## CHAPTER XXXVI

It was in the course of the "lessons" that he realized that he had always argued that the best way to do business was to do it face to face with people. To stay in England, and let another chap make your bargains for you in France or Germany or some other outlandish place, where frog-eating foreigners ran loose, was a fool's trick. He'd said it often enough. "Get your eye on 'em, and let them know you've got it on them, and they'd soon find out they were dealing with Lancashire, and not with foreign knaves and nincompoops." So, when it became necessary to deal with France, Little Ann packed him up neatly, so to speak, and in the role of obedient secretarial companion took him to that country, having for weeks beforehand mentally confronted the endless complications attending the step. She knew, in the first place, what the effect of the French language would be upon his temper: that it would present itself to him as a wall deliberately built by the entire nation as a means of concealing a deep duplicity the sole object of which was the baffling, thwarting, and undoing of Englishmen, from whom it wished to wrest their honest rights. Apoplexy becoming imminent, as a result of his impotent rage during their first few days in Paris, she paid a private visit to a traveler's agency, and after careful inquiry discovered that it was not impossible to secure the attendance and service of a well-mannered young man who spoke most of the languages employed by most of the inhabitants of the globe. She even found that she might choose from a number of such

persons, and she therefore selected with great care.

"One that's got a good temper, and isn't easy irritated," she said to herself, in summing up the aspirants, "but not one that's easy-tempered because he's silly. He must have plenty of common sense as well as be willing to do what he's told."

When her father discovered that he himself had been considering the desirability of engaging the services of such a person, and had, indeed already, in a way, expressed his intention of sending her to "the agency chap" to look him up, she was greatly relieved.

"I can try to teach him what you've taught me, Father," she said, "and of course he'll learn just by being with you."

The assistant engaged was a hungry young student who had for weeks, through ill luck, been endeavoring to return with some courage the gaze of starvation, which had been staring him in the face.

His name was Dudevant, and with desperate struggles he had educated himself highly, having cherished literary ambitions from his infancy. At this juncture it had become imperative that he should, for a few months at least, obtain food. Ann had chosen well by instinct. His speech had told her that he was intelligent, his eyes had told her that he would do anything on earth to earn his living.

From the time of his advent, Joseph Hutchinson had become calmer and had ceased to be in peril of apoplectic seizure. Foreign nations became less iniquitous and dangerous, foreign languages were less of a barrier, easier to understand. A pleasing impression that through great facility he had gained a fair practical knowledge of French, German, and Italian, supported and exhilarated him immensely.

"It's right-down wonderful how a chap gets to understand these fellows' lingo after he's listened to it a bit," he announced to Ann. "I wouldn't have believed it of myself that I could see into it as quick as I have. I couldn't say as I understand everything they say just when they're saying it; but I understand it right enough when I've had time to translate like. If foreigners didn't talk so fast and run their words one into another, and jabber as if their mouths was full of puddin', it'd be easier for them as is English. Now, there's `wee' and `nong.' I know 'em whenever I hear 'em, and that's a good bit of help."

"Yes," answered Ann, "of course that's the chief thing you want to know in business, whether a person is going to say `yes' or `no.'"

He began to say "wee" and "nong" at meals, and once broke forth "Passy mor le burr" in a tone so casually Parisian that Ann was frightened, because she did not understand immediately, and also because she saw looming up before her a future made perilous by the sudden interjection of unexpected foreign phrases it would be incumbent upon

her and Dudevant to comprehend instantaneously without invidious hesitation.

"Don't you understand? Pass the butter. Don't you understand a bit o' French like that?" he exclaimed irritatedly. "Buy yourself one o' these books full of easy sentences and learn some of 'em, lass. You oughtn't to be travelin' about with your father in foreign countries and learnin' nothin'. It's not every lass that's gettin' your advantages."

Ann had not mentioned the fact that she spent most of her rare leisure moments in profound study of phrase-books and grammars, which she kept in her trunk and gave her attention to before she got up in the morning, after she went to her room at night, and usually while she was dressing. You can keep a book open before you when you are brushing your hair. Dudevant gave her a lesson or so whenever time allowed. She was as quick to learn as her father thought he was, and she was desperately determined. It was really not long before she understood much more than "wee and nong" when she was present at a business interview.

