Bartlett Frederick Orin

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
DON RECEIVES A JOLT

Before beginning to read the interesting document in front of him, Jonas Barton, senior member of Barton & Saltonstall, paused to clean his glasses rather carefully, in order to gain sufficient time to study for a moment the tall, good-looking young man who waited indifferently on the other side of the desk. He had not seen his late client's son since the latter had entered college–a black-haired, black-eyed lad of seventeen, impulsive in manner and speech. The intervening four years had tempered him a good deal. Yet, the Pendleton characteristics were all there–the square jaw, the rather large, firm mouth, the thin nose, the keen eyes. They were all there, but each a trifle subdued: the square jaw not quite so square as the father's, the mouth not quite so large, the nose so sharp, or the eyes so keen. On the other hand, there was a certain fineness that the father had lacked.

In height Don fairly matched his father's six feet, although he still lacked the Pendleton breadth of shoulder.

The son was lean, and his cigarette–a dilettante variation

of honest tobacco-smoking that had always been a source of irritation to his father–did not look at all out of place between his long, thin fingers; in fact, nothing else would have seemed quite suitable. Barton was also forced to admit to himself that the young man, in some miraculous way, managed to triumph over his rather curious choice of raiment, based presumably on current styles. In and of themselves the garments were not beautiful. From Barton's point of view, Don's straw hat was too large and too high in the crown. His black-and-white check suit was too conspicuous and cut close to the figure in too feminine a fashion. His lavender socks, which matched a lavender tie, went well enough with the light stick he carried; but, in Barton's opinion, a young man of twenty-two had no business to carry a light stick. By no stretch of the imagination could one picture the elder Pendleton in such garb, even in his jauntiest days. And yet, as worn by Don, it seemed as if he could not very well have worn anything else. Even the mourning-band about his left arm, instead of adding a somber touch, afforded an effective bit of contrast. This, however, was no fault of his. That mourning has artistic possibilities is a happy fact that has brought gentle solace to many a widow.

On the whole, Barton could not escape the deduction that the son reflected the present rather than the past. Try as he might, it was difficult for him to connect this young man with Grandfather Pendleton, shipbuilder of New Bedford, or with the father who in his youth commanded the Nancy R. But that was by no means

his duty–as Don faintly suggested when he uncrossed his knees and hitched forward impatiently.

"Your father's will is dated three years ago last June," began Barton.

"At the end of my freshman year," Don observed.

Jonas Barton adjusted his spectacles and began to read. He read slowly and very distinctly, as if anxious to give full value to each syllable:

"New York City, borough of Manhattan, State of New York. I, Donald Joshua Pendleton, being of sound mind and–"

Donald Pendleton, Jr., waved an objection with his cigarette.

"Can't you cut out all the legal stuff and just give me the gist of it? There's no doubt about father having been of sound mind and so forth."

"It is customary–" began the attorney.

"Well, we'll break the custom," Don cut in sharply.

Barton glanced up. It might have been his late client speaking; it gave him a start.

"As you wish," he assented. "Perhaps, however, I may be allowed to observe that in many ways your father's will is peculiar."

"It wouldn't be father's will if it wasn't peculiar," declared Don.

Barton pushed the papers away from him.

"Briefly, then," he said, "your father leaves his entire estate to you–in trust."

Don leaned forward, his stick grasped in his gloved hands.

"I don't get that last."

"In trust," repeated Barton with emphasis. "He has honored our firm with the commission of serving as a board of trustees for carrying out the terms of the will."

"You mean to fix my allowance?"

"To carry out the terms of the will, which are as follows: namely, to turn over to you, but without power of conveyance, the paternal domicile on West Sixtieth Street with all its contents."

Don frowned.

"Paternal domicile–I can translate that all right. I suppose you mean the house. But what's that line 'without power of conveyance'?"

"It means that you are at liberty to occupy the premises, but that you are to have no power to sell, to rent, or to dispose of the property in any way whatsoever."

Don appeared puzzled.

"That's a bit queer. What do you suppose Dad thought I wanted of a place that size to live in?"

"I think your father was a man of considerable sentiment."

"Eh?"

"Sentiment," Barton repeated. "It was there you were born, and there your mother died."

"Yes, that's all correct; but–well, go on."

"The rest of the document, if you insist upon a digest, consists principally of directions to the trustees. Briefly, it provides that

we invest the remainder of the property in safe bonds and apply the interest to meet taxes on the aforesaid paternal domicile, to retain and pay the wages of the necessary servants, to furnish fuel and water, and to maintain the house in proper repair."

"Well, go on."

"In case of your demise–"

"You may skip my demise; I'm not especially interested in that."

"Then I think we have covered all the more important provisions," Barton concluded.

"All?" exclaimed Don. "What do you think I'm going to live on?"

Here was the clash for which Barton had been waiting. His face hardened, and he shoved back his chair a little.

"I am not able to find any provision in the will relating to that," he answered.

"Eh? But what the deuce–"

For a moment Don stared open-mouthed at the lawyer. Then he reached in his pocket for his cigarettes, selected one with some deliberation, and tapped an end upon the case.

"You said Dad had considerable sentiment," he observed. "It strikes me he has shown more humor than sentiment."

Barton was still aggressive. To tell the truth, he expected some suggestion as to the possibility of breaking the will; but if ever he had drawn a paper all snug and tight, it was the one in question.

"Damme," Pendleton, Sr., had said. "Damme, Barton, if the

lad is able to break the will, I'll rise in my grave and haunt you the rest of your days."

If the boy wished to test the issue, Barton was ready for him. But the boy's thoughts seemed to be on other things.

"I suppose," mused Pendleton, Jr., "I suppose it was that freshman scrape that worried him."

"I was not informed of that," replied Barton.

"It made good reading," the young man confided. "But, honest, it was not so bad as the papers made it out. Dad was a good sport about it, anyhow. He cleared it up and let me go on."

"If you will allow me to advance an opinion,–a strictly personal opinion,–it is that Mr. Pendleton devised the entire will with nothing else but your welfare in mind. He had a good deal of pride, and desired above all things to have you retain the family home. If I remember correctly, he said you were the last lineal descendant."

Don nodded pleasantly.

"The last. Kind of looks as if he wanted me to remain the last."

"On the contrary," ventured Barton, "I think he hoped you might marry and–"

"Marry?" broke in Don. "Did you say *marry?*"

"I even understood, from a conversation with your father just before his death, that you–er–were even then engaged. Am I mistaken?"

"No; that's true enough. But say–look here."

The young man reached in his pocket and brought forth

a handful of crumpled bills and loose change. He counted it carefully.

"Twelve dollars and sixty-three cents," he announced. "What do you think Frances Stuyvesant will say to that?"

Barton refrained from advancing an opinion.

"What do you think Morton H. Stuyvesant will say?" demanded Don.

No point of law being involved in the query, Jonas Barton still refrained.

"What do you think Mrs. Morton H. Stuyvesant will say, and all the uncles and aunties and nephews and nieces?"

"Not being their authorized representative, I am not prepared to answer," Barton replied. "However, I think I can tell you what your father would do under these circumstances."

"What?" inquired Don.

"He would place all the facts in the case before the girl, then before her father, and learn just what they had to say."

"Wrong. He wouldn't go beyond the girl," answered Don.

He replaced the change in his pocket.

"Ah," he sighed–"them were the happy days."

"If I remember correctly," continued Jonas Barton thoughtfully, "twelve dollars and sixty-three cents was fully as much as your father possessed when he asked your mother to marry him. That was just after he lost his ship off Hatteras."

"Yes, them were the happy days," nodded Don. "But, at that, Dad had his nerve with him."

“He did,” answered Barton. “He had his nerve with him always.”

