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AN AWAKENED INTEREST IN BUSINESS

CHAPTER 97. I wrote Mother a long, cheerful letter, telling her of my new position of Mr. Claxton's kindness, and all about the people in the office. "Tell Aunt Susan that perhaps some day I may be able to pay that young writer's board bill for him in return for his typewriters," I also added that now I had found this work I had greater hope than ever that some day I might make a home for her. If only I could earn enough to have just three or four rooms, and Mother to keep house for me, it would be like Heaven. I said nothing of this to Mary. She was planning a home for me with them, a home I should enjoy, but still not like the one I had in my mind for Mother and myself.

Miss Baker seemed not to get over her resentment because I refused her invitation to lunch at the same place she and the girls I knew frequented each day. I was sorry simply because I hated to have anyone feel unkindly toward me for such a reason. Yet at the same time I did not want to go with her.

I often caught her and Mr. Betts, the manager, whispering and glancing my direction. They seemed very intimate and my first impression, that they were interested in each other—anyway—that Miss Baker was intrigued with him—was sustained by what I saw.

I was often embarrassed and annoyed by their evident interest in me and what I did. But when I talked with Mary she insisted Miss Baker was jealous because of something.

There was much that happened however to offset any unpleasantness caused by her. Mr. Claxton had assured me it was improving so fast that it would not be long before I could assume the same position Miss Lee had held—practically that of private secretary.

Oh, how I worked after he told me that. I begrudged the time I spent eating and sleeping. I worked constantly, feverishly, always with that thought before me. After my experience in working for others—even for myself in a public place—the thought of the seclusion of a private office appealed strongly to me.

At first I had no slightest interest in the business as a business, but now I had commenced to read the financial news, to listen when securities and their values were discussed. I had begun to realize that if I were to hold a position of trust, I must familiarize myself with the business of the firm, the terms used, and many other things that up to now had seemed of minor or of no importance.

I believe there is no truer saying than "To be busy is to be happy." I know I was happier than I had been since Dad died—happier even than when Mary and I first started our little pancake business. Even though we were our own mistresses, because of the tipplings, or the actions of some of the people I served. So far, here I had had nothing but kindness—unless I considered Miss Baker's actions, which really amounted to nothing by comparison.

One day Mr. Claxton spoke of a security, said he wished he knew something about it. I happened to have read about that very thing, and told him so, explaining where I had found my information. He looked surprised and pleased. He complimented me highly, they made the somewhat cryptic remark: "I knew I was making a mistake." But as it seemed to be addressed to himself, not to me, I could only guess at what he implied.

Occasionally after this incident he brought me something to read, usually something connected with large corporations, of securities of some kind in which the firm were particularly interested or which they were underwriting.

Frequently he would question me about what I read and if I seemed hazy on any points and unable to grasp the meaning or explain it, he would patiently go over it with me.

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until it was perfectly clear. Often I wondered why there was so much said against employers and the manner in which they treated their employees, and so it said in their favor in this office it seemed that courtesy and consideration were given as freely as it was expected—more freely, in fact.

Even Mr. Betts, who for some unknown reason, I felt disliked me was uniformly polite. That the time would come when he would not be and would even make things unpleasant and so hard for me that I could scarcely endure it, I could not imagine.

Suavity often covers an unkind heart. AN INVITATION TO LUNCHEON Chapter 98. Several times when on my way to the little restaurant where I always lunched, I had seen Mr. Betts—seemingly by accident. One day he stopped me:

"Thank you for lunch with me today Miss Stewart?" "I will take you to a nice place which you will enjoy." "Thank you, but I cannot," I answered.

"I wonder if you would have the same reply for Claxton?" The answer was unmistakable, as he turned and walked away.

I felt very uncomfortable for some time whenever I recalled his remark. Why should he bring Mr. Claxton's name into the matter? I knew I would have given my employer the same answer that I had given to myself with a different feeling. And I understood the implication. But gradually it slipped from my mind—probably because I never again encountered Mr. Betts in the vicinity of the cheap restaurant where I lunched.

I had been with Mr. Claxton nearly three months when he said to me: "You are capable now of filling Miss Lee's position. I shall return your assistant to the outer office where she belongs. Your salary will be \$25 a week and will increase as you prove your worth."