"You are a wonderful young lady," Dudevant said, with that well-known yearning in his eyes. "You are most wonderful."

"She's just a wonder," Mrs. Bowse and her boarders had said. And the respectful yearning in the young Frenchman's eyes and voice were well

known to her because she had seen it often before, and remembered it, in Jem Bowles and Julius Steinberger. That this young man had without an hour of delay fallen abjectly in love with her was a circumstance with which she dealt after her own inimitably kind and undeleterious method, which in itself was an education to any amorous youth.

"I can understand all you tell me," she said when he reached the point of confiding his hard past to her. "I can understand it because I knew some one who had to fight for himself just that way, only perhaps it was harder because he wasn't educated as you are."

"Did he--confide in you?" Dudevant ventured, with delicate hesitation. "You are so kind I am sure he did, Mademoiselle."

"He told me about it because he knew I wanted to hear," she answered. "I was very fond of him," she added, and her kind gravity was quite unshaded by any embarrassment. "I was right-down fond of him."

His emotion rendered him for a moment indiscreet, to her immediate realization and regret, as was evident by his breaking off in the midst of his question.

"And now--are you?"

"Yes, I always shall be, Mr. Dudevant."

His adoration naturally only deepened itself as all hope at once receded, as it could not but recede before the absolute pellucid truth of her.

"However much he likes me, he will get over it in time. People do, when they know how things stand," she was thinking, with maternal sympathy.

It did him no bitter harm to help her with her efforts at learning what she most needed, and he found her intelligence and modest power of concentration remarkable. A singularly clear knowledge of her own specialized requirements was a practical background to them both. She had no desire to shine; she was merely steadily bent on acquiring as immediately as possible a comprehension of nouns, verbs, and phrases that would be useful to her father. The manner in which she applied herself, and assimilated what it was her quietly fixed intention to assimilate, bespoke her possession of a brain the powers of which being concentrated on large affairs might have accomplished almost startling results. There was, however, nothing startling in her intentions, and ambition did not touch her. Yet, as she went with Hutchinson from one country to another, more than one man of affairs had it borne in upon him that her young slimness and her silence represented an unanticipated knowledge of points under discussion which might wisely be considered as a factor in all decisions for or against. To realize that a soft-cheeked, child-eyed girl was an element to regard privately in discussions connected with the sale of,

or the royalties paid on, a valuable patent appeared in some minds to be a situation not without flavor. She was the kind of little person a man naturally made love to, and a girl who was made love to in a clever manner frequently became amenable to reason, and might be persuaded to use her influence in the direction most desired. But such male financiers as began with this idea discovered that they had been led into errors of judgment through lack of familiarity with the variations of type. One personable young man of title, who had just been disappointed in a desirable marriage with a fortune, being made aware that the invention was likely to arrive at amazing results, was sufficiently rash to approach Mr. Hutchinson with formal proposals. Having a truly British respect for the lofty in place, and not being sufficiently familiar with titled personages to discriminate swiftly between the large and the small, Joseph Hutchinson was somewhat unduly elated.

"The chap's a count, lass," he said. "Tha'u'd go back to Manchester a countess."

"I've heard they're nearly all counts in these countries," commented Ann. "And there's countesses that have to do their own washing, in a manner of speaking. You send him to me, Father."

When the young man came, and compared the fine little nose of Miss Hutchinson with the large and bony structure dominating the countenance of the German heiress he had lost, also when he gazed into

the clearness of the infantile blue eyes, his spirits rose. He felt himself en veine; he was equal to attacking the situation. He felt that he approached it with alluring and chivalric delicacy. He almost believed all that he said.

But the pellucid blueness of the gaze that met his was confusingly unstirred by any shade of suitable timidity or emotion. There was something in the lovely, sedate little creature, something so undisturbed and matter of fact, that it frightened him, because he suddenly felt like a fool whose folly had been found out.

"That's downright silly," remarked Little Ann, not allowing him to escape from her glance, which unhesitatingly summed up him and his situation. "And you know it is. You don't know anything about me, and you wouldn't like me if you did. And I shouldn't like you. We're too different. Please go away, and don't say anything more about it. I shouldn't have patience to talk it over."

