

CHAPTER IV - JIMMY HUNTS A JOB.

Once again Jimmy walked out onto Madison Street, and, turning to his right, dropped into a continuous vaudeville show in an attempt to coax his spirits back to somewhere near their normal high-water mark. Upon the next day he again haunted the newspaper office without reward, and again upon the third day with similar results. To say that Jimmy was dumfounded would be but a futile description of his mental state. It was simply beyond him to conceive that in one of the largest cities in the world, the center of a thriving district of fifty million souls, there was no business man with sufficient acumen to realize how badly he needed James Torrance, Jr., to conduct his business for him successfully.

With the close of the fourth day, and no reply, Jimmy was thoroughly exasperated. The kindly clerk, who by this time had taken a personal interest in this steadiest of customers, suggested that Jimmy try applying for positions advertised in the Help Wanted column, and this he decided to do.

There were only two concerns advertising for general managers in the issue which Jimmy scanned; one ad called for an experienced executive to assume the general management of an old established sash, door and blind factory; the other insisted upon a man with mail-order experience to take charge of the mail-order department of a large department store.

Neither of these were precisely what Jimmy had hoped for, his preference really being for the general management of an automobile manufactory or possibly something in the airplane line. Sash, door and blind sounded extremely prosaic and uninteresting to Mr. Torrance. The mail-order proposition, while possibly more interesting, struck him as being too trifling and unimportant.

"However," he thought, "it will do no harm to have a talk with these people, and possibly I might even consider giving one of them a trial."

And so, calling a taxi, he drove out onto the west side where, in a dingy and squalid neighborhood, the taxi stopped in front of a grimy unpainted three-story brick building, from which a great deal of noise and dust were issuing. Jimmy found the office on the second floor, after ascending a narrow, dark, and dirty stairway. Jimmy's experience of manufacturing plants was extremely limited, but he needed no experience as he entered the room to see that he was in a busy office of a busy plant. Everything about the office was plain and rather dingy, but there were a great many file clerks and typists and considerable bustling about.

After stating his business to a young lady who sat behind a switchboard, upon the front of which was the word "Information," and waiting while she communicated with an inner office over the telephone, he was directed in the direction of a glass partition at the opposite end of the room--a partition in which there were doors at intervals, and upon each door a name.

He had been told that Mr. Brown would see him, and rapping upon the door bearing that name he was bid to enter, and a moment later found himself in the presence of a middle-aged man whose every gesture and movement was charged with suppressed nerve energy.

As Jimmy entered the man was reading a letter. He finished it quickly, slapped it into a tray, and wheeled in his chair toward his caller.

"Well?" he snapped, as Jimmy approached him.

"I came in reply to your advertisement for a general manager," announced Jimmy confidently.

The man sized him up quickly from head to foot. His eyes narrowed and his brows contracted.

"What experience you had? Who you been with, and how many years?" He snapped the questions at Jimmy with the rapidity of machine-gun fire.

"I have the necessary ability," replied Jimmy, "to manage your business."

"How many years have you had in the sash, door and blind business?" snapped Mr. Brown.

"I have never had any experience in the sash, door and blind business," replied Jimmy. "I didn't come here to make sash, doors and blinds. I came here to manage your business."

Mr. Brown half rose from his chair. His eyes opened a little wider than normal. "What the--" he started; and then, "Well, of all the--" Once again he found it impossible to go on. "You came here to manage a sash, door and blind factory, and don't know anything about the business! Well, of all--"

"I assumed," said Jimmy, "that what you wanted in a general manager was executive ability, and that's what I have."

"What you have," replied Mr. Brown, "is a hell of a crust. Now, run along, young fellow. I am a very busy man--and don't forget to close the door after you as you go out."

Jimmy did not forget to close the door. As he walked the length of the interminable room between rows of desks, before which were seated young men and young women, all of whom Jimmy thought were staring at him, he could feel the deep crimson burning upward from his collar to the roots of his hair.

Never before in his life had Jimmy's self-esteem received such a tremendous jolt. He was still blushing when he reached his cab, and as he drove back toward the Loop he could feel successive hot waves suffuse his countenance at each recollection of the humiliating scene through which he had just passed.

It was not until the next day that Jimmy had sufficiently reestablished his self-confidence to permit him to seek out the party who wished a mail-order manager, and while in this instance he met with very pleasant and gentlemanly treatment, his application was no less definitely turned down.

For a month Jimmy trailed one job after another. At the end of the first week he decided that the street-cars and sole leather were less expensive than taxicabs, as his funds were running perilously low; and he also lowered his aspirations successively from general managerships through departmental heads, assistants thereto, office managers, assistant office managers, and various other vocations, all with the same result; discovering meanwhile that experience, while possibly not essential as some of the ads stated, was usually the rock upon which his hopes were dashed.

He also learned something else which surprised him greatly: that rather than being an aid to his securing employment, his college education was a drawback, several men telling him bluntly that they had no vacancies for rah-rah boys.

At the end of the second week Jimmy had moved from his hotel to a still less expensive one, and a week later to a cheap boarding-house on the north side. At first he had written his father and his mother regularly, but now he found it

difficult to write them at all. Toward the middle of the fourth week Jimmy had reached a point where he applied for a position as office-boy.

"I'll be damned if I'm going to quit," he said to himself, "if I have to turn street-sweeper. There must be some job here in the city that I am capable of filling, and I'm pretty sure that I can at least get a job as office-boy."

And so he presented himself to the office manager of a life-insurance company that had advertised such a vacancy. A very kindly gentleman interviewed him.

"What experience have you had?" he asked.

Jimmy looked at him aghast.

"Do I have to have experience to be an office-boy?" he asked.

"Well, of course," replied the gentleman, "it is not essential, but it is preferable. I already have applications from a dozen or more fellows, half of whom have had experience, and one in particular, whom I have about decided to employ, held a similar position with another life-insurance company."

Jimmy rose. "Good day," he said, and walked out.

That day he ate no lunch, but he had discovered a place where an abundance might be had for twenty-five cents if one knew how to order and ordered judiciously. And so to this place he repaired for his dinner. Perched upon a high stool, he filled at least a corner of the aching void within.

Sitting in his room that night he took account of his assets and his liabilities. His room rent was paid until Saturday and this was Thursday, and in his pocket were one dollar and sixty cents. Opening his trunk, he drew forth a sheet of paper and an envelope, and, clearing the top of the rickety little table which stood at the head of his bed, he sat down on the soiled counterpane and wrote a letter.

DEAR DAD:

I guess I'm through, I have tried and failed. It is hard to admit it, but I guess I'll have to. If you will send me the price I'll come home.
With love, Jim

Slowly he folded the letter and inserted it in the envelope, his face mirroring an utter dejection such as Jimmy Torraine had never before experienced in his life.

"Failure," he muttered, "unutterable failure."

Taking his hat, he walked down the creaking stairway, with its threadbare carpet, and out onto the street to post his letter.