

Chester George Randolph

# The Making of Bobby Burnit



George Chester

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**Chester G.**

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**Chester George Randolph  
The Making of Bobby Burnit /  
Being a Record of the Adventures  
of a Live American Young Man**

**DEDICATION**

**To the Handicapped Sons of Able**

**Fathers, and the Handicapped**

**Fathers of Able Sons,**

**with Sympathy for**

**each, and a**

**Smile for**

**both**

## CHAPTER I

### BOBBY MAKES SOME IMPORTANT PREPARATIONS FOR A COMMERCIAL LIFE

“I am profoundly convinced that my son is a fool,” read the will of old John Burnit. “I am, however, also convinced that I allowed him to become so by too much absorption in my own affairs and too little in his, and, therefore, his being a fool is hereditary; consequently, I feel it my duty, first, to give him a fair trial at making his own way, and second, to place the balance of my fortune in such trust that he can not starve. The trusteeship is already created and the details are nobody’s present business. My son Robert will take over the John Burnit Store and personally conduct it, as his only resource, without further question as to what else I may have left behind me. This is my last will and testament.”

That is how cheerful Bobby Burnit, with no thought heretofore above healthy amusements and Agnes Elliston, suddenly became a business man, after having been raised to become the idle heir to about three million. Of course, having no kith nor kin in all this wide world, he went immediately to consult Agnes. It is quite likely that if he had been supplied with dozens of uncles and aunts he would have gone first to Agnes anyhow, having a mighty regard for her keen judgment, even though her clear gaze rested now and then all too critically upon himself. Just as he came whirling up the avenue he saw Nick Allstyn’s white car, several blocks ahead of him, stop at her door, and a figure which he knew must be Nick jump out and trip up the steps. Almost immediately the figure came down again, much more slowly, and climbed into the car, which whizzed away.

“Not at home,” grumbled Bobby.

It was like him, however, that he should continue straight to the quaint old house of the Ellistons and proffer his own card, for, though his aims could seldom be called really worth while, he invariably finished the thing he set out to do. It seemed to be a sort of disease. He could not help it. To his surprise, the Cerberus who guarded the Elliston door received him with a smile and a bow, and observed:

“Miss Elliston says you are to walk right on up to the Turkish alcove, sir.”

While Wilkins took his hat and coat Bobby paused for a moment figuratively to hug himself. At home to no one else! Expecting him!

“I’ll ask her again,” said Bobby to himself with determination, and stalked on up to the second floor hall, upon which opened a delightful cozy corner where Aunt Constance Elliston permitted the more “family-like” male callers to smoke and loll and be at mannish ease.

As he reached the landing the door of the library below opened, and in it appeared Agnes and an unusually well-set-up young man – a new one, who wore a silky mustache and most fastidious tailoring. The two were talking and laughing gaily as the door opened, but as Agnes glanced up and saw Bobby she suddenly stopped laughing, and he almost thought that he overheard her say something in an aside to her companion. The impression was but fleeting, however, for she immediately nodded brightly. Bobby bowed rather stiffly in return, and continued his ascent of the stairs with a less sprightly footstep. Crestfallen, and conscious that Agnes had again closed the door of the library without either herself or the strange visitor having emerged into the hall, he strode into the Turkish alcove and let himself drop upon a divan with a thump. He extracted a cigar from his cigar-case, carefully cut off the tip and as carefully restored the cigar to its place. Then he clasped his interlocked fingers around his knee, and for the next ten minutes strove, like a gentleman, not to listen.

When Agnes came up presently she made no mention whatever of her caller, and, of course, Bobby had no excuse upon which to hang impertinent questions, though the sharp barbs of them were darting through and through him. Such fuming as he felt, however, was instantly allayed by the

warm and thoroughly honest clasp she gave him when she shook hands with him. It was one of the twenty-two million things he liked about her that she did not shake hands like two ounces of cold fish, as did some of the girls he knew. She was dressed in a half-formal house-gown, and the one curl of her waving brown hair that would persistently straggle down upon her forehead was in its accustomed place. He had always been obsessed with a nearly irresistible impulse to put his finger through that curl.

“I have come around to consult you about a little business matter, Agnes,” he found himself beginning with sudden breathlessness, his perturbation forgotten in the overwhelming charm of her. “The governor’s will has just been read to me, and he’s plunged me into a ripping mess. His whole fortune is in the hands of a trusteeship, whatever that is, and I’m not even to know the trustees. All I get is just the business, and I’m to carry the John Burnit Store on from its present blue-ribbon standing to still more dazzling heights, I suppose. Well, I’d like to do it. The governor deserves it. But, you see, I’m so beastly thick-headed. Now, Agnes, you have perfectly stunning judgment and all that, so if you would just – ” and he came to an abrupt and painful pause.

“Have you brought along the contract?” she asked demurely. “Honestly, Bobby, you’re the most original person in the world. The first time, I was to marry you because you were so awkward, and the next time because your father thought so much of me, and another time because you wanted us to tour Norway and not have a whole bothersome crowd along; then you were tired living in a big, lonely house with just you and your father and the servants; now, it’s an advantageous business arrangement. What share of the profits am I to receive?”

Bobby’s face had turned red, but he stuck manfully to his guns.

“All of them,” he blurted. “You know that none of those is the real reason,” he as suddenly protested. “It is only that when I come to tell you the actual reason I rather choke up and can’t.”

“You’re a mighty nice boy, Bobby,” she confessed. “Now sit down and behave, and tell me just what you have decided to do.”

“Well,” said he, accepting his defeat with great philosophy, since he had no reason to regard it as final, “of course, my decision is made for me. I’m to take hold of the business. I don’t know anything about it, but I don’t see why it shouldn’t go straight on as it always has.”

“Possibly,” she admitted thoughtfully; “but I imagine your father expected you to have rather a difficult time of it. Perhaps he wants you to, so that a defeat or two will sting you into having a little more serious purpose in life than you have at present. I’d like, myself, to see you handle, with credit to him and to you, the splendid establishment he built up.”

“If I do,” Bobby wanted to know, “will you marry me?”

“That makes eleven times. I’m not saying, Bobby, but you never can tell.”

“That settles it. I’m going to be a business man. Let me use your ’phone a minute.” It was one of the many advantages of the delightfully informal Turkish alcove that it contained a telephone, and in two minutes Bobby had his tailors. “Make me two or three business suits,” he ordered. “Regular business suits, I mean, for real business wear – you know the sort of thing – and get them done as quickly as you can, please. There!” said he as he hung up the receiver. “I shall begin to-morrow morning. I’ll go down early and take hold of the John Burnit Store in earnest.”

“You’ve made a splendid start,” commented Agnes, smiling. “Now tell me about the polo tournament,” and she sat back to enjoy his enthusiasm over something about which he was entirely posted.

He was good to look at, was Bobby, with his clean-cut figure and his clean-cut face and his clean, blue eyes and clean complexion, and she delighted in nothing more than just to sit and watch him when he was at ease; he was so restful, so certain to be always telling the truth, to be always taking a charitably good-humored view of life, to turn on wholesome topics and wholesome points of view; but after he had gone she smiled and sighed and shook her head.

“Poor Bobby,” she mused. “There won’t be a shred left of his tender little fleece by the time he gets through.”

One more monitor Bobby went to see that afternoon, and this was Biff Bates. It required no sending in of cards to enter the presence of this celebrity. One simply stepped out of the elevator and used one’s latch-key. It was so much more convenient. Entering a big, barnlike room he found Mr. Bates, clad only in trunks and canvas shoes, wreaking dire punishment upon a punching-bag merely by way of amusement; and Mr. Bates, with every symptom of joy illuminating his rather horizontal features – wide brows, wide cheek-bone, wide nose, wide mouth, wide chin, wide jaw – stopped to shake hands most enthusiastically with his caller without removing his padded glove.

“What’s the good news, old pal?” he asked huskily.

He was half a head shorter than Bobby and four inches broader across the shoulders, and his neck spread out over all the top of his torso; but there was something in the clear gaze of the eyes which made the two gentlemen look quite alike as they shook hands, vastly different as they were.

“Bad news for you, I’m afraid,” announced Bobby. “That little partnership idea of the big gymnasium will have to be called off for a while.”

Mr. Bates took a contemplative punch or two at the still quivering bag.

“It was a fake, anyway,” he commented, putting his arm around the top of the punching-bag and leaning against it comfortably; “just like this place. You went into partnership with me on this joint – that is, you put up the coin and run in a lot of your friends on me to be trained up – squarest lot of sports I ever saw, too. You fill the place with business and allow me a weekly envelope that makes me tilt my chin till I have to wear my lid down over my eyes to keep it from falling off the back of my head, and when there’s profits to split up you shoves mine into my mitt and puts yours into improvements. You put in the new shower baths and new bars and traps, and the last thing, that swimming-tank back there. I’m glad the big game’s off. I’m so contented now I’m getting over-weight, and you’d bilk me again. But what’s the matter? Did the bookies get you?”

“No; I’ll tell you all about it,” and Bobby carefully explained the terms of his father’s will and what they meant.

Mr. Bates listened carefully, and when the explanation was finished he thought for a long time.

“Well, Bobby,” said he, “here’s where you get it. They’ll shred you clean. You’re too square for that game. Your old man was a fine old sport and *he* played it on the level, but, say, he could see a marked card clear across a room. They’ll double-cross you, though, to a fare-ye-well.”

The opinion seemed to be unanimous.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **PINK CARNATIONS APPEAR IN THE OFFICE OF THE JOHN BURNIT STORE**

Bobby gave his man orders to wake him up early next morning, say not later than eight, and prided himself very much upon his energy when, at ten-thirty, he descended from his machine in front of the old and honored establishment of John Burnit, and, leaving instructions for his chauffeur to call for him at twelve, made his way down the long aisles of white-piled counters and into the dusty little office where old Johnson, thin as a rail and with a face like whittled chalk, humped over his desk exactly as he had sat for the past thirty-five years.

“Good-morning, Johnson,” observed Bobby with an affable nod. “I’ve come to take over the business.”

He said it in the same untroubled tone he had always used in asking for his weekly check, and Johnson looked up with a wry smile. Applerod, on the contrary, was beaming with hearty admiration. He was as florid as Johnson was colorless, and the two had rubbed elbows and dispositions in that same room almost since the house of Burnit had been founded.

“Very well, sir,” grudged Johnson, and immediately laid upon the time-blackened desk which had been old John Burnit’s, a closely typewritten statement of some twenty pages. On top of this he placed a plain gray envelope addressed:

**To My Son Robert,**

#### **Upon the Occasion of His Taking Over the Business**

Upon this envelope Bobby kept his eyes in mild speculation, while he leisurely laid aside his cane and removed his gloves and coat and hat; next he sat down in his father’s jerky old swivel chair and lit a cigarette; then he opened the letter. He read:

“Every business needs a pessimist and an optimist, with ample opportunities to quarrel. Johnson is a jackass, but honest. He is a pessimist and has a pea-green liver. Listen to him and the business will die painlessly, by inches. Applerod is also a jackass, and I presume him to be honest; but I never tested it. He suffers from too much health, and the surplus goes into optimism. Listen to him and the business will die in horrible agony, quickly. But keep both of them. Let them fight things out until they come almost to an understanding, then take the middle course.”

That was all. Bobby turned squarely to survey the frowning Johnson and the still beaming Applerod, and with a flash of clarity he saw his father’s wisdom. He had always admired John Burnit, aside from the fact that the sturdy pioneer had been his father, had admired him much as one admires the work of a master magician – without any hope of emulation. As he read the note he could seem to see the old gentleman standing there with his hands behind him, ready to stretch on tiptoe and drop to his heels with a thump as he reached a climax, his spectacles shoved up on his forehead, his strong, wrinkled face stern from the cheek-bones down, but twinkling from that line upward, the twinkle, which had its seat about the shrewd eyes, suddenly terminating in a sharp, whimsical, little up-pointed curl in the very middle of his forehead. To corroborate his warm memory Bobby opened the front of his watch-case, where the same face looked him squarely in the eyes. Naturally, then,

he opened the other lid, where Agnes Elliston's face smiled up at him. Suddenly he shut both lids with a snap and turned, with much distaste but with a great show of energy, to the heavy statement which had all this time confronted him. The first page he read over laboriously, the second one he skimmed through, the third and fourth he leafed over; and then he skipped to the last sheet, where was set down a concise statement of the net assets and liabilities.

"According to this," observed Bobby with great show of wisdom, "I take over the business in a very flourishing condition."

"Well," grudgingly admitted Mr. Johnson, "it might be worse."

"It could hardly be better," interposed Applerod – "that is, without the extensions and improvements that I think your father would have come in time to make. Of course, at his age he was naturally a bit conservative."