"Father," she said that night, "if ever I get married at all, there's only one person I'm going to marry. You know that." And she would say no more.

By the time they returned to England, the placing of the invention in divers countries had been arranged in a manner which gave assurance of a fortune for its owners on a foundation not likely to have established itself in more adverse circumstances. Mr. Hutchinson had

really driven some admirable bargains, and had secured advantages which to his last hour he would believe could have been achieved only by Lancashire shrewdness and Lancashire ability to "see as far through a mile-stone as most chaps, an' a bit farther." The way in which he had never allowed himself to be "done" caused him at times to chuckle himself almost purple with self-congratulation.

"They got to know what they was dealing with, them chaps. They was sharp, but Joe was a bit sharper," he would say.

They found letters waiting for them when they reached London.

"There's one fro' thy grandmother," Hutchinson said, in dealing out the package. "She's written to thee pretty steady for an old un."

This was true. Letters from her had followed them from one place to another. This was a thick one in an envelop of good size.

"Aren't tha going to read it? " he asked.

"Not till you've had your dinner, Father. You've had a long day of it with that channel at the end. I want to see you comfortable with your pipe."

The hotel was a good one, and the dinner was good. Joseph Hutchinson enjoyed it with the appetite of a robust man who has had time to get

over a not too pleasant crossing. When he had settled down into a stout easy-chair with the pipe, he drew a long and comfortable breath as he looked about the room.

"Eh, Ann, lass," he said, "thy mother 'd be fine an' set up if she could see aw this. Us having the best that's to be had, an' knowin' we can have it to the end of our lives, that's what it's come to, tha knows. No more third-class railway-carriages for you and me. No more `commercial' an' `temperance' hotels. Th' first cut's what we can have--th' upper cut. Eh, eh, but it's a good day for a man when he's begun to be appreciated as he should be."

"It's a good day for those that love him," said Little Ann. "And I dare say mother knows every bit about it."

"I dare say she does," admitted Hutchinson, with tender lenience. "She was one o' them as believed that way. And I never knowed her to be wrong in aught else, so I'm ready to give in as she was reet about that. Good lass she was, good lass."

He had fallen into a contented and utterly comfortable doze in his chair when Ann sat down to read her grandmother's letter. The old woman always wrote at length, giving many details and recording village events with shrewd realistic touches. Throughout their journeyings, Ann had been followed by a record of the estate and neighborhood of Temple Barholm which had lacked nothing of atmosphere.

She had known what the new lord of the manor did, what people said, what the attitude of the gentry had become; that the visit of the Countess of Mallowe and her daughter had extended itself until curiosity and amusement had ceased to comment, and passively awaited results. She had heard of Miss Alicia and her reincarnation, and knew much of the story of the Duke of Stone, whose reputation as a "dommed clever owd chap" had earned for him a sort of awed popularity. There had been many "ladies." The new Temple Barholm had boldly sought them out and faced them in their strongholds with the manner of one who would confront the worst and who revealed no tendency to flinch. The one at Stone Hover with the "pretty color" and the one with the dimples had appeared frequently upon the scene. Then there had been Lady Joan Fayre, who had lived at his elbow, sitting at his table, driving in his carriages with the air of cold aloofness which the cottagers "could na abide an' had no patience wi'." She had sometimes sat and wondered and wondered about things, and sometimes had flushed daisy-red instead of daisy-pink; and sometimes she had turned rather pale and closed her soft mouth firmly. But, though she had written twice a week to her grandmother, she had recorded principally the successes and complexities of the invention, and had asked very few questions. Old Mrs. Hutchinson would tell her all she must know, and her choice of revelation would be made with a far-sightedness which needed no stimulus of questioning. The letter she had found awaiting her had been long on its way, having missed her at point after point and followed her at last to London. It looked and felt thick and solid in its envelop. Little Ann opened it, stirred by the suggestion of

quickened pulse-beats with which she had become familiar. As she bent over it she looked sweetly flushed and warmed.