"You are sure I am not supplanting that other girl—or Miss Wilcox?" "Your feeling toward the other girl is very commendable. But Miss Wilcox is Mr. Betts's stepdaughter. The other girl I borrowed until you were capable of doing my work, alone—until you had the necessary speed. In other words you were capable from the beginning."

"I am so glad!" I exclaimed, unable to conceal my delight. "I am so happy, yet I should not like to think my good fortune meant someone else's misfortune."

"I am called a hard taskmaster," he smiled at me. "I am not afraid!" I laughed from pure joy. Already there were plans running through my mind. I could live on half my salary or less, give Mother \$5 each week and save something toward the home that loomed large in my mind. It was as I had said almost too good to be true.

That night when I told Mary and Mrs. Fagin, they were delighted. I had scarcely finished telling them before Thomas Clancy came in, and I had to repeat it all for his benefit, or hurt Mary's feelings. So I went through it all again.

Mary and Tom insisted that I go to the motion pictures with them to celebrate my good luck. I much preferred to remain quietly at home but saw I would hurt their sensitive souls if I refused so I consented.

We went to a medium priced house near enough so that we could walk. Cars were counted for, Tom and I there was three of us. The picture, a clean society drama, was very interesting and I was enjoying it thoroughly, when someone behind me leaned over and said in a sneering voice which I seemed to recognize but could not place:

"I wonder if you would have come with me?" Then "Who's your swagger friend?"—of course making fun of Tom. I turned a bit in my seat and saw the sneering face of Mr. Betts. A disdainful smile curved his lips. Mary turned, saw, and understood something disagreeable was happening.

enough so he could easily hear: "I don't like his face much. If you say so we'll have Tom fix it for him."

It was a terrible embarrassment. Mary saw my position, and whispered: "I didn't mean anything. I thought he was worrying you."

A NEW PLAN FOR TOM AND MARY Chapter 99

"Never had I left a place more gladly than I left that theatre. I felt as if Mr. Betts' eyes were boring through me, and it was torture. After Tom had taken us home, and we were alone, Mary said:

"Who was that guy Zena? Someone you know?" "The manager at the office," I replied. "I know she already felt badly, that she had embarrassed me and I would say nothing to add to her hurt."

"I didn't mean anything," I said. "What was it?" "Oh, just something about my refusal to go to lunch with him the other day." I was delighted that she had not heard his sneering remark about Tom.

"Oh, him! That 'delicious' fellow. If I had known it was him I would have set Tom on him!" "I laughed. I couldn't help it. Mary's expression was so funny. Then I forgot all about the incident in thinking of my good fortune and in having my new son I could save money for Mother with me."

"Say, Zena, you are going to be splendid! You are going to be a big success!" Mary's eyes were shining. "And I want to ask you advice about something. I feel as if the shop was yours yet you know. I can't seem to feel that you are out of it."

"I am just so interested as I was when I was your partner Mary. What is it?" "What do you think of Tom going in on his job at the tea and coffee house and coming into the restaurant with me? We are doing a pretty good business now and I really need someone. If he don't come with me I shall have to hire a man I think. But we ain't sure about it. Tell me what you think."

"I have thought many times it was the thing for you to do, but hesitated to say so. Tom earns you say \$30 a week. I believe he can make more—as much anyway—with you. I shall have him to help you can gradually make the place larger, or like another place. I think it a splendid idea. What does Mrs. Fagin say?"

"I haven't said a word to her. Tom and me talked it over and decided we wouldn't say a thing about it until you knew."

"Let's call Mrs. Fagin and ask her if she's not too tired to talk with us a little while. It isn't quite 10 o'clock."

"If you come right up—no, you come down. We'll have her with us. I'll call her. The dear old soul said when we asked her: 'I feel like sliding down the banisters after hearing that!' Mary exclaimed as she hurried down to the basement."

"Don't say a word," she said. "I'll get this supper on the table. I can't work and listen to."

"I'll have bread and butter, pickles and cider," Mary checked each thing off on her fingers as Mrs. Fagin put the dishes on.

"Mary, eat and talk," Mrs. Fagin said as she sat down. "Mary told her just as she had told me—that she would like Tom with her, but that they both wanted to be sure they were doing the right thing from a business standpoint."