CHAPTER II
IT BECOMES NECESSARY TO EAT

In spite of the continued efforts of idealists to belittle it, there is scarcely a fact of human experience capable of more universal substantiation than that in order to live it is necessary to eat. The corollary is equally true: in order to eat it is necessary to pay.

Yet until now Pendleton had been in a position to ignore, if not to refute, the latter statement. There was probably no detail of his daily existence calling for less thought or effort than this matter of dining. Opportunities were provided on every hand,–at the houses of his friends, at his club, at innumerable cafés and hotels,–and all that he was asked to contribute was an appetite.

It was not until he had exhausted his twelve dollars and sixty-three cents that Don was in any position to change his point of view. But that was very soon. After leaving the office of Barton & Saltonstall at eleven, he took a taxi to the Harvard Club, which immediately cut down his capital to ten dollars and thirteen cents. Here he met friends, Higgins and Watson and Cabot of his class, and soon he had disposed of another dollar. They then persuaded him to walk part way downtown with them. On his return, he passed a florist's, and, remembering that Frances was going that afternoon to a *thé dansant*, did the decent thing and sent up a dozen roses, which cost him five dollars. Shortly after this he

passed a confectioner's, and of course had to stop for a box of Frances's favorite bonbons, which cost him another dollar.

Not that he considered the expense in the least. As long as he was able to reach in his pocket and produce a bill of sufficient value to cover the immediate investment, that was enough. But it is surprising how brief a while ten dollars will suffice in a leisurely stroll on Fifth Avenue. Within a block of the confectionery store two cravats that took his fancy and a box of cigarettes called for his last bill, and actually left him with nothing but a few odd pieces of silver. Even this did not impress him as significant, because, as it happened, his wants were for the moment fully satisfied.

It was a clear October day, and, quite unconscious of the distance, Don continued up the Avenue to Sixtieth Street–to the house where he was born. In the last ten years he had been away a good deal from that house,–four years at Groton, four at Harvard,–but, even so, the house had always remained in the background of his consciousness as a fixed point.

Nora opened the door for him, as she had for twenty years.

"Are you to be here for dinner, sir?" she inquired.

"No, Nora," he answered; "I shall dine out to-night."

Nora appeared uneasy.

"The cook, sir, has received a letter–a very queer sort of letter, sir–from a lawyer gentleman."

"Eh?"

"He said she was to keep two accounts, sir: one for the

servants' table and one for the house."

"Oh, that's probably from old Barton."

"Barton–yes, sir, that was the name. Shall I bring you the letter, sir?"

"Don't bother, Nora. It's all right. He's my new bookkeeper."

"Very well, sir. Then you'll give orders for what you want?"

"Yes, Nora."

In the library an open fire was burning brightly on the hearth, as always it had been kept burning for his father. With his hands behind his back, he stood before it and gazed around the big room. It seemed curiously empty with the old man gone. The machinery of the house as adjusted by him still continued to run on smoothly. And yet, where at certain hours he should have been, he was not. It was uncanny.

It was a little after one; Don determined to change his clothes and stroll downtown for luncheon–possibly at Sherry's. He was always sure there of running across some one he knew.

He went to his room and dressed with some care, and then walked down to Forty-fourth Street. Before deciding to enter the dining-room, however, he stood at the entrance a moment to see if there was any one there he recognized. Jimmy Harndon saw him and rose at once.

"Hello, Jimmy," Don greeted him.

"Hello, Don. You came in the nick of time. Lend me ten, will you?"

"Sure," answered Don.

He sought his bill-book. It was empty. For a moment he was confused.

"Oh, never mind," said Jimmy, perceiving his embarrassment. "I'll 'phone Dad to send it up by messenger. Bit of fool carelessness on my part. You'll excuse me?"

Harndon hurried off to the telephone.

Don stared at his empty pocket-book, at the head waiter, who still stood at the door expectantly, and then replaced the empty wallet in his pocket. There was no use waiting here any longer. He could not dine, if he wished. Never before in his life had he been confronted by such a situation. Once or twice he had been in Harndon's predicament, but that had meant no more to him than it meant to Harndon–nothing but a temporary embarrassment. The difference now was that Harndon could still telephone his father and that he could not. Here was a significant distinction; it was something he must think over.

Don went on to the Harvard Club. He passed two or three men he knew in the lobby, but shook his head at their invitation to join them. He took a seat by himself before an open fire in a far corner of the lounge. Then he took out his bill-book again, and examined it with some care, in the hope that a bill might have slipped in among his cards. The search was without result. Automatically his father's telephone number suggested itself, but that number now was utterly without meaning. A new tenant already occupied those offices–a tenant who undoubtedly would report to the police a modest request to forward to the Harvard

Club by messenger a hundred dollars.

He was beginning to feel hungry–much hungrier than he would have felt with a pocket full of money. Of course his credit at the club was good. He could have gone into the dining-room and ordered what he wished. But credit took on a new meaning. Until now it had been nothing but a trifling convenience, because at the end of the month he had only to forward his bill to his father. But that could not be done any longer.

He could also have gone to any one of a dozen men of his acquaintance and borrowed from five to fifty dollars. But it was one thing to borrow as he had in the past, and another to borrow in his present circumstances. He had no right to borrow. The whole basis of his credit was gone.

The situation was, on the face of it, so absurd that the longer he thought it over the more convinced he became that Barton had made some mistake. He decided to telephone Barton.

It was with a sense of relief that Don found the name of Barton & Saltonstall still in the telephone-book. It would not have surprised him greatly if that too had disappeared. It was with a still greater sense of relief that he finally heard Barton's voice.

"Look here," he began. "It seems to me there must be some misunderstanding somewhere. Do you realize that I'm stony broke?"

"Why, no," answered Barton. "I thought you showed me the matter of thirteen dollars or so."

"I did; but that's gone, and all I have now is the matter of

thirteen cents or so."

"I'm sorry," answered Barton. "If a small loan would be of any temporary advantage–"

"Hang it!" cut in Don. "You don't think I'm trying to borrow, do you?"

"I beg your pardon. Perhaps you will tell me, then, just what you do wish."

"I must eat, mustn't I?"

"I consider that a fair presumption."

"Then what the deuce!"

Don evidently expected this ejaculation to be accepted as a full and conclusive statement. But, as far as Barton was concerned, it was not. "Yes?" he queried.

"I say, what the deuce?"

"I don't understand."

"What am I going to do?"

"Oh, I see. You mean, I take it, what must you do in order to provide yourself with funds."

"Exactly," growled Don.

"Of course, the usual method is to work," suggested Barton.

"Eh?"

"To find a position with some firm which, in return for your services, is willing to pay you a certain fixed sum weekly or monthly. I offer you the suggestion for what it is worth. You can think it over."

"Think it over!" exclaimed Don. "How long do you think I can

think on thirteen cents?"

"If you authorize me to act for you, I have no doubt something can be arranged."

"You seem to hold all the cards."

"I am merely obeying your father's commands," Barton hastened to assure him. "Now, can you give me any idea what you have in mind?"

"I'll do anything except sell books," Don answered promptly.

"Very well," concluded Barton. "I'll advise you by mail as soon as anything develops."

"Thanks."

"In the mean while, if you will accept a loan–"

"Thanks again," answered Don; "but I'll go hungry first." He hung up the receiver and went back to the lounge.

CHAPTER III
THE QUEEN WAS IN THE PARLOR

Stuyvesant was proud of his daughter–proud of her beauty, proud of her ability to dress, proud of her ability to spend money. She gave him about the only excuse he now had for continuing to hold his seat on the Stock Exchange. The girl was tall and dark and slender, and had an instinct for clothes that permitted her to follow the vagaries of fashion to their extremes with the assurance of a Parisienne, plus a certain Stuyvesant daring that was American. At dinner that night she wore, for Don's benefit, a new French gown that made even him catch his breath. It was beautiful, but without her it would not have been beautiful. Undoubtedly its designer took that into account when he designed the gown.

