

Wayne Dorothy

Dorothy Dixon and the Double Cousin



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Chapter I THE ENCOUNTER

“Why – good heavens, girl! How in the world did you escape?”

Dorothy Dixon heard the low, eager whisper at her elbow but disregarded it. She was intent on selecting a tie from the colorful rack on the counter before her. She spoke to the clerk:

“I’ll take this one, and that’ll make four. I hope Daddy will approve my taste in Christmas presents,” she smiled, and laid a bill on her purchases.

“But – please, dear, tell me! Don’t you know I’m worried crazy? Who let you out?”

This time Dorothy felt a touch on her arm. She wheeled quickly to face a tall, slender young fellow of twenty-two or three. As she stared at him, half indignant, half wondering, she saw sincere distress in his brown eyes, and in the lines of his pleasant face. Hat in hand, he waited anxiously for an answer to his question, while the crowd of holiday shoppers poured through

the aisles about them.

Dorothy's eyes softened, then danced. "It seems to me," she said, "that you have the wires twisted – it's not I who've escaped, but you! Run along now and find your keeper. You're evidently in need of one!"

"Your change and package, miss," the impersonal voice of the haberdashery clerk intervened and Dorothy turned back to the counter.

"But why on earth are you acting this way, Janet?" The strange young man was at her elbow again.

Once more Dorothy turned swiftly toward him but when she spoke her eyes and voice were serious. "Do you really mean to say you think you're speaking to Janet Jordan? Because – "

"My dear – what are you trying to tell me?" He broke in impatiently. "I certainly ought to know the girl I'm going to marry!"

Dorothy nodded slowly. "I agree with you – you ought to – but then, you see, you *don't!*"

The young man crushed his soft felt hat in his hands and took a step nearer to her. "Look here – what *is* the matter with you? I know you've been through a lot, but – " He broke off abruptly, a gleam of horror and suspicion in his honest eyes. "Janet! What have they done to you?"

Dorothy laid a firm hand on his arm. "Sh! Be quiet – listen to me." Then she added gently – "I am *not* Janet Jordan, your fiancée."

“You’re not – !”

“No. My name is Dorothy Dixon – and I’m Janet’s first cousin.”

The young man seemed flabbergasted for a moment. Then he stammered – “Wh-why, it’s astounding – the resemblance, I mean! You’re alike as – as two peas. If you were twins – ”

“But you see,” she smiled, “our mothers, Janet’s and mine, *were* twins, and I guess that accounts for it. I’ve never seen Janet, but this is the third time, just recently, that I’ve been taken for her by her friends, Mr. – ?”

“My name is Bright,” he supplied. “Howard Bright. Yes, now I can see a slight difference, Miss Dixon. You’re a bit taller and broader across the shoulders than she is. But it’s your personalities, more than anything else, that are altogether unlike. I hope you’ll forgive me, Miss Dixon, for making a nuisance of myself!”

“No indeed – that is, of course I will!” Dorothy laughed merrily. “You’re not a nuisance, you know, but,” and her tone became grave, “I can see that you’re in trouble. Is there – ” she hesitated.

“Not I, Miss Dixon – that is, not directly. But,” he lowered his voice, “Janet is – is in very serious trouble. And for a moment, when I saw you, I thought that in some miraculous way she had escaped.”

Howard Bright’s face suddenly became almost haggard and Dorothy’s sympathy and concern for her cousin deepened into

resolve.

“Look here, Mr. Bright,” she said abruptly, “we can’t talk here, in this shopping crowd, it’s a regular football scrimmage. Let’s go up to the mezzanine. A friend of mine is waiting there for me now, I’m a little late as it is, and – ”

“But I can’t bother *you* with this,” he protested, “and especially – ”

“Oh, come along,” she urged, “Bill is a grand guy when it comes to getting people out of messes. I insist you tell us all about it. After all, Janet’s my cousin, you know, and you’ll soon be a member of the family, won’t you?”

“There doesn’t seem much hope of that now.” Young Bright’s tone was despondent. “But Janet certainly does need help, and she needs it badly – so – ”

Dorothy caught his arm. “I’m going to call you Howard,” she announced briskly. “So please drop the Miss Dixon. And come on – let’s push our way over to the elevators.”

The mezzanine floor of the department store was arranged as a lounge or waiting room for customers. Comfortable arm chairs and divans invited tired shoppers to rest. Writing desks and tables strewn with current magazines gave the place a club-like appearance.

Dorothy and her newly found acquaintance stepped out of the elevator and looked about. The place seemed especially quiet after the rush and bustle on other floors, and was almost deserted, save for two elderly ladies conversing in low tones near a window,

and a young man, who rose at their approach.

As the good looking youth moved toward them with the lithe, easy grace of a trained athlete, Howard Bright saw that he had light brown hair, and blue eyes snapping with vitality and cheerfulness.

“Hello, Dorothy!” He greeted her smilingly, “better late than never, if you don’t mind my saying so. I’d just about figured you were going to pass up our date.”

“Sorry, Colonel,” she mocked. “Explanations are in order I guess, but they can wait. This is Howard Bright, Bill – Howard, Mr. Bolton!”

The two young men shook hands.

“Bolton – Dixon?” Howard’s tone was thoughtful. “Why!” he exclaimed suddenly. “You two are the flyers – the pair who won the endurance test with the Conway motor! I’m certainly glad to meet you both. The papers have been full of your doings. Well, this is a surprise! But you know, I’d got the impression that you were both older – ”

“I’m sixteen,” smiled Dorothy. “Bill has me beat by a year.”

“How about lunch?” suggested Bill. He invariably changed the subject when his exploits were mentioned. People always enthused so, it embarrassed him. “You’ll join us, of course, Mr. Bright?”

