

# The LOVE DODGER

By VIRGINIA SWAIN

## BARBARA TRAILS MANNERS AS HE FLEES FROM HIS OFFICE AND LEAVES THE CITY

BEGIN HERE TODAY  
BARBARA HAWLEY, 25, her tawed and painted hair with her fingers, BRUCE REYNOLDS, and gets a job on the Indianapolis Telegraph office. McDermott, a former friend of her father, she makes friends with BOB MANNERS and with others a satellite of a prominent man in a roadhouse. The train came on, with no slackening of speed. Barbara looked again. The taxi driver was still running up and down, waving the coat.

The great locomotive made the last curve and came to a stop. Barbara saw Manners jump from the car and run for the train. The engineer was shouting at the cab driver, who was running back to his machine.

Manners receives and prints in her lover's column many letters from a girl named Violette. When she sees the girl, she asks Bruce to encourage VIOLETTA CRANEY, a factory girl, she realizes that through her column she can succeed. Violette is trying to catch him.

Barbara's mother is taken very ill. In the meantime, where Bruce's firm has its offices, Barbara sees Manners, the senior partner, running down the fire escape. The stewardess who told her he was out of town.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

CHAPTER XXV

ANNERS crept past the window without seeing her, and down the fire escape. Barbara stood still on the stair landing.

At last she caught her breath and started back down the stairs at a run. She reached the front sidewalk just in time to see a taxicab turn into the alley which led to the fire escape at the back of the building.

Barbara hopped another taxi. Her cab wheeled into the alley as Manners' cab left it at the other end. She called to the driver to hurry and then settled back in the tonneau.

They came out into the street at the end of the alley. Manners' cab was not far ahead. Barbara's driver was speeding, and the car ahead increased its speed also. She expected it to turn toward the railroad station, but it did not.

The chase went on through the streets of the city and out into the country. Barbara was beginning to wonder whether Manners meant to travel across country in a hired cab, when she noticed that they were following the railroad tracks. A whistle sounded not far away.

The car ahead shot forward, cut sideways, suddenly and came to a stop exactly on the railroad tracks. Barbara thrust her head out of the cab and saw a train coming from the direction of town.

Manners' car still sat on the rails.

The driver jumped out and ran down the side of the track bed, waving his coat about his head. Manners did not get out of the tonneau. Barbara shuddered. It seemed certain death for the man in the cab.

"Zat so?" he asked. His eyes were curiously sleepy.

Barbara clasped her hands. "Bob says there's a nigger in the woodpile of that company anyway. And something is surely amiss in Manners' way of leaving. He sneaked out of town in a taxi, stopped the east-bound limited and jumped aboard. I'll bet he never comes back to Indianapolis—at least of his own accord."

McDermott rose and pressed a button. Jimmy appeared. "Tell Wee and the foreman to come here."

"What are you going to do?" almost whispered Barbara, clasping her hands more tightly and watching his face.

"Look here, Miss Hawley, don't fret about this business. It isn't your fault if we have to wreck Bruce Reynolds' company. I've been watching 'em ever since Lydia Stacy paid her last visit to me. You know that lady never pays a visit without a purpose."

Barbara gasped. "She didn't?"

"Yes, she did. Give me the hint that the company was rotten, with out ever committing herself. Suggested that she had discovered its rottenness and that is why she decided not to go into it. I'm inclined to think there was another reason. She hasn't been seen with this young Reynolds since the night of the party."

Wells and the foreman entered the office. "Going to extra, boys, just as soon as we get the last done on this Vale Acres gang. Miss Hawley saw Manners skip town in a taxi and says his office is lying about his whereabouts."

"Gladly and wait for orders. You, Wells, look up all we've printed on the project so far, and get the names of heavy investors. Ought to be a sucker list that will knock their eyes out. Miss Hawley, you call Manners' home and ask about him, then rush over to see Stone and Reynolds and report what they say at once."

Barbara found herself in the ele-

vator going down within a moment or two.

She climbed the steps in the office building for the third time that day, and found the hall outside the Manners, Stone and Reynolds office deserted.

The reception office was also empty when she went into it.

The haughty stenographer entered from an inner corridor. "I told you, Mr. Manners was not in town," she snapped before Barbara had time to speak.

Barbara threw her head back. "I don't want to see Mr. Manners. I happen to know too well that he can't be seen. But I do want to see Mr. Stone or Mr. Reynolds."

The woman seemed surprised at her sharp retort. "Mr. Stone is in his private office," she said, "and Mr. Reynolds is also out of town—not expected back until tonight."

Barbara went through the office to Stone's private room.

When Barbara entered the office she started up and gave her a troubled look.