The dinner was in every way a success, and a credit to the Stuyvesant chef–who, however, it must be said, seldom had the advantage of catering to a guest that had not lunched. Stuyvesant was in a good humor, Mrs. Stuyvesant pleasantly negative as usual, and Frances radiant. Early in the evening Stuyvesant went off to his club for a game of bridge, and Mrs. Stuyvesant excused herself to write notes.

"I met Reggie Howland at the tea this afternoon," said Frances. "He was very nice to me."

"Why shouldn't he be?" inquired Don.

"I rather thought you would come. Really, when one goes to all the bother of allowing one's self to be engaged, the least one expects is a certain amount of attention from one's fiancée."

She was standing by the piano, and he went to her side and took her hand–the hand wearing the solitaire that had been his mother's.

"You're right," he nodded; "but I was all tied up with business this afternoon."

She raised her dark brows a trifle.

"Business?"

"Lots of it," he nodded. "Come over here and sit down; I want to tell you about it."

He led her to a chair before the open fire. He himself continued to stand with his back to the flames. He was not serious. The situation struck him now as even funnier than it had in Barton's office. He had in his pocket just thirteen cents, and yet here he was in Stuyvesant's house, engaged to Stuyvesant's daughter.

"It seems," he began–"it seems that Dad would have his little joke before he died."

"Yes?" she responded indifferently. She was bored by business of any sort.

"I had a talk to-day with Barton–his lawyer. Queer old codger, Barton. Seems he's been made my guardian. Dad left him to me in his will. He left me Barton, the house, and twelve dollars and

sixty-three cents."

"Yes, Don."

She did not quite understand why he was going into details. They did not seem to concern her, even as his fiancée.

"Of that patrimony I now have thirteen cents left," Don continued. "See, here it is."

He removed from his pocket two nickels and three coppers.

"It doesn't look like much, does it?"

"Oh, Don," she laughed, "do be serious!"

"I am serious," he assured her. "I've been serious ever since I went to Sherry's for lunch, and found I did not have enough for even a club sandwich."

"But, Don!" she gasped.

"It's a fact. I had to leave."

"Then where *did* you lunch?"

"I didn't lunch."

"You mean you did not have enough change to buy something to eat?"

"I had thirteen cents. You can't buy anything with that, can you?"

"I–I don't know."

Suddenly she remembered how, once on her way home from Chicago, she lost her purse and did not have sufficient change left even to wire her father to meet her. She was forced to walk from the station to the house. The experience had always been like a nightmare to her. She rose and stood before him.

"But, Don–what are you going to do?"

"I telephoned Barton, and he suggested I take some sort of position with a business house. He's going to find something for me. I'm not worrying about that; but what I want to know is what I ought to do about you."

"I don't understand, Don."

"I mean about our engagement."

She looked puzzled.

"I'm afraid I'm very stupid."

"We can't be married on thirteen cents, can we?"

"But we needn't be married until you have more, need we?"

"That's so. And you're willing to wait?"

"You know I've told you I didn't wish to be married before spring, anyway. I think it's much pleasanter staying just as we are."

"We can't be engaged all our lives," he protested.

"We can be engaged as long as we wish, can't we?"

"I want to marry you as soon as I can."

Her eyes brightened and she placed a soft hand upon his arm.

"That's nice of you, Don," she said. "But you don't know what a frightfully expensive burden I'll be as a wife."

"If I earned, to start with, say fifty dollars a week–would you marry me on that?"

"If I did, what would we live on?" she inquired.

"Well, I have the house. That's provided for–all except the table."

"But if I spent the fifty dollars for a new hat, then what would we have left for provisions?"

"You mustn't spend it all on a new hat," he warned.

"Then, there are gowns and–oh, lots of things you don't know anything about."

"Couldn't you get along with a little less?"

She thought a moment.

"I don't see how," she decided. "I never get anything I don't want."

"That's something," he nodded approvingly. "Then you think I must earn more than fifty a week?"

"I only know that Dad gives me an allowance of ten thousand a year, and there's never anything left," she answered.

"Ten thousand a year!" he exclaimed.

"Everything is so expensive to-day, Don. All this talk sounds frightfully vulgar, but–there's no use pretending, is there?"

"Not a bit," he answered. "If ten thousand a year is what you need, ten thousand a year is what I must earn."

"I don't believe it's very hard, because Dad does it so easily," she declared.

"I'll get it," he nodded confidently. "And, now that it's all settled, let's forget it. Come over to the piano and sing for me."

He sat down before the keys and played her accompaniments, selecting his own songs. They ran through some of the latest opera successes, and then swung off to the simpler and older things. It was after "Annie Laurie" that he rose and looked deep

into her eyes.

"I'll get it for you," he said soberly.

"Oh, Don!" she whispered. "Sometimes nothing seems important but just you."

CHAPTER IV
CONCERNING SANDWICHES

The arrangement that Barton made for his late client's son was to enter the banking house of Carter, Rand & Seagraves, on a salary of twelve hundred dollars a year. Don found the letter at the Harvard Club the next morning, and immediately telephoned Barton.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "I appreciate what you've tried to do and all that, but what in thunder good is twelve hundred dollars a year?"

"It is at least twelve hundred more than you have now," suggested Barton.

"But how can I live on it?"

"You must remember you have the house–"

"Hang the house," Don interrupted. "I must eat and smoke and buy clothes, mustn't I? Besides, there's Frances. She needs ten thousand a year."

"I have no doubt but that, in time, a man of your ability–"

"How long a time?"

"As to that I am not prepared to give an opinion," replied Barton.

"Because it isn't when I'm eighty that I want it."

"I should say the matter was entirely in your own hands. This

at least offers you an opening, and I advise you to accept it. However, you must decide for yourself; and if at any later date I may be of service–"

Don returned to the lounge to think the matter over. It was ten o'clock and he had not yet breakfasted. As he had neglected to send any provisions to the house, Nora, acting upon his orders of the day before, had not prepared anything for him–there was nothing to prepare.

However, whether he ate breakfast or not was a detail. That is to say, it was a detail when he left the house; but now, after the brisk walk to the club in the snapping cold air, it had grown in importance. Watson, on his way into the dining-room, passed him.

"Join me?" he asked, waving a greeting with the morning paper.

"Thanks," answered Don. "Guess I'll wait a bit."

Watson went on.

Don returned to a consideration of Barton's proposal. He was forced to admit that the old lawyer had an irritating knack of ignoring all incidental issues and stripping a problem to a statement of irrefutable fact. It was undeniable, for example, that what Don might desire in the way of salary did not affect the truth of Barton's contention that twelve hundred dollars was a great deal more than nothing. With a roof over his head assured him, it was possible that he might, with economy, be able at least to keep alive on this salary. That, of course, was a matter to

be considered. As for Frances, she was at present well provided for and need not be in the slightest affected by the smallness of his income. Then, there was the possibility of a rapid advance. He had no idea how those things were arranged, but his limited observation was to the effect that his friends who went into business invariably had all the money they needed, and that most of his older acquaintances–friends of his father–were presidents and vice-presidents with unlimited bank accounts. Considering these facts, Don grew decidedly optimistic.

In the mean time his hunger continued to press him. His body, like a greedy child, demanded food. Watson came out and, lighting a fresh cigarette, sank down comfortably into a chair next him.

"What's the matter, Don–off your feed?" he inquired casually.

"Something of the sort," nodded Don.

"Party last night?"

"No; guess I haven't been getting exercise enough."

He rose. Somehow, Watson bored him this morning.

"I'm going to take a hike down the Avenue. S'long."