“Thanks, Mr. Bolton. I really don’t think I can butt in this way – ”

“There’s no butting in about it,” Dorothy interrupted.

“Howard is engaged to my cousin, Janet Jordan, Bill. And Janet’s in a lot of trouble. I’ve promised we’d do everything we can to help.”

Bill, after one look at Howard’s worried face, sized up the situation instantly. “Why, of course,” he said. “And we can’t talk with any privacy in this place. I can see that whatever the trouble is, it’s serious.”

“Janet’s in desperate peril,” Howard said huskily.

“You said something about her escape when we met,” Dorothy reminded him. “Has somebody kidnapped her? Have you any idea where she is?”

“Yes, she’s a prisoner. A prisoner in the Jordans’ apartment on West 93rd Street.”

“Then her father is away?”

“No. He leaves tonight, I believe.”

“But, my goodness! – a girl can’t be kidnapped and made a prisoner in her own home. Especially if her father is there. It doesn’t sound possible.”

“I know it doesn’t,” admitted Howard desperately, “it sounds crazy. But it’s the truth, just the same. She’s in frightful danger.”

Dorothy looked horrified. “You mean that my uncle and Janet don’t get on together – that they’ve had a row and you’re afraid he will harm her?”

“Oh, no, they’re very fond of each other.”

“Then Uncle Michael is a prisoner, too!”

“No, he is free enough himself, but he can do nothing – it

would only make matters worse.”

“Well!” declared Dorothy, “I don’t think much of Uncle Michael if he can’t protect his own daughter.”

Bill stepped into the breach.

“What about the police – can’t you call them in?”

Howard Bright shook his head. “They would only bring this horrible business to a climax,” he explained. “And that is exactly what must not be done. It is more a matter for Secret Service investigation – but I don’t think that even they could be of any real help.”

Bill and Dorothy exchanged a quick glance.

“Have you ever heard of a man named Ashton Sanborn, Mr. Bright?”

“Yes, I have, Mr. Bolton. Wasn’t he the detective who helped you unearth that fiendish scheme of old Professor Fanely?”¹

“Bull’s eye!” grinned Bill. “Only Ashton Sanborn is quite a lot more than a mere detective. And it so happens that he is over at the Waldorf right now, waiting for Dorothy and me to lunch with him. Let me tell you, Bright, it’s a mighty lucky thing for Janet Jordan that he is in town. Come along. We’ll hop a taxi and be with him in ten minutes.”

Howard hung back. “But really – ”

Dorothy caught his arm. “Don’t be silly, now,” she urged.

“But I can’t call in a detective, Dorothy. I know I’m rotten at explaining, but if these devils who have Janet in their power are

¹ See *Bill Bolton and The Winged Cartwheels*.

interfered with they will kill her out of hand!”

“But you spoke of the Secret Service just now. This is not for publication, but Mr. Sanborn is the head of that branch of the government. If anyone *can* help Janet, he can do it.”

“I doubt it. I admit I’m half crazy with worry, but Janet is going to be removed from the apartment tonight, and heaven only knows what will happen then. It takes days, generally weeks, to get the government started on anything.”

“Not Sanborn’s branch of it,” interrupted Bill. “We’re talking in circles, Bright. If Sanborn can’t help Janet, he’ll tell you so. At least you can give him the dope and find out. He’s an expert and you’ll get expert advice.”

“All right, I’ll go with you. But I’m afraid it won’t do any good. Please don’t think, though, that I’m not appreciating the interest you’re taking. I don’t mean to be a wet blanket.”

“Of course you don’t, and you’re not.” Dorothy led toward the staircase. “You’ll feel a whole lot better when you get the story off your chest.”

“And when you’ve got outside a good substantial lunch,” added Bill. “I know I shall, anyway.”

“That,” said Dorothy, “is just like a boy. I believe you’d eat a good meal, Bill, an hour before you were hung, if it were offered to you.”

“I’d be hanged if I didn’t,” he laughed and followed her down the steps onto the main floor.

Chapter II

“FAMILY AFFAIRS”

“Just – one – moment, please!” Ashton Sanborn’s keen blue eyes twinkled as he surveyed his young guests. His heavy-set body moved with a muscular grace as he placed a chair for Dorothy and motioned the two boys to seats on a divan nearby. “Now then, Dorothy and Bill – I want you two chatterboxes to keep quiet while I ask Mr. Bright some questions and get this matter straight in my own head. Your turn to talk will come later.” His quizzical smile robbed the words of any harshness, and the culprits grinned and nodded their willingness to comply with his request.

“Mr. Bright,” he went on, “if you’ll just answer my questions for the present, I’ll get you to tell the story from the beginning in a few minutes.”

“It’s mighty decent of you to take all this interest, Mr. Sanborn.”

The Secret Service Man shook his prematurely grey head – “It’s my business to ferret things out. Now, as I understand it, you mistook Dorothy for her cousin, Miss Jordan, to whom you are engaged. The likeness must be amazing?”

“It is, sir.”

“Yes – well, we’ll get back to the likeness after a while. You

say that Miss Jordan is a prisoner in her father's apartment, and is in danger of her life?"

"Yes, sir." Howard, tense and taut as a fiddle string, his hands gripping the edge of the cushioned couch, gazed steadily back at his questioner.

"Do you know for certain that she is in actual danger at the present moment, Bright?" Ashton Sanborn's quiet tone and unhurried manner of speaking was gradually gaining the young man's confidence. Bill and Dorothy noticed that Howard's strained look was beginning to disappear, and he had started to relax.

"She has been in great danger," he replied, "but now, they've decided to test her. There isn't a chance, though, that she will pass the test, Mr. Sanborn. The poor girl is so worn out and nervous she's bound to fail."

"Do you know what time she is to be taken away from the apartment?"

