mind she would have found absurd in any one else.

Yet she was not the least bit ashamed of it in herself. Rather she gloried in it. She accepted it in a way as a sort of purgatory. And always she admitted with utter frankness her love for him. She attempted no subtlety on that point. She allowed no quibbling on the ground of maidenly reserve. She loved him honestly and whole-heartedly and from the depths. She faced that truth with raised head—with pride. The fact that he had once asked her to marry him gave her a certain privilege, but even without this it would have been the same.

After all, such a thing as this was no more to be denied because of the conventions than the matter of her age or the color of her eyes. Either it was or it was not. If one were honest one admitted the truth at all times.

And this love was no mere abstract mental condition. It was a very personal and vital and altogether human love. She was by no means content to let it rest where it was; to fold her hands like the maidens of her mother's day and if need be to wait and pine away in loneliness.

Because she loved Dicky she wanted him. She wanted to see him—to be with him. She wanted to share his days with him. She especially wanted to share these present days with him. He was going to work now at seven in the morning he had told her. With an hour out for lunch he toiled until five and then went home dog-tired. It was to her he should come when dog-tired. She should have had the privilege of relieving his weariness. She could have kissed him all smutched as he might be. It was when the rest of him was almost unrecognizable that she had seen into his eyes. What she had seen there then she craved. It was the sweet soul of the man—the very gallant knight in the man.

Why did he not come to her? Day after day for a week she asked herself that and received no answer. And day after day as she dwelt alone with her love it burned away all the old barriers and gathered heat with what it fed upon. The need of him became acute, so at the end of a long day it resolved itself into action.

Half-frightened by her new boldness, she rang up Dicky's mother at the little apartment in Brooklyn.

"Please," she said, "will you ask me to dinner to-night?"

"Why, my dear," came the gentle voice, "we should be delighted. We have dinner at six because both Dicky and his father are very hungry when they get home."

"Then—may I come a little early?"

"Come as soon as you wish."

So that much was accomplished without any particular harm to any one. It is surprising what may be accomplished in violation of all rules if one has an honest purpose and a clean heart.

She changed her gown into a simple white summer dress and hurried down to tell her mother.

“I’m going to have dinner to-night with the Burnetts,” she said.

“Very good,” answered Mrs. Fairburne. “I’m glad you are going out.”

Charles left her at the unpretentious apartment house in the quiet street at five, and a few moments later she had mounted to the third floor and was facing the door which bore a card reading “Mr. Joshua Burnett.” Mrs. Burnett herself came in response to her ring, and without apology and with sincere friendliness welcomed her in.

“I am doing the cooking myself,” she explained as soon as Joan had removed her hat. “It seems real good to be able to do it again. Both of the men seem to like it, too.”

Joan insisted upon accompanying her into the tiny kitchen and there she tried her best to find something to do. But as she watched the sure, practiced hands busy about their tasks, she felt quite helpless and useless. There was nothing left but to sit back and keep out from under foot and watch. Suddenly she realized that she was accepting this rather startling change in the fortunes of the Burnetts in quite a matter-of-fact way. It was almost as though there had been no change at all. And that was because she thought only of the little woman herself and not of her surroundings or her tasks. She was the mother of Dicky wherever she was. Here preparing his dinner she was more than ever that. Only it was not right for the older woman to be doing this. She, Joan, should be doing it for her.

“I wish you would show me how to do all these things,” she said.

“Haven’t you ever learned to cook?” replied Mrs. Burnett, in astonishment.

“No,” admitted Joan with a touch of color.

“Then it’s certainly time you did learn,” answered Mrs. Burnett. “But my way of cooking is all for Mr. Burnett and Dicky.”

“I should like to learn that way, too,” breathed Joan.

It was the tone of the girl’s voice that made Mrs. Burnett glance sharply at her. Then, while she looked, she saw the young cheeks grow a deeper and deeper scarlet, though she did not speak a word. The eyes held steady, but perhaps the lips trembled the slightest bit, partly in fear, partly in a mute plea for sympathy. That was only for a second because Mrs. Burnett stepped closer, her face radiant.

“You mean you—you care for Dicky?” she asked tenderly.

Joan rose, breathing rapidly. She tried to answer, but her lips remained dumb. So she just nodded.

The mother of Dicky, her hands all flour-covered as they were, took the girl into her arms. She kissed the rich dark hair, murmuring:

“Oh, I’m so glad—so glad.”

