

CHAPTER II - JIMMY WILL ACCEPT A POSITION.

Following his graduation he went to New York to visit with one of his classmates for a short time before returning home. He was a very self-satisfied Jimmy, nor who can wonder, since almost from his matriculation there had been constantly dinned into his ears the plaudits of his fellow students. Jimmy Torrance had been the one big outstanding feature of each succeeding class from his freshman to his senior year, and as a junior and senior he had been the acknowledged leader of the student body and as popular a man as the university had ever known.

To his fellows, as well as to himself, he had been a great success--the success of the university--and he and they saw in the future only continued success in whatever vocation he decided to honor with his presence. It was in a mental attitude that had become almost habitual with him, and which was superinduced by these influences, that Jimmy approached the new life that was opening before him. For a while he would play, but in the fall it was his firm intention to settle down to some serious occupation, and it was in this attitude that he opened a letter from his father--the first that he had received since his graduation.

The letter was written on the letterhead of the Beatrice Corn Mills, Incorporated, Beatrice, Nebraska, and in the upper left-hand corner, in small type, appeared "James Torrance, Sr., President and General Manager," and this is what he read:

Dear Jim

You have graduated--I didn't think you would--with honors in football, baseball, prize-fighting, and five thousand dollars in debt. How you got your diploma is beyond me--in my day you would have got the sack. Well, son, I am not surprised nor disappointed--it is what I expected. I know you are clean, though, and that some day you will awaken to the sterner side of life and an appreciation of your responsibilities.

To be an entirely orthodox father I should raise merry hell about your debts and utter inutility, at the same time disinheriting you, but instead I am going to urge you to come home and run in debt here where the cost of living is not so high as in the East--meanwhile praying that your awakening may come while I am on earth to rejoice.

Your affectionate FATHER,

Am enclosing check to cover your debts and present needs.

For a long time the boy sat looking at the letter before him. He reread it once, twice, three times, and with each reading the film of unconscious egotism that had blinded him to his own shortcomings gradually became less opaque, until finally he saw himself as his father must see him. He had come to college for the purpose of fitting himself to succeed in some particular way in the stern battle of life which must follow his graduation; for, though his father had ample means to support him in indolence, Jimmy had never even momentarily considered such an eventuality.

In weighing his assets now he discovered that he had probably as excellent a conception of gridiron strategy and tactics as any man in America; that as a boxer he occupied a position in the forefront of amateur ranks; and he was quite positive that out-side of the major leagues there was not a better first baseman.

But in the last few minutes there had dawned upon him the realization that none of these accomplishments was greatly in demand in the business world. Jimmy spent a very blue and unhappy hour, and then slowly his natural optimism reasserted itself, and with it came the realization of his youth and strength and inherent ability, which, without egotism, he might claim.

"And then, too," he mused, "I have my diploma. I am a college graduate, and that must mean something. If dad had only reproached me or threatened some condign punishment I don't believe I should feel half as badly as I do. But every line of that letter breathes disappointment in me; and yet, God bless him, he tells me to come home and spend his money there. Not on your life! If he won't disinherit me, I am going to disinherit myself. I am going to make him proud of me. He's the best dad a fellow ever had, and I am going to show him that I appreciate him."

And so he sat down and wrote his father this reply:

DEAR DAD:

I have your letter and check. You may not believe it, but the former is worth more to me than the latter. Not, however, that I spurn the check, which it was just like you to send without a lot of grumbling and reproaches, even if I do deserve them.

Your letter shows me what a rotten mess I have made of myself. I'm not going to hand you a lot of mush, dad, but I want to try to do something that will give you reason to at least have hopes of rejoicing before I come home again. If I fail I'll come home anyway, and then neither one of us will have any doubt but what you will have to support me for the rest of my life. However, I don't intend to fail, and one of these days I will bob up all serene as president of a bank or a glue factory. In the mean time I'll keep you posted as to my whereabouts, but don't send me another cent until I ask for it; and when I do you will know that I have failed.

Tell mother that I will write her in a day or two, probably from Chicago, as I have always had an idea that that was one burg where I could make good.

With lots of love to you all,

Your affectionate

SON.