"Yes, sir. Lawson told her to pack her clothes today, so as to be ready to leave at midnight."

"Mmm!" Sanborn glanced at his watch. "It is now one-thirty. That gives us exactly eleven and a half hours in which to get her out of their hands. Now just one question more, Mr. Bright. What made you say that this is a matter in which the so-called Secret Service of the United States should be called in, rather than the police?"

"Well," Howard's brows knit in a puzzled frown, "you see,

Janet is being taken to Dr. Tyson Winn's house near Ridgefield, Connecticut, tonight. As I understand it, Dr. Winn has a big laboratory up there where he is experimenting on high explosives for the government. Lawson, the man who told Janet she was to go there, is Dr. Winn's secretary. It all looks so queer to me – I thought – ”

“That *is* interesting!” Ashton Sanborn's tone was serious and for a little while he seemed lost in thought. Then abruptly he looked up from an inspection of his finger tips, and rose from his chair. “I ordered lunch for three before you young people arrived,” he said with a return of his cheerful, hearty way of speaking. “Now I'll phone down and have lunch for four served up here instead.” He looked at Dorothy. “By the way, the menu calls for oyster cocktails, sweetbreads on grilled mushrooms, O'Brien potatoes, alligator pear salad, and cafe parfait – any suggestions?”

“Oh, aren't you a dear!” Dorothy, who had been using a miniature powder puff on her nose, snapped shut the cover of her compact. “You have ordered all the things I like best. No wonder you're a great detective – you never forget a single thing, no matter what it is.”

Sanborn laughed. “Thanks for the compliment – but those dishes happen to be favorites of my own, too. Now get that brain of yours working, Dorothy. When I've finished with the head waiter, I want you to tell us all you know about your uncle and cousin. Before we can go further I must have every possible detail

of the case at my fingers' ends.”

He took up a phone from a small table near the window, and Dorothy turned toward Howard.

“You probably know more about the Jordans than I do,” she said. “I have a picture of Janet that she sent me a couple of years ago. We always exchange presents at Christmas – but we’ve never seen each other.”

“I really know very little about the Jordans, myself,” protested Howard. “You see, Janet and I saw each other for the first time just five weeks ago. It was on a Sunday afternoon, I’d been taking a walk in Central Park, when one of those equinoctial downpours came on very suddenly. Janet was right ahead of me, so naturally, I offered her my umbrella. She’s – well, rather shy and retiring, and at first she wasn’t so keen on accepting –”

“So there *is* a difference between the cousins!” Bill winked at Howard. “If it had been Dorothy, she’d have taken your overcoat and rubbers as well. Nothing shy or retiring about Janet’s double!”

“Is that so, Mr. Smarty! It’s a good thing Howard met her that rainy Sunday. If it had been you, Bill, the poor girl would certainly have got a soaking!”

“You mean she wouldn’t have accepted my umbrella?”

“I *mean* you never would have offered it!”

“You win – one up, Dorothy,” said Ashton Sanborn when the laughter at this sally had subsided. “What happened after you and Janet got under your umbrella, Bright?”

“Oh, nothing much. We walked over to Central Park West but there were no taxis to be had for love or money. So then I suggested taking her home and we found we lived in the same apartment house. I asked if I might call, but she said that was impossible – that Mr. Jordan permitted no callers.”

“Well,” said Dorothy, “that didn’t seem to stop you. I mean you are a pretty fast worker, Howard, to get engaged with a tyrant father guarding the doorstep and all that.”

“Cut it out, Dot,” broke in Bill, who had been waiting patiently for a chance to get even. “You can’t be in the center of the stage all the time, and your remarks are out of order, anyway.”

“I’ll dot you one, if you take my name in vain, young man!”

“Silence, woman! Go ahead, Howard, and speak your piece, or she’ll jump in with both feet next time.”

Dorothy said nothing but the glance she shot Bill Bolton was a promise of dire things to come.

“Oh, I don’t mind,” grinned Howard, and Dorothy immediately put him down as a good sport. “Well, to go on with it – we used to meet in the lobby, go for walks and bus rides, sometimes to the movies or a matinee. Two weeks ago, Janet, who is just eighteen, by the way, said she would marry me. She seemed to have no friends in New York. I’ve seen her father, but never met him. Except for this horrible business, which came up a few days ago, all that I know about Janet is that her mother died when she was five, her father parked her at a boarding-school near Chicago, and she stayed there until last June when

she graduated. Her summer holidays were spent at a girls' camp in Wisconsin. She was never allowed to visit the homes of the other girls, so Christmas and Easter holidays she stayed in the school. During her entire schooling, she saw her father only five times. Last summer he took her abroad with him. They travelled in Germany and in Russia, I believe."

"Gosh, what a life for a girl!" exploded Bill.

"I should say so!" Dorothy made no attempt to hide her disgust. "The more I hear about Uncle Michael, the less I care about him."

"Tell us what you do know about him," prompted Sanborn. "I want to get all the background possible before Bright explains the girl's present predicament. I know a good deal about Dr. Winn and his secretary. If those men are threatening her, there must be something very serious brewing. Go ahead, Dorothy – luncheon will be up here any minute, now."