“Only,” whispered Joan brokenly, “I—I don’t know if Dicky cares for me.”

“That’s for Dicky to tell you,” answered Mrs. Burnett. “But I think all you’ll have to do is to give him the chance.”

That evening Joan had the honor of setting the table for Dicky. Incidentally she set it for the others, but they did not count for very much, not even herself. The table was set for Dicky alone as, if the truth were known, the dinner was cooked for Dicky alone. Even when Mr. Burnett came in, ruddy and tired after his afternoon at the country club, he did not seem very important.

“Hasn’t Dicky come home yet?” were his first words.

“It isn’t quite time,” answered Mrs. Burnett. “You haven’t spoken to Miss Fairburne.”

He had not seen her. Now he took her hand and bowed politely, at the same moment reaching for his watch.

“It’s quarter of six. He was here last night at this time.”

“Now you go get ready,” urged Mrs. Burnett. “What was your score to-day?”

“Made it in a hundred,” he answered proudly.

As he disappeared, Mrs. Burnett attempted a weak apology for him.

“He acts just as silly as that every time the boy isn’t here when he gets home.”

It was not five minutes later that Dicky did come in with something in his hand that looked very much like a lunch-box. Joan, whether deliberately or not cannot be said with certainty, was standing very near the door. At sight of her Dicky appeared to be frozen in his tracks.

“I’m—I’m here to dinner,” explained Joan.

“But how—”

“Your mother invited me,” she faltered on as though she really found it necessary to account for herself.

“Good for mother!” he exclaimed. “Why—why I’m darned glad to see you.”

“Thank you, Dicky. You’d better get ready. It’s almost cooked.”

“Dad home?”

“He’s waiting for you,” she answered.

From the kitchen came his mother’s voice.

“He’s gone to tidy up.”

“You’ll have to give me time to shave if there’s company,” he called back.

Joan had turned to put the finishing touches to the table. He followed her a little way. Then he stopped. He felt like rubbing his eyes.

“Joan,” he said.

She looked over her shoulder.

“I’m *awful* glad to see you,” he said.

It was not an especially poetic speech, but it made her heart jump. Nor, all through the dinner, was the conversation of a character to be worth recording. It was significant neither for its wit nor wisdom and yet every one appeared happy. After the dinner Joan insisted that Mrs. Burnett retire to the sitting-room with her husband and leave the clearing-up to her—and to Dicky if he cared to help.

“You betcha,” agreed Dicky.

So after the table was cleared, Dicky found himself in the little buttery engaged in the task of wiping dishes, while Joan in a long apron of his mother’s washed them. Even here the dialogue did not sparkle. He had a feeling that there was something he did not understand, which was quite correct. There was a mystery about her presence. He was not quite clear how his mother happened to ask her and still less clear how she happened to accept. If he had been consulted beforehand he would have advised against any such invitation. He would have said that, under the circumstances, it might place her in a position where she would not feel at liberty to refuse. She had been wonderfully decent through these last few weeks—wonderfully decent. She had extended invitation after invitation to him which he had turned down because he felt that she was making an especial effort to be nice to him in what she thought his adversity. In a way she pitied him, though he did not pity himself in the slightest. Still it was necessary to recognize the fact that there *had* been a change in his circumstances. As a laborer working for fifteen dollars a week, he was in an entirely different position in regard to her than he had been a month ago. He had enough faith in himself to believe this was only temporary, but while such conditions existed they were, that was all there was about it. Hartley had already recognized his ability to the extent of making him foreman of the room. In six months or a year he might be put on the road, and from that point he could climb as high as he was able. But he had no right to ask her to gamble on any such



prospects. Her life was based on certainties. There was nothing contingent about the Fairburne income and he had no right to offer her anything less. A man would be a cad to allow such a woman as she to run any chances. She must be made as secure as papers in a safe deposit vault. He was as yet far from a point where he could offer her that.

All this was what the reasoning part of him said, but at the very same time his heart kept running counter to it. Every time he reached for a dish and by that much came nearer to her soft arm revealed to the elbow by her rolled-up sleeves, his heart said, "Go a little nearer." Then it was necessary to step back quickly in fear lest he yield to the temptation. For the heart of him was a very vagabond for carelessness and laughed to scorn all his best arguments.