Don secured his hat, gloves, and stick, and started from the club at a brisk clip.

From Forty-fourth Street to the Twenties was as familiar a path as any in his life. He had traversed it probably a thousand times. Yet, this morning it suddenly became almost as strange as some street in Kansas City or San Francisco.

There were three reasons for this, any one of which would

have accounted for the phenomenon: he was on his way to secure a job; he had in his pocket just thirteen cents; and he was hungry.

The stores before which he always stopped for a leisurely inspection of their contents took on a different air this morning. Quite automatically he paused before one and another of them and inspected the day's display of cravats and waistcoats. But, with only thirteen cents in his pocket, a new element entered into his consideration of these things–the element of cost. It was at the florist's that his situation was brought home to him even more keenly. Frances liked flowers, and she liked to receive them from him. Here were roses that looked as if they had been plucked for her. But they were behind a big plate-glass window. He had never noted before that, besides being transparent, plate-glass was also thick and hard. And he was hungry. The fact continually intruded itself.

At last he reached the address that Barton had given him. "Carter, Rand & Seagraves, Investment Securities," read the inscription on the window. He passed through the revolving doors and entered the office.

A boy in buttons approached and took his card.

"Mr. Carter, Mr. Rand, or Mr. Seagraves," said Don.

The boy was soon back.

"Mr. Farnsworth will see you in a few minutes," he reported.

"Farnsworth?" inquired Don.

"He's the gent what sees every one," explained the boy. "Ticker's over there."

He pointed to a small machine upon a stand, which was slowly unfurling from its mouth a long strip of paper such as prestidigitators produce from silk hats. Don crossed to it, and studied the strip with interest. It was spattered with cryptic letters and figures, much like those he had learned to use indifferently well in a freshman course in chemistry. The only ones he recalled just then were H_2O and CO_2, and he amused himself by watching to see if they turned up.

"Mr. Pendleton?"

Don turned to find a middle-aged gentleman standing before him with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Barton wrote to us about you," Farnsworth continued briskly. "I believe he said you had no business experience."

"No," admitted Don.

"Harvard man?"

Don named his class.

"Your father was well known to us. We are willing to take you on for a few months, if you wish to try the work. Of course, until you learn something of the business you won't be of much value; but if you'd like to start at–say twenty-five dollars a week–why, we'd be glad to have you."

At the beginning Don had a vague notion of estimating his value at considerably more; but Mr. Farnsworth was so decided, it did not seem worth while. At that moment, also, he was reminded again that he had not yet breakfasted.

"Thanks," he replied. "When shall I begin?"

"Whenever you wish. If you haven't anything on to-day, you might come in now, meet some of the men, and get your bearings."

"All right," assented Don.

Within the next five minutes Farnsworth had introduced him to Blake and Manson and Wheaton and Powers and Jennings and Chandler. Also to Miss Winthrop, a very busy stenographer. Then he left him in a chair by Powers's desk. Powers was dictating to Miss Winthrop, and Don became engrossed in watching the nimbleness of her fingers.

At the end of his dictation, Powers excused himself and went out, leaving Don alone with Miss Winthrop. For a moment he felt a bit uncomfortable; he was not quite sure what the etiquette of a business office demanded in a situation of this sort. Soon, however, he realized that the question was solving itself by the fact that Miss Winthrop was apparently oblivious to his presence. If he figured in her consciousness any more than one of the office chairs, she gave no indication of it. She was transcribing from her notebook to the typewriter, and her fingers moved with marvelous dexterity and sureness. There was a sureness about every other movement, as when she slipped in a new sheet of paper or addressed an envelope or raised her head. There was a sureness in her eyes. He found himself quite unexpectedly staring into them once, and they didn't waver, although he was not quite certain, even then, that they saw him. They were brown eyes, honest and direct, above a good nose and a mouth that, while

retaining its girlish mobility, also revealed an unexpected trace of almost manlike firmness. It was a face that interested him, but, before he was able to determine in just what way, she finished her last letter and, rising abruptly, disappeared into a rear room. Presently she emerged, wearing a hat and coat.

It was, on the whole, a very becoming hat and a very becoming coat, though they would not have suited at all the critical taste of Frances Stuyvesant. But they had not been designed for that purpose.

Miss Winthrop paused to readjust a pin and the angle of her hat. Then she took a swift glance about the office.

"I guess the boys must have gone," she said to Don. "This is the lunch hour."

Don rose.

"Thank you for letting me know," he replied cordially.

"Most of them get back at one," she informed him.

"Then you think I may go out until then?"

"I don't see why not. But I'd be back at one sharp if I were you."

"Thanks, I will."

Don gave her an opportunity to go out the door and disappear before he himself followed. He had a notion that she could have told him, had he asked, where in this neighborhood it was possible to get the most food for the least money. He had a notion, also, that such a question would not have shocked her. It was difficult to say by just what process he reached this conclusion,

but he felt quite sure of it.

Don was now firmly determined to invest a portion of his thirteen cents in something to eat. It had no longer become a matter of volition, but an acute necessity. For twenty minutes he wandered about rather aimlessly; then, in a sort of alley, he found a dairy lunch where in plain figures coffee was offered at five cents a cup, and egg sandwiches at the same price. The place was well filled, but he was fortunate in slipping into a chair against the wall just as a man was slipping out. It was a chair where one broad arm served as a table. Next to him sat a young woman in a black hat, munching a chocolate éclair. She looked up as he sat down, and frowned. Don rose at once.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't know you were here. Honest I didn't."

"Well, it's a public lunch, isn't it?" she inquired. "I'm almost through."

"Then you don't mind if I stay?"

"It's no business of mine," she said curtly.

"But I don't want you to think I–I'm intruding."

She glanced at him again.

"Let's forget it," she decided. "But you might sit there all day and you wouldn't get anything to eat."

He looked around, uncertain as to just what she meant.

"You go to the counter, pick out what you want, and bring it back here," she explained. "I'll hold your seat for you."

Don made his way into the crowd at the rear. At the counter

he found he had for ten cents a wide choice; but her éclair had looked so good he selected one of those and a cup of coffee. In returning he lost a portion of the coffee, but he brought the éclair through safely. He deposited it on the arm of the chair and sat down. In spite of his utmost effort at self-control, that éclair made just four mouthfuls. It seemed to him that he had no more than picked up his fork than it was gone. However, he still had his coffee, and he settled back to enjoy that in a more temperate fashion.

Without apparently taking the slightest interest in him, Miss Winthrop observed the rapidity with which he concluded his lunch. She knew something about being hungry, and if she was any judge that tidbit produced no more impression upon this six-foot man than a peanut on an elephant.

"That all you're going to eat?" she demanded.

Don was startled. The question was both unexpected and pointed. He met her eyes–brown eyes and very direct. The conventional explanation that he had ready about not caring for much in the middle of the day seemed scarcely worth while.

"Yes," he answered.

"Broke?" she inquired.

He nodded.

"Then you ought to have had an egg sandwich instead of one of those things," she informed him.

"But the one you had looked so good," he smiled.

"I had an egg sandwich to start with; this was dessert."

"I didn't know," he apologized.

"You ought to get one now. You won't last until night on just that."

"How much are they?" he inquired.

"A nickel."

"Then I guess I won't have one."

"Haven't you five cents?" she cross-examined.

"Only three cents," he answered.

"And you begin work to-day?"

"Yes."

"It's only Tuesday, and you won't get paid until Saturday."

"So?"

"Do you expect to make that éclair go until then?"

"I hadn't thought much about it," he answered uneasily.

"You don't look as if you would," she said. "You are new to this, aren't you?"

"Yes."

He did not resent her questioning; and it did not occur to him to give her an evasive reply.

"Just out of college?"

"Last fall."

