

MY SWEET DOROTHY

The "Youth" and the "Maid." Book II.

IX.

BY JEAN HAMILTON



HERE is a certain lure about journalism which becomes well nigh irresistible. My employment, though not yet specially remunerative, interested me deeply, as it does all newspaper men, and I soon found myself reaching out in all directions for new avenues besides those assigned me.

"Howard, my boy," said my college friend, meeting me on the street one day, "I hear you are doing well. They think at the office that you have in you the making of a first-class journalist."

This was certainly very pleasing news to me, in view of my compact with Dorothy.

"With your connections in this city,—founded by your forefathers—your father's connections with the business interests of the city, you ought to be able to get a dozen good stories every week. Of course, it will take a little time to catch on, and know good news when you come across it; to recognize 'a scoop' when you get it, and handle it right; but an all round chap like you will certainly get there; and don't you forget it. Now, there's the brokers; you ought to be able to get good tips from them."

This was very encouraging, for this was one of the days when I was feeling dispirited and needed just this kind of talk. Thus stimulated, I began to look around in search of new fields.

"I began to call upon my father's old friends; a thing which I could not bring myself to do,—at first. From them I picked up many little items of interest to the public. One of them, Mr. Moreton, a broker to whom my father entrusted a great deal of his business, was specially cordial, imparting to me freely many scraps of information in demand at that time.

En passant, taking me into his private office one day, he said to me:

"Now, Percy, my boy, here is a tip for you and no one else."

"Not for the dear public?"

"Not yet. When it is ready for the public, I will put you next. You shall have the 'scoop,' and it will be a big one. You may have heard your father speak of a certain deal in lead and zinc lands, in which he was greatly interested?"

"I remember it very well."

"If he had lived, my boy, it would have made him a million. When the crash came those securities which he held in this deal had to go with the rest. They were taken over, in fact, by the syndicate, at what he paid for them. It could not let them go upon the market, because it had not then acquired titles to all of the lands, which the syndicate had in view; and did not wish to attract attention to their operations. Now our plans are all matured. We were only waiting for Mr. Vernon's return from Europe, in fact this is the chief thing that brought him back at this time. Of course, we could have arranged everything by cable, but he is here and everything is settled.

"Now, my boy, I am telling you this because you are your father's son; hoping you may be able to take advantage of the opportunity offered to obtain a little interest in this property. If you happen to have a few hundreds or thousands or so lying idle, I can make a pretty little deal for you—an absolutely safe one. In fact, I can and will guarantee it."

I did have just one paltry thousand lying in the Savings Trust Co., drawing its three per cent interest. My father had sent it to me on my twenty-second birthday, for a summer trip to Europe, thinking of Dorothy, no doubt. Before the time came he was gone, and the thousand was about all that was left to me.

I had never counted it in my assets, for it would not go very far when once broken, as I knew from experience. I was therefore keeping it for a rainy day.

I knew of course the hazard of such deals, but it seemed to me as my father's friend talked to me that it must have been given me for that very purpose. I thanked Mr. Moreton for his confidence, shown in entrusting the matter to me, and for his considerate offer made to me personally.

I told him of the little sum I had laid by, and asked if the offer could remain open until Monday. This was Saturday.

"I know that in matters of this kind nothing is absolutely certain. There must be some risk, and I feel that I must take a little time for consideration. The fact that it was one of my father's favorite securities has impressed me, has sufficient influence with me to cause me to consider taking the risk and ask for a little time."

"I understand. Take until Monday to think it over. If you decide to make the investment, dismiss it from your mind; forget that you have it. Some day, maybe, when you most need it, it may come in handy."



Dorothy.

I longed to ask, "How long?" Could it possibly turn over within a year?

I found Dorothy watching for me on Sunday. She it was who opened the door and put up her hand for me to kiss.

"Sweetheart," I said, "Let this be the token between us that you have found no other man that you prefer to me. Then I need not be always asking disagreeable questions."