"All right, but I warn you it isn't much. My mother, who as you know died when I was a little girl, had one sister, my Aunt Edith, who was her twin. They looked so much alike that their own father and mother had trouble in telling them apart. Aunt Edith fell in love with a young Irishman named Michael Jordan, whom she met at a dance. He seemed prosperous, and my grandfather gave his consent to their engagement. Then he learned that Michael Jordan made his money by selling arms and ammunition to South and Central American revolutionists. Grandpa, from all accounts, hit the ceiling. He was a deacon

of the church, very sedate and all that, and he said he wouldn't allow his daughter to marry a gun-runner. And that was that. To make a long story short, Aunt Edith ran away with Michael Jordan. They were married in New York, sent Grandpa a copy of the marriage certificate, and then sailed for South America. For several years there was no word from them at all. My mother, whose name was Janet, by the way, loved Aunt Edith as only a twin can love the other. But she couldn't write to her because the eloping couple had left no address. Six years later, mother had a letter from Uncle Michael. He was in Chicago then, and he wrote that Aunt Edith had died, and that he had placed little Janet at the Pence School in Evanston. Mother and Daddy went right out to Chicago, to see Uncle Michael. They tried to get him to let them take Janet home with them, and bring her up with me. I was only three at the time, so naturally I don't remember anything about it. But what I'm telling you Daddy told to me years later. Well, their trip to Chicago was all for nothing – Uncle Michael refused to let them have Janet. It almost broke my mother's heart. Well, and that is the reason Janet and I have always given each other presents at Christmas and on our birthdays, although we've never even met. Two years ago, she sent me her photograph, and both Daddy and I were astounded to see the resemblance to me. Twice, since then, I've been taken for Janet by girls who were at school with her at Evanston. Perhaps, if we were seen together, you'd be able to tell us apart – I don't know."

"I do, though," declared Howard, "you may be slightly broader

across the shoulders, Dorothy, but otherwise you might be Janet, sitting there. You've the same brown hair, grey eyes, your features are alike – ”

“How about our voices?”

“Exactly the same. You have a more forceful way of speaking, that's all. I keep wanting to call you ‘Janet’ all the time.” Howard turned his head away, and Dorothy could see the emotion that again overtook him as he thought of his helpless little fiancée, a prisoner in the hands of unscrupulous men.

She glanced at Bill, and shook her head in sympathy. Just then there came a knock on the sitting room door.

“Ah! lunch at last!” Ashton Sanborn rose and put his hand on Howard's shoulder. “Come, no more of this now. The subject of the double cousins is taboo until we've all done justice to this excellent meal!”

Chapter III

THE SLEEPWALKER

“Mr. Sanborn,” said Dorothy, “when you’re tired of fathoming mysteries for people, come out to New Canaan and help me order meals. That was the most scrumptious lunch I’ve had in a month of Sundays.” She dropped a lump of sugar in her demitasse and threw her host a bright smile across the table.

“Thank you, my dear,” the detective smiled back. “I may take you up on that one of these days. But speaking of mysteries reminds me that now the waiter is gone, it’s high time we busied ourselves again with the affairs of Janet Jordan. Now that I understand something of the young lady’s background and her family, I want to hear all there is to tell about her present position.” He pulled a briar pipe and tobacco pouch out of his pocket and commenced to fill the one with the contents of the other. “All ready, Howard. Start at the beginning and don’t skimp on details – they may be and they generally are important.”

“Very well, sir. I’ll begin with a week ago today.” Howard pushed his chair away from the table, thrust his hands into trouser pockets and jumped into his story. “Janet had a date to meet me last Thursday at two p. m. at the Strand. We intended to take in a movie – but she never showed up.”

“Then you aren’t a business man – ?” This from the detective.

“Oh, but I am – a mining engineer, Mr. Sanborn. With the Tuthill Corporation. But I am free on Thursday afternoons, instead of Saturday. It is more convenient for the office staff.”

“Hasn’t your concern large mining concessions in Peru?”

“It has, sir – silver mines. To make matters worse – but no – I’ll tell it this way. I particularly wanted to meet Janet last Thursday, because I had been told the day before by the head of our New York office that I was to be transferred to Lima, Peru. The boat that I’m scheduled to sail on, leaves this coming Saturday. I was fearfully pepped up about it. I’m going down there as assistant manager of our Lima office, the job carries a considerable increase in salary, and, if I make good, a fine future with the firm. My plan was to get Janet to marry me, with or without her father’s consent, and to take her to Lima with me. I couldn’t bear to think of leaving her to the kind of existence she’d had before I’d known her – and with no way of correspondence – Well, I waited for over an hour in the lobby of the theatre but she didn’t come. At last I went up to my apartment.”

“Why didn’t you phone her?” asked Dorothy, who was nothing if not direct.

“Because Janet had asked me never to do that. She said if her father knew she had a boy friend, he’d pack her off somewhere, and we’d never be able to meet again.”

“Nice papa – I don’t think!” observed Bill Bolton.

“No comments now, please,” said Sanborn. “Go on, Howard. If you couldn’t talk to Janet, how did you find out that she was

a prisoner?”

Howard smiled. “But we *were* able to talk to each other, Mr. Sanborn. About the time we became engaged, I fixed that. My small flat is on the ninth floor of the building, the Jordans’ on the seventh. My three rooms have windows on an air shaft. The Jordans’ back bedroom and bath overlook the same airshaft and are directly opposite my sitting room, two flights below. The shaft is only twenty feet wide, so I bought one of those headphone sets that are used in airplanes for conversation between the cockpits of a plane while it is being flown. I lengthened the wires of course, and got a long, collapsible pole. After dark, Janet would come to her window, I’d pass her headphone set down to her, hooked on to the end of the pole, and we would hold long conversations across the court without anybody being the wiser. When we were through talking, I’d pass the pole over to her and draw it back when she’d attached her headset.”

“By Jingo!” cried Bill. “I’ll say that’s clever!”

“It sure is, Howard!” Dorothy was quite as enthusiastic. “You certainly deserve to get Janet after that.”