"Mr. Applerod and myself have never agreed upon that point," wheezed Johnson sharply. "For my part I considered your father – well, scarcely reckless, but, say, sufficiently daring! Daring is about the word."

Bobby grinned cheerfully.

"He let the business go rather by its own weight, didn't he?"

Both gentlemen shook their heads, instantly and most emphatically.

"He certainly must have," insisted Bobby. "As I recollect it, he only worked up here, of late years, from about eleven fifty-five to twelve every other Thursday."

"Oftener than that," solemnly corrected the literal Mr. Johnson. "He was here from eleven until twelve-thirty every day."

"What did he do?"

It was Applerod who, with keen appreciation, hastened to advise him upon this point.

"Said 'yes' twice and 'no' twelve times. Then, at the very last minute, when we thought that he was through, he usually landed on a proposition that hadn't been put up to him at all, and put it clear out of the business."

"Looks like good finessing to me," said Bobby complacently. "I think I shall play it that way."

"It wouldn't do, sir," Mr. Johnson replied in a tone of keen pain. "You must understand that when your father started this business it was originally a little fourteen-foot-front place, one story high. He got down here at six o'clock every morning and swept out. As he got along a little further he found that he could trust somebody else with that job — *but he always knew how to sweep*. It took him a lifetime to simmer down his business to just 'yes' and 'no.'"

"I see," mused Bobby; "and I'm expected to take that man's place! How would you go about it?"

"I would suggest, without meaning any impertinence whatever, sir," insinuated Mr. Johnson, "that if you were to start clerking –"

"Or sweeping out at six o'clock in the morning?" calmly interrupted Bobby. "I don't like to stay up so late. No, Johnson, about the only thing I'm going to do to show my respect for the traditions of the house is to leave this desk just as it is, and hang an oil portrait of my father over it. And, by the way, isn't there some little side room where I can have my office? I'm going into this thing very earnestly."

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Applerod exchanged glances.

"The door just to the right there," said Mr. Johnson, "leads to a room which is at present filled with old files of the credit department. No doubt those could be moved somewhere else."

Bobby walked into that room and gaged its possibilities. It was a little small, to be sure, but it would do for the present.

"Just have that cleared out and a 'phone put in. I'll get right down to business this afternoon and see about the fittings for it." Then he looked at his watch once more. "By George!" he exclaimed, "I almost forgot that I was to see Nick Allstyne at the Idlers' Club about that polo match. Just have one of your boys stand out at the curb along about twelve, will you, and tell my chauffeur to report at the club."

Johnson eyed the closed door over his spectacles.

“He’ll be having blue suits and brass buttons on us two next,” he snorted.

“He don’t mean it at all that way,” protested Applerod. “For my part, I think he’s a fine young fellow.”

“I’ll give you to understand, sir,” retorted Johnson, violently resenting this imputed defection, “that he is the son of his father, and for that, if for nothing else, would have my entire allegiance.”

Bobby, meanwhile, feeling very democratic and very much a man of affairs, took a street-car to the Idlers’, and strode through the classic portals of that club with gravity upon his brow. Flaxen-haired Nick Allstyne, standing by the registry desk, turned to dark Payne Winthrop with a nod.

“You win,” he admitted. “I’ll have to charge it up to you, Bobby. I just lost a quart of the special to Payne that since you’d become immersed in the cares of business you’d not be here.”

Bobby was almost austere in his reception of this slight.

“Don’t you know,” he demanded, “that there is nobody who keeps even his social engagements like a business man?”

“That’s what I gambled on,” returned Payne confidentially, “but I wasn’t sure just how much of a business man you’d become. Nick, don’t you already seem to see a crease in Bobby’s brow?”

“No, that’s his regular polo crease,” objected lanky Stanley Rogers, joining them, and the four of them fell upon polo as one man. Their especially anxious part in the tournament was to be a grinding match against Willie Ashler’s crack team, and the point of worry was that so many of their fellows were out of town. They badly needed one more good player.

“I have it,” declared Bobby finally. It was he who usually decided things in this easy-going, athletic crowd. “We’ll make Jack Starlett play, but the only way to get him is to go over to Washington after him. Payne, you’re to go along. You always keep a full set of regalia here at the club, I know. Here, boy!” he called to a passing page. “Find out for us the next two trains to Washington.”

“Yes, sir,” said the boy with a grin, and was off like a shot. They had a strict rule against tipping in the Idlers’, but if he happened to meet Bobby outside, say at the edge of the curb where his car was standing, there was no rule against his receiving something there. Besides, he liked Bobby, anyhow. They all did. He was back in a moment.

“One at two-ten and one at four-twenty, sir.”

“The two-ten sounds about right,” announced Bobby. “Now, Billy, telephone to my apartments to have my Gladstone and my dress-suit togs brought down to that train. Then, by the way, telephone Leatherby and Pluscher to send up to my place of business and have Mr. Johnson show their man my new office. Have him take measurements of it and fit it up at once, complete. They know the kind of things I like. Really, fellows,” he continued, turning to the others, after he had patiently repeated and explained his instructions to the foggy but willing Billy, “I’m in serious earnest about this thing. Up to me, you know, to do credit to the governor, if I can.”

“Bobby, the Boy Bargain Baron,” observed Nick. “Well, I guess you can do it. All you need to do is to take hold, and I’ll back you at any odds.”

“We’ll all put a bet on you,” encouraged Stanley Rogers. “More, we’ll help. We’ll all get married and send our wives around to open accounts with you.”

In spite of the serious business intentions, the luncheon which followed was the last the city saw of Bobby Burnit for three days. Be it said to his credit that he had accomplished his purpose when he returned. He had brought reluctant Jack Starlett back with him, and together they walked into the John Burnit Store.

“New office fitted up yet, Johnson?” asked Bobby pleasantly.

“Yes, sir,” replied Johnson sourly. “Just a moment, Mr. Burnit,” and from an index cabinet back of him he procured an oblong gray envelope which he handed to Bobby. It was inscribed:

## To My Son,

### Upon the Fitting-Out of New Offices

With a half-embarrassed smile, Bobby regarded that letter thoughtfully and carried it into the luxurious new office. He opened it and read it, and, still with that queer smile, passed it over to Starlett. This was old John Burnit's message:

“I have seen a business work up to success, and afterward add velvet rugs and dainty flowers on the desk, but I never saw a successful business start that way.”

Bobby looked around him with a grin. There *was* a velvet rug on the floor. There were no flowers upon the mahogany desk, but there *was* a vase to receive them. For just one moment he was nonplussed; then he opened the door leading to the dingy apartment occupied by Messrs. Johnson and Applerod.

“Mr. Johnson,” said he, “will you kindly send out and get two dozen pink carnations for my room?”

Quiet, big Jack Starlett, having loaded and lit and taken the first long puff, removed his pipe from his lips.

“Bully!” said he.

### CHAPTER III

## OLD JOHN BURNIT'S ANCIENT ENEMY POINTS OUT THE WAY TO GRANDEUR

Mr. Johnson had no hair in the very center of his head, but, when he was more than usually vexed, he ran his fingers through what was left upon both sides of the center and impatiently pushed it up toward a common point. His hair was in that identical condition when he knocked at the door of Bobby's office and poked in his head to announce Mr. Silas Trimmer.

"Trimmer," mused Bobby. "Oh, yes; he is the John Burnit Store's chief competitor; concern backs up against ours, fronting on Market Street. Show him in, Johnson."

Jack Starlett, who had dropped in to loaf a bit, rose to go.

"Sit down," insisted Bobby. "I'm conducting this thing all open and aboveboard. You know, I think I shall like business."

"They tell me it's the greatest game out," commented Starlett, and just then Mr. Trimmer entered.

He was a little, wiry man as to legs and arms, but fearfully rotund as to paunch, and he had a yellow leather face and black eyes which, though gleaming like beads, seemed to have a muddy cast. Bobby rose to greet him with a cordiality in no degree abashed by this appearance.

"And what can we do for you, Mr. Trimmer?" he asked after the usual inanities of greeting had been exchanged.

"Take lunch with me," invited Mr. Trimmer, endeavoring to beam, his heavy, down-drooping gray mustache remaining immovable in front of the deeply-chiseled smile that started far above the corners of his nose and curved around a display of yellow teeth. "I have just learned that you have taken over the business, and I wish as quickly as possible to form with the son the same cordial relations which for years I enjoyed with the father."

Bobby looked him contemplatively in the eye, but had no experience upon which to base a picture of his father and Mr. Trimmer enjoying perpetually cordial relations with a knife down each boot leg.

"Very sorry, Mr. Trimmer, but I am engaged for lunch."

"Dinner, then – at the Traders' Club," insisted Mr. Trimmer, who never for any one moment had remained entirely still, either his foot or his hand moving, or some portion of his body twitching almost incessantly.

Inwardly Bobby frowned, for, so far, he had found no points about his caller to arouse his personal enthusiasm; and yet it suddenly occurred to him that here was doubtless business, and that it ought to have attention. His father, under similar circumstances, would find out what the man was after. He cast a hesitating glance at his friend.

"Don't mind me, Bobby," said Starlett briskly. "You know I shall be compelled to take dinner with the folks to-night."

"At about what time, Mr. Trimmer?" Bobby asked.

"Oh, suit yourself. Any time," responded that gentleman eagerly. "Say half-past six."

"The Traders'," mused Bobby. "I think the governor put me up there four or five years ago."

"I seconded you," the other informed him; "and I had the pleasure of voting for you just the other day, on the vacancy made by your father. You're a full-fledged member now."

"Fine!" said Bobby. "Business suit or –"

"Anything you like." With again that circular smile behind his immovable mustache, Mr. Trimmer backed out of the room, and Bobby, dropping into a chair, turned perplexed eyes upon his friend.

“What do you suppose he wants?” he inquired.

“Your eye-teeth,” returned Jack bluntly. “He looks like a mucker to me.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” returned Bobby, a trifle uneasily. “You see, Jack, he isn’t exactly our sort, and maybe we can’t get just the right angle in judging him. He’s been nailed down to business all his life, you know, and a fellow in that line don’t have a chance, as I take it, to cultivate all the little – well, say artificial graces.”

“Your father wasn’t like him. He was as near a thoroughbred as I ever saw, Bobby, and he was nailed down, as you put it, all *his* life.”

“Oh, you couldn’t expect them all to be like the governor,” responded Bobby instantly, shocked at the idea. “But this chap may be no end of a good sort in his style. No doubt at all he merely came over in a friendly way to bid me a sort of welcome into the fraternity of business men,” and Bobby felt quite a little thrill of pride in that novel idea. “By George! Wait a minute,” he exclaimed as still another brilliant thought struck him, and going into the other room he said to Johnson: “Please give me the letter addressed: ‘To My Son Robert, Upon the Occasion of Mr. Trimmer’s First Call.’”

For the first time in days a grin irradiated Johnson’s face.

“Nothing here, sir,” he replied.

“Let me go through that file.”

“Strictly against orders, sir,” said Johnson.

“Indeed,” responded Bobby quizzically; “I don’t like to press the bet, Johnson, but really I’d like to know who has the say here.”

“You have, sir, over everything except my private affairs; and that letter file is my private property and its contents my private trusteeship.”

“I can still take my castor oil like a little man, if I have to,” Bobby resignedly observed. “I remember that when I was a kiddy the governor once undertook to teach me mathematics, and he never would let me see the answers. More than ever it looks like it was up to Bobby,” and whistling cheerfully he walked back into his private office.

Johnson turned to Applerod with a snarl.

“Mr. Applerod,” said he, “you know that I almost never swear. I am now about to do so. Darn it! It’s a shame that Trimmer calls here again on that old scheme about which he deviled this house for years, and we forbidden to give Mr. Robert a word of advice unless he asks for it.”

“Why is it a shame?” demanded Applerod. “I always have thought that Trimmer’s plan was a great one.”

So, all unprepared, Bobby went forth that evening, to become acquainted with the great plan.

At the restless Traders’ Club, where the precise corridors and columns and walls and ceilings of white marble were indicative of great formality, men with creases in their brows wore their derbies on the backs of their heads and ceaselessly talked shop. Mr. Trimmer, more creased of brow than any of them, was drifting from group to group with his eyes turned anxiously toward the door until Bobby came in. Mr. Trimmer was most effusively glad to see the son of his old friend once again, and lost no time in seating him at a most secluded table, where, by the time the oysters came on, he was deep in a catalogue of the virtues of John Burnit; and Bobby, with a very real and a very deep affection for his father which seldom found expression in words, grew restive. One thing held him, aside from his obligations as a guest. He was convinced now that his host’s kindness was in truth a mere graceful act of welcome, due largely to his father’s standing, and the idea flattered him very much. He strove to look as businesslike as possible, and thought again and again upon his father; of how he had sat day after day in this stately dining-hall, honored and venerated among these men who were striving still for the ideal that he had attained. It was a good thought, and made for pride of the right sort. With the entrée Mr. Trimmer ordered his favorite vintage champagne, and, as it boiled up like molten amber in the glasses, so sturdily that the center of the surface kept constantly a full quarter of an inch above

the sides, he waited anxiously for Bobby to sample it. Even Bobby, long since disillusioned of such things and grown abstemious from healthy choice, after a critical taste sipped slowly again and again.

