

## CHAPTER XXXV

“**T**HANK Heaven, you have come, father. I am in the hell of a hole.”

“Another hole?” asked Lord Woden, grimly. “Or the same old one?”

“Don’t joke, father,” implored Harry, quite unnecessarily. “It is a serious matter, I suppose you have my cables?”

“Not one. Why should you cable me?”

“You must have sailed before them. I’ll tell you what’s the matter. You know I have gone into business?”

“I did not know, but I am glad to hear it,” said John. He looked round Harry’s apartments. “You look fairly flourishing.”

“Oh, none of that is paid for. A man must take advantage of the credit system; it makes for—for elasticity in business. You see, it is like this. I realised that I was not making all the money I should like, so I set out to make more.”

“And lost it instead?”

“Only temporarily. Markets are bound to improve. But in the meantime I am in rather a difficulty.”

“In round figures,” said John. “how much do you owe? Mind, I am not promising to help you. I want to know what you owe, and I may help you.”

“As near as I can tell you, it is about \$250,000,” Harry eyed his father nervously.

“Over £50,000,” said John. “Who have been fools enough to let you owe them £50,000? How on earth did you get the credit?—Wait a minute.” His voice took on

an ominous note. "Is it possible that you have been trading on *my* name and reputation? Yes, I see by your face that that is so. Don't trouble to deny it."

It was evidently useless to deny it. Harry sat on the edge of the table, very perturbed. It was an expensive table and an elegant apartment. The only thing in the room which did not blend with the elegance was Harry's suit of clothes, made by an American tailor, obviously not in the front rank of tailors.

"How did this indebtedness come about?"

Harry began a stammering explanation, to which John listened intently.

"So you have been venturing your foolishness in Wall Street? You seem to have been dabbling in rails, and wheat and coal and other commodities, and everything you have touched has gone down. Is there anything you have touched which has not gone down?"

"Well, Alabama Rails went up a point yesterday, but, of course, they went down three the day before. I think these things will all be good enough in time. I only want a little time."

"A judge will be giving you that one of these days if you are not careful," observed John, with grim humour. "Who are your brokers?"

"Russell and Willis. Excellent people. No one could be more sorry than they that things have turned out so badly."

"Give me their address and I shall look into the matter. I promise nothing."

John was not much impressed by Russell and Willis. Colonel Russell, having no discoverable military career, appeared to have obtained his title by inheritance from a father in the Federal Army during the war. Mr. Willis was the sort of man whom one would only like to touch with a pair of tongs. Both of them were effusively polite to Lord Woden, which did not prevent them making veiled sugges-

tions as to the deplorable consequences to his son in event of default.

John was non-committal. In his own time he would move in his own way.

"I hope that the pleasant business dealings with your lordship's son will continue, your lordship?" asked Colonel Russell, in some alarm.

"For the present, yes. Under my orders, of course."

John had business connections of his own in New York City. From them he obtained an introduction to brokers of much greater repute than Russell and Willis. It would appear from all accounts that he could hardly have had access to any brokers with less.

"I am going to take over your liabilities, Harry, and if there are any assets I am going to take those over as well. This stock-and-share game is not altogether new to me. I have a mind to pit my brains against Wall Street. Now, get in touch with those damned scoundrels, Russell and Willis, and ask their advice."

So the pleasant game went on. Russell and Willis gave advice which was promptly examined, inverted, and other instructions given to Woolmers, John's own brokers.

At the end of a month the liability of \$250,000 was reduced by half. At the end of two it was obliterated, and John found himself making money. What had started as a plan to extricate Harry was now John's own game, a gigantic game of chess, into which he threw his whole soul.

He had a natural aptitude for finance and a genius for sensing values. Where Harry had consistently "beared" shares he should have "bulled," and "bulled" shares he should have "beared," John acted with almost unflinching accuracy. Sometimes he lost a little, most times he gained much. He would hazard so much of his fortune, not a penny more. That zero point was never reached.

"I say, father, there was a girl asking for you. Came round to these rooms. Been round several times, and says

she is your niece. I told her you have never had any brothers or sisters."

John had been much too busy to go down to Easthampton, and he had not advised Delilah of his visit to America. Evidently the social columns of the New York Press had chronicled his arrival, and Delilah had read them.

"I thought you never had any brothers or sisters——"

"Keep quiet, Harry, and don't talk nonsense. If she comes again, tell her I shall call and see her. What is she like?"

"Oh, horrible. Wears specs and is flat-chested. Looks like a school-marm."

"The devil she does! Well, I'll see her in a day or two. I made money to-day, my boy. I am up \$2,000,000 to date."

"Can you let me have some money, then, father? I seem to have put you on to rather a good thing."

"I'm damned. Of all the infernal cheek! I'll see what I can do for you at the end of the week."

Harry looked rather sulky. From his point of view he had put his father on to a good thing; there was no sense of gratitude for deliverance in his thoughts.

With deliverance had come relief of mind, and he had taken to sundry other delights from which anxiety and lack of funds had recently kept him. Whilst his father was out, a series of parties began to be given, attended by kindred spirits of both sexes.