Howard shook his head. “We’ll have to do something really clever to get her away from the bunch who are holding her prisoner. Well, – as I say, when I got to my flat, I sat down by my sitting room window, and pretended to read a book. In reality, of course, I was watching Janet’s window. Presently she appeared. Even at that distance, I could see that she had been crying. She held up a slate, for we never dared to use the headphones in the

day time, and slates are a good medium for short messages. On it she had written, '*After dark.*' Well, that was one of the longest afternoons I'd ever put in. About five-thirty, she came back to her window and I passed over the headgear. When I heard her story, I went half crazy, and I guess I've been pretty much that way ever since.

"You see, Mr. Sanborn, Janet has told me that occasionally she walks in her sleep, especially when she isn't feeling very well. The evening before, that was a week ago Wednesday night, she had a headache and went to bed early. When she awoke, she was terrified to find herself seated on the floor of their living room, behind a large Chinese screen. There seemed to be seven or eight men in the room, including her father. Of course, she could not see them, but she could hear every word they said. By the clock on the wall above her head, she saw that it was one in the morning. She soon realized that this was a meeting of the heads of some large society or organization and that these men had come there from all parts of the world. There was an air of mystery about them and their talk. No names were mentioned but they addressed each other by number. Mr. Jordan was Number 5; Number 2, who spoke with a foreign accent, was evidently conducting the meeting, in place of the absent Number 1, whom they all seemed to hold in great awe. Janet realized that she must have entered the room before the meeting started, while she was still asleep. She saw that so long as the meeting lasted, there would be no way of escape. Gradually she became terrified at

her predicament, and – ”

“Just a moment,” interrupted Ashton Sanborn. “Has Janet ever told you anything of her father’s business?”

“She really knows nothing about it, Mr. Sanborn. I asked her myself some time ago, and she said then, except that he seemed to travel a lot, she hadn’t the slightest idea what he did for a living. Once when she asked him outright what it was, Mr. Jordan flew into a rage. He said it was his own affair, and that so long as it brought them in enough money to live comfortably, he did not wish her to bring up the matter again. The one thing she does know is that he doesn’t go regularly to an office. Men frequently come to see him at the apartment, but their conversations are invariably held behind locked doors.”

“I see. Go on now, with Janet and the meeting.”

“Well, sir, as I’ve said, she was behind that screen, listening to what the men said – and in fact, she couldn’t help listening. Not that she understood much of what they were saying. Number 2 made a long speech and the gist of it was that now they were agreed upon the use of Formula X, the demonstration (whatever that was) must be made in their respective sectors at the same time on the same day. He also proposed that Number 5 (Janet’s father) interview Number 1 and learn from him when the demonstrations should be made. This motion was carried unanimously. Then Number 3 asked the chairman if they could not in future hold their meeting in some safer place than the Jordans’ apartment. ‘For all we know,’ he said, ‘someone may be

secreted behind that screen!’ Mr. Jordan laughed at this, and told Number 3 to close up the screen if it made him nervous. So the first thing Janet knew, the screen was dragged aside and she was staring into the face of a Chinaman. Seated in a circle behind him were the others, her father among them.”

“Gosh!” exclaimed Dorothy. “I’ll bet that scared the poor kid silly.”

“It did,” admitted Howard. “She was absolutely petrified. And then there was the dickens to pay. All the men started talking at once. The Chinaman pulled a revolver and pointed it straight at her, yelling that she had heard their secrets and must be immediately executed!”

“She has heard nothing!” her father told them. ‘She frequently walks in her sleep. She was asleep when she wandered in here before the meeting, and she is sleeping now – look!’ Then he lit a match and held the flame before Janet’s eyes. ‘You see,’ he said, ‘she doesn’t even blink. Janet has heard nothing, gentlemen.’”

“Of course Janet had taken her father’s hint, and followed it. She knew that he was doing the only thing he could to save her life, so she kept right on staring in front of her without moving, while the Chinaman held the automatic within a foot of her head. But the strain she was under nearly broke her nerve. She knew that the slightest sign on her part that she was conscious would mean a bullet through her brain. A furious argument followed. Most of the men – there were eight of them including Mr. Jordan – wanted her put out of the way at once. But at last, her father

and Number 2, a big man with a long beard who seemed to be more humane than the rest, prevailed upon them to let him lead her back to her bed. Her father was forbidden to hold any intercourse with her whatsoever. She was locked in her bedroom, afraid even to cry, for fear she would be heard, and not knowing what moment the door would open and they would drag her to her death.”

“Horrible!” Mr. Sanborn’s pipe had gone out but he didn’t seem to notice it. “That experience was enough to unhinge a person’s mind. Janet may be shy and retiring, but she evidently doesn’t lack grit. By the way, did she say she recognized any of the men at the meeting?”

“No. She said that without exception she was sure she’d never seen any of them before, although they were all on good terms with her father. Each one seemed to be of a different nationality. One was a black man who wore a turban – an East Indian, probably. Another, also pretty dark, wore a red fez. The others were apparently Europeans, but as they all spoke English together she had no way of guessing what they were. Number 2, the man with the long brown beard, she thought might be a Scandinavian. She was sure, though, that her father was the only American or Anglo-Saxon in the group.”

“Tell us what happened next morning,” proposed Dorothy. Her coffee, now cold, remained untasted in the cup.

“I’m getting to that. At eight o’clock her door was unlocked and a woman, a stranger to her, came into her bedroom with

a breakfast tray. She put the tray on a table and went into the bathroom and turned on the water for Janet's bath, then left the room and locked the door after her. At nine this same woman came back, brought some books and magazines to her, made up the bed and put the room straight. Whenever Janet spoke to her, she shook her head and put her finger to her lips. But Janet said that even now she doesn't know whether the woman is actually dumb or only acting under orders. She has brought and taken away her meals ever since, but she has never been able to get her to speak."

"But how did she find out about going to Dr. Winn's house?" asked Bill Bolton, who had shown an interest quite as keen as Dorothy's or Sanborn's.