“That’s ripping good wine,” he acknowledged.

“There’s only a little over two hundred bottles of it left in the world,” Mr. Trimmer assured him, and then he waited for that first glass to exert its warming glow. He was a good waiter, was Silas Trimmer, and keenly sensitive to personal influences. He knew that Bobby had not been in entire harmony with him at any period of the evening, but after the roast came on – a most careful roast, indeed, prepared under a certain formula upon which Mr. Trimmer had painstakingly insisted – he saw that he had really found his way for a moment to Bobby’s heart through the channel provided by Nature for attacks upon masculine sympathy, and at that moment he leaned forward with his circular smile, and observed:

“By the way, Mr. Burnit, I suppose your father often discussed with you the great plan we evolved for the Burnit-Trimmer Arcade?”

Bobby almost blushed at the confession he must make.

“I’m sorry to say that he didn’t,” he owned. “I never took the interest in such things that I ought, and so I missed a lot of confidences I’d like to have had now.”

“Too bad,” sympathized Mr. Trimmer, now quite sure of his ground, since he had found that Bobby was not posted. “It was a splendid plan we had. You know, your building and mine are precisely the same width and precisely in a line with each other, back to back, with only the alley separating us, the Trimmer establishment fronting on Market Street and the Burnit building on Grand. The alley is fully five feet below our two floor lines, and we could, I am quite sure, get permission to bridge it at a clearance of not to exceed twelve feet. By raising the rear departments of your store and of mine a foot or so, and then building a flight of broad, easy steps up and down, we could almost conceal the presence of this bridge from the inside, and make one immense establishment running straight through from Grand to Market Streets. The floors above the first, of course, would bridge over absolutely level, and the combined stores would comprise by far the largest establishment in the city. Of course, the advantage of it from an advertising standpoint alone would be well worth while.”

Bobby could instantly see the almost interminable length of store area thus presented, and it appealed to his sense of big things at once.

“What did father say about this?” he asked.

“Thought it a brilliant idea,” glibly returned Mr. Trimmer. “In fact, I think it was he who first suggested such a possibility, seeing very clearly the increased trade and the increased profits that would accrue from such an extension, which would, in fact, be simply the doubling of our already big stores without additional capitalization. We worked out two or three plans for the consolidation, but in the later years your father was very slow about making actual extensions or alterations in his merchandising business, preferring to expend his energies on his successful outside enterprises. I feel sure, however, that he would have come to it in time, for the development is so logical, so much in keeping with the business methods of the times.”

Here again was insidious flattery, the insinuation that Bobby must be thoroughly aware of “the business methods of the times.”

“Of course, the idea is new to me,” said Bobby, assuming as best he could the air of business reserve which seemed appropriate to the occasion; “but I should say, in a general way, that I should not care to give up the identity of the John Burnit Store.”

“That is a fine and a proper spirit,” agreed Mr. Trimmer, with great enthusiasm. “I like to see it in a young man, but I’ve no doubt that we can arrange that little matter. Of course, we would have to incorporate, say, as the Burnit-Trimmer Mercantile Corporation, but while having that name on the front of both buildings, it might not be a bad idea, for business as well as sentimental reasons, to keep the old signs at the tops of both, just as they now are. Those are little details to discuss later; but as the stock of the new company, based upon the present invoice values of our respective concerns, would

be practically all in your hands and mine, this would be a very amicable and easily arranged matter. I tell you, Mr. Burnit, this is a tremendous plan, attractive to the public and immensely profitable to us, and I do not know of anything you could do that would so well as this show you to be a worthy successor to John Burnit; for, of course, it would scarcely be a credit to you to carry on your father's business without change or advance.”

It was the best and the most crafty argument Mr. Trimmer had used, and Bobby carried away from the Traders' Club a glowing impression of this point. His father had built up this big business by his own unaided efforts. Should Bobby leave that legacy just where he had found it, or should he carry it on to still greater heights? The answer was obvious.

## CHAPTER IV

### AGNES EMPHATICALLY DECIDES THAT SHE DOES NOT LIKE A CERTAIN PERSON

At the theater that evening, Bobby, to his vexation, found Agnes Elliston walking in the promenade foyer with the well-set-up stranger. He passed her with a nod and slipped moodily into the rear of the Elliston box, where Aunt Constance, perennially young, was entertaining Nick Allstyne and Jack Starlett, and keeping them at a keen wit's edge, too. Bobby gave them the most perfunctory of greetings, and, sitting back by himself, sullenly moped. He grumbled to himself that he had a headache; the play was a humdrum affair; Trimmer was a bore; the proposed consolidation had suddenly lost its prismatic coloring; the Traders' Club was crude; Starlett and Allstyne were utterly frivolous. All this because Agnes was out in the foyer with a very likely-looking young man.

She did not return until the end of that act, and found Bobby ready to go, pleading early morning business.

"Is it important?" she asked.

"Who's the chap with the silky mustache?" he suddenly demanded, unable to forbear any longer. "He's a new one."

The eyes of Agnes gleamed mischievously.

"Bobby, I'm astonished at your manners," she chided him. "Now tell me what you've been doing with yourself."

"Trying to grow up into John Burnit's truly son," he told her with some trace of pompous pride, being ready in advance to accept his rebuke meekly, as he always had to do, and being quite ready to cover up his grievous error with a change of topic. "I had no idea that business could so grip a fellow. But what I'd like to find out just now is who is my trustee? It must have been somebody with horse sense, or the governor would not have appointed whoever it was. I'm not going to ask anything I'm forbidden to know, but I want some advice. Now, how shall I learn who it is?"

"Well," replied Agnes thoughtfully, "about the only plan I can suggest is that you ask your father's legal and business advisers."

He positively beamed down at her.

"You're the dandy girl, all right," he said admiringly. "Now, if you would only –"

"Bobby," she interrupted him, "do you know that we are standing up here in a box, with something like a thousand people, possibly, turned in our direction?"

He suddenly realized that they were alone, the others having filed out into the promenade, and, placing a chair for her in the extreme rear corner of the box, where he could fence her off, sat down beside her. He began to describe to her the plan of Silas Trimmer, and as he went on his enthusiasm mounted. The thing had caught his fancy. If he could only increase the profits of the John Burnit Store in the very first year, it would be a big feather in his cap. It would be precisely what his father would have desired! Agnes listened attentively all through the fourth act to his glowing conception of what the reorganized John Burnit Company would be like. He was perfectly contented now. His headache was gone; such occasional glimpses as he caught of the play were delightful; Mr. Trimmer was a genius; the Traders' Club a fascinating introduction to a new life; Starlett and Allstyne a joyous relief to him after the sordid cares of business. In a word, Agnes was with him.

"Do you think your father would accept this proposition?" she asked him after he was all through.

"I think he would at my age," decided Bobby promptly.

"That is, if he had been brought up as you have," she laughed. "I think I should study a long time over it, Bobby, before I made any such important and sweeping change as this must necessarily be."

“Oh, yes,” he agreed with an assumption of deep conservatism; “of course I’ll think it over well, and I’ll take good, sound advice on it.”

“I have never seen Mr. Trimmer,” mused Agnes. “I seldom go into his store, for there always seems to me something shoddy about the whole place; but to-morrow I think I shall make it a point to secure a glimpse of him.”

Bobby was delighted. Agnes had always been interested in whatever interested him, but never so absorbedly so as now, it seemed. He almost forgot the stranger in his pleasure. He forgot him still more when, dismissing his chauffeur, he seated Agnes in the front of the car beside him, with Starlett and Allstyne and Aunt Constance in the tonneau, and went whirling through the streets and up the avenue. It was but a brief trip, not over a half-hour, and they had scarcely a chance to exchange a word; but just to be up front there alone with her meant a whole lot to Bobby.

Afterward he took the other fellows down to the gymnasium, where Biff Bates drew him to one side.

“Look here, old pal!” said Bates. “I saw you real chummy with T. W. Tight-Wad Trimmer to-night.”

“Yes?” admitted Bobby interrogatively.

“Well, you know I don’t go around with my hammer out, but I want to put you wise to this mut. He’s in with a lot of political graft, for one thing, and he’s a sure thing guy for another. He likes to take a flyer at the bangtails a few times a season, and last summer he welshed on Joe Poog’s book; claimed Joe misunderstood his fingers for two thousand in place of two hundred.”

“Well, maybe there was a mistake,” said Bobby, loath to believe such a monstrous charge against any one whom he knew.

“Mistake nawthin’,” insisted Biff. “Joe Poog don’t take finger bets for hundreds, and Trimmer never did bet that way. He’s a born welsher, anyhow. He looks the part, and I just want to tell you, Bobby, that if you go to the mat with this crab you’ll get up with the marks of his pinchers on your windpipe; that’s all.”

Early the next morning – that is, at about ten o’clock – Bobby bounced energetically into the office of Barrister and Coke, where old Mr. Barrister, who had been his father’s lawyer for a great many years, received him with all the unbending grace of an ebony cane.

“I have come to find out who were the trustees appointed by my father, Mr. Barrister,” began Bobby, with a cheerful air of expecting to be informed at once, “not that I wish to inquire about the estate, but that I need some advice on entirely different matters.”

“I shall be glad to serve you with any legal advice that you may need,” offered Mr. Barrister, patting his finger-tips gently together.

“Are you the trustee?”

“No, sir” – this with a dusty smile.

“Who is, then?”

“The only information which I am at liberty to give you upon that point,” said Mr. Barrister drily, “is that contained in your father’s will. Would you care to examine a copy of that document again?”

“No, thanks,” declined Bobby politely. “It’s too truthful for comfort.”

From there he went straight to his own place of business, where he asked the same question of Johnson. In reply, Mr. Johnson produced, from his own personal and private index-file, an oblong gray envelope addressed:

## To My Son Robert,

### Upon His Inquiring About the Trusteeship of My Estate

Opening this in the privacy of his own office, Bobby read:

“As stated in my will, it is none of your present business.”

“Up to Bobby again,” the son commented aloud. “Well, Governor,” and his shoulders straightened while his eyes snapped, “if you can stand it, I can. Hereafter I shall take my own advice, and if I lose I shall know how to find the chap who’s to blame.”

He had an opportunity to “go it alone” that very morning, when Johnson and Applerod came in to him together with a problem. Was or was not that Chicago branch to be opened? The elder Mr. Burnit had considered it most gravely, but had left the matter undecided. Mr. Applerod was very keenly in favor of it, Mr. Johnson as earnestly against it, and in his office they argued the matter with such heat that Bobby, accepting a typed statement of the figures in the case, virtually turned them out.

“When must you have a decision?” he demanded.

“To-morrow. We must wire either our acceptance or rejection of the lease.”

“Very well,” said Bobby, quite elated that he was carrying the thing off with an air and a tone so crisp; “just leave it to me, will you?”

He waded through the statement uncomprehendingly. Here was a problem which was covered and still not covered by his father’s observations anent Johnson and Applerod. It was a matter for wrangling, obviously enough, but there was no difference to split. It was a case of deciding either yes or no. For the balance of the time until Jack Starlett called for him at twelve-thirty, he puzzled earnestly and soberly over the thing, and next morning the problem still weighed upon him when he turned in at the office. He could see as he passed through the outer room that both Johnson and Applerod were furtively eying him, but he walked past them whistling. When he had closed his own door behind him he drew again that mass of data toward him and struggled against the chin-high tide. Suddenly he shoved the papers aside, and, taking a half-dollar from his pocket, flipped it on the floor. Eagerly he leaned over to look at it. Tails! With a sigh of relief he put the coin back in his pocket and lit a cigarette. About half an hour later the committee of two came solemnly in to see him.

“Have you decided to open the Chicago branch, sir?” asked Johnson.

“Not this year,” said Bobby coolly, and handed back the data. “I wish, Mr. Johnson, you would appoint a page to be in constant attendance upon this room.”

Back at their own desks Johnson gloated in calm triumph.

“It may be quite possible that Mr. Robert may turn out to be a duplicate of his father,” he opined.

“I don’t know,” confessed Applerod, crestfallen. “I had thought that he would be more willing to take a sporting chance.”

Mr. Johnson snorted. Mr. Applerod, who had never bet two dollars on any proposition in his life, considered himself very much of a sporting disposition.