"Take her," it said, "for by all the laws of love she's yours. You've known her now since you were schoolmates together, and there hasn't been a day in all that time when you haven't known that she was the biggest thing in your life. There hasn't been a time when you wouldn't have been willing to lay at her feet all the most precious things of your life—including life itself. You've tried her through your prosperous days and it was like that. You went away from her and it remained like that. She went away from you and it was just the same. Now in this sudden shift of your fortunes there is no change in your love. If anything you love her more than you ever did because you need her more. You need her to give point to your ambitions. You need her to give you respite from the sheer drudgery of your labors. You need her in a thousand new ways.

"Here she is. Take her. The two of you are here alone and you have only to look into her eyes to know you have better than a sporting chance."

But because he wanted her—even because he needed her—was no reason why he should ask for her, replied the cold-blooded, reasoning part of him. Merely because he wanted the crown jewels, did that justify him in seizing them? Men called that larceny. It was then a worse larceny to make off—provided always that were possible—with something infinitely

more valuable. Compared with the pure radiance of her soul the crown jewels were but so many baubles of colored glass. He must keep a tight grip on himself or he would land in a jail of his own making.

In the meanwhile Joan went on with the washing of her dishes as though she had no other concern. And though she tried now and then to open the conversation on general topics, she did not get very far. Had it not seemed disloyal to harbor such a thought, she would have said that Dicky was stupid this evening. At times it seemed almost worse than that—as though he were bored with having her here. And the pitiful part of it all was that with both of them attending strictly to business the work was being completed at such a rapid rate that it was soon only a matter of minutes before it would be done and they would both be back again in the sitting-room. Then Lord only knew when there would be another such opportunity. Fate sometimes plays strange tricks and in the space of a single evening erects barriers that last a lifetime. It is difficult to foretell what is going to happen from one minute to the next.

So they came to the last dish and he was left quite helpless with the dishcloth in his hands.

“Hang it up nicely on the rack over the stove,” she said.

He did that. She turned and washed her hands.

“There,” she said, “I guess we’re all through now.”

She undid her apron and hung it up. Then she began to roll down her sleeves. To him it was like a slowly descending curtain. It was the last act of the play.

When she had done that there was no further excuse for their remaining there. She looked at him, and as her eyes caught his the old telltale color flooded back to her cheeks. They faced each other like that a moment. Then from somewhere deep came a little, stifled cry.

He gripped his jaws.

“Oh, Dicky!” she repeated.

And again, as once before, the name was but a synonym for love. He heard it this time and reason fled from him. He

took her in his arms and without a single word kissed her lips. He kissed them with the world swimming about him—kissed them with a kiss that made them eternally one.

In the due course of time—as far as they were concerned there was no longer any such thing as time—they came back to the sitting-room.

“Seems to me it took you a long time to finish those dishes,” said Burnett.

But Mrs. Burnett raised her eyes questioningly to Joan. Then she smiled and went to her son and kissed him.

Said Burnett senior a little later in the evening as they were discussing ways and means in a committee of the whole:

“Of course, it’s all nonsense to talk about Dicky having only fifteen dollars a week. What’s mine is his. And if there’s anything in the prospect of that little investment of his panning out to the extent of ten thousand a year, it belongs to him. I loaned him the money and when he gets ready he can pay that back. I didn’t look upon it then as an investment, but charged it in my books against profit and loss, so I don’t see why I should claim it now.”

Dicky jumped to his feet and clapped his father on his back.

“Why, you real old sport!” he exclaimed.

But Joan stole up to the father and placed one arm about his neck and whispered in his ear. The others did not hear what she said. They never heard. It remained one of the mysteries of Dicky’s whole life. It was a secret between Joan and Burnett. As such it really is even to-day the concern of no one else in the wide world.

However, if any one chooses to be impertinent enough to read the last sentence, what she said was this:

“You old dear, don’t you go and spoil it all. Please don’t let him have that money. I want him just as he is.”

THE END

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## Transcriber's Notes

Spelling, punctuation, and hyphens standardised across the text.

[p92 "Gatling\\_gun" capitalised as a proper noun.](#)

[p215 Comma adjusted in "My boy, I've looked".](#)

[p252 Hyphen removed from "staring one day overlong".](#)

[p212 A.E. Hartley](#) and [p235 E.A. Hartley](#), elsewhere last name only.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOAN  
AND CO. \*\*\*

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