"Yes," he said, in answer to her introduction of herself. "I saw you in the office today. I regret that Mr. Manners is not here to tell you what you want to know."

"Mr. Manners would not be likely to tell me if he were here," remarked Barbara coolly.

"What do you mean?"

"Just this," she replied. "I saw Manners leave this building by the fire escape not ten minutes after your office girl had said he was out of town. He caught the east-bound limited and I think there's something wrong. The bank tells me he's just closed his account."

Stone turned gray. He swallowed several times before he could speak. "Now, Miss Hawley, let's not be hasty. Great harm can be done by jumping at conclusions in a time like this. For God's sake, Miss Hawley, give us a chance. It's a civic matter."

"And if the public loses faith in this company, thousands of dollars will be lost. If the papers will only help us, we'll pull through all right and explain everything."

"The Telegraph will not be too anxious to help you flim-flam the public," said Barbara slowly.

Stone's face worked. He put his head down on his arms and began to cry.

Barbara saw that there was no use in waiting. She left the office.

"On what train do you expect Mr. Reynolds?" she asked the woman in the outer room.

"On the 8 o'clock from the East," she replied.

Barbara hurried back to the Telegraph office, and into McDermott's private room.

"Look here, Miss Hawley," he said. "We've got this story sewed up, I think. And we're not entirely sure of the facts yet. I've decided to hold off until tomorrow morning and extra early, to catch the crowds on their way to work. You've done your share. Now you can go home."

To his great surprise, instead of going, Barbara sat down opposite him and began to cry.

McDermott laid down his pipe. He looked about for help. Seeing none, he said to her, "Look here, Miss Hawley. You're wearing out under this life. I regret that Mr. Manners is not here to tell you what you want to know."

"Why don't you get married?"

Barbara only sobbed the harder. "There, I didn't mean that imperatively. But sometimes I wonder how on earth you happen to be in this game. I know you're not the kind of woman who'd want to marry just to stop working. But why kill yourself in a newspaper job?"

"You see I'm talking like your father's friend, now, not like your own life. You mustn't worry just closed his account."

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"All at once she was out of bed as a sound came from her mother's room. Barbara snatched her bathrobe from a chair and ran into the hall."

Barbara stole to the door and listened. Someone was stirring inside. She pushed the door open. The night nurse lay asleep on her cot. Mrs. Hawley was sitting upright in bed, her head drooping.

Barbara sat down on the bedside and put her arm around her mother's shoulders. "Are you feeling worse, mother? Shall I call Miss Upton?"

The older woman shook her head feebly. "No, I want to talk to you, Barbara. We may not have another chance."

Barbara reached for her hand.

"There's nothing in all the world so fearful as loneliness, Babs," she said.

"We all have to go through life more or less by ourselves. Nobody can meet the crisis with us. But just to have somebody who loves us—that's the only defense there is against the cold."

Barbara choked. "Nonsense, mother, darling. Dr. Graham told me today you were on the mend. You wouldn't let these night thoughts get hold of you. In a few days you're going to be sitting up by the dining room window, with Kiki singing in his cage beside you. Just wait."

"Perhaps, Babs—and perhaps not. But anyhow, I want to talk to you now."

"All right, mumsy, but don't ever say such gloomy things again. They're not true and I can't stand them. What's on your mind?"

"Just this, Babs," her mother replied, slowly. "I'm worried about you. It seems to be you're living a miserable life. Day after day, I've watched you and feared for you. How long can you go on like this? You're missing everything that makes life worth living."

Mrs. Hawley sank lower in the bed from the effort of speaking.

"Why, honey," replied Barbara.

"I'm not leading such a hard life. It's long hours and heavy work, but I like it. And you know I wanted my own life. You mustn't worry about me."

Her mother was not listening. "If I should go, Barbara, what would become of you? It terrifies me. I'm afraid to die because of it. You'll be knocked around with nobody to care what happens to you."

"It isn't the old maid part of it, that is so awful—it's the being alone in your later years—not having any place that belongs to you. I'm afraid I should not have encouraged you to give up Bruce."

Barbara was crying harder than ever. "Bruce Reynolds will believe that I've ruined him," she choked.

BARRARA slept little that night.

All at once she was out of bed as a sound came from her mother's room. Barbara snatched her bathrobe from a chair and ran into the hall.

Barbara stole to the door and listened. Someone was stirring inside. She pushed the door open. The night nurse lay asleep on her cot. Mrs. Hawley was sitting upright in bed, her head drooping.

"Mother dear," whispered Barbara, slipping into the room noiselessly.

"What's the matter?"

"Babs, dear," she said huskily, and Barbara's heart almost stopped.

Her mother's voice was so unfamiliar.

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