Savagely in love with his new assertiveness Bobby called on Agnes that evening.

“I saw Mr. Trimmer to-day,” she told him. “I don’t like him.”

“I didn’t want you to,” he replied with a grin. “You like too many people now.”

“But I’m serious, Bobby,” she protested, unconsciously clinging to his hand as they sat down upon the divan. “I wouldn’t enter into any business arrangements with him. I don’t know just what there is about him that repels me, but – well, I don’t *like* him!”

“Can’t say I’ve fallen in love with him myself,” he replied. “But, Agnes, if a fellow only did business with the men his nearest women-folks liked, there wouldn’t be much business done.”

“There wouldn’t be so many losses,” she retorted.

“Bound to have the last word, of course,” he answered, taking refuge in that old and quite false slur against women in general; for a man suffers from his spleen if he can not put the quietus on every argument. “But, honestly, I don’t fear Mr. Trimmer. I’ve been inquiring into this stock company business. We are each to have stock in the new company, if we form one, in exact proportion to the invoices of our respective establishments. Well, the Trimmer concern can’t possibly invoice as much as we shall, and I’ll have the majority of stock, which is the same as holding all the trumps. I had Mr. Barrister explain all that to me. With the majority of stock you can have everything your own way, and the other chap can’t even protest. Seems sort of a shame, too.”

“I don’t like him,” declared Agnes.

The ensuing week Bobby spent mostly on the polo match, though he called religiously at the office every morning, coming down a few minutes earlier each day. It was an uneasy week, too, as well as a busy one, for twice during its progress he saw Agnes driving with the unknown; and the fact that in both instances a handsome young lady was with them did not seem to mend matters much. He was astonished to find that losing the great polo match did not distress him at all. A year before it would have broken his heart, but the multiplicity of new interests had changed him entirely. As a matter of fact, he had been long ripe for the change, though he had not known it. As he had matured, the blood of his heredity had begun to clamor for its expression; that was all.

At the beginning of the next week Mr. Trimmer came in to see him again, with a roll of drawings under his arm. The drawings displayed the proposed new bridge in elevation and in cross section. They showed the total stretch of altered store-rooms from street to street, and cleverly-drawn perspectives made graphically real that splendid length. They were accompanied by an estimate of the cost, and also by a permit from the city to build the bridge. With these were the preliminary papers for the organization of the new company, and Bobby, by this time intensely interested and convinced that his interest was business acumen, went over each detail with contracted brow and with kindling enthusiasm.

It was ten o’clock of that morning when Silas Trimmer had found Bobby at his desk; by eleven Mr. Johnson and Mr. Applerod, in the outer office, were quite unable to work; by twelve they were snarling at each other; at twelve-thirty Johnson ventured to poke his head in at the door, framing some trivial excuse as he did so, but found the two merchants with their heads bent closely over the advantages of the great combined stores. At a quarter-past one, returning from a hasty lunch, Johnson tiptoed to the door again. He still heard an insistent, high-pitched voice inside. Mr. Trimmer was doing all the talking. He had explained and explained until his tongue was dry, and Bobby, with a full sense of the importance of his decision, was trying to clear away the fog that had grown up in his brain. Mr. Trimmer was pressing him for a decision. Bobby suddenly slipped his hand in his pocket, and, unseen, secured a half-dollar, which he shook in his hand under the table. Opening his palm he furtively looked at the coin. Heads!

“Get your papers ready, Mr. Trimmer,” he announced, as one finally satisfied by good and sufficient argument, “we’ll form the organization as soon as you like.”

No sooner had he come to this decision than he felt a strange sense of elation. He had actually consummated a big business deal! He had made a positive step in the direction of carrying the John Burnit Store beyond the fame it had possessed at the time his father had turned it over to him! Since he had stiffened his back, he did not condescend to take Johnson and Applerod into his confidence, though those two gentlemen were quivering to receive it, but he did order Johnson to allow Mr. Trimmer’s representatives to go over the John Burnit books and to verify their latest invoice, together with the purchases and sales since the date of that stock-taking. To Mr. Applerod he assigned the task of making a like examination of the Trimmer establishment, and each day felt more like a really-truly business man. He affected the Traders’ Club now, formed an entirely new set of acquaintances,

and learned to go about the stately rooms of that magnificent business annex with his hat on the back of his head and creases in his brow.

Even before the final papers were completed, a huge gang of workmen, consisting of as many artisans as could be crowded on the job without standing on one another's feet, began to construct the elaborate bridge which was to connect the two stores, and Mr. Trimmer's publicity department was already securing column after column of space in the local papers, some of it paid matter and some gratis, wherein it appeared that the son of old John Burnit had proved himself to be a live, progressive young man – a worthy heir of so enterprising a father.

## CHAPTER V

### WHEREIN BOBBY ATTENDS A STOCK-HOLDERS' MEETING AND CUTS A WISDOM-TOOTH

Within a very few days was completed the complicated legal machinery which threw the John Burnit Store and Trimmer and Company into the hands of "The Burnit-Trimmer Merchandise Corporation" as a holding and operating concern. The John Burnit Store went into that consolidation at an invoice value of two hundred and sixty thousand dollars, Trimmer and Company at two hundred and forty thousand; and Bobby was duly pleased. He had the majority of stock! On the later suggestion of Mr. Trimmer, however, sixty thousand dollars of additional capital was taken into the concern.

"The alterations, expansions, new departments and publicity will compel the command of about that much money," Mr. Trimmer patiently explained; "and while we could appropriate that amount from our respective concerns, we ought not to weaken our capital, particularly as financial affairs throughout the country are so unsettled. This is not a brisk commercial year, nor can it be."

"Yes," admitted Bobby, "I've heard something of all this hard-times talk. I know Nick Allstyne sold his French racer, and Nick's supposed to be worth no end of money."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Trimmer dryly. "This sixty thousand dollars' worth of stock, Mr. Burnit, I am quite sure that I can place with immediate purchasers, and if you will leave the matter to me I can have it all represented in our next meeting without any bother at all to you."

"Very kind of you, I am sure," agreed Bobby, thankful that this trifling detail was not to bore him.

And so it was that the Burnit-Trimmer Merchandise Corporation was incorporated at five hundred and sixty thousand dollars. It was considerably later when Bobby realized the significance of the fact that the subscribers to the additional capitalization consisted of Mr. Trimmer's son, his son-in-law, his head bookkeeper, his confidential secretary and his cousin, all of whom had also been minor stock-holders in the concern of Trimmer and Company.

It was upon the day preceding the first stock-holders' meeting of the reorganized company that Bobby, quite proud of the fact that he had acted independently of them, made the formal announcement to Johnson and Applerod that the great consolidation had been effected.

"Beginning with to-morrow morning, Mr. Johnson," said he to that worthy, "the John Burnit Store will be merged into the Burnit-Trimmer Merchandise Corporation, and Mr. Trimmer will doubtless send his secretary to confer with you about an adjustment of the clerical work."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Johnson dismally, and rose to open the filing case behind him. With his hand in the case he paused and turned a most woebegone countenance to the junior Burnit. "We shall be very regretful, Mr. Applerod and myself, to lose our positions, sir," he stated. "We have grown up with the business from boyhood."

"Nonsense!" exploded Applerod. "We would be regretful if that were to occur, but there is nothing of the sort possible. Why, Mr. Burnit, I think this consolidation is the greatest thing that ever happened. I've been in favor of it for years; and as for its losing me my position – Pooh!" and he snapped his fingers.

"Applerod is quite right, Mr. Johnson," said Bobby severely. "Nothing of the sort is contemplated. Yourself and Mr. Applerod are to remain with me as long as fair treatment and liberal pay and personal attachment can induce you to do so."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Johnson dryly, but he shook his head, and from the file produced one of the familiar gray envelopes.

Bobby eyed it askance as it came toward him, and winced as he saw the inscription. He was beginning to dread these missives. They seemed to follow him about, to menace him, to give him a

constant feeling of guilt. Nevertheless, he took this one quite calmly and walked into his own room. It was addressed:

**To My Son,**

**Upon the Occasion of His Completing a Consolidation with Silas Trimmer**

and it read:

“When a man devils you for years to enter a business deal with him, you may rest assured that man has more to gain by it than you have. Aside from his wormwood business jealousy of me, Silas Trimmer has wanted this Grand Street entrance to his store for more than the third of a century; now he has it. He’ll have your store next.”

“Look here, Governor,” protested Bobby aloud, to his lively remembrance of his father as he might have stood in that very room, “I call this rather rubbing it in. It’s a bit unsportsmanlike. It’s almost like laying a trap for a chap who doesn’t know the game,” and, rankling with a sense of injustice, he went out to Johnson.

“I say, Johnson,” he complained, “it’s rather my fault for being too stubborn to ask about it, but if you knew that Mr. Trimmer was trying to work a game on me that was dangerous to the business, why didn’t you volunteer to explain it to me; to forewarn me and give me a chance for judgment with all the pros and cons in front of me?”

“From the bottom of my heart, Mr. Burnit,” said Johnson with feeling, “I should like to have done it; but it was forbidden.”

He already had lying before him another of the gray envelopes, and this he solemnly handed over. It was addressed:

**To My Son,**

**Upon His Complaining that Johnson Gave  
Him No Warning Concerning Silas Trimmer**

The message it contained was:

“It takes hard chiseling to make a man, but if the material is the right grain the tool-marks won’t show. If I had wanted you merely to make money, I would have left the business entirely in the hands of Johnson and Applerod. But there is no use to put off pulling a tooth. It only hurts worse in the end.”

When Bobby left the office he felt like walking in the middle of the street to avoid alley corners, since he was unable to divine from what direction the next brick might come. He had taken the business to heart more than he had imagined that he would, and the very fact of his father’s having foreseen that he would succumb to this consolidation made him give grave heed to the implied suggestion that he would be a heavy loser by it. He had an engagement with Allstyne and Starlett at the Idlers’ that afternoon, but they found him most preoccupied, and openly voted him a bore. He called on Agnes Elliston, but learned that she was out driving, and he savagely assured himself that he knew who was handling the reins. He dined at the Traders’, and, for the first time since he had begun to frequent that place, the creases in his brow were real.

Later in the evening he dropped around to see Biff Bates. In the very center of the gymnasium he found that gentleman engaged in giving a preliminary boxing lesson to a spider-like new pupil, who was none other than Silas Trimmer. Responding to Biff's cheerful grin and Mr. Trimmer's sheepish one with what politeness he could muster, Bobby glumly went home.

On the next morning occurred the first stock-holders' meeting of the Burnit-Trimmer Merchandise Corporation, which Bobby attended with some feeling of importance, for, with his twenty-six hundred shares, he was the largest individual stock-holder present. That was what had reassured him overnight: the magic "majority of stock!" Mr. Trimmer only had twenty-four hundred, and Bobby could swing things as he pleased. His father, omniscient as he was, must certainly have failed to foresee this fact. In his simplicity of such matters and his general unsuspectingness, Bobby had not calculated that if the additional six hundred shares were to vote solidly with Mr. Trimmer against him, his twenty-six hundred shares would be confronted by three thousand, and so rendered paltry.

Mr. Trimmer was delighted to see young Mr. Burnit. This was a great occasion indeed, both for the John Burnit Store and for Trimmer and Company, and, in the opinion of Mr. Trimmer, his circular smile very much in evidence, John Burnit himself would have been proud to see this day! Mr. Smythe, Mr. Trimmer's son-in-law, also thought it a great day; Mr. Weldon, Mr. Trimmer's head bookkeeper, thought it a great day; Mr. Harvey, Mr. Trimmer's confidential secretary, and Mr. U. G. Trimmer, Mr. Silas Trimmer's cousin, shared this pleasant impression.

In the beginning the organization was without form or void, as all such organizations are, but Mr. Trimmer, having an extremely clear idea of what was to be accomplished, proposed that Mr. Burnit accept the chair *pro tem.*— where he would be out of the way. The unanimous support which this motion received was quite gratifying to the feelings of Mr. Burnit, proving at once that his fears had been not only groundless but ungenerous, and, in accepting the chair, he made them what he considered a very neat little speech indeed, striving the while to escape that circular smile with its diameter of yellow teeth and its intersecting crescent of stiff mustache; for he disliked meanly to imagine that smile to have a sarcastic turn to-day. At the suggestion of Mr. Trimmer, Mr. Weldon accepted the post of secretary *pro tem.* Mr. Trimmer then, with a nicely bound black book in his hand, rose to propose the adoption of the stock constitution and by-laws which were neatly printed in the opening pages of this minute-book, and in the articles of which he had made some trifling amendments. Mr. Weldon, by request, read these most carefully and conscientiously, making quite plain that the entire working management of the consolidated stores was to be under the direct charge of a general manager and an assistant general manager, who were to be appointed and have their salaries fixed by the board of directors, as was meet and proper. Gravely the stock-holders voted upon the adoption of the constitution and by-laws, and, with a feeling of pride, as the secretary called his name, Bobby cast his first vote in the following conventional form:

"Aye – twenty-six hundred shares."