It was on Saturday evening that John returned to his son's abode, after a very successful week in the financial world. He had already been a very rich man; year after year had seen his fortune mount higher and higher; before he had left London it was over the £700,000 mark. Now, he could call himself a millionaire.

"Not a damned dollar millionaire, either, but in pounds sterling," he ruminated. "I wonder how much Harry would have been down the other way now had I left him to it?"

There was the noise of singing and shouting at his son's rooms. Already a few indignant neighbours were in consultation, with a view to concerted protests. John entered to find on the tables a mixture of Scotch, Irish and Kentucky whiskies, and many other delectable drinks. In the room was a crowd of both sexes, singing several songs at once.

One little dark girl stood on the table, a masculine hand clasping each of her ankles. She was minus her skirt and bodice.

There was a shout as Lord Woden entered.

"It's the governor," said Harry, thickly. "Jolly old governor. Governor, this is Diane." He indicated the lady on the table. "A real, live lord, my father, ladies and gentlemen."

This last remark disgusted JOHN more than anything else, because of its appalling coarseness. "For goodness sake, Harry," he said, testily, "remember that you were born an English gentleman."

"American citizen—now. Put my father on to a good tip—Merican citizen, you fellows."

"And a damned disgrace to them, too. . . . Harry, I am going to bed."

John had had a wearying week and was tired. He had every sympathy with youth and its ways, but could see that Harry's friends were most decidedly not of the right sort.

"I think this is perfectly abominable," said a tart voice from the passage. There was something familiar in its ring.

John swung round. There was a lady of severe countenance, with spectacles and a flat chest. She was still young, but looked older than her years.

"Says she is your niece. Wouldn't come and join us. Spoiling sport," growled the drunken Harry. "Would wait."

"Delilah."

"Yes, uncle. Why did you not come and see me?"

"I intended to do so to-morrow, my dear."

"I do not approve of travelling on Sunday, uncle."

Before John could reply to this, Harry again intervened.

"Never had any brothers and sisters," he laughed. "What sort of a niece? Eh?"

"Brothers and sisters have I none," chanted a drunken companion. "Yet——"

"I, too, should like to know," began Delilah.

"If you are so desirous of inquiring into my private affairs," said John, sternly, "I shall tell you and the assembled company that this lady is not my niece—she is my daughter."

John was tired—very tired, and in no mood to be equivocal. His son looked at him stupidly. "Daughter?"

"Yes."

"Then——?"

"Exactly. I need not fill in the details, I suppose? I am sorry, Delilah, but you, too, wanted to know. There is nothing to be ashamed of; if fault there be, it is mine. Good-night, I am going to my room." He left a silent company, highly delighted at heart at this revelation of a scandal.

As he went to bed, he thought what a rotten lot they all were, including his son and Delilah, his daughter. All except little Diane on the table.

"Something good about that girl by her face. She is in with a very bad set."

He dozed. The noise had recommenced in the other room, but it was muffled and did not disturb him.

"Perhaps I was a fool to tell them about Delilah, but, damme, they asked for it."

Someone came into the room with a candle. He sat up in bed with a gasp.

"Diane."

"Yes, milord, it is little Diane."

"For a moment I thought you were—someone else. What are you doing here?"

"I like you," she said simply, and lighted the gas.

"Are you my son's mistress?"

"Milord, no. To that—non-non. I am Diane of New Orleans, and I come to New York to grow rich."

John remembered that there were still speakers of French in Louisiana as there were in Quebec.

"They laugh at you out there, Milord Woden, but I am sorry. I think you are nice."

He saw that she was still more undressed, and that her knickers, short for the period and unduly frilly, left a gap of bare leg between them and the tops of her black stockings. He felt strange thrills; at sixty-four he was still vigorous; the mistress of sex had not lost her power to charm, and Diane was beautiful.

And yet how different from Angeline and Lucy, with their innate purity! Diane—there was more than a spice of *diablerie* in Diane.

Yes, she was beautiful. She was also a shrewd judge of character.

"I never thought to spend the evening with a succubus," said John.

"I do not understand."

"You are beautiful, my child. I hope you are good."

Diane laughed and turned lower the gas.

"I think this is—is absolutely disgraceful," said Delilah the following morning, bristling with indignation. "Uncle, or I suppose I must call you father, I think——"

"Are you referring to your staying in these apartments all night?" demanded John.

"I am referring to this person."

"I tell you what," said Harry, shaky and trembling with the full effects of the morning after. "It is too thick.

Lecturing me and then this. I want the money you have made out of my good thing."

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"Otherwise I shall write mother all about it—about this Diane, and Delilah being your daughter. Pretty goings on. I wonder what mother will think and say. Break her heart, probably."

"Are you blackmailing me?" asked Lord Woden, grimly.

"Well, fair's fair. Hand over my money, and I'll keep quiet."

"I'll see you damned first. You never had any money but mine."

"And you had better send this girl away," continued Harry, triumphantly, "I don't want her in my place. A good-for-nothing wanton."

This was really very cool from Harry.

"A scarlet woman," added Delilah, self-righteously.

Diane was looking out of the window at the April sunlight. She bowed and acknowledged the conversation about herself.

"No pretty names," she said. "I am Diane of New Orleans."