It was a hot July day that James Torrance, Jr., alighted from the Twentieth Century Limited at the La Salle Street Station, and, entering a cab, directed that he be driven to a small hotel; "for," he soliloquized, "I might as well start economizing at once, as it might be several days before I land a job such as I want," in voicing which sentiments he spoke with the tongues of the prophets.

Jimmy had many friends in Chicago with whom, upon the occasion of numerous previous visits to the Western metropolis, he had spent many hilarious and expensive hours, but now he had come upon the serious business of life, and there moved within him a strong determination to win financial success without recourse to the influence of rich and powerful acquaintances.

Since the first crushing blow that his father's letter had dealt his egotism, Jimmy's self-esteem had been gradually returning, though along new and more practical lines. His self-assurance was formed in a similar mold to those of all his other salient characteristics, and these conformed to his physical proportions, for physically, mentally and morally Jimmy Torrance was big; not that he was noticeably taller than other men or his features more than ordinarily attractive, but there was something so well balanced and harmonious in all the proportions of his frame and features as to almost invariably compel a second glance from even a casual observer, especially if the casual observer happened to be in the nonessential creation class.

And so Jimmy, having had plenty of opportunity to commune with himself during the journey from New York, was confident that there were many opportunities awaiting him in Chicago. He remembered distinctly of having read somewhere

that the growing need of big business concerns was competent executive material--that there were fewer big men than there were big jobs--and that if such was the case all that remained to be done was to connect himself with the particular big job that suited him.

In the lobby of the hotel he bought several of the daily papers, and after reaching his room he started perusing the "Help Wanted" columns. Immediately he was impressed and elated by the discovery that there were plenty of jobs, and that a satisfactory percentage of them appeared to be big jobs. There were so many, however, that appealed to him as excellent possibilities that he saw it would be impossible to apply for each and every one; and then it occurred to him that he might occupy a more strategic position in the negotiations preceding his acceptance of a position if his future employer came to him first, rather than should he be the one to apply for the position.

And so he decided the wisest plan would be to insert an ad in the "Situations Wanted" column, and then from the replies select those which most appealed to him; in other words, he would choose from the cream of those who desired the services of such a man as himself rather than risk the chance of obtaining a less profitable position through undue haste in seizing upon the first opening advertised.

Having reached this decision, and following his habitual custom, he permitted no grass to grow beneath his feet. Writing out an ad, he reviewed it carefully, compared it with others that he saw upon the printed page, made a few changes, rewrote it, and then descended to the lobby, where he called a cab and was driven to the office of one of the area's metropolitan morning newspapers.

Jimmy felt very important as he passed through the massive doorway into the great general offices of the newspaper. Of course, he didn't exactly expect that he would be ushered into the presence of the president or business manager, or that even the advertising manager would necessarily have to pass upon his copy, but there was within him a certain sensation that at that instant something was

transpiring that in later years would be a matter of great moment, and he was really very sorry for the publishers of the newspaper that they did not know who it was who was inserting an ad in their Situations Wanted column.

He could not help but watch the face of the young man who received his ad and counted the words, as he was sure that the clerk's facial expression would betray his excitement. It was a great moment for Jimmy Torrance. He realized that it was probably the greatest moment of his life--that here Jimmy Torrance ceased to be, and James Torrance, Jr., Esq., began his career. But though he carefully watched the face of the clerk, he was finally forced to admit that the young man possessed wonderful control over his facial expression.

"That bird has a regular poker-face," mused Jimmy; "never batted an eye," and paying for his ad he pocketed the change and walked out.

"Let's see," he figured; "it will be in tomorrow morning's edition. The tired business man will read it either at breakfast or after he reaches his office. I understand that there are three million people here in Chicago. Out of that three million it is safe to assume that one million will read my advertisement, and of that one-million there must be at least one thousand who have responsible positions which are, at present, inadequately filled.

"Of course, the truth of the matter is that there are probably tens of thousands of such positions, but to be conservative I will assume that there are only one thousand, and reducing it still further to almost an absurdity, I will figure that only ten per cent of those reply to my advertisement. In other words, at the lowest possible estimate I should have one hundred replies on the first day. I knew it was foolish to run it for three days, but the fellow insisted that that was the proper way to do, as I got a lower rate.

"By taking it for three days, however, it doesn't seem right to make so many busy men waste their time answering the ad when I shall doubtless find a satisfactory position the first day."