

The Love Dodger

By VIRGINIA SWAIN

CHAPTER I.

BARBARA leaned wearily against the door jamb, her face resting on her right hand, her left hand limp at her side. Outside, footsteps creaked down the old wooden steps and clicked on the sidewalk. Then the gate slammed.

The steps were hasty, decisive, with a hint of sharpness. They did not hesitate, but went on down the street until Barbara heard them no more.

At last she straightened her shoulders, brushed a hand across her forehead and started toward the stairway. As she rounded the landing, a clock in a distant room struck twelve.

Her mother came out of the shadows of the dining room and glanced at the closed door. Then she peered up the stairway. There were no sounds from above. Mrs. Hawley moved across the hall, bolted the door, snuffed out the lights and climbed the stairs.

Barbara was sitting on the bed when her mother entered. She was brushing her hair with sharp strokes of a silver-backed brush, and there was a line between her eyes.

"Would you like a cup of tea, Babs?" asked her mother. "There is cold meat and some cake in the pantry. You didn't eat much dinner."

"I'm not hungry, mother," answered Barbara. "But, perhaps, the tea—."

Mrs. Hawley was gone almost before the words were out. Barbara went on brushing her hair, her face growing more grim every moment. Then suddenly she dropped the brush and melted into a limp little heap on the bed, sobbing.

When the storm of tears had passed, she sat up again and wiped her eyes. They were gray-blue eyes, red-rimmed and swimming. She dabbed at them with a hard little ball of wet handkerchief, and sat up very straight.

Then she slipped off the bed, thrust her feet into the satin mules that lay waiting, and crossed the room to the open fireplace. The Hawley house belonged to that era of the past in which open hearths were not unusual in bedrooms.

On the rug before the fire, Barbara sat down, hugging her knees with both arms. She stared at the fire, and seeing that it was about to go out, jabbed at it with a little brass poker.

The flames shot up and brightened the room. Barbara was thankful for the added warmth. Her body, in the thin silk lounging robe, was shivering with that sick coldness which follows emotion in sensitive women.

She stirred uneasily and glanced over her shoulder. There was a picture of a young man in a silver frame on her dressing table across the room. She turned her head away from it with a jerk. But the eyes seemed to be burning into her back.

Barbara was grateful for the steaming hot tea that her mother brought in on an old tray. She felt the blood rising again in her cheeks, as she sat on the rug and sipped the fragrant liquid.

"Is it all over, Babs?" asked her mother softly. Barbara nodded, but did not speak.

After a long silence, with an impatient movement of her head, she spoke. "Yes, mother, it's all over. I shall never see him again—or, at least, never speak to him again. And I'm glad of it."

"He's a selfish tyrant and it's lucky for me I discovered it in time."

"But is it really final?" asked Mrs. Hawley, her thin face twisted in deep lines of anxiety.

Barbara began to talk rapidly, in a torrent of feeling. "Yes, mother, it's final. And he knows it, too. It's so final that I don't ever want to speak of him after tonight. We've made a clean break—no hang-overs or regrets. Tomorrow is the beginning of everything."

"He was quite impossible—spoke his mind about my views—called me selfish—said I'd never get anywhere in a profession—no women did, except sour old maids and monstrosities. Said a newspaper office was no place for a woman, and all I'd get out of it was hard knocks and a bad reputation."

Barbara stopped, breathless. Her eyes were blazing and her lips quivering.

"That's the old-fashioned idea," said Mrs. Hawley. "I've heard your father say the same thing, not only about newspaper work, but about any kind of public work for women. Men just don't like it, Barbara."

"And why?" cried Barbara. "Because they're jealous, that's all. They've had things all their own way in business for so long that they can't bear to let women in."

"And the ones that aren't jealous are just plain selfish. Take father! He wanted you to have no interest in life but to cook and sweep and sew for him, and be on hand to bring him his slippers. And what a life he led you!"

BARBARA stopped, struck by the look of pain in her mother's eyes.

It was a moment before Mrs. Hawley answered. "Yes," she said, "it's true that my kind of life hasn't brought me much joy, except what I've found in you. But your father's idea and Bruce's idea is the orthodox one, you know. You can't upset centuries of custom over night, Barbara."