Howard Bright drank a glass of water. "I'm getting to that part now," he explained. "I'm not much of a story teller and I seem to be taking an awful time to get through this one – but I'm doing my best just the same."

"Of course you are!" Dorothy motioned Bill to keep quiet. "You're doing noble, Howard! Pay no attention to that goof over there."

"O.K., Dorothy." Howard replaced his empty glass on the table. "At about noon of the first day of Janet's imprisonment in her room, the door was unlocked and Mr. Lawson came in. She knew him as a friend of her father's who had dined with them two or three times. She had always thought him quite a jolly sort of chap and knew that he was private secretary to Dr. Winn, the

celebrated chemist. Naturally, she felt rather relieved to see him, and she opened up on him at once. She still felt that her only hope for life and freedom was to pretend absolute ignorance of the happenings of the night before. And she managed to keep up that pretense before Lawson, though what he had to do with the affair she hadn't any idea, nor does she yet know where he comes into the picture. Anyway, he wasn't at the meeting. She let him know, though, that she was very indignant and astonished to find herself kept a prisoner, and demanded to see her father. Lawson, she told me, was most affable and kind to her. He said that she of course did not realize that she had been very ill during the night and that she was now under doctor's orders. He also told her that her father had been called away on business, so he had come to her as an old friend of the family, to be of any help that he could. Janet said that his sympathy almost undermined her suspicion – she almost confided in him. But luckily, she didn't. He has been to see her every day since, and she is now convinced that his part in this devilish scheme is to gain her confidence, and to find out whether she actually did hear or see anything at the meeting. Yesterday he told her that it had been decided she should visit him and his wife at Dr. Winn's house while her father is away, and that in order to occupy her mind, she should act as secretary to Mrs. Lawson, who assists Dr. Winn in his work."

"Maybe they don't really mean to harm her after all," said Dorothy hopefully.

"Janet is certain," said Howard, "that they want her at the

Doctor's for close observation. She took a secretarial course at school, so that part of it is all right, but I believe with her that one slip, one sign that she is deceiving them, will mean that she will simply vanish and never be heard of again. She knows that Lawson lied about one thing: her father is still living in their flat. She has heard his voice several times."

"But what I can't understand," said Dorothy, "is why, just as soon as you knew all this, you didn't go to the nearest police station and have that flat raided!"

"Because, Janet won't hear of it." Howard's tone was thoroughly wretched. "I worked out some other plans to release her, but she refuses to budge."

"Is the girl crazy?" This from Bill.

"No – she's as sane as any of us – maybe saner. She says that if the police are called in or I help her to escape, that crew will believe her father knew all the time that she was faking – as of course he does. And she says she is sure they will have him killed out of hand, once they discover that. To make matters worse, if possible, my firm thinks I'm going to sail for Lima the day after tomorrow! If I turn them down, I'll lose my job here and ruin my future. I've been hoping against hope that something would turn up so Janet could sail with me. I certainly shall not sail without her. I was buying some clothes for the trip when I ran into you this morning –" Howard's voice trailed off hopelessly.

"Gee!" It was evident that Dorothy was not far from tears. "You poor dears are in an awful fix! I do wish I could help you.

Do *something*— so that you two could get married and sail for Peru!”

“Perhaps you can.” Ashton Sanborn knocked the ashes from his pipe into an ash tray.

“*How?*” shouted three voices simultaneously.

Chapter IV

MEET FLASH!

“Dorothy, have you ever done anything in the way of amateur theatricals?” Ashton Sanborn stroked the bowl of his pipe reflectively.

“Why – er – yes, a little.” She looked a bit bewildered. “I’ve been in the Silvermine Sillies for the past two years.”

Sanborn nodded. “How is it you’re out of school on a Thursday?” The question seemed irrelevant. He was leaning back in his chair now, surveying the ceiling rather absently, but there was nothing lackadaisical about his crisp tones.

“Christmas holidays. Why?”

“Because, if you’re willing, I may want you to work for me for a few days. I suppose I can reach your father by telephone at the New Canaan bank?”

“No, you can’t – Daddy is down in Florida on a fishing trip. He’s on Mr. Bolton’s yacht, somewhere off the coast. They won’t be back until Christmas Eve.”

“That,” said the Secret Service man, “complicates matters. Who, may I ask, is looking after Miss Dixon while Mr. Dixon is away?”

“I’m looking after my own sweet self, sir.” Dorothy grinned roguishly.

“Then who is to take the responsibility for your actions, young lady?”

“Why, you may – if you want to!”

For a moment or two the detective studied her thoughtfully. There was a certain assurance about this girl’s manner, a steely quality that came sometimes into her grey eyes, an indefinable air of strength and quiet courage —

“Do you think you could impersonate your cousin, Dorothy?”

“Why – of course!” Dorothy showed her surprise. “We look exactly alike. Didn’t Howard take me for Janet?”

“He did – but from what he has told us about her, your natures are entirely different. Janet, from all accounts, is a rather meek and demure young lady. Remember, that in order to convince anyone who knows her you would have to submerge your own personality in hers. And nobody would ever describe *you* as a meek, demure young lady!”

“An untamed wildcat – if you ask me,” chuckled Bill.

“Why, thanks a lot, William!” Dorothy’s hearers were abruptly aware of the changed quality of her voice as she continued to speak in melting tones of pained acceptance. “But nobody *did* ask you, darling, so in future when your betters are conversing, be good enough to button up that lip of yours!” She finished her withering tirade in the same quiet tones and with a positively shrinking demeanor that sent the others into shouts of laughter.

“Say, you’re Janet to a T!” cried Howard. “Her voice is always

like that if I happen to hurt her feelings.”

“How about her hair, Howard? Is it long or short?”