"You see \$30 is \$30," Mary said. "And Tom won't wait to get married only two months longer. He worries me almost to death about it." Mary blushed adorably.

"You don't want to get married, do you?" Mrs. Fagin remarked. "No, I don't," I replied. "Try to understand it. I'm a girl friend of yours. I'm Mary Murphy."

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"If he wants to go I wouldn't stop him," Mary retorted. "I thought we were going to talk about the shop. I broke in, some other girl. I don't believe he had a quarrel about Tom and ever has looked at anyone else since he met you Mary."

"There's Zena, Zena," Mrs. Fagin said, quarrelling. "I know Thomas loves Mary, and she him. They're a fine couple and will be happy. I am sure. Now let's get back to business."

"Tom earns \$30 a week now. Do you think he is warranted in giving it up? Will he be able to make as much in the shop?" I asked her. "I don't know," Mrs. Fagin often lapsed into a thick brogue. "And more! That business is making money and Mary needs her money."

"That settles it! Tom gives up the office during Mr. Claxton's absence. I made no reply. "To bad! I'm not good enough to lunch with! That fellow you had with you last night surely wasn't so many."

"He is a gentleman." "Oh, is he? He don't look the part!" The open sneer made me lose my temper. Had I been older more accustomed to men of his type perhaps I might have been able to explain to my friends were. But I just blurted out:

"He is far more gentlemanly than you are proving yourself." My voice trembled, and I was shaking all over. But no sooner had I said it than my lips than I realized how terribly foolish I had been. Mr. Claxton left the hiring and discharging of the help entirely to Mr. Betts. Of course now he would discharge me.

"Thoughts of the home I had planned for Mother came to me, and I felt my eyes. Oh, why had I lost my temper? I could see that Mr. Betts was so amazed at my daring he could scarcely speak. I was really frightened by the ugly look in his face when I glanced at him. Finally he said, his voice trembling and husky with anger:

"You are discharged Miss Stewart. Your services will not be required in this office any longer. You can go at once. I will have your envelope ready immediately."

"What's all this? What are you discharging Miss Stewart for?" Mr. Claxton had come in so quickly that neither of us had heard him.

"I am discharging her because she was both impudent and insolent. Aside from that she is incompetent. I have a man who will come to you at once, so you will not be inconvenienced. Mr. Betts had spoken willingly enough, although I noticed he had turned white when Mr. Claxton spoke.

"I am the best judge of Miss Stewart's ability as she does only my work. As to the other charges you make against her, I shall have to hear her version as well as yours. But understand, Mr. Betts, I will both hire and discharge my private stenographers hereafter. I will talk with Miss Stewart and then she can go."

"Mr. Betts went out leaving me alone, with my employer. I felt chagrined, ashamed, unworthy of his kindness and faith in me. I had allowed myself to lose my temper and make him trouble simply because I had felt insulted for Mary and Tom. I might easily have placated Mr. Betts by a few tactful words of explanation, instead of making trouble."

"Now Miss Stewart, please tell me what it is all about," Mr. Claxton's tone was so kind that it increased my feeling of shame. "I am much to blame, I am my temper."

"So I perceived." He smiled a little. "May I know what about?" "Certainly—albeit I am ashamed of myself. I have a girl friend here who is a person my own age I know in Chicago. She is uneducated, but fine. I love her dearly. She was my partner in the shop I told you of."

"You mean the Irish girl at the bank who the one who served me the other day?" "I don't know you had been there—but Mary is very pretty, tall with dark hair, and gray eyes." "That's the one. I liked her immensely. She was so businesslike, so anxious to please."

may he commented on my willingness to go to movies, and then he started Thomas and I lost my temper, and told him that Tom was more of a gentleman than he was I am very sorry Mr. Claxton. I don't know men very well but I will try and be more tactful if I may stay?" It was only thoughts of Mother that helped me say that—that gave me courage to ask remain.

"Thank you, Miss Stewart. Of course you will stay." He thanked him, then went about his work. I supposed the incident ended. It showed how little I knew my employer.

CHAPTER 101. A few days afterward, Mary came home very much excited. "I've got something to tell you tonight Zena, that'll make you open your eyes."

"Haven't run away and married Tom, have you?" I asked. "Nothing like that! Your boss came to the shop for his dinner. He's been there before, but I didn't know him. My, but he's a swell!"