"What you been doing since then?"

"Why, nothing," he admitted. "You see, my father died only last month, and–"

"Oh, I see," she said more gently. "That's hard luck."

"It makes a good deal of a difference," he said.

"I know."

It had made a difference in her life when her father died.

She turned to her éclair; but, as she was raising the fork to her lips, she caught his eyes and put it down again.

"Look here," she said; "you must eat something. You can't get along without food. I've tried it."

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Indeed, yes."

"Dieting?"

"Hardly," she replied grimly.

He had heard of men going perforce without food, but he did not remember ever having heard of a woman in that predicament. Certainly he had never before met one.

"You mean that you've gone broke, too?"

"Why, certainly," she answered. "The firm I was with first went broke, and it was a couple of months before I found another position. But that's over now. What I want to know is what *you're* going to do until Saturday."

"Oh, I'll worry along," he answered confidently.

She shook her head.

"Worry won't carry you along."

She hesitated a moment, and then said impulsively:–

"Now, look here–don't get peeved at what I'm going to say, will you?"

"I don't believe it's possible to get peeved with you," he declared.

She frowned.

"Well, let it go at that. What I want to do is to lend you a couple of dollars until Saturday. It isn't much, but–"

Don caught his breath. "You–"

She did not give him time to finish. From somewhere she produced a two-dollar bill and slipped it into his hand.

"Take this and get an egg sandwich right now."

"But look here–"

"Don't talk. Go get a sandwich."

He seemed to have no alternative; but when he came back with it she had disappeared.

He sat down, but he could not understand why she should have gone like that. He missed her–missed her more than he would have thought possible, considering that he had met her only some two hours before. Without her this place seemed empty and foreign. Without her he felt uneasy here. He hurried through his sandwich and went out–anxious to get back to her.

CHAPTER V
BUSINESS

When Don came back to the office he found Miss Winthrop again at her typewriter, but she did not even glance up as he took his former place at Powers's desk. If this was not particularly flattering, it at least gave him the privilege of watching her. But it was rather curious that he found in this enough to hold his attention for half an hour. It is doubtful whether he could have watched Frances herself for so long a time without being bored.

It was the touch of seriousness about the girl's eyes and mouth that now set him to wondering–a seriousness that he had sometimes noted in the faces of men who had seen much of life.

Life–that was the keynote. He felt that she had been in touch with life, and had got the better of it: that there had been drama in her past, born of contact with men and women. She had been dealing with such problems as securing food–and his experience of the last twenty-four hours had hinted at how dramatic that may be; with securing lodgings for the night; with the problem of earning not more money but enough money to keep her alive. All this had left its mark, not in ugliness, but in a certain seriousness that made him keen to know about her. Here was a girl who was not especially concerned with operas, with books, with the drama, but with the stuff of which those things are made.

Miss Winthrop removed from her typewriter the final page of the long letter she had finished and rapidly went over it for errors. She found none. But, as she gathered her papers together before taking them into the private office of Mr. Farnsworth, she spoke. She spoke without even then glancing at Don–as if voicing a thought to herself.

"Believe me," she said, "they are not going to pay you for sitting there and watching me."

Don felt the color spring to his cheeks.

"I beg your pardon," he apologized.

"It doesn't bother me any," she continued, as she rose. "Only there isn't any money for the firm in that sort of thing."

"But there doesn't seem to be anything around here for me to do."

"Then make something," she concluded, as she moved away.

Blake, to whom he had been introduced, was sitting at his desk reading an early edition of an evening paper. Spurred on by her admonition, he strolled over there. Blake glanced up with a nod.

"How you making it?" he inquired.

"There doesn't seem to be much for me to do," said Don. "Can you suggest anything?"

"Farnsworth will dig up enough for you later on. I wouldn't worry about that."

"But I don't know anything about the game."

"You'll pick it up. Did I understand Farnsworth to say you were Harvard?"

"Yes."

"I'm Princeton. Say, what sort of a football team have you this year?"

Don knew football. He had played right end on the second team. He also knew Princeton, and if the information he gave Blake about the team ever went back to New Jersey it did not do the coaching staff there any good. However, it furnished a subject for a pleasant half hour's conversation. Then Blake went out, and Don returned to his former place back of Powers's desk.

"I'll bet you didn't get much out of him," observed Miss Winthrop, without interrupting the click of her machine.

"He seems rather a decent sort," answered Don.

"Perhaps he is," she returned.

"He's a Princeton man," Don informed her.

"He's Percy A. Blake," she declared–as if that were a fact of considerably more importance.

He waited to see if she was ready to volunteer any further information, but apparently she considered this sufficient.

At that point Farnsworth came out and took a look about the office. His eyes fell upon Don, and he crossed the room.

He handed Don a package.

"I wish you would deliver these to Mr. Hayden, of Hayden & Wigglesworth," he requested.

Farnsworth returned to his office, leaving Don staring helplessly at the package in his hands.

"For Heaven's sake, get busy!" exclaimed Miss Winthrop.

"But where can I find Mr. Hayden?" inquired Don.

"Get out of the office and look up the firm in a directory," she returned sharply. "But hustle out of here just as if you did know."

Don seized his hat and obeyed. He found himself on the street, quite as ignorant of where to find a directory as he was of where to find Mr. Hayden, of Hayden & Wigglesworth. But in rounding a corner–still at full speed–he ran into a messenger boy.

"Take me to the office of Hayden & Wigglesworth and there's a quarter in it for you," he offered.

"I'm on," nodded the boy.

The office was less than a five minutes' walk away. In another two minutes Don had left his package with Mr. Hayden's clerk and was back again in his own office.

"Snappy work," Miss Winthrop complimented him. "The closing prices must be out by now. You'd better look them over."

"Closing prices of what?" he inquired.

"The market, of course. Ask Eddie–the boy at the ticker. He'll give you a sheet."

So Don went over and asked Eddie, and was handed a list of closing quotations–which, for all he was concerned, might have been football signals. However, he sat down and looked them over, and continued to look them over until Farnsworth passed him on his way home.

"You may as well go now," Farnsworth said. "You'll be here at nine to-morrow?"

"Nine to-morrow," nodded Don.

He returned to Miss Winthrop's desk.

"He says I may go now," he reported.

"Then I'd go," she advised.

"But I–I want to thank you."

"For Heaven's sake, don't!" she exploded. "I'm busy."

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

He took the Subway back to the Grand Central, and walked from there to the club. Here he found a message from Frances:–

Dad sent up a box for the theater to-night. Will you come to dinner and go with us?

When Don, after dressing, left his house for the Stuyvesants' that evening, it was with a curious sense of self-importance. He now had the privilege of announcing to his friends that he was in business in New York–in the banking business–with Carter, Rand & Seagraves, as a matter of fact. He walked with a freer stride and swung his stick with a jauntier air than he had yesterday.

He was full of this when, a few minutes before dinner, Frances swept down the stairs.

"I'm glad you could come, Don," she said. "But where in the world have you been all day?"

"Downtown," he answered. "I'm with Carter, Rand & Seagraves now."

He made the announcement with considerable pride.

"Poor Don!" she murmured. "But, if you're going to do that

sort of thing, I suppose you might as well be with them as any one. I wonder if that Seagraves is Dolly Seagraves's father."

For a second he was disappointed–he had expected more enthusiasm from her.

"I haven't met the families of the firm yet," he answered.

"I thought you knew Dolly. I'll ask her up for my next afternoon, to meet you."

"But I can't come in the afternoon, Frances."

"How stupid! You're to be downtown all day?"

"From nine to three or later."

"I'm not sure I'm going to like that."

"Then you'll have to speak to Farnsworth," he laughed.

"Farnsworth?"

"He's the manager."

"I imagine he's very disagreeable. Oh, Don, please hurry and make your fortune and have it over with!"