“Oh, she wears it bobbed like yours.”

“I suppose,” Dorothy said to Mr. Sanborn, “that you want to smuggle me into the flat and have me change places with her?”

“That’s the idea exactly,” admitted the detective. “And I don’t want you to make your decision until I explain my plan in detail – or, rather, the necessity for the risk you will be taking.”

“Shoot – ” said Miss Dixon, “but I can tell you right now, risk or no risk, I’m going through with it. Janet, after all she’s been through and from what Howard has told us, is bound to flop once she gets to Dr. Winn’s. Nervous, and probably high strung, the chances are against her being able to hold up under the strain.”

“I think you are right about that. But although Janet is in serious danger, she could be rescued and her father guarded without bringing you into the picture, Dorothy, if it were not for one thing. These men who hold Janet in their custody are in some way mixed up with Dr. Winn, who has undertaken to make some very important experiments for the United States government.”

“I make a bet that he is Number 1 of the gang!” ventured Bill, the irrepressible.

“Very possibly. That has yet to be discovered. But what I want you young people to realize is that this is no ordinary gang. Quite evidently we are up against an international organization. Their treatment of Janet is concrete evidence of their cold-blooded ruthlessness when they believe their plans to be in jeopardy. If

you take your cousin's place, Dorothy, of course we will see that you are well guarded, but even so, your part in clearing up this mystery will entail a very great element of risk."

"I'm willing to take the chance." Dorothy met his inquiring eyes steadily. "Naturally, I'm sorry for Janet and I want to help her. The only thing is, I've got to be back at High School by January fourth."

"I think I can promise you that this job will be cleaned up within a week."

"I reckon," smiled Bill, "that you haven't told us all you know about these lads with numbers instead of names."

"Not quite all." Sanborn smiled back at him. "But that is neither here nor there just now. By the way, Dorothy, how are you on shorthand and typewriting?"

"Oh, not so worse. It's part of the course I'm taking at New Canaan High."

"Good enough. Frankly, young lady, I would not consider using you, had not the New Canaan Bank robbery, the affair of the Mystery Plane and the Conway Case proved conclusively that you have a decided flair for this kind of thing."

"Thank you, sir," said Miss Dixon with mock coyness. "Them kind words is a great comfort to a poor workin' goil. Do I pack a gat wid me, Mister?"

"You do not. In fact, you will take nothing except what belongs to your cousin. If I am able to get you into the Jordan flat and they carry you up to Ridgfield in her place, just being Janet Jordan,

who never woke up when she was sleepwalking last week will be your best protection. Of course, I'm not deserting you. Either I or some of my men will find means of keeping in touch with you constantly."

"And when the villains scrag me, the secret service boys will arrive on the scene just in time – to identify the deceased! No thank you. If the gun is out of orders, Flash will have to go. Of course my jiu jitsu may help at a pinch, but Flash is more potent and ever so much quicker."

"What are you talking about, Dorothy?" Ashton Sanborn looked puzzled.

"It's a cinch you can't drag a dog along if that's your big idea," declared Bill.

"It is not the big idea, old thing." Dorothy grinned wickedly. "Flash and I have got very clubby this fall. He's really quite a dear, you know. We travel about together a lot."

"The mystery of this age," observed Bill, "is how certain females can talk so much and say so little."

"Then," said Dorothy cheerfully, "I'll let you solve the mystery right now. Catch!" She tossed him a macaroon from a plate on the table. "Go over to that bedroom door," she commanded. "Stand to one side of the door and throw that thing into the air."

"But, I say, Dorothy!" interposed Ashton Sanborn. "This is no time for fooling, we've got –"

"This is not fooling, you dear old fuss-budget," she cut in. "It's – well, it's just something that may save you from worrying so

much about me. Now, Bill, are you ready?"

"Anything to please the ladies," retorted that young man wearily. He got up and walked to the far end of the room and took his stand beside the closed door. "Is Flash a cake hound? Will he jump for the cookie?"

"He sure will – toss it in the air."

The small cake went spinning toward the ceiling, and at the same instant Dorothy's right hand disappeared under the table. With the speed of legerdemain she brought it into view again and her arm shot out suddenly like a signpost across the white cloth. There was a streak of silver light – and the three male members of the quartet stared at the bedroom door in open-mouthed wonder. Quivering in the very center of its upper panel was a small knife, and impaled on the knife's blade was the macaroon.

"Meet Flash!" said Dorothy.

"Great suffering snakes!" exploded Bill, plucking out the blade, and examining it. "The thing's a throwing knife."

"Six inches of razor-keen, leaf-shaped blade," said Dorothy, "and three inches of carved ivory hilt, beautifully balanced – that's Flash. How do you like him, fellers?"

"You," declared Howard, who was still goggle-eyed with surprise, "you are the most amazing girl I've ever met, Dorothy!"

"And you don't know the half of it," said Bill with unstinted fervor.

"Think I can take care of myself at a pinch, Uncle Sanborn?" Dorothy was laughing at the expression of astonishment on the

detective's face.

"You win, young lady." He chuckled softly. "After this I'll keep my worries for Doctor Winn and his friends. Who'd have thought you had anything like that up your sleeve!"

"Not up my sleeve, old dear. A little leather sheath strapped just above my left knee is where Flash came from."

"Regular Jesse James stuff, eh?" remarked Bill as he handed back the knife.

"Oh, yeah?" Flash disappeared as quickly as he'd come, and Dorothy stood up. "What's on the boards, now, boss?" she asked sweetly.

"Howard – " said Ashton Sanborn, "will you let me have the key to that apartment of yours? Thanks. Bill and I will need it this afternoon, and even if things go according to Hoyle, we'll be powerful busy. In the meantime, I've got a job for you and Dorothy." He took out his pocketbook and extracting a sheaf of bills, handed them to the girl.