"But I can, mother," retorted Barbara. "I can set rules for my own life, at any rate. Why should Bruce try to rule me, and lay out plans for me to give up my whole life to him?"

"I don't think it is so much that he wants to rule you, as it is that he hates the thought of his wife working for money, Barbara," replied her mother. "It hurts his pride and dignity. A man's dignity is his most precious possession. Barbara. You ought to know that."

Barbara turned on her mother. "Do you mean that you wish I hadn't broken with him?" she flared.

Mrs. Hawley shook her head. "No," she said. "Heaven knows I'm not wishing my kind of life for you. I'd have broken away myself, if only I'd had your talent. If there'd been anything I could do well enough to earn money, I'd never have stuck to the pots."

"With you, it's different. I want you to go as far as your gifts will take you."

Barbara threw her arms around her mother's neck. "I didn't mean to be so cross, mummy," she said. "But if you didn't back me up in this, I don't know what I'd do. I thought you would sympathize with me—you always do."

Mrs. Hawley smiled a twisted smile. "I do, Babs," she said. "I'm glad you've done what you did. For I can't see you, with your talents and your beauty, tied forever to some man's kitchen sink and nursery, with

BARBARA HAWLEY DECIDES SHE PREFERS A CAREER AS A NEWSPAPER REPORTER TO LOVE

For some time she listened to the words at the other end of the wire.

"But Bruce, that doesn't change the facts." She was struggling for cool decision.

"No, I don't want you to make concessions. It isn't concessions that I want. I just want my rights as a human being—and I don't want a man that has to be clubbed into giving them to me!"

She hung up.

THE morning was crisp and bright, with a sparkle here and there of light frost.

Maple leaves tapping against Barbara's window woke her not long after sunrise, but she lay in bed, watching the long streak of pale, early light that crept across the pale blue.

When the perfume of coffee drifted in from downstairs she sat up and stretched her arms. She had reluctantly shut out thoughts of the night before, fixing her mind upon the coming search for a job.

Her eyes fell upon the picture of Bruce. With a plunge she was out of bed and across the room. She grasped the silver frame and ripped the picture out of it. Another motion of her nervous fingers would have torn it across.

She hesitated, opened the lower drawer and slipped the picture beneath the paper that lined it. Then she closed the drawer with a bang and began to dress.

She found breakfast waiting for her.

Her mother greeted her brightly: "Sleep well, Babs."

"Like a top, mother. Takes a lot to keep me from eating, or sleeping, you know. Life's too short to be awake when you might be resting."

"I thought I heard the telephone ring in the night," Mrs. Hawley spoke hesitantly.

"You did, mother," replied Barbara, with a petulant note in her voice. "It was Bruce again. I told him there was no use."

"My, what a busy day this is going to be." She was obviously changing a disagreeable subject.

"Do you suppose I'll find a job?"

"Of course, you will, Babs," but

maybe not the first days. When you

go into the telegraph office, don't forget to tell Mr. McDermott you are Edward Hawley's daughter. He knew your father."

Barbara was eating toast and marmalade with relish. Her mother, watching her, nodded her head almost imperceptibly.

"Of course, you'll get something, Barbara. You always come out on top, you know."

Barbara nibbled the last crumb and rose from the table.

The Terminal Station was crowded this morning, chiefly with chattering boys and girls going into Indianapolis to school. They were much like the youngsters with whom Barbara had labored for three weary years of school teaching. As she looked at them, she was doubly thankful that that chapter was closed.

A faded woman across the aisle looked enviously at Barbara's happy eyes and at the crisply smart blue suit and the tilted velour turban. Barbara was the picture of triumphant youth.

She had decided to try the telegraph first, because its managing editor knew something of her.

When the elevator stopped and she stepped out into the editorial room, heads went up on every side. Barbara was conscious of smoke, a clatter of telegraph instruments, ejaculations and a crowd of people rushing in and out of doors.

The place was terrifying, but she was looking at a card that Barbara had given the city editor.