"You ought to give me more than one day, anyhow."

"I'll give you till June," she smiled. "I really got sort of homesick for you to-day, Don."

"Honest?"

"Honest, Don. I've no business to tell you such a secret, but it's true."

"I'm glad you told me," he answered soberly. "What have you been doing all day?"

"I had a stupid morning at the tailor's, and a stupid bridge in the afternoon at the Martins'. Oh, I lost a disgraceful lot of

money."

"How much?" he inquired.

She shook her head. "I won't tell; but that's why I told Dad he must take me to see something cheerful this evening."

"Tough luck," he sympathized.

They went in to dinner. Afterward the Stuyvesant car took them all to a vaudeville house, and there, from the rear of a box, Don watched with indifferent interest the usual vaudeville turns. To tell the truth, he would have been better satisfied to have sat at the piano at home and had Frances sing to him. There were many things he had wished to talk over with her. He had not told her about the other men he had met, his adventure on his first business assignment, his search for a place to lunch, or–Miss Winthrop. Until that moment he had not thought of her himself.

A singing team made their appearance and began to sing sentimental ballads concerned with apple blossoms in Normandy. Don's thoughts went back, strangely enough, to the white-tiled restaurant in the alley. He smiled as he contrived a possible title for a popular song of this same nature. "The White-Tiled Restaurant in the Alley" it might read, and it might have something to do with "Sally." Perhaps Miss Winthrop's first name was Sally–it fitted her well enough. She had been funny about that chocolate éclair. And she had lent him two dollars. Unusual incident, that! He wondered where she was to-night–where she went after she left the office at night. Perhaps she was here. He leaned forward to look at the faces of people in

the audience. Then the singing stopped, and a group of Japanese acrobats occupied the stage.

Frances turned, suppressing a yawn.

"I suppose one of them will hang by his teeth in a minute," she observed. "I wish he wouldn't. It makes me ache."

"It is always possible to leave," he suggested.

"But Mother so enjoys the pictures."

"Then, by all means, let's stay."

"They always put them at the end. Oh, dear me, I don't think I shall ever come again."

"I enjoyed the singing," he confessed.

"Oh, Don, it was horrible!"

"Still, that song about the restaurant in the alley–"

"The *what?*" she exclaimed.

"Wasn't it that or was it apple blossoms? Anyhow, it was good."

"Of course there's no great difference between restaurants in alleys and apple blossoms in Normandy!" she commented.

"Not so much as you'd think," he smiled.

It was eleven before they were back at the house. Then Stuyvesant wanted a rarebit and Frances made it, so that it was after one before Don reached his own home.

Not until Nora, in obedience to a note he had left downstairs for her, called him at seven-thirty the next morning did Don realize he had kept rather late hours for a business man. Bit by bit, the events of yesterday came back to him; and in the midst

of it, quite the central figure, stood Miss Winthrop. It was as if she were warning him not to be late. He jumped from bed.

But, even at that, it was a quarter-past eight before he came downstairs. Nora was anxiously waiting for him.

"You did not order breakfast, sir," she reminded him.

"Why, that's so," he admitted.

"Shall I prepare it for you now?"

"Never mind. I haven't time to wait, anyway. You see, I must be downtown at nine. I'm in business, Nora."

"Yes, sir; but you should eat your breakfast, sir."

He shook his head. "I think I'll try going without breakfast this week. Besides, I didn't send up any provisions."

Nora appeared uneasy. She did not wish to be bold, and yet she did not wish her late master's son to go downtown hungry.

"An egg and a bit of toast, sir? I'm sure the cook could spare that."

"Out of her own breakfast?"

"I–I beg your pardon, sir," stammered Nora; "but it's all part of the house, isn't it?"

"No," he answered firmly. "We must play the game fair, Nora."

"And dinner, sir?"

"Dinner? Let's not worry about that as early in the morning as this."

He started to leave, but at the door turned again.

"If you should want me during the day, you'll find me at my

office with Carter, Rand & Seagraves. Better write that down."

"I will, sir."

"Good-day, Nora."

Don took the Subway this morning, in company with several hundred thousand others for whom this was as much a routine part of their daily lives as the putting on of a hat. He had seen all these people coming and going often enough before, but never before had he felt himself as coming and going with them. Now he was one of them. He did not resent it. In fact, he felt a certain excitement about it. But it was new–almost foreign.

It was with some difficulty that he found his way from the station to his office. This so delayed him that he was twenty minutes late. Miss Winthrop, who was hard at work when he entered, paused a second to glance at the watch pinned to her dress.

"I'm only twenty minutes late," he apologized to her.

"A good many things can happen around Wall Street in twenty minutes," she answered.

"I guess I'll have to leave the house a little earlier."

"I'd do something to get here on time," she advised. "Out late last night?"

"Not very. I was in bed a little after one."

"I thought so."

"Why?"

"You look it."

She brought the conversation to an abrupt end by resuming

her work.

He wanted to ask her in just what way he looked it. He felt a bit hollow; but that was because he hadn't breakfasted. His eyes, too, were still a little heavy; but that was the result, not of getting to bed late, but of getting up too early.

She, on the other hand, appeared fresher than she had yesterday at noon. Her eyes were brighter and there was more color in her cheeks. Don had never seen much of women in the forenoon. As far as he was concerned, Frances did not exist before luncheon. But what experience he had led him to believe that Miss Winthrop was an exception–that most women continued to freshen toward night and were at their best at dinner-time.

"Mr. Pendleton." It was Eddie. "Mr. Farnsworth wants to see you in his office."

Farnsworth handed Don a collection of circulars describing some of the securities the firm was offering.

"Better familiarize yourself with these," he said briefly. "If there is anything in them you don't understand, ask one of the other men."

That was all. In less than three minutes Don was back again at Powers's desk. He glanced through one of the circulars, which had to do with a certain electric company offering gold bonds at a price to net four and a half. He read it through once and then read it through again. It contained a great many figures–figures running into the millions, whose effect was to make twenty-five

dollars a week shrink into insignificance. On the whole, it was decidedly depressing reading–the more so because he did not understand it.

He wondered what Miss Winthrop did when she was tired, where she lived and how she lived, if she played bridge, if she spent her summers abroad, who her parents were, whether she was eighteen or twenty-two or – three, and if she sang. All of which had nothing to do with the affairs of the company that wished to dispose of its gold bonds at a price to net four and a half.

At twelve Miss Winthrop rose from her machine and sought her hat in the rear of the office. At twelve-five she came back, passed him as if he had been an empty chair, and went out the door. At twelve-ten he followed. He made his way at once to the restaurant in the alley. She was not in the chair she had occupied yesterday, but farther back. Happily, the chair next to her was empty.

"Will you hold this for me?" he asked.

"Better drop your hat in it," she suggested rather coldly.

He obeyed the suggestion, and a minute later returned with a cup of coffee and an egg sandwich. She was gazing indifferently across the room as he sat down, but he called her attention to his lunch.

"You see, I got one of these things to-day."

"So?"

"Do you eat it with a fork or pick it up in your fingers?" he

asked.

She turned involuntarily to see if he was serious. She could not tell, but it was a fact he looked perplexed.

"Oh, pick it up in your fingers," she exclaimed. "But look here; are you coming here every day?"

"Sure," he nodded. "Why not?"

"Because, if you are, I'm going to find another place."

"You–what?" he gasped.

"I'm going to find another place."

The sandwich was halfway to his lips. He put it down again.

"What have I done?" he demanded.

She was avoiding his eyes.

"Oh, it isn't you," she answered. "But if the office ever found out–"

"Well," he insisted.

"It would make a lot of talk, that's all," she concluded quickly. "I can't afford it."

"Whom would they talk about?"