Mr. Trimmer followed, voting twenty-four hundred shares; then Mr. Smythe, three hundred; Mr. Weldon, fifty; Mr. Harvey, fifty; Mr. U. G. Trimmer, fifty; Mr. Thomas Trimmer, whose proxy was held by his father, one hundred and fifty; making in all a total of fifty-six hundred shares unanimously cast in favor of the motion; and Bobby, after having roundly announced the result, felt that he was conducting himself with vast parliamentary credit and lit a cigarette with much satisfaction.

Mr. Trimmer, twirling his thumbs, displayed no surprise, nor even gratification, when Mr. Smythe almost immediately put him in nomination for president. Mr. Weldon promptly seconded that nomination. Mr. Harvey moved that the nominations for the presidency be closed. Mr. U. G. Trimmer seconded that motion, which was carried unanimously; and with no ado whatever Mr. Silas Trimmer was made president of the Burnit-Trimmer Merchandise Corporation, Mr. Burnit having most courteously cast twenty-six hundred votes for him; for was not Mr. Trimmer entitled

to this honor by right of seniority? In similar manner Mr. Burnit, quite pleased, and not realizing that the vice-president of a corporation has a much less active and influential position than the night watchman, was elected to the second highest office, while Mr. Weldon was made secretary and Mr. Smythe treasurer. Mr. Harvey, Mr. U. G. Trimmer and Mr. Thomas Trimmer were, as a matter of course, elected members of the board of directors, the four officers already elected constituting the remaining members of the board. There seemed but very little business remaining for the stockholders to do, so they adjourned; then, the members of the board being all present and having waived in writing all formal notification, the directors went into immediate session, with Mr. Trimmer in the chair and Mr. Weldon in charge of the bright and shining new book of minutes.

The first move of that body, after opening the meeting in due form, was made by Mr. Harvey, who proposed that Mr. Silas Trimmer be constituted general manager of the consolidated stores at a salary of fifty thousand dollars per year, a motion which was immediately seconded by Mr. U. G. Trimmer.

Bobby was instantly upon his feet. Even with his total lack of experience in such matters there was something about this that struck him as overdrawn, and he protested that fancy salaries should have no place in the reorganized business until experience had proved that the business would stand it. He was very much in earnest about it, and wanted the subject discussed thoroughly before any such rash step was taken. The balance of the discussion consisted in one word from Mr. Smythe, echoed by all his fellow-members.

“Question!” said that gentleman.

“You have all heard the question,” said Mr. Trimmer calmly. “Those in favor will please signify by saying ‘Aye.’”

“Aye!” voted four members of the board as with one scarcely interested voice.

“No!” cried Bobby angrily, and sprang to his feet, his anger confused, moreover, by the shock of finding unsuspected wolves tearing at his vitals. “Gentlemen, I protest against this action! I – ”

Mr. Trimmer pounded on the table with his pencil in lieu of a gavel.

“The motion is carried. Any other business?”

It seemed that there was. Mr. Harvey proposed that Mr. Smythe be made assistant general manager at a salary of twenty-five thousand dollars per year. Again the farce of a ballot and the farce of a protest was enacted. Where now was the voting power of Bobby’s twenty-six hundred shares? In the directors’ meeting they voted as individuals, and they were six against one. Rather indifferently, as if the thing did not amount to much, Mr. Smythe proposed that the selection of a firm name for advertising and publicity purposes be left to the manager, and though Bobby voted no as to this proposition on general principles, it seemed of minor importance, in his then bewildered state of mind. After all, the thing which grieved him most just then was to find that people *could* do these things!

## CHAPTER VI

# CONSISTING ENTIRELY OF A RAPID SUCCESSION OF MOST PAINFUL SHOCKS

He was still dazed with what had happened, when, the next morning, he turned into the office and found Johnson and Applerod packing-up their personal effects. Workmen were removing letter-files and taking desks out of the door.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, surveying the unwonted confusion in perplexity.

“The entire office force of the now defunct John Burnit Store has been dismissed, that’s all!” blurted Applerod, now the aggrieved one. “You sold us out, lock, stock and barrel!”

“Impossible!” gasped Bobby.

Mr. Johnson glumly showed him curt letters of dismissal from Trimmer.

“Where’s mine, I wonder?” inquired Bobby, trying to take his terrific defeat with sportsmanlike nonchalance.

“I don’t suppose there is any for you, sir, inasmuch as you never had a recognized position to lose,” replied Johnson, not unkindly. “Did the board of directors elect you to any salaried office?”

“Why, so they didn’t!” exclaimed Bobby, and for the first time realized that no place had been made for him. He had taken it as a matter of course that he was to be a part of the consolidation, and the omission of any definite provision for him had passed unnoticed.

The door leading to his own private office banged open, and two men appeared, shoving through it the big mahogany desk turned edgewise.

“What are they doing?” Bobby asked sharply.

“Moving out all the furniture,” snapped Applerod with bitter relish. “All the office work, I understand, is to be done in the other building, and this space is to be thrown into a special cut-glass department. I suppose the new desk is for Mr. Trimmer.”

Furious, choking, Bobby left the office and strode back through the store. The first floor passageway was already completed between the two buildings, and a steady stream of customers was going over the bridge from the old Burnit store into the old Trimmer store. There were very few coming in the other direction. He had never been in Mr. Trimmer’s offices, but he found his way there with no difficulty, and Mr. Trimmer came out of his private room to receive him with all the suavity possible. In fact, he had been saving up suavity all morning for this very encounter.

“Well, what can we do for you this morning, Mr. Burnit?” he wanted to know, and Bobby, though accustomed to repression as he was, had a sudden impulse to drive his fist straight through that false circular smile.

“I want to know what provision has been made for me in this new adjustment,” he demanded.

“Why, Mr. Burnit,” expostulated Mr. Trimmer in much apparent surprise, “you have two hundred and sixty thousand dollars’ worth of stock in what should be the best paying mercantile venture in this city; you are vice-president, and a member of the board of directors!”

“I have no part, then, in the active management?” Bobby wanted to know.

“It would be superfluous, Mr. Burnit. One of the chief advantages of such a consolidation is the economy that comes from condensing the office and managing forces. I regretted very much indeed to dismiss Mr. Johnson and Mr. Applerod, but they are very valuable men and should have no difficulty in placing themselves advantageously. In fact, I shall be glad to aid them in securing new positions.”

“The thing is an outrage!” exclaimed Bobby with passion.

“My dear Mr. Burnit, it is business,” said Mr. Trimmer coldly, and, turning, went deliberately into his own room, leaving Bobby standing in the middle of the floor.

Bobby sprang to that door and threw it open, and Trimmer, who had been secretly trembling all through the interview, turned to him with a quick pallor overspreading his face, a pallor which Bobby saw and despised and ignored, and which turned his first mad impulse.

"I'd like to ask one favor of you, Mr. Trimmer," said he. "In moving the furniture out of the John Burnit offices I should be very glad, indeed, if you would order my father's desk removed to my house. It is an old desk and can not possibly be of much use. You may charge its value to my account, please."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Trimmer. "I'll have it sent out with pleasure. Is there anything else?"

"Nothing whatever at present," said Bobby, trembling with the task of holding himself steady, and walked out, unable to analyze the bitter emotions that surged within him.

On the sidewalk, standing beside his automobile, he found Johnson and Applerod waiting for him, and the moment he saw Johnson, cumbered with the big index-file that he carried beneath his arm, he knew why.

"Give me the letter, Johnson," he said with a wry smile, and Johnson, answering it with another equally as grim, handed him a gray envelope.

Applerod, who had been the first to upbraid him, was now the first to recover his spirits.

"Never mind, Mr. Burnit," said he; "businesses and even fortunes have been lost before and have been regained. There are still ways to make money."

Bobby did not answer him. He was opening the letter, preparing to stand its contents in much the same spirit that he had often gone to his father to accept a reprimand which he knew he could not in dignity evade. But there was no reprimand. He read:

"There's no use in telling a young man what to do when he has been gouged. If he's made of the right stuff he'll know, and if he isn't, no amount of telling will put the right stuff in him. I have faith in you. Bobby, or I'd never have let you in for this going.

"In the meantime, as there will be no dividends on your stock for ten years to come, what with 'improvements, expenses and salaries,' and as you will need to continue your education by embarking in some other line of business before being ripe enough to accomplish what I am sure you will want to do, you may now see your trustee, the only thoroughly sensible person I know who is sincerely devoted to your interests. Her name is Agnes Elliston."

"What is the matter?" asked Johnson in sudden concern, and Applerod grabbed him by the arm.

"Oh, nothing much," said Bobby; "a little groggy, that's all. The governor just handed me one under the belt. By the way, boys" – and they scarcely noted that he no longer said "gentlemen" – "if you have nothing better in view I want you to consider yourselves still in my employ. I'm going into business again, at once. If you will call at my house tomorrow forenoon I'll talk with you about it," and anxious to be rid of them he told his driver "Idlers'," and jumped into his automobile.

Agnes! That surely was giving him a solar-plexus blow! Why, what did the governor mean? It was putting him very much in a kindergarten position with the girl before whom he wanted to make a better impression than before anybody else in all the world.

It took him a long time to readjust himself to this cataclysm.

After all, though, was not his father right in this, as he had been in everything else? Humbly Bobby was ready to confess that Agnes had more brains and good common sense than anybody, and was altogether about the most loyal and dependable person in all the world, with the single and sole exception of allowing that splendid looking and unknown chap to hang around her so. They were in the congested down-town district now, and as they came to a dead stop at a crossing, Bobby, though immersed in thought, became aware of a short, thick-set man, who, standing at the very edge of the car, was apparently trying to stare him out of countenance.

“Why, hello, Biff!” exclaimed Bobby. “Which way?”

“Just waiting for a South Side trolley,” explained Biff. “Going over to see Kid Mills about that lightweight go we’re planning.”

“Jump in,” said Bobby, glad of any change in his altogether indefinite program. “I’ll take you over.”

On the way he detailed to his athletic friend what had been done to him in the way of business.

“I know’d it,” said Biff excitedly. “I know’d it from the start. That’s why I got old Trimmer to join my class. Made him a special price of next to nothing, and got Doc Willets to go around and tell him he was in Dutch for want of training. Just wait.”

“For what?” asked Bobby, smiling.

“Till the next time he comes up,” declared Biff vengefully. “Say, do you know I put that shrimp’s hour a-purpose just when there wouldn’t be a soul up there; and the next time I get him in front of me I’m going to let a few slip that’ll jar him from the cellar to the attic; and the next time anybody sees him he’ll be nothing but splints and court-plaster.”

“Biff,” said Bobby severely, “you’ll do nothing of the kind. You’ll leave one Silas Trimmer to me. Merely bruising his body won’t get back my father’s business. Let him alone.”

“But look here, Bobby – ”

“No; I say let him alone,” insisted Bobby.

“All right,” said Biff sullenly; “but if you think there’s a trick you can turn to double cross this Trimmer you’ve got another think coming. He’s sunk his fangs in the business he’s been after all his life, and now you couldn’t pry it away from him with a jimmy. You know what I told you about him.”

“I know,” said Bobby wearily. “But honestly, Biff, did you ever see me go into a game where I was a loser in the end?”

“Not till this one,” confessed Biff.

“And this isn’t the end,” retorted Bobby.

He knew that when he made such a confident assertion that he had nothing upon which to base it; that he was talking vaguely and at random; but he also knew the intense desire that had arisen in him to reverse conditions upon the man who had waited until the father died to wrest that father’s pride from the son; and in some way he felt coming strength. In Biff’s present frame of conviction Bobby was pleased enough to drop him in front of Kid Mills’ obscure abode, and turn with a sudden hungry impulse in the direction of Agnes. At the Ellistons’, when the chauffeur was about to slow up, Bobby in a panic told him to drive straight on. In the course of half an hour he came back again, and this time pride alone – fear of what his chauffeur might think – determined him to stop. With much trepidation he went up to the door. Agnes was just preparing to go out, and she came down to him in the front parlor.

“This is only a business call,” he confessed with as much appearance of gaiety as he could summon under the circumstance. “I’ve come around to see my trustee.”

“So soon?” she said, with quick sympathy in her voice. “I’m *so* sorry, Bobby! But I suppose, after all, the sooner it happened the better. Tell me all about it. What was the cause of it?”

