

CHAPTER XVI

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

WHEN Silver left Charles—the latter went up-town to his humble lodgings—a thought came to him.

It was not yet ten-thirty, and Susie Martin's final curtain never rang down until eleven-ten. He would go to the theatre and see the girl, question her adroitly, try to fathom this mystery. He might have good news for the doorman the next morning when he came on duty.

When he reached the glittering lane of Broadway, his pulse missed a beat, as it generally did here; for this was the world of the theatre—the world of make-believe. He never wearied of it. His own rehearsals would not begin for another week or two, and it would be good to get into a playhouse to taste, as it were, the sweetness of the life there, before he sat down to a hearty banquet. No one could mistake him for a stage Johnny, with his silver locks and dignified bearing! He smiled at the very

thought. But he did like those little alleys that led to the magic door, whereon was written "Stage Entrance." And he always liked the ancient Cerberus who watched over this particular portal.

"Is Miss Martin to be seen?" he asked in his beautiful voice. "Just say that an old friend" (he meant "old" in the sense of his years) "would like to see her."

"Name, please?" the ancient Cerberus asked, without looking at him, saying the words mechanically. Then he glanced at the caller. "Why, it's Mr. Silver!" he exclaimed; and rushed within to bear the message.

Oliver could hear the waves of applause, as Susie was finishing a song. And he knew how dear that sound was to any Thespian. Not long now, perhaps, before he would be hearing it himself! But he was thinking only of Susie and Charles. Were their names really to be linked?

He waited in the draughty doorway. The confusion behind the scenes—he could peep in, and he saw the forms of chorus-girls, lightly clad, moving about, hurrying up the narrow iron staircase that led to the dressing-rooms above; and comedians with grotesquely painted faces emerging from the wings, solemn now after

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giving their Harlequin mood to that greedy monster out in front, the Public. Strange, yet fascinating world! Would he never weary of it? What lure did it hold for an old man of seventy-odd? He knew that he could never grow old so long as he cared for this thrilling domain. It gave one youth, as Ponce de Leon's fountain must have done.

He was at her dressing-room door a little later. She beamed upon him; but she did not guess how he was studying her face, and that tiny droop of her lid, with new eyes to-night.

"How sweet of you to come and see me!" Susie exclaimed. "How often I thought of you since that dreadful day. Wondered where you were—Dollie couldn't remember the name of your hotel, and we lost you in the great shuffle of New York. Do come in." And she pushed open the door that led to her magic room, where the lotions and creams and laces and folderols and mirrors and lights lured this love'y creature every night. A trim maid awaited her.

"My years give me the privilege of coming in!" Old Silver laughed. "There are compensations in having crossed the Rubicon."

"And now tell me all about yourself, dear Mr. Silver," Susie rushed ahead. "But no, we

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won't talk here. Come home with me and have supper. Just us two, eh?"

Silver could not have named it, could not have analysed it, but he was certain that Susie had changed since the day of the accident. She seemed restless, nervous, high-strung. Perhaps the long run of the play might have created these jangled nerves, even in one so young. Yet he felt sure this was not the primary cause. She was unhappy. She was uncomfortable in his presence. He wondered, all the way up to her flat, if she would open her little heart to him. He could wait and see.

Dollie opened the door for them. She, too, was glad to get a glimpse of him. She all but threw her arms about his old shoulders and kissed him.

"To think, when Miss Susie sent word there'd be two for supper, the other one should be you, sir!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I'm so happy!" And she rushed ahead with the preparations.

The tiny table was set before the fireplace, in which great logs burned. Only candlelight was in the room; yet even in this dimness Silver noted Susie's weariness and nervousness. She did not seem able to sit still, tired though she was. She would jump up for a book,

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then change her mind, and take a cigarette, begin a sentence and then break off. Her restlessness was inexplicable. She would scold Dollie one moment, and praise her the next. "Hurry, hurry!" she would exclaim, and then countermand the order by saying, "Never mind; take your time, Dollie. No hurry."

A small bottle of imprisoned joy was brought by the faithful servant, and two sprawling glasses placed to contain it.

"Just a snack," Susie said. "The champagne will warm our hearts."

Dollie discreetly withdrew when the simple supper had been placed upon the table.

"Now," thought old Silver, "the confidences will come."

But they did not—at once. Susie was strangely abstracted. Should he begin with his questions?

After a little, "Why did you happen in tonight, of all nights, Mr. Silver?" Susie asked.