"Oh, they wouldn't talk about you–that's sure."

"They would talk about you?"

"They certainly would."

"What would they say?"

"You think it over," she replied. "The thing you want to remember is that I'm only a stenographer there, and you–well, if you make good you'll be a member of the firm some day."

"I don't see what that has to do with where you eat or where

I eat."

"It hasn't, as long as we don't eat at the same place. Can't you see that?"

She raised her eyes and met his.

"I see now," he answered soberly. "They'll think I'm getting fresh with you?"

"They'll think I'm letting you get fresh," she answered, lowering her eyes.

"But you don't think that yourself?"

"I don't know," she answered slowly. "I used to think I could tell; but now–oh, I don't know!"

"But good Heavens! you've been a regular little trump to me. You've even lent me the money to buy my lunches with. Do you think any man could be so low down–"

"Those things aren't fit to eat when they're cold," she warned him.

He shoved his plate aside and leaned toward her. "Do you think–"

"No, no, no!" she exclaimed. "Only, it isn't what *I* think that matters."

"That's the only thing in this case that does matter," he returned.

"You wait until you know Blake," she answered.

"Of course, if any one is to quit here, it is I," he said.

"You'd better stay where you are," she answered. "I know a lot of other places just like this."

"Well, I can find them, can't I?"

She laughed–a contagious little laugh.

"I'm not so sure," she replied.

"You don't think much of my ability, do you?" he returned, somewhat nettled.

She lifted her eyes at that.

"If you want to know the truth," she said, "I do. And I've seen a lot of 'em come and go."

He reacted curiously to this unexpected praise. His color heightened and unconsciously he squared his shoulders.

"Thanks," he said. "Then you ought to trust me to be able to find another lunch-place. Besides, you forget I found this myself. Are you going to have an éclair to-day?"

She nodded and started to rise.

"Sit still; I'll get it for you."

Before she could protest he was halfway to the counter. She sat back in her chair with an expression that was half-frown and half-smile.

When he came back she slipped a nickel upon the arm of his chair.

"What's this for?" he demanded.

"For the éclair, of course."

"You–you needn't have done that."

"I'll pay my own way, thank you," she answered, her face hardening a little.

"Now you're offended again?"

"No; only–oh, can't you see we–I must find another place?"

"No, I don't," he answered.

"Then that proves it," she replied. "And now I'm going back to the office."

He rose at once to go with her.

"Please to sit right where you are for five minutes," she begged.

He sat down again and watched her as she hurried out the door. The moment she disappeared the place seemed curiously empty–curiously empty and inane. He stared at the white-tiled walls, at the heaps of pastry upon the marble counter, prepared as for wholesale. Yet, as long as she sat here with him, he had noticed none of those details. For all he was conscious of his surroundings, they might have been lunching together in that subdued, pink-tinted room where he so often took Frances.

He started as he thought of her. Then he smiled contentedly. He must have Frances to lunch with him in the pink-tinted dining-room next Saturday.

CHAPTER VI
TWO GIRLS

That night, when Miss Winthrop took her place in the Elevated on her way to the uptown room that made her home, she dropped her evening paper in her lap, and, chin in hand, stared out of the window. That was decidedly unusual. It was so unusual that a young man who had taken this same train with her month after month, and who had rather a keen eye for such things, noticed for the first time that she had in profile rather an attractive face. She was wondering just how different this Pendleton was from the other men she met. Putting aside for a moment all generalizations affecting the sex as a whole, he was not like any of them. For the first time in a long while she found herself inclined to accept a man for just what he appeared to be. It was difficult not to believe in Pendleton's eyes, and still more difficult not to believe in his smile, which made her smile back. And yet, if she had learned anything, those were the very things in a man she had learned to question.

Not that she was naturally cynical, but her downtown experience had left her very skeptical about her ability to judge men from such details. Blake, for instance, could smile as innocently as a child and meet any woman's eyes without flinching. But there was this difference between Blake and

Pendleton: the latter was new to New York. He was fresh to the city, as four years ago she had been. In those days she had dreamed of such a man as Pendleton–a dream that she was sure she had long since forgotten. Four years was a long while. It gave her rather a motherly feeling as she thought of Pendleton from that distance. And she rather enjoyed that. It left her freer to continue thinking of him. This she did until she was almost carried beyond her street.

After that she almost forgot to stop at the delicatessen store for her rolls and butter and cold meat. She hurried with them to her room–hurried because she was anxious to reach the place where she was more at liberty than anywhere else on earth. She tossed aside her hat and coat and sat by the radiator to warm her hands.

She wondered if Pendleton would go the same way Blake had gone. It was so very easy to go the one way or the other. Farnsworth himself never helped. His theory was to allow new men to work out their own salvation, and to fire them if they did not. He had done that with young Brown, who came in last year; and it had seemed to her then a pity–though she had never liked Brown. This was undoubtedly what he would do with Pendleton.

But supposing–well, why shouldn't she take an interest in Pendleton to the extent of preventing such a finish if she could? There need be nothing personal in such an interest; she could work it out as an experiment.

Miss Winthrop, now thoroughly warm, began to prepare her supper. She spread a white cloth upon her table, which was just

large enough to seat one. She placed upon this one plate, one cup and saucer, one knife and fork and spoon. It was a very simple matter to prepare supper for one. She sliced her small portion of cold meat and placed this on the table. She removed her rolls from a paper bag and placed them beside the cold meat. By this time the hot water was ready, and she took a pinch of tea, put it in her tea-ball, and poured hot water over it in her cup. Then she took her place in the one chair.

But, oddly enough, although there was no place for him, another seemed to be with her in the room.

"Let me have your engagement-book a moment," Frances requested.

Don complied. He had taken his dinner that night at the dairy lunch, and after returning to the house to dress had walked to his fiancée's.

Frances puckered her brows.

"You are to have a very busy time these next few weeks," she informed him. "Let me see–to-day is Wednesday. On Friday we are to go to the Moores'. Evelyn's débutante dance, you know."

She wrote it in his book.

"On Saturday we go to the opera. The Warringtons have asked us to a box party."

She wrote that.

"Next Wednesday comes the Stanley cotillion. Have you received your invitation?"

"Haven't seen it," he answered.

"The Stanleys are always unpardonably late, but I helped Elise make out her list. On the following Friday we dine at the Westons'."

She wrote that.

"On the following Saturday I'm to give a box party at the opera–the Moores and Warringtons."

She added that, and looked over the list.

"And I suppose, after going to this trouble, I'll have to remind you all over again on the day of each event."

"Oh, I don't know; but–" He hesitated.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Seems to me we are getting pretty gay, aren't we?"

"Don't talk like an old man!" she scolded. "So far, this has been a very stupid season."

"But–"

"Well?"

"You know, now I'm in business–"

"Please don't remind me of that any more than is necessary," she interrupted.

"Oh, all right; only, I do have to get up in the morning."

"Why remind me of that? It's disagreeable enough having to think of it even occasionally."

"But I do, you know."

"I know it, Don. Honestly I do."

She seated herself on the arm of his chair, with an arm about his neck and her cheek against his hair.

"And I think it quite too bad," she assured him–"which is why I don't like to talk about it."

She sprang to her feet again.

"Now, Don, you must practice with me some of the new steps. You'll get very rusty if you don't."

"I'd rather hear you sing," he ventured.

"This is much more important," she replied.

She placed a Maxixe record on the Victrola that stood by the piano; then she held out her arms to him.

"Poor old hard-working Don!" she laughed as he rose.

It was true that it was as poor old hard-working Don he moved toward her. But there was magic in her lithe young body; there was magic in her warm hand; there was magic in her swimming eyes. As he fell into the rhythm of the music and breathed the incense of her hair, he was whirled into another world–a world of laughter and melody and care-free fairies. But the two most beautiful fairies of all were her two beautiful eyes, which urged him to dance faster and faster, and which left him in the end stooping, with short breaths, above her upturned lips.