“You wouldn’t marry me,” charged Bobby. “If you had this never would have happened.”

She shook her head and smiled, but she laid her hand upon his arm and drew closer to him.

“I’m afraid it would, Bobby. You might have asked my advice, but I expect you wouldn’t have taken it.”

“I guess you’re right about that,” admitted Bobby; “but if you’d only married me – Honest, Agnes, when are you going to?”

“I shall not commit myself,” she replied, smiling up at him rather wistfully.

“There’s somebody else,” declared Bobby, instantly assured by this evasiveness that the unknown had something to do with the matter.

“If there were, it would be my affair entirely, wouldn’t it?” she wanted to know, still smiling.

“No!” he declared emphatically. “It would be my affair. But really I want to know. Will you, if I get my father’s business back?”

“I’ll not promise,” she said. “Why, Bobby, the way you put it, you would be binding me *not* to marry you in case you *didn’t* get it back!” and she laughed at him. “But let’s talk business now. I was just starting out upon your affairs, the securing of some bonds for which the lawyer I have employed has been negotiating, so you may take me up there and he will arrange to get you the two hundred and fifty thousand dollars you are to have.

It’s for a new start, without restrictions except that you are to engage in business with it. That’s all the instructions I have.”

“Thanks,” said Bobby, with a gulp. “Honestly, Agnes, it’s a shame. It’s a low-down trick the governor played to put me in this helplessly belittled position with you.”

“Why, how strange,” she replied quietly. “I look upon it as a most graceful and agreeable position for myself.”

“Oh!” he exclaimed blankly, as it occurred to him just how uncomfortable the situation must be to her, and he reproached himself with selfishness in not having thought of this phase of the matter before. “That’s a fact,” he admitted. “I say, Agnes, I’ll say no more about that end of it if you don’t; and, after all, I’m glad, too. It gives me a legitimate excuse to see you much oftener.”

“Gracious, no!” she protested. “You fill up every spare moment that I have now; but so long as you are here on business this time, let’s attend to business. You may take me up to see Mr. Chalmers. By the way, I want you to meet him, anyhow. You have seen him, I believe, once or twice. He was here one day when you called, and he was walking with me in the lobby of the theater when you came in to join us one evening.”

“Y-e-s,” drawled Bobby, as if he were placing the man with difficulty.

“The Chalmers’ are charming people,” she went on. “His wife is perfectly fascinating. We used to go to school together. They have only been married three months, and when they came here to go into business I was very glad to throw such of your father’s estate as I am to handle into his hands. Whenever they are ready I want to engineer them into our set, but they live very quietly now. I know you’ll like them.”

“Oh, I’m sure I will,” agreed Bobby heartily, and his face was positively radiant, as, for some unaccountable reason, he clutched her hand. She lifted it up beneath his arm, around which, for one ecstatic moment, she clasped her other hand, and together they went out into the hall, Bobby, simply driveling in his supreme happiness, allowing her to lead him wheresoever she listed. Still in the joy of knowing that his one dreaded rival was removed in so pleasant a fashion, he handed her into the automobile and they started out to see Mr. Chalmers. Their way led down Grand Street, past the John Burnit Store, and with all that had happened still rankling sorely in his mind, Bobby looked up and gave a gasp. Workmen were taking down the plain, dignified old sign of the John Burnit Store from the top of the building, and in its place they were raising up a glittering new one, ordered by Silas Trimmer on the very day Bobby had agreed to go into the consolidation; and it read:

## “TRIMMER AND COMPANY”

## CHAPTER VII

### PINK-CHEEKED APPLEROD RUSHES TO THE RESCUE WITH A GOLDEN SCHEME

Agnes had been surprised into an exclamation of dismay by that new sign, but she checked it abruptly as she saw Bobby's face. She could divine, but she could not fully know, how that had hurt him; how the pain of it had sunk into his soul; how the humiliation of it had tingled in every fiber of him. For an instant his breath had stopped, his heart had swelled as if it would burst, a great lump had come in his throat, a sob almost tore its way through his clenched teeth. He caught his breath sharply, his jaws set and his nostrils dilated, then the color came slowly back to his cheeks. Agnes, though longing to do so, had feared to lay her hand even upon his sleeve in sympathy lest she might unman him, but now she saw that she need not have feared. It had not weakened him, this blow; it had strengthened him.

"That's brutal," he said steadily, though the steadiness was purely a matter of will. "We must change that sign before we do anything else."

"Of course," she answered simply.

Involuntarily she stretched out her small gloved hand, and with it touched his own. Looking back once more for a fleeting glimpse at the ascending symbol of his defeat, he gripped her hand so hard that she almost cried out with the pain of it; but she did not wince. When he suddenly remembered, with a frightened apology, and laid her hand upon her lap and patted it, her fingers seemed as if they had been compressed into a numb mass, and she separated them slowly and with difficulty. Afterward she remembered that as a dear hurt, after all, for in it she shared his pain.

While they were still stunned and silent under Silas Trimmer's parting blow, the machine drew up at the curb in front of the building in which Chalmers had his office. Chalmers, Bobby found, was a most agreeable fellow, to whom he took an instant liking. It was strange what different qualities the man seemed to possess than when Bobby had first seen him in the company of Agnes. Their business there was very brief. Chalmers held for Bobby, subject to Agnes' order as trustee, the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in instantly convertible securities, and when they left, Bobby had a check for that amount comfortably tucked in his pocket.

There was another brief visit to the office of old Mr. Barrister, where Agnes, again as Bobby's trustee, exhibited the papers Chalmers had made out for her, showing that the funds previously left in her charge had been duly paid over to Bobby as per the provisions of the will, and thereupon filed her order for a similar amount. Barrister received them with an "I told you so" air which amounted almost to satisfaction. He was quite used to seeing the sons of rich men hastening to become poor men, and he had so evidently classed Bobby as one of the regular sort, that Bobby took quite justifiable umbrage and decided that if he had any legal business whatever he would put it into the hands of Chalmers.

He spent the rest of the day with Agnes and took dinner at the Ellistons', where jolly Aunt Constance and shrewd Uncle Dan, in genuine sympathy, desisted so palpably from their usual joking about his "business career," that Bobby was more ill at ease than if they had said all the grimly humorous things which popped into their minds. For that reason he went home rather early, and tumbled into bed resolving upon the new future he was to face to-morrow.

At least, he consoled himself with a sigh, he was now a man of experience. He had learned something of the world. He was not further to be hoodwinked. His last confused vision was of Silas Trimmer on his knees begging for mercy, and the next thing he knew was that some one was reminding him, with annoying insistency, of the early call he had left.

The world looked brighter that morning, and he was quite hopeful when, in the dim old study, seated at his father's desk and with the portrait of stern old John Burnit frowning and yet shrewdly

twinkling down upon him, he received Johnson, dry and sour looking as if he expected ill news, and Applerod, bright and radiant as if Fortune's purse were just about to open to him.

"Well, boys," said Bobby cheerily, "we're going to stick right together. We're going to start into a new business as soon as we can find one that suits us, and your employment begins from this minute. We're beginning with a capital of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars," and rather pompously he spread the check upon the desk. His pompousness faded in something under fifteen seconds, for it was in about that length of time that he caught sight of a plain gray envelope then in the process of emerging from Johnson's pocket. He accepted it with something of reluctance, but opened it nevertheless; and this was the message of the late John Burnit:

### **To my Son Upon the Occasion of his Being Intrusted With Real Money**

"In most cases the difference between spending money and investing it is wholly a matter of speed. Not one man in ten knows when and where and how to put a dollar properly to work; so the only financial education I expect you to get out of an attempt to go into business is a painful lesson in subtraction."

"This letter, Johnson, is only a delicate intimation from the governor that I'll make another blooming ass of myself with this," commented Bobby, tapping his finger on the check, and placing the letter face downward beside it, where he eyed it askance.

"A quarter of a million!" observed Applerod, rolling out the amount with relish. "A great deal can be done with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, you know."

"That's just the point," observed Bobby with a frown of perplexity, directed alternately to the faithful gentlemen who for upward of thirty years had been his father's right and left bowers. "What am I to do with it? Johnson, what would you do with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars?"

"Lose it," confessed stooped and bloodless Johnson. "I never made a dollar out of a dollar in my life."

"What would you do with it, Applerod?"

Mr. Applerod, scarcely able to contain himself, had been eagerly awaiting that question.

"Purchase, improve and market the Westmarsh Addition," he said promptly, expanding fully two inches across his already rotund chest.

"What?" snorted Johnson, and cast upon his workmate a look of withering scorn. "Are you still dreaming about the possibilities of that old swamp?"

"To be sure it is a swamp," admitted Mr. Applerod with some heat. "Do you suppose you could buy one hundred and twenty acres of directly accessible land, almost at the very edge of the crowded city limits, at two hundred dollars an acre if it wasn't swamp land?" he demanded. "Why, Mr. Burnit, it is the opportunity of a lifetime!"

"How much capital would be needed?" asked Bobby, gravely assuming the callous, inquisitorial manner of the ideal business man.

"Well, I've managed to buy up twenty acres out of my savings, and there are still one hundred acres to be purchased, which will take twenty thousand dollars. But this is the small part of it. Drainage, filling and grading is to be done, streets and sidewalks ought to be put down, a gift clubhouse, which would serve at first as an office, would be a good thing to build, and the thing would have to be most thoroughly advertised. I've figured on it for years, and it would require, all told, about a two-hundred-thousand investment."

"And what would be the return?" asked Bobby without blinking at these big figures, and proud of his attitude, which, while conservative, was still one of openness to conviction.

"Figure it out for yourself," Mr. Applerod invited him with much enthusiasm. "We get ten building lots to the acre, turning one hundred and twenty acres into one thousand two hundred lots.

Improved sites at any point surrounding this tract can not be bought for less than twenty-five dollars per front foot. Corner lots and those in the best locations would bring much more, but taking the average price at only six hundred dollars per lot, we would have, as a total return for the investment, seven hundred and twenty thousand dollars!”

“In how long?” Bobby inquired, not allowing himself to become in the slightest degree excited.

“One year,” announced the optimistic Mr. Applerod with conviction.

Mr. Johnson, his lips glued tightly together in one firm, thin, straight line across his face, was glaring steadfastly at the corner of the ceiling, permitting no expression whatever to flicker in his eyes; noting which, Bobby turned to him with a point-blank question:

“What do you think of this opportunity, Mr. Johnson?” he asked.

Mr. Johnson glared quickly at Mr. Applerod.

“Tell him,” defied that gentleman.

“I think nothing whatever of it!” snapped Mr. Johnson.

“What is your chief ground of objection?” Bobby wanted to know.

Again Mr. Johnson glared quickly at Mr. Applerod.

“Tell him,” insisted that gentleman with an outward wave of both hands, expressive of his intense desire to have every secret of his own soul and of everybody’s else laid bare.

“I will,” said Johnson. “Your father, a dozen times in my own hearing, refused to have anything to do with the scheme.”

Bobby turned accusing eyes upon Applerod, who, though red of face, was still strong of assertion.

“Mr. Burnit never declined on any other grounds than that he already had too many irons in the fire,” he declared. “Tell him that, too, Johnson!”

“It was only his polite way of putting it,” retorted Mr. Johnson.

“John Burnit was noted for his polite way of putting his business conclusions,” snapped Applerod in return, whereat Bobby smiled with gleeful reminiscence, and Mr. Johnson smiled grimly, albeit reluctantly, and Mr. Applerod smiled triumphantly.

“I can see the governor doing it,” laughed Bobby, and dismissed the matter. “Mr. Johnson, as a start in business we may as well turn this study into a temporary office. Take this check down to the Commercial Bank, please, and open an account. You already have power of attorney for my signature. Procure a small set of books and open them. Make out for me against this account at the Commercial a check for ten thousand. Mr. Applerod, kindly reduce your swamp proposition to paper and let me have it by to-morrow. I’ll not promise that I will do anything with it, but it would be only fair to examine it.”

With these crisp remarks, upon the decisiveness of which Bobby prided himself very much, he left the two to open business for him under the supervision of the portrait of stern but humor-given old John Burnit.

“Applerod,” said Johnson indignantly, his lean frame almost quivering, “it is a wonder to me that you can look up at that picture and reflect that you are trying to drag John Burnit’s son into this fool scheme.”

“Johnson,” said Mr. Applerod, puffing out his cheeks indignantly, “you were given the first chance to advise Mr. Robert what he should do with his money, and you failed to do so. This is a magnificent business opportunity, and I should consider myself very remiss in my duty to John Burnit’s son if I failed to urge it upon him.”

Mr. Johnson picked up the letter that Bobby, evidently not caring whether they read it or not, had left behind him. He ran through it with a grim smile and handed it over to Applerod as his best retort.