"You and Howard are going to have a busy afternoon, too. See that you're back here in time for dinner at seven, and – "

"But what under the sky-blue canopy is all this?" Dorothy was thumbing the bills, counting them. "Why, I've never seen so much money – "

"Use it to buy your cousin a trousseau. Have the things sent to Mrs. Howard Bright's apartment at this hotel. And remember, that when she arrives here, Janet will have nothing but the clothes she is wearing. You don't mind doing this, do you?"

“Mind! Why, I’ll love it!” Dorothy turned a dazzling smile on Howard, who was simply tongue-tied by the detective’s announcement. “Isn’t he swell, Howard? Isn’t he some guy?”

Ashton Sanborn laughed. “Don’t thank me. Uncle Sam is paying, so you needn’t bring back any change.”

Dorothy thrust the money into her purse. “Don’t worry, old bean, I won’t. So long, you two. Come on, Howard, we’re going to have a beautiful afternoon!” She caught young Bright by the arm and whirled him across the room to the coat-rack. She jammed a bright green beret over her right ear and slung her leopard-cat coat onto her shoulders. “All set for Fifth Avenue!” she called out merrily as she preceded Howard out of the room.

Chapter V

ON SECRET SERVICE

To say that Dorothy enjoyed her afternoon's shopping would be putting it mildly. Give any girl plenty of money and tell her to go out and buy an entire trousseau for herself – or even for somebody else – and watch her jump at the chance!

Howard trailed along in more or less of a daze. This sudden change in his outlook; being drawn from the depths of despondency to the hope of a future with the girl he loved, and all in the space of a couple of hours, was a little too much for him to realize at once. Ever after, he had but a hazy recollection of that shopping tour. The afternoon seemed but a whirling maze of lingerie, stockings, street dresses, party frocks, coats, hats, shoes and accessories, upon which his advice was invariably asked, and never taken.

They were bowling hotelwards in a taxi, jammed with cardboard boxes and packages of various shapes and sizes, before he returned to normal.

“Whew!” he looked at Dorothy. “I should think you'd be dead!”

She shook her head and laughed. “No girl ever gets tired of shopping,” she told him gaily. “Wait till you're married – you'll find out.”

“But what’s the idea of bringing all these things back with us? I thought Mr. Sanborn said to have them sent.”

“He did – but I have a better idea. This is part of it. I’ll tell you all about it when we get to the hotel. Keep still now – I want to go over the lists and see if I’ve forgotten anything!”

Howard sighed in resignation.

At the hotel desk they learned that Ashton Sanborn had not returned as yet, but had left word that they should go to his rooms. With the assistance of three bellboys, they piled themselves and their packages into the elevator.

“Gee! This looks like the night before Christmas!” Howard dropped his hat and overcoat and stared at the boxes and bundles piled along the wall of the sitting room. “Janet certainly will be surprised when she sees all those things!”

Dorothy pulled off her close-fitting little hat, and tossed it with her purse and coat onto the table. Then she sank into an easy-chair. “Well, I only hope she’ll approve. My, this was a strenuous afternoon. You’d better sit down.”

Howard followed her advice. “You said it. But I know Janet – she’ll be crazy about the things you’ve bought.”

“Oh, you boys are all alike.” Dorothy yawned unashamedly.

“I don’t get you.”

“What I mean is that as soon as a fellow goes round with a girl for a while, he invariably says ‘Oh yes, she’ll like this,’ or, ‘she won’t like that.’”

“And – ?”

“Ninety-nine times out of a hundred you guess wrong.”

“Why?”

“I think it’s because girls like to do their own choosing. Especially when it comes to buying clothes. Well, anyway, I think the things are darling, and they’ll be becoming, too. At least they look well on me.”

“Don’t worry – those clothes will make her look like a million dollars.”

“I know they will. I’m tired, I guess.” Dorothy yawned again and closed her eyes.

Howard started to say something, thought better of it, yawned, and let his head pillow itself on the soft upholstery.

Three quarters of an hour later, Ashton Sanborn and Bill Bolton marched into the room to find the two shoppers sound asleep in their respective chairs. The detective coughed discreetly and both the young people awoke.

“I see that you’ve brought your spoils back with you,” he smiled, pointing to the boxes and bundles. Dorothy stared at him, only half awake, then sat upright in her chair as she realized where she was.

“Looks to me,” said Bill, getting out of his overcoat, “as if she thought Janet was going to start a shop of her own. Why did you cart all the stuff back here instead of having it sent?”

“Because, Mr. Inquisitive – well, just because. You and Howard run along now and prepare your handsome selves for dinner. The principles of this piece are going into conference

now.”

“My *word*— ” began Bill, but at a shake of the head from Sanborn, he took the still drowsy Howard by the arm and together they disappeared into the bedroom.

“Pretty tough time you’ve had, I expect?” Mr. Sanborn’s eyes twinkled, though his tone was grave.

“Oh, but it was lots of fun,” cried Dorothy. “Thanks to Uncle Sam, and Uncle Sanborn! And look here, I’ve got a great idea.”

“Which has to do with your bringing back the packages yourself?”

“Quite right, it has. Do you think those boys can hear what we’re saying?”

“I doubt it, Dorothy – but Bill, as you probably guessed at the end of the affair of the Winged Cartwheels, is a full-fledged member of my organization and – ”

“Oh, I don’t mind Bill,” she interrupted in a low tone. “But Howard mustn’t get wind of it. He might make a fuss.”

She rose from her chair and going over to the detective, began to whisper in his ear.

“But that’s impossible, Dorothy!” he protested, although he allowed a smile to come to his eyes. “And what’s more, my dear, I’m afraid it would be illegal.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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