The question floored him for a moment.

"Why—I don't exactly know, Miss Susie. A great actress like you, in a roaring success—I hardly dared. I——"

"Oh, there was some reason. You can't fool a woman. We have intuitions, you know!" And she tried to smile. The eye drooped

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more than usual, giving her lovely face a lovelier aspect.

"Are you happy?" Silver continued. "Some change has come over you. Something seems to be on your mind."

She lifted her glass, in which the bubbles twinkled.

"Ah! So you have intuitions, too," she said.

"Perhaps," the old man answered.

"I am *not* happy. Queer how success never brings us what we think it will." There was a note of pain in her voice. "You may have been sent here to-night—how do I know?—to save me."

Old Silver, in the firelight, seemed to take on added years.

"Save you, Susie? What do you mean? You have a family, somewhere," he hinted.

"None. My mother died when I was quite young; my father went to the War, returned, and—well, maybe I wasn't the best of daughters. Maybe my punishment is for that."

"What punishment, Susie? Tell me—tell me everything. You know you can trust me." She was beginning to open up; but he did not suspect what she would reveal.

"The plice we must all pay in this wretched

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show business," she said rapidly. "Munson has been hounding me. I escaped his attentions once, in the early days of the run. How much longer I can hold on I don't know."

"Are you serious, my child?"

"Never more serious in my life. It's a long story. Why go into it? You are of the theatre. You know how young girls are pursued. Yet Munson promises to marry me," she laughed. "Oh, yes, it's matrimony he offers, and I don't love him. But what can I do? He can get some one else to take my place if I refuse. Even a success like mine—there are others always coming up over the hill to take one's place. You know that. I'm at his mercy."

"The beast!"

"Yes; but . . ."

Silver did not answer. Was this the time to spring his suspicions?

"You spoke of your father, Susie. Do you know where he is?"

The girl winced.

"I think that—he came to America—as I did. I'm not sure. Once, in a cab, I thought I saw him—a flash—a glimpse. Oh, don't question me. I should have jumped out, and made sure. I should have done many things

I never did. . . . Come," nervously, "let's drink another glass of this, and drown all our sorrows!"

He was thrilled. It was true, then!

"You *did* see him, Susie! I know him. I know he saw you, too! That's why I came here to-night—to tell you."

A log crashed in the grate.

"Oh!" was all that came from Susie's lips, and then—she fainted.

"Dollie!" cried Old Silver, alarmed beyond measure.

The little maid was in the room in an instant. Together they brought Susie to.

"I know where your father is—at this very moment," Silver was saying, when Susie's eyes opened once more. "Shall I fetch him here?"

How much better, he thought, for her to get her first glimpse of him, not in his uniform as a door-keeper, but as a human being in mufti.

"Yes—do, do, you best of friends!"

And Old Silver was out of the house in a jiffy, scrambling into a taxi, remembering, miraculously, the shoddy address of Charles, hastening there to rout him out of his bed and bring him down—to his daughter.

It was a wonderful meeting.

"Father—I lost you; but I've found you"

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again!" little Susie, very pale, was saying an hour later, after all the explanations in the world had been made.

"That accident—it was for this," Old Silver was saying, when he could become a part of the scene; for he had had the wit to leave them alone in their strange joy, and he and Dollie had disappeared into another room when the great meeting took place.

"My little girl! My little Emmie!" was all that poor Charles could utter.

"And no more hotel work for you, dear Dad!" the girl was weeping. "For even if Munson fires me, there are other worlds for your little girl to conquer!"

But she was not "fired." No. The indelicate Munson, like the manager for Miss Clavendish, saw, in this reunion of daughter and father, a monstrous publicity campaign. Headlines would be in the papers. The theatre would be packed to capacity. The strongest passion in him was his passion for the theatre—and the box-office. He would let Susie alone. He would allow her to revel in her new-found joy. He could wait. Yes, he did love her. Some day—some day she might come to love him, to believe in him. For he saw of what fine stuff she was made. A new

Susie, giving the performances of her life from now on. Yes, he could wait. A temperamental girl. . . . She was well worth waiting for.

Late, very late it was when Old Silver found his way that night back to the Splendide.

“This old hotel,” he said, “is full of drama. And to think it’s only one of thousands, here in this throbbing city! Oh, Lordy me, what’s it all about, this thing we call life? I wonder, and I never know. Does anyone ever know?”