"You are Miss Hawley?" He was looking at a card that Barbara had given the city editor.

"Yes," she replied. "Edward Hawley's daughter, as my mother reminded me to tell you." She smiled.

McDermott raised his eyes and studied her face. "Your father was a brilliant man, Miss Hawley." Then he added, "but not a very successful man, I think."

Barbara was taken aback. She thought of her mother's struggle against necessity and against Edward Hawley's erratic temper.

"No," she said, "I think not."

McDermott was evidently pleased with her candor. "I hear you are looking for a job—or is it a position?"

Barbara caught her breath. Then she answered, with her most winning smile, "I think I'll wait for him, anyway."

While she waited, she glanced around the office. Tobacco smoke curled about the head of every man in the room. Shouts and replies went hurtling on every side and reckless errand boys brushed around her chair perilously.

Barbara was surprised to see that everybody, including the city editor, was working in his shirt sleeves.

The woman at the corner desk shot several glances of hostility at Barbara, and turned away angrily when Barbara caught her eye. An extraordinarily homely youth was dashing in and out of a mysterious door that gave short glimpses of a blacker chaos beyond. From this door came a clatter of metallic sounds.

The curious glances of the workers at the typewriter desks had almost ruined Barbara's morale, when help came in the person of the handsome youth, who approached her, and with a jerk of his elbow toward a tiny enclosed office, announced, "Mr. McDermott's in there now."

McDermott smiled, with evident relish of her fire.

"We have no job at present," he drawled. Barbara's mouth dropped.

"And of course, to make this true to type, you ought to be turned down by about half a dozen editors before anybody gives you a glimmer of encouragement. Never saw a cub who amounted to a darn, without that initial ordeal."

"But there aren't half a dozen editors in Indianapolis," protested Barbara. "There are only Mr. Morledge of the Press and Mr. Simmons of the Tribune left, if you refuse me. And I'd much rather work for the Telegraph."

"Hm-m," said McDermott. "Then it looks as if I would have to make a job for you, doesn't it? Now, as it happens, I am inclined to do that very thing. Your father had brains, you know. What do you say to a reporter's place at \$25 a week, starting Monday?"

Barbara did not hesitate. "I'd like it," she answered.

"Don't be too sure you would. In the Telegraph office the newest cub may have to do anything from interviewing the president to sweeping out the composing room."

"I'll take a chance," she said.

She was about to thank him, when she realized that for McDermott she no longer existed. He had turned his back on her and was rattling away at a dilapidated typewriter, with his two index fingers.

She went out.

is, so long as it lets me into the newspaper game."

"What makes you think you can get a job if I give you one?" queried McDermott, looking at her through lazy, half-shut lids. "What experience have you had?"

Barbara flushed. "None in the newspaper line," she confessed. "But I can write. And I'm fairly well educated. I have taught for three years at the Vilmont Country Day School."

"And what connection do you think that has with newspaper work?"

Barbara answered sharply: "As English. It should help me to write good English."

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ON THE car going back to Southport Barbara met Wilma Collins, a girl who lived on her street.

Wilma welcomed her with glee and began to chatter about the trousseau she had been buying in town. "I'll tell you, Babs, what do you mean?"

"Just that. We've quit. I'm going out for journalism and a career."

"As a reporter?" asked Wilma. She pronounced the word with a slightly flat tone, as she might have spoken of something beyond the social pale.

"Exactly." Barbara retreated into the pages of her newspaper.

When she reached home, she found Bruce sitting on the front steps.

set that I bought for my hope chest. I've outgrown those things now."

Wilma's mouth and eyes widened.

"Whoo! Babs, what do you mean?"

"You and Bruce—"

"Just that. We've quit. I'm going out for journalism and a career."

"As a reporter?" asked Wilma.

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(To Be Continued)

JOANNA

Beautiful JOANNA MANNERS, a New York clerk, who was given \$1,000,000 by an unknown man, is the latest creation of YVONNE COUNTANT, ditto, in France.

While FRANCIS BRANDON, wealthy New York architect, is the latest creation of JOANNE COUNTANT, ditto, in France.

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