

CHAPTER XVII

THE PENALTIES OF JOURNALISM

Two strange men appeared in Millville--keen, intelligent looking fellows--and applied to Joe Wegg for jobs. Having received a hint from Mr. Merrick, Joe promptly employed the strangers to prepare the old mill for the reception of the machinery for the lighting plant, and both of them engaged board at the hold.

"Thursday," said Hetty, as she watched the pressman that night, "there's a New York detective here--two of them, I think."

"How do you know?"

"I recognized one of them, who used to prowl around the city looking for suspicious characters. They say they've come to work on the new electric plant, but I don't believe it."

Thursday worked a while in silence.

"Mr. Merrick must have sent for them," he suggested.

"Yes. I think he suspects about the bomb."

"He ought to discharge me," said Thursday.

"No; he's man enough to stand by his guns. I like Mr. Merrick. He didn't become a millionaire without having cleverness to back him and I imagine he is clever enough to thwart Skeelty and all his gang."

"Perhaps I ought to go of my own accord," said Thursday.

"Don't do that. When you've found a friend like Mr. Merrick, stick to him. I imagine those detectives are here to protect you, as well as the printing plant. It won't be so easy to set a bomb the next time."

Smith looked at her with a smile. There was a glint of admiration in his eyes.

"You're not a bad sleuth yourself, Hetty," he remarked. "No detective could have acted more wisely and promptly than you did that night."

"It was an accidental discovery, Thursday. Sometimes I sleep."

That was a good deal of conversation for these two to indulge in. Hetty was talkative enough, at times, and so was Thursday Smith, when the humor seized him; but when they were together they said very little. The artist would stroll into the pressroom after the composers had finished their tasks and watch the man make up the forms, lock them, place them on the press and run off the edition. Then he would glance

over the paper while Thursday washed up and put on his coat, after which he accompanied her to the door of her hotel and with a simple "good night" proceeded up the street to his own lodging.

There are surprises in the newspaper business, as our girl journalists were fast discovering. It was a real calamity when Miss Briggs, who had been primarily responsible for getting the Millville Daily Tribune into proper working order, suddenly resigned her position. They had depended a great deal on Miss Briggs, so when the telegraph editor informed them she was going back to New York, they were positively bewildered by her loss. Questions elicited the fact that the woman was nervous over the recent explosion and looked for further trouble from the mill hands. She also suspected the two recent arrivals to be detectives, and the town was so small and so absolutely without police protection that she would not risk her personal safety by remaining longer in it.

"Perhaps I'm homesick," she added. "It's dreadfully lonely here when I'm not at work, and for that reason I've tried to keep busy most of the time. Really, I'm astonished to think I've stood this isolation so long; but now that my mind is made up, I'm going, and it is useless to ask me to remain."

They offered her higher wages, and Mr. Merrick himself had a long talk with her, but all arguments were unavailing.

"What shall we do, Thursday?" asked Patsy in despair. "None of us understands telegraphy."

"Hetty Hewitt does," he suggested.

"Hetty! I'm afraid if I asked her to assume this work she also would leave us."

"No; she'll stay," he said positively.

"But she can't edit the telegraph news. Suppose she took the messages, who would get the night news in shape for the compositors? My uncle would not like to have me remain here until midnight, but even if he would permit it I have not yet mastered the art of condensing the dispatches and selecting just such items as are suitable for the Tribune."

"I'll do that, Miss Doyle," promised Smith.

"I've been paying especial attention to the work of Miss Briggs, for I had an idea she was getting uneasy. And I can take all the day messages, too. If Hetty will look after the wires evenings I can do the rest of the telegraph editor's work, and my own, too."

"Good gracious, Thursday!" exclaimed Patsy; "you'll be running the whole paper, presently."

"No; I can't do the typesetting. But if the Dwyer girls stick to their job--and they seem quite contented here--I'll answer for the rest of the outfit."

"I'm glad the Dwyer girls seem contented," she answered; "but I'm afraid to depend upon anyone now--except you."

He liked that compliment, but said nothing further. After consulting with Louise and Beth, Patsy broached the subject to Hetty, and the artist jumped at the opportunity to do something to occupy her leisure time. The work brought her in contact with Thursday Smith more than ever, and when Miss Briggs departed bag and baggage for New York, the paper suffered little through her defection.

"Newspaper folk," remarked Major Doyle, who was now at the farm enjoying his vacation and worshipping at the shrine of the managing editor in the person of his versatile daughter, "are the most unreliable of any class in the world. So I've often been told, and I believe it. They come and go, by fits and starts, and it's a wonder the erratic rascals never put a paper out of business. But they don't. You never heard of a newspaper that failed to appear just because the mechanical force deserted and left it in the lurch. By hook or crook the paper must be printed--and it always is. So don't worry, mavourneen; when your sallow-faced artist and your hobo jack-of-all-trades desert you, there'll still be a way to keep the Millville Tribune going, and therefore the world will

continue to whirl on its axis."

"I don't believe Thursday will ever desert, and Hetty likes us too well to leave us in the lurch; but suppose those typesetters take a notion to flit?"

"Then," said matter-of-fact Beth, "we'll fill the paper with ready-made plate stuff and telegraph for more compositors."

"That's it," agreed the major, "Those people are always to be had. But don't worry till the time comes. As me grandfather, the commodore, once said: 'Never cross a bridge till ye come to it.'"

"It wasn't your grandfather who originated that remark," said Uncle John.

"It was, sir! I defy you to prove otherwise."

"I'm not certain you ever had a grandfather; and he wasn't a commodore, anyhow."

"Sir!" cried the major, glaring at his brother-in-law, "I have his commission, somewhere--laid away."

"Never mind," said Patsy, cheerfully, for these fierce arguments between her father and uncle--who were devotedly attached to one another--never

disturbed her in the least, "the Tribune's running smoothly just now, and the work is keeping us delightfully busy. I think that never in my life have I enjoyed myself more than since I became a journalist."

"Is the thing paying dividends?" inquired the major.

Arthur laughed.

"I've just been figuring up the last month's expenditures and receipts," said he. "The first month didn't count, for we were getting started."

"And what's the result?" asked the Major.

"Every paper we send out--for one cent--costs us eighty-eight cents to manufacture."

There was a painful silence for a time, broken by the major's suggestive cough.

"I hope," said the old soldier, solemnly, "that the paper's circulation is very small."

"The smallest of any daily paper in all the civilized world, sir," declared the bookkeeper.

"Of course," remarked Louise, with dignity; "that is what distinguishes

it. We did not undertake this publication to make money, and it does not cost us more than we are willing to pay for the exceptional experiences we are gaining."

The major raised his eyebrows; Arthur whistled softly; Uncle John smiled; but with one accord they dropped the disagreeable subject.