"How did you know it was Mr. Claxton?" "He told me. Introduced himself. That other man Betts, was with him, too."

"Really? Was Tom there?" "Yes and that was the best part of it. Tom told me a gentleman had asked for me. I went out and that boss of yours mentioned me. There was only one or two others in the shop. I went over to the table, and he said:

"Is this Miss Murphy?" I told him I was. Then he introduced himself and the other fellow, that one who was at the picture show. You'd a thought I was the Queen of England or some other high and mighty person the way he talked. Then when Tom came thru he stopped him and without waiting for me to introduce him, he says: "This is my friend Mr. Thomas Clancy Mr. Betts. I hear that you are soon to be Mrs. Clancy, Miss Murphy!"

"We are to be married in about a month," Tom answers, just as quiet like. "I hope you may be very happy," your boss says, but you should have seen that man Betts. When your Mr. Claxton introduced him to Tom, his face got awful red and he looked so funny. He never spoke but your boss went right on talking to Tom and me just as if we was real old friends. I'll bet you told him a lot about us."

"Yes, I did tell him some things. I had a little unpleasantness at the office, I lost my temper, and made Mr. Betts angry, and—"

"It was about that night at the picture show?" "Yes, I then told Mr. Claxton who I was with and how I liked both you and Tom. He asked me some questions, and I told him that you were going to be married and that Tom had given up his clerkship and was going to help you in the restaurant. You aren't offended because I told it, are you?"

"Not on your life! A few customers like him and we could retire in a year or two. He eat everything in the place, most. That other man, Betts didn't seem to be hungry, tho. He just pretended to eat."

"I can imagine he wasn't very comfortable." I was unwilling Mary should know Tom had been spoken of surlingly but she must have mistrusted it because she said: "He ain't as much of a gentleman as Tom is in spite of being manager of a big office."

"Indeed he is not!" I agreed, then changed the subject. "But later Mary again referred to it by saying: "He called Tom his friend 'Zena' wasn't that nice of him?" "He is always nice Mary. I think he is what Dad would call a true gentleman."

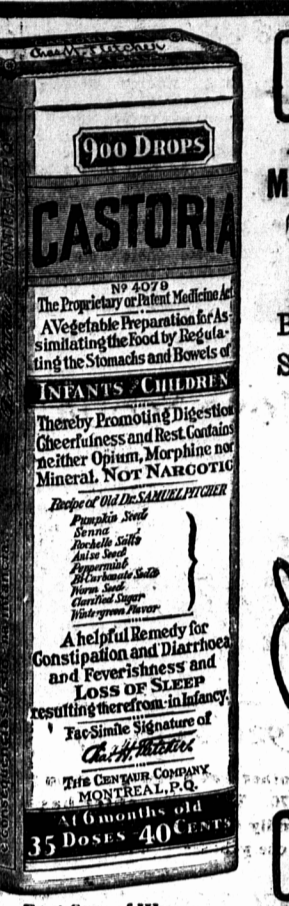
The next day Mr. Claxton said to me: "I am sure you will have more trouble with Betts, Miss Stewart. But if you should please tell me at once, I cannot have any of the young girls in the office annoyed."

I promised to report any trouble but felt less embarrassment because of his remarks. He had spoken as if it might happen to any of the other girls. How tactful he was!

"I predict your friends will make a great success of that restaurant. Miss Murphy is very bright and holy Thomas is just the sort to help her."

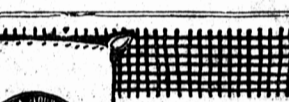
"Yes, I think so too. I have called him her balance wheel ever since I knew him." "Please let me know if I can help them in any way. I mean aside from eating their delicious griddle cakes—no pancakes," he corrected himself. "When young people of their class are ambitious enough to start out for themselves, they deserve all praise."

"Thank you, Mr. Claxton. I'll tell Mary and Tom. They will surely appreciate your interest." How kind he was!



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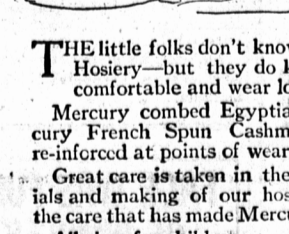


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