CHAPTER VII
ROSES

When Miss Winthrop changed her mind and consented not to seek a new luncheon place, she was taking a chance, and she knew it. If ever Blake heard of the new arrangement,–and he was sure to hear of it if any one ever saw her there with Don,–she was fully aware how he would interpret it to the whole office.

She was taking a chance, and she knew it–knew it with a curious sense of elation. She was taking a chance for him. This hour at noon was the only opportunity she had of talking to Don. If she let that pass, then she could do nothing more for him. She must stand back and watch him go his own way, as others had gone their way.

For one thing was certain: she could allow no further conversations in the office. She had been forced to stop those, and had warned him that he must not speak to her again there except on business, and that he must not sit at Powers's desk and watch her at work. When he had challenged her for a reason, she had blushed; then she had replied simply:–

"It isn't business."

So, when on Saturday morning Don came in heavy-eyed for lack of sleep after the Moore dance, she merely looked up and nodded and went on with her work. But she studied him a dozen

times when he did not know she was studying him, and frowned every time he suppressed, with difficulty, a yawn. He appeared tired–dead tired.

For the first time in months she found herself looking forward to the noon hour. She glanced at her watch at eleven-thirty, at eleven-forty-five, and again at five minutes before twelve.

To-day she reserved a seat for him in the little lunch-room. But at fifteen minutes past twelve, when Don usually strode in the door, he had not come. At twenty minutes past he had not come. If he did not come in another five minutes she resolved to make no further effort to keep his place–either to-day or at any future time. At first she was irritated; then she was worried. It was possible he was lunching with Blake. If he began that–well, she would be freed of all further responsibility, for one thing. But at this point Don entered. He made no apologies for having kept her waiting, but deposited in the empty chair, as he went off for his sandwich and coffee, a long, narrow box done up in white paper. She gave him time to eat a portion of his lunch before she asked:–

"Out late again last night?"

"Went to a dance," he nodded.

She was relieved to hear that. It was a better excuse than some, but still it was not a justifiable excuse for a man who needed all his energies.

"You didn't get enough sleep, then."

"I should say not," Don admitted cheerfully. "In bed at four

and up at seven."

"You look it."

"And I feel it."

"You can't keep that up long."

"Sunday's coming, and I'm going to sleep all day," he declared.

"But what's the use of getting into that condition?" she inquired.

He thought a moment.

"Well, I don't suppose a man can cut off everything just because he's in business."

"That's part of the business–at the beginning," she returned.

"To work all the time?"

"To work all the time," she nodded. "I wish I had your chance."

"My chance to work?" he laughed.

"Your chance to get ahead," she answered. "It's all so easy–for a man!"

"Easy?"

"You don't have to do anything but keep straight and keep at work. You ought to have taken those circulars home with you last night and learned them by heart."

"I've read 'em. But, hang it all, they don't mean anything."

"Then find out what they mean. Keep at it until you do find out. The firm isn't going to pay you for what you *don't* know."

"But last night–well, a man has to get around a little bit."

"Around where?" she questioned him.

"Among his friends. Doesn't he?"

She hesitated.

"It seems to me you'll have to choose between dances and business."

"Eh?"

She nodded.

"Between dances and business. I tell you, this next six months is going to count a lot on how you make good with Farnsworth."

"Well, he isn't the only one," he said.

"He's the only one in this office–I know what I'm talking about."

"But outside the office–"

She put down her fork.

"I don't know why I'm mixing up in your business," she declared earnestly. "Except that I've been here three years now, and have seen men come and go. Every time they've gone it has been clear as daylight why they went. Farnsworth is square. He hasn't much heart in him, but he's square. And he has eyes in the back of his head."

She raised her own eyes and looked swiftly about the room as if she half-expected to discover him here.

"What's the matter?" he inquired.

She did not answer his question, but as she ran on again she lowered her voice:–

"You've been in his office to-day?"

"He gave me some more circulars," Don admitted.

"Then you'd better believe he knew you didn't get to bed last night until 4 a.m. And you'd better believe he has tucked that away in his mind somewhere."

Don appeared worried.

"He didn't say anything."

"No, he didn't say anything. He doesn't say anything until he has a whole collection of those little things. Even then he doesn't say much; but what he does say–counts."

"You don't think he's getting ready to fire me?" he asked anxiously.

"He's always getting ready," she answered. "He's always getting ready to fire or advance you. That's the point," she went on more earnestly. "What I don't understand is why the men who come in here aren't getting ready too. I don't see why they don't play the game. I might stay with the firm twenty years and I'd still be pounding a typewriter. But you–"

She raised her eyes to his. She saw that Don's had grown less dull, and her own warmed with this initial success.

"You used to play football, didn't you?" she asked.

"A little."

"Then you ought to know something about doing things hard; and you ought to know something about keeping in training."

"But look here, it seems to me you take this mighty seriously."

"Farnsworth does," she corrected. "That's why he's getting ten thousand a year."

The figures recalled a vivid episode.

"Ten thousand a year," he repeated after her. "Is that what he draws?"

"That's what they say. Anyway, he's worth it."

"And you think I–I might make a job like that?"

"I'll bet I'd try for it if I were in your boots," she answered earnestly.

"I'll bet you'd land it if you were in my boots." He raised his coffee-cup. "Here's to the ten thousand a year," he drank.

Miss Winthrop rose. She had talked more than she intended, and was somewhat irritated at herself. If, for a second, she thought she had accomplished something, she did not think so now, as he too rose and smiled at her. He handed her the pasteboard box.

"Your two dollars is in there," he explained.

She looked perplexed.

"Shall I wait five minutes?"

"Yes," she answered, as he thrust the box into her hands.

That box worried her all the afternoon. Not having a chance to open it, she hid it beneath her desk, where it distracted her thoughts until evening. Of course she could not open it on the Elevated, so it lay in her lap, still further to distract her thoughts on the way home. It seemed certain that a two-dollar bill could not occupy all that space.

She did not wait even to remove her hat before opening it in her room. She found a little envelope containing her two-dollar bill nestling in five dollars' worth of roses.

It was about as foolish a thing as she had ever known a man to do.

She placed the flowers on the table when she had her supper. All night long they filled the room with their fragrance.

CHAPTER VIII
A MAN OF AFFAIRS

When, with some eighteen dollars in his pocket, Don on Sunday ordered Nora to prepare for him on that day and during the following week a breakfast of toast, eggs, and coffee, he felt very much a man of affairs. He was paying for his own sustenance, and with the first money he had ever earned. He drew from his pocket a ten-dollar bill, a five-dollar bill, a two-dollar bill, and some loose change.

"Pick out what you need," he ordered, as he held the money toward her.

"I don't know how much it will be, sir. I'll ask the cook, sir."

"Very well; ask the cook. About dinners–I think I'd better wait until I see how I'm coming out. Dinners don't matter so much, any way, because they come after I'm through work."

Don ate his breakfast in the dining-room before the open fire, as his father used to do. In smoking-jacket and slippered feet, he enjoyed this as a rare luxury–even this matter of breakfasting at home, which until now had been merely a negative detail of routine.

When he had finished he drew his chair closer to the flames and lighted a cigarette. He had been cutting down on cigarettes. He had always bought them by the hundred; he was now buying

them by the box. Until this week he never realized that they represented money. He was paying now twenty-five cents for a box of ten; and twenty-five cents, as he had learned in the restaurant in the alley, was a sum of money with tremendous possibilities. It would buy, for one thing, five egg sandwiches; and five egg sandwiches would keep a man from being uncomfortably hungry a good many hours.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.