At the home of Agnes Elliston Bobby’s car stopped almost as a matter of habit, and though the hour was a most informal one he walked up the steps as confidently as if he intended opening the

door with a latch-key; for since Agnes was become his trustee, Bobby had awakened, overnight, to the fact that he had a proprietary interest in her which could not be denied.

Agnes came down to meet him in a most ravishing morning robe of pale green, a confection so stunning in conjunction with her gold-brown eyes and waving brown hair and round white throat that Bobby was forced to audible comment upon it.

“Cracking!” said he. “I suppose that if I hadn’t had nerve enough to pop in here unexpectedly before noon I wouldn’t have seen that gown for ages.”

It was Aunt Constance, the irrepressible, who, leaning over the stair railing, sank the iron deep into his soul.

“It was bought at Trimmer and Company’s, Grand Street side, Bobby,” she informed him, and with this Parthian shot she went back through the up-stairs hall, laughing.

“Ouch!” said Bobby. “That was snowballing a cripple,” and he was really most woebegone about it.

“Never mind, Bobby, you have still plenty of chance to win,” comforted Agnes, who, though laughing, had sympathetic inkling of that sore spot which had been touched. He seemed so forlorn, in spite of his big, good-natured self, that she moved closer to him and unconsciously put her hand upon his arm. It was too much for him in view of the way she looked, and, suddenly emboldened, he did a thing the mere thought of which, under premeditation, would have scared him into a frappéd perspiration. He placed his hands upon her shoulders, and, drawing her toward him, bent swiftly down to kiss her. For a fleeting instant she drew back, and then Bobby had the surprise of his life, for her warm lips met his quite willingly, and with a frank pressure almost equal to his own. She sprang back from him at once with sparkling eyes, but he had no mind to follow up his advantage, for he was dazed. It had left him breathless, amazed, incredulous. He stood for a full minute, his face gone white with the overwhelming wonder of this thing that had happened to him, and then the blunt directness which was part of his inheritance from his father returned to him.

“Well, anyhow, we’re to be engaged at last,” he said.

“No,” she rebuked him, with a sudden flash of mischief; “that was perfectly wicked, and you mustn’t do it again.”

“But I will,” he said, advancing with heightened color.

“You mustn’t,” she said firmly, and although she did not recede farther from him he stopped. “You mustn’t make it hard for us, Bobby,” she warned him. “I’m under promise, too; and that’s all I can tell you now.”

“The governor again,” groaned Bobby. “I suppose that I’m not to talk to you about marrying, nor you to listen, until I have proved my right and ability to take care of you and your fortune and mine. Is that it?”

She smiled inscrutably.

“What brings you at this unearthly hour?” she asked by way of evasion. “Some business pretext, I’ll be bound.”

“Of course it is,” he assured her. “This morning you are strictly in the rôle of my trustee. I want you to look at some property.”

“But I have an appointment with my dressmaker.”

“The dressmaker must wait.”

“What a warning!” she laughed. “If you would order a mere – a mere acquaintance around so peremptorily, what would you do if you were married?”

“I’d be the boss,” announced Bobby with calm confidence.

“Indeed?” she mocked, and started into the library. “You’d ask permission first, wouldn’t you?”

“Where are you going?” he queried in return, and grinned.

“To telephone my dressmaker,” she admitted, smiling, and realizing, too, that it was not all banter.

“I told you to, remember,” asserted Bobby, with a strange new sense of masterfulness which would not down.

When she came down again, dressed for the trip, he was still in that dazed elation, and it lasted through their brisk ride to the far outskirts of the city, where, at the side of a watery marsh that extended for nearly a mile along the roadway, he halted.

“This is it,” waving his hand across the dismal waste.

“It!” she repeated. “What?”

“The property that it was suggested I buy.”

“No wonder your father thought it necessary to appoint a trustee,” was her first comment. “Why, Bobby, what on earth could you do with it? It’s too large for a frog farm and too small for a summer resort,” and once more she turned incredulous eyes upon the “property.”

Dark, oily water covered the entire expanse, and through it emerged, here and there, clumps of dank vegetation, from the nature and dispersement of which one could judge that the water varied from one to three feet in depth. Higher ground surrounded it on all sides, and the urgent needs of suburban growth had scattered a few small, cheap cottages, here and there, upon the hills.

“It doesn’t seem very attractive until you consider those houses,” Bobby confessed. “You must remember that the city hasn’t room to grow, and must take note that it is trying to spread in this direction. Wouldn’t a fellow be doing a rather public-spirited thing, and one in which he might take quite a bit of satisfaction, if he drained that swamp, filled it, laid out streets and turned the whole stretch into a cluster of homes in place of a breeding-place for fevers?”

“You talk just like a civic improvement society,” she said, laughing.

“We did have a chap lecturing on that down at the club a few nights ago,” he admitted, “and maybe I have picked up a bit of the talk. But wouldn’t it be a good thing, anyhow?”

“Oh, I quite approve of it, now that I see your plan,” she agreed; “but could it be made to pay?”

“Well,” he returned with a grave assumption of that businesslike air he had recently been trying to copy down at the Traders’ Club, “there are one hundred and twenty acres in the tract. I can buy it for two hundred dollars an acre, and sell each acre, in building lots, for full six hundred. It seems to me that this is enough margin to carry out the needed improvements and make the marketing of it worth while. What do you think of it?”

They both gazed out over that desolate expanse and tried to picture it dotted with comfortable cottages, set down in grassy lawns that bordered on white, clean streets, and the idea of the transformation was an attractive one.

“It looks to me like a perfectly splendid idea,” Agnes admitted. “I wonder what your father would have thought of it.”

“Well,” confessed Bobby a trifle reluctantly, “this very proposition was presented to him several times, I believe, but he always declined to go into it.”

“Then,” decided Agnes, so quickly and emphatically that it startled him, “don’t touch it!”

“Oh, but you see,” he reminded her, “the governor couldn’t go into everything that was offered him, and to this plan he never urged any objection but that he had too many irons in the fire.”

“I wouldn’t touch it,” declared Agnes, and that was her final word in the matter, despite all his arguments. If John Burnit had declined to go into it, no matter for what reason, the plan was not worth considering.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BOBBY SUCCEEDS IN SNAPPING A BARGAIN FROM UNDER SILAS TRIMMER'S NOSE

Still undecided, but carrying seriously the thought that he must overlook no opportunity if he was to prove himself the successful man that his father had so ardently wished him to become, Bobby dropped into the Idlers' Club for lunch, where Nick Allstyne and Payne Winthrop hailed him as one returned from the dead.

"Just the chap," declared Nick. "Stan Rogers has written me that I'm to scrape the regular crowd together and come up to his new Canadian lodge for a hunt. Stag affair, you know. Real sport and no pink-coat pretense."

"Sorry, Nick," said Bobby, pluming himself a trifle upon his steadfastness to duty, "but I know what Stan's stag affairs are like. It would mean two weeks at least, and I could not spare that much time from the city."

"Business again!" groaned Payne in mock dismay. "This grasping greed for gain is blighting the most promising young men of our avaricious country. Why, it's positively shameful, Bobby, when your father must have left you over three million."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand, so far as I'm allowed to inquire just now," corrected Bobby; "and I'm ordered to go into business with that and prove that I'm not such a blithering idiot that I can't be trusted with the rest of it, whatever there is."

"But I thought you'd had your trial by fire and pulled out of it," interposed Nick. "I heard that you had sold your interests or something, and when I saw a new sign over the store I knew that it was true. Sensible thing, I call it."

"Sensible!" winced Bobby. "You're allowing me a mighty pleasant way out of it, but the fact of the matter is that I lost in such a stinging way I'm bound to get back into the game and do nothing else until I win," and he explained how Silas Trimmer had performed upon him a neat and delicate operation in commercial surgery.

They were properly sympathetic; not that they cared much about business, but if Bobby had entered any game whatsoever in which he had been soundly beaten, they could quite understand his desire to stay in that game until he could show points on the right side.

"Nevertheless," Nick urged, "you ought to take a little breathing spell in between."

All through lunch, and through the game of billiards which followed, they strove to make him see the error of his ways, but Bobby was obdurate, and at last they gave him up as a bad job, with the grave prediction that later he would find himself nothing more nor less than a beast of burden. When he left them Bobby was surprised at himself. For a time he had feared that in his declaration of such close attention to business he might be posing; but he found that to miss a stag hunting party, which heretofore had been one of his keenest delights, weighed upon him not at all; found actually that he would far rather stay in the city to engage in the game of finance which was unfolding before him! He came upon this surprising discovery while he was on his way across to a side street, where, on the fourth floor of a store and warehouse building, he let himself in at a wide door with a latch-key and entered the gymnasium of Biff Bates. That gentleman, in trunks, sweater and sandals, was padding all alone around and around the edge of the hall at a steady jog, which, after twenty solid minutes, had left no effect whatever upon his respiration.

"Getting fat as a butcher again," he announced as he trotted steadily around to Bobby, suddenly stopping short with an expansive grin across his wide face and a handshake that it took an athlete to withstand. "Got to cut it down or it'll put me on the blink. What's the best thing you know, chum?"

“How does this hit you?” asked Bobby, taking from his pocket the check Johnson had given him that morning.

Mr. Bates looked at it with his hands behind him.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance,” he said to the slip of paper, nodding profoundly.

“Oh, everybody’s friendly to these,” said Bobby, indorsing the check. “It is for the new gymnasium,” he explained. “Now, partner, turn loose and monopolize the physical training business of this city.”

“Partner!” scorned Mr. Bates. “Look here, old pal, there’s only one way I’ll take this big ticket, and that is that you’ll drag down your split of the profits.”

“But don’t I on this place?” protested Bobby.

“Nit!” retorted Mr. Bates with infinite scorn. “You put them right back into the business, but that don’t go any more. If we start this big joint it’s got to be partners right, see? Or else take back this wealthy handwriting. I don’t guess I want it, anyhow. From past performances you need all the money in the world, and ten thousand simoleons will put a crimp in any wad.”

“No,” laughed Bobby; “you’re saving it for me when you take it. I’ve just read a very nice note, left for me by the governor, that I’ll be a fool and lose anyhow.”

Mr. Bates grinned.

“You will, all right, all right, if you’re going into business,” he admitted, and stuffed the check in the upturned cuff of his sweater. “After these profit-and-loss artists get your goat on all the starts your old man left you, maybe I’ll have to put up the eats and sleeps for you anyhow; huh?” and Mr. Bates laughed with keen enjoyment of this delicately expressed idea. “How are you going to divorce yourself from the rest of it, Bobby?”

“I’m not quite sure,” said Bobby. “You know that big stretch of swamp land, out on the Millberg Road?”

“Where Paddy Dolan fell in and died from drinkin’ too much water? Sure I do.”

“Well, it has been suggested to me that I buy it, drain it, fill it, put in paved streets, cut it up into building lots and sell it.”

“And build it full of these pale yellow shacks that the honest working slob buys with seventeen years of his wages, and then loses the shack?” Biff incredulously wanted to know.

“You guessed wrong, Biff,” laughed Bobby. “Just selling the lots will be enough for me. What do you think of it?”

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Bates thoughtfully. “I know they frame up such stunts and boost ’em strong in the papers, and if any of these real-estate sharps is working just for their healths they’ve been stung from all I’ve seen of ’em. But the main point is, who’s the guy that’s tryin’ to lead you to it?”

“Oh, that part’s all right,” replied Bobby with perfect assurance. “The man who wants me to finance this, and who has already bought some of the land, was one of my father’s right-hand men for nearly thirty years.”

“Then that’s all right,” agreed Mr. Bates. “But say!” he suddenly exclaimed as a new thought struck him; “it’s a wonder this right-mitt mut of your father’s didn’t make the old man fall for it long ago, if it’s such a hot muffin.”

“He did try it,” confessed Bobby with hesitation for the second time that day; “but the governor always complained that he had too many other irons in the fire.”

“He did, *did* he?” Mr. Bates wanted to know, fixing accusing eyes on Bobby. “Then don’t be the fall guy for any other touting. Your old man knew this business dope from Sheepshead Bay to Oakland. You take it from me that this tip ain’t the one best bet.”

Bobby left the gymnasium with a certain degree of dissatisfaction, not only with Mr. Applerod’s scheme but with the fact that wherever he went his father’s business wisdom was thrown into his teeth. That evening, drawn to the atmosphere into which events had plunged him, he dined at the Traders’ Club. As he passed one of the tables Silas Trimmer leered up at him with the circular smile, which,

bisected by a row of yellow teeth and hooded with a bristle of stubby mustache, had now come to aggravate him almost past endurance. To-night it made him approach his dinner with vexation, and, failing to find the man he had sought, he finished hastily. As he went out, Silas Trimmer, though looking straight in his direction, did not seem to be at all aware of Bobby's approach. He was deep in a business discussion with his priggish son-in-law.