"It's a bargain," she answered, smiling adorably.

Now that I looked at her in the broad light of day I saw the changes a year had made in her. She was very beautiful, as she had always been in my eyes, but in losing the soft rounded contours of early youth she seemed to have grown more spirituelle. Perhaps this was what Mam' Chloe meant when she said she was "peaked" from "fretting." I hoped so, for in that case she would soon regain her wonted health. Now she reminded me of a fragile flower. I feared she had outgrown her strength, while I had been

broadening out and taking on the proportion and sinews of a man. My heart was filled with tenderness for her. My sweet Dorothy must not be crossed or made unhappy.

With these thoughts in my mind I had been holding her at arms' length, surveying her critically, my whole heart in my eyes, as I could see from her face.

Above her forehead was rolled in silky waves her soft brown hair, a tinge of burnished gold running through it. Her skin, fair and exquisite in texture, was tinted like a sea shell as the blood came straight from her heart under my steady gaze, lingered awhile, then raced back, leaving a soft glow on her cheek. Her mouth, rose-lipped, was parted with a most alluring smile, tempting a man almost beyond endurance to gather her in his arms and lay his kisses upon her sweet lips.

Leading her to the mirror I brought my head matched exactly, as they did in our childhood, one could scarce tell them apart.

"Dorothy dear, they must have been matched in heaven."

"Are you satisfied?" she asked, lifting at length her downcast eyes to mine.

"More than satisfied."

"Then turn to the light; I would see if we are mutually pleased with each other," looking me over carefully, never vouchsafing a word. Growing restive under her calm scrutiny, I asked "What do you see?"

"What do I see? I see a man—a real man—good to look upon. He is very tall—as he should be to look down upon me, and give to him an air of superiority over all of his fellows. I think he is handsome—others may not agree with me. He is naturally light-hearted, boyish; now I look grave, weighted down by care, borrowed trouble—it seems to me a very bad habit. The severe lines which only of late have marked my mouth may disappear with proper massage. They are more than counter-balanced, however, by the love light that I find in his dark blue eyes, usually so full of humor, now too serious by far; and the brown hair, with a glint of gold, is like his own—matched in Heaven, I think."

"Witch, sorceress," I exclaimed. "I forsee that will be no peace of mind for me until the fate year is ended. You find me youthful, boy? Well, time is fast mending that, as you see, in the same breath you say you see a man, a real man! I hope time will also pay off my borrowed troubles." I sighed, unconsciously, I still held her at arms' length.

"No sighing today. That is tabooed here."

Slipping her hand in mine she led me into the reception room, where the bright sunlight was excluded by hangings of silk and lace. Seated, she seated herself upon a small divan making room for me beside her. As I looked about me at the rich furnishing, the harmonious coloring, everything indicative of lavish wealth and taste, forming a perfect setting for my dainty maiden at my side, a feeling of abject wretchedness came over me.

It was at this moment that I realized keenly how hopeless was my love for Dorothy. Years must elapse before I could provide environments suited to her, to which she had been accustomed all her life. How would I bear transplanting into the "wee, tiny apartment" of which I had fatuously dreamed for a moment the other night, when she had committed me to look into her heart and see if she loved me. And I—thinking still only of self, of my love, of my strong desire for the companionship of Dorothy—had weakly allowed matters to drift.

I recalled the time two years before when Dorothy seemed to have outgrown me; now I realized that the balance had changed. I had attained the maturity of manhood, while my sweet Dorothy had only just reached the most alluring period of the young maiden verging on womanhood.

All of this I realized, sitting there beside me in the dim, luxuriously appointed parlor, her hand still clasped in mine. I had come early in Dorothy's behest, in order that we might enjoy this hour together alone; instead I sat there dumb with the misery of it all. Under the stars and stars which shine alike upon the prince and the pauper, I had somehow lost sight of the