"It's a great opportunity," he was loudly insisting. "If I can secure that land I'll drain and improve it and cut it up into building lots. This city is ripe for a suburban boom."

That settled it with Bobby. No matter what arguments there might be to the contrary, if Silas Trimmer had his eye on that piece of property, Bobby wanted it.

Applerod, though eagerness brought him early, had no sooner entered the study next morning than Bobby, who was already dressed for business and who had his machine standing outside the door, met him briskly.

"Keep your hat on, Applerod," he ordered. "We'll go right around and buy the rest of that property at once."

"I thought those figures I left last night would convince you," beamed Mr. Applerod.

There is no describing the delight and pride with which that highly-gratified gentleman followed the energetic young Mr. Burnit to the curb, nor the dignity with which, a few minutes later, he led the way into the office of one Thorne, real-estate dealer.

"Mr. Thorne, Mr. Robert Burnit," said Mr. Applerod, hastening straight to business. "Mr. Burnit has come around to close the deal for that Westmarsh property."

Mr. Thorne was suavity itself as he shook hands with Mr. Burnit, but the most aching regret was in his tone as he spoke.

"I'm very sorry indeed, Mr. Burnit," he stated; "but that property, which, by the way, seems very much in demand, passed out of my hands yesterday afternoon."

"To whom?" Mr. Applerod excitedly wanted to know. "I think you might have let us have time to turn around, Thorne. I spoke about it to you yesterday morning, you know, and said that I felt quite hopeful Mr. Burnit would buy it."

"I know," said Mr. Thorne, politely but coldly; "and I told you at the time we talked about it that I never hold anything in the face of a bona fide offer."

"But who has it?" Bobby insisted, more eager now to get it, since it had slipped away from him, than ever before.

"The larger portion of it, the ninety-two acres adjoining Mr. Applerod's twenty," Mr. Thorne advised him, "was taken up by Miles, Eddy and Company. The north eight acres are owned by Mr. Silas Trimmer, and I am quite positive, from what Mr. Trimmer told me, not two hours later, that this parcel is not for sale."

Bobby's heart sank. Eight acres of that land had already been gobbled up by Silas Trimmer, and, no doubt, that astute and energetic business gentleman was now after the balance.

"Where is the office of Miles, Eddy and Company?" Bobby asked, with a crispness that pleased him tremendously as he used it.

"Twenty-six Plum Street," Mr. Thorne advised him.

"Thanks," said Bobby, and whirled out of the door, followed by the disconsolate Applerod.

At the office of Miles, Eddy and Company better luck awaited them.

Yes, that firm had secured possession of the Westmarsh ninety-two acres. Yes, the property was listed for sale, having been bought strictly for speculative purposes. And its figure? The price was now three hundred dollars per acre.

"I'll take it," said Bobby.

There was positive triumph in his voice as he announced this decision. He would show Silas Trimmer that he was awake at last, that he was not to be beaten in every deal.

“Twenty-seven thousand six hundred dollars,” said Bobby, figuring the amount on a pad he picked up from Mr. Eddy’s desk. “Very well. Allow me to use your telephone a moment. Mr. Chalmers,” directed Bobby when he had his new lawyer on the wire, “kindly get into communication with Miles, Eddy and Company and look up the title on ninety-two acres of Westmarsh property which they have for sale. If the title is clear the price is to be three hundred dollars per acre, for which amount you will have a check, payable to your order, within half an hour.”

Then to Johnson – biting his pen-handle in Bobby’s study and wondering where his principal and Applerod could be at this hour – he telephoned to deliver a check in the amount of twenty-seven thousand six hundred dollars to Mr. Chalmers. Never, since he had been plunged into “business,” had Bobby been so elated with himself as when he walked from the office of Miles, Eddy and Company; and, to keep up the good work, as soon as he reached the hall he turned to Applerod with a crisp, ringing voice, which was the product of that elation.

“Now for an engineer,” he said.

“Already as good as secured,” Mr. Applerod announced, triumphant that every necessity had been anticipated. “Jimmy Platt, son of an old neighbor of mine. Fine, smart boy, and knows all about the Westmarsh proposition. Bless you, I figured on this with him every vacation during his schooling!”

An hour later, Bobby, Mr. Applerod and the secretly jubilant Jimmy Platt had sped out Westmarsh way, and were inspecting the hundred and twelve acres of swamp which the new firm of Burnit and Applerod held between them.

“It’s a fine job,” said the young engineer, coveting anew the tremendous task as he bent upon it an admiring professional eye. “This time next year you won’t recognize the place. It’s a noble thing, Mr. Burnit, to turn an utterly useless stretch of swamp like this into habitable land. Have you secured the entire tract?”

“Unfortunately, no,” Bobby confessed with a frown. “The extreme north eight acres are owned by another party.”

“And when you drain your property,” mused Jimmy, smiling, “you will drain his.”

“Not if I can help it,” declared Bobby emphatically.

“You must come to some arrangement before you begin,” warned the engineer with the severe professional authority common to the quite young. Already, however, he was trying to grow regulation engineer’s whiskers; also he immediately planned to get married upon the proceeds of this big job, which, after years of chimerical dreaming, had become too real, almost, to be believed. “Perhaps you could get the owner to stand his proportionate share of the expense of drainage.”

Bobby smiled at the suggestion but made no other answer. He knew Silas Trimmer, or thought that he did, and the idea of Silas bearing a portion of a huge expense like this, when he could not be forced to shoulder it, struck him as distinctly humorous.

## CHAPTER IX

### AGNES DELIVERS BOBBY A NOTE FROM OLD JOHN BURNIT – IN A GRAY ENVELOPE

That night, at the Traders' Club, Bobby was surprised when Mr. Trimmer walked over to his table and dropped his pudgy trunk and his lean limbs into a chair beside him. His yellow countenance was creased with ingratiating wrinkles, and the smile behind his immovable mustache became of perfectly flawless circumference as his muddy black eyes peered at Bobby through thick spectacles. It seemed to Bobby that there was malice in the wrinkles about those eyes, but the address of Mr. Trimmer was most conciliatory.

"I have a fuss to pick with you, young man," he said with clumsy joviality. "You beat me upon the purchase of that Westmarsh property. Very shrewd, indeed, Mr. Burnit; very like your father. I suppose that now, if I wanted to buy it from you, I'd have to pay you a pretty advance." And he rubbed his hands as if to invite the opening of negotiations.

"It is not for sale," said Bobby, stiffening; "but I might consider a proposition to buy your eight acres." He offered this suggestion with reluctance, for he had no mind to enter transactions of any sort with Silas Trimmer. Still, he recalled to himself with a sudden yielding to duty, business is business, and his father would probably have waved all personal considerations aside at such a point.

"Mine *is* for sale," offered Silas, a trifle too eagerly, Bobby thought.

"How much?" he asked.

"A thousand dollars an acre."

"I won't pay it," declared Bobby.

"Well," replied Mr. Trimmer with a deepening of that circular smile which Bobby now felt sure was maliciously sarcastic, "by the time it is drained it will be worth that to any purchaser."

"Suppose we drain it," suggested Bobby, holding both his temper and his business object remarkably well in hand. "Will you stand your share of the cost?"

"It strikes me as an entirely unnecessary expense at present," said Silas and smiled again.

"Then it won't be drained," snapped Bobby.

Later in the evening he caught Silas laughing at him, his shoulders heaving and every yellow fang protruding. The next morning, keeping earlier hours than ever before in his life, Bobby was waiting outside Jimmy Platt's door when that gentleman started to work.

"The first thing you do," he directed, still with a memory of that aggravating laugh, "I want you to build a cement wall straight across the north end of my Westmarsh property."

Mr. Platt smiled and shook his head.

"Evidently you can not buy that north eight acres, and don't intend to drain it," he commented, stroking sagely the sparse beginning of those slow professional whiskers. "It's your affair, of course, Mr. Burnit, but I am quite sure that spite work in engineering can not be made to pay."

"Nevertheless," insisted Bobby, "we'll build that wall."

The previous afternoon Jimmy Platt had made a scale drawing of the property from city surveys, and now the two went over it carefully, discussing it in various phases for fully an hour, proving estimates of cost and general feasibility. At the conclusion of that time Bobby, well pleased with his own practical manner of looking into things, telephoned to Johnson and asked for Applerod. Mr. Applerod had not yet arrived.

"Very well," said Bobby, "when he comes have him step out and secure suitable offices for us," and this detail despatched he went out with his engineer to make a circuit of the property and study its drainage possibilities.

From profiles that Platt had made they found the swamp at its upper point to be much lower than the level of the river, which ran beyond low hills nearly a mile away; but the river made a detour, including a considerable fall, coming back again to within a scant half-mile of the southern end of the tract, where it was much lower than the marsh. Between marsh and river at the south was an immense hill, too steep and rugged for any practical purpose, and this they scaled.

The west end of the city lay before them crowding close to the river bank, and already its tentacles had crept around and over the hills and on past Westmarsh tract. Young Platt looked from river to swamp, his eyes glowing over the possibilities that lay before them.

“Mr. Burnit,” he announced, after a gravity of thought which he strove his best to make take the place of experience, “you ought to be able to buy this hill very cheaply. Just through here we’ll construct our drainage channel, and with the excavation fill your marsh. It is one of the neatest opportunities I have ever seen, and I want to congratulate you upon your shrewdness in having picked out such a splendid investment.”

This, Bobby felt, was praise from Cæsar, and he was correspondingly elated.

He did not return to the study until in the afternoon. He found Johnson livid with abhorrence of Applerod’s gaudy metamorphosis. That gentleman wore a black frock-coat, a flowered gray waistcoat, pin-striped light trousers, shining new shoes, sported a gold-headed cane, and on the table was the glistening new silk hat which had reposed upon his snow-white curls. His pink face was beaming as he rose to greet his partner.

“Mr. Burnit,” said he, shaking hands with almost trembling gravity and importance, “this day is the apex of my life, and I’m happy to have the son of my old and revered employer as my partner.”

“I hope that it may prove fortunate for both of us,” replied Bobby, repressing his smile at the acquisition of the “make-up” which Applerod had for years aspired to wear legitimately.

Johnson, humped over the desk that had once been Bobby’s father’s, snorted and looked up at the stern portrait of old John Burnit; then he drew from the index-file which he had already placed upon the back of that desk a gray-tinted envelope which he handed to Bobby with a silence that was more eloquent than words. It was inscribed:

### **To my Son if he is Fool Enough to Take up With Applerod’s Swamp Scheme**

Rather impatiently Bobby tore it open, and on the inside he found:

“When shrewd men persist in passing up an apparently cinch proposition, don’t even try to find out what’s the matter with it. In this six-cylinder age no really good opportunity runs loose for twenty-four hours.”

“If the governor had only arranged to leave me his advice beforehand instead of afterward,” Bobby complained to Agnes Elliston that evening, “it might have a chance at me.”

“The blow has fallen,” said Agnes with mock seriousness; “but you must remember that you brought it on yourself. You have complained to *me* of your father’s carefully-laid plans for your course in progressive bankruptcy, and he left in my keeping a letter for you covering that very point.”

“*Not* in a gray envelope, I hope,” groaned Bobby.

“*In* a gray envelope,” she replied firmly, going across to her own desk in the library.

“I had feared,” said Bobby dismally, “that sooner or later I should find he had left letters for me in your charge as well as in Johnson’s, but I had hoped, if that were the case, that at least they would be in pink envelopes.”

She brought to him one of the familiar-looking missives, and Bobby, as he took it, looked speculatively at the big fireplace, in which, as it was early fall, comfortable-looking real logs were crackling.

“Don’t do it, Bobby,” she warned him smiling. “Let’s have the fun together,” and she sat beside him on the couch, snuggling close.

The envelope was addressed:

**To My Son Upon his Complaining that His Father’s Advice Comes too Late!**

He opened it, and together they read:

“No boy will believe green apples hurt him until he gets the stomach-ache. Knowing you to be truly my son, I am sure that if I gave you advice beforehand you would not believe it. This way you will.”

Bobby smiled grimly.

“I remember one painful incident of about the time I put on knickerbockers,” he mused. “Father told me to keep away from a rat-trap that he had bought. Of course I caught my hand in it three minutes afterward. It hurt and I howled, but he only looked at me coldly until at last I asked him to help. He let the thing squeeze while he asked if a rat-trap hurt. I admitted that it did. Would I believe him next time? I acknowledged that I would, and he opened the trap. That was all there was to it except the raw place on my hand; but that night he came to my room after I had gone to bed, and lay beside me and cuddled me in his arms until I went to sleep.”

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