Joseph Hutchinson's doze had almost deepened into sleep when he was awakened by the touch of her hand on his shoulder. She was standing by him, holding some sheets of her grandmother's letter, and several other sheets were lying on the table. Something had occurred which had changed her quiet look.

"Has aught happened to your grandmother?" he asked.

"No, Father, but this letter that's been following me from one place to another has got some queer news in it."

"What's up, lass? Tha looks as if summat was up."

"The thing that's happened has given me a great deal to think of," was her answer. "It's about Mr. Temple Barholm and Mr. Strangeways."

He became wide-awake at once, sitting up and turning in his chair in testy anxiety.

"Now, now," he exclaimed, "I hope that cracked chap's not gone out an' out mad an' done some mischief. I towd Temple Barholm it was a foolish

thing to do, taking all that trouble about him. Has he set fire to th' house or has he knocked th' poor lad on th' head?"

"No, he hasn't, Father. He's disappeared, and Mr. Temple Barholm's disappeared, too."

"Disappeared?" Hutchinson almost shouted. "What for, i' the Lord's name?"

"Nobody knows for certain, and people are talking wild. The village is all upset, and all sorts of silly things are being said."

"What sort o' things?"

"You know what servants at big houses are--how they hear bits of talk and make much of it," she explained. "They've been curious and chattering among themselves about Mr. Strangeways from the first. It was Burrill that said he believed he was some relation that was being hid away for some good reason. One night Mr. Temple Barholm and Captain Palliser were having a long talk together, and Burrill was about--"

"Aye, he'd be about if he thought there was a chance of him hearing summat as was none of his business," jerked out Hutchinson, irately.

"They were talking about Mr. Strangeways, and Burrill heard Captain

Palliser getting angry; and as he stepped near the door he heard him say out loud that he could swear in any court of justice that the man he had seen at the west room window--it's a startling thing, Father--was Mr. James Temple Barholm." For the moment her face was pale.

Hereupon Hutchinson sprang up.

"What!" His second shout was louder than his first. "Th' liar! Th' chap's dead, an' he knows it. Th' dommed mischief-makin' liar!"

Her eyes were clear and speculatively thoughtful, notwithstanding her lack of color.

"There have been people that have been thought dead that have come back to their friends alive. It's happened many a time," she said. "It wouldn't be so strange for a man that had no friends to be lost in a wild, far-off place where there was neither law nor order, and where every man was fighting for his own life and the gold he was mad after. Particularly a man that was shamed and desperate and wanted to hide himself. And, most of all, it would be easy, if he was like Mr. Strangeways, and couldn't remember, and had lost himself."

As her father listened, the angry redness of his countenance moderated its hue. His eyes gradually began to question and his under jaw fell slightly.

"Si' thee, lass," he broke out huskily, "does that mean to say tha believes it?"

"It's not often you can believe what you don't know," she answered. "I don't know anything about it. There's just one thing I believe, because I know it. I believe what grandmother does. Read that."

She handed him the final sheet of old Mrs. Hutchinson's letter. It was written with very black ink and in an astonishingly bold and clear hand. It was easy to read the sentences with which she ended.

There's a lot said. There's always more saying than doing. But it's right-down funny to see how the lad has made hard and fast friends just going about in his queer way, and no one knowing how he did it. I like him myself. He's one of those you needn't ask questions about. If there's anything said that isn't to his credit, it's not true. There's no ifs, buts, or ands about that, Ann.

Little Ann herself read the words as her father read them.

"That's the thing I believe, because I know it," was all she said.

"It's the thing I'd swear to mysel'," her father answered bluffly. "But, by Judd--"

She gave him a little push and spoke to him in homely Lancashire phrasing, and with some soft unsteadiness of voice.

"Sit thee down, Father love," she said, "and let me sit on thy knee."

He sat down with emotional readiness, and she sat on his stout knee like a child. It was a thing she did in tender or troubled moments as much in these days as she had done when she was six or seven. Her little lightness and soft young ways made it the most natural thing in the world, as well as the prettiest. She had always sat on his knee in the hours when he had been most discouraged over the invention. She had known it made him feel as though he were taking care of her, and as though she depended utterly on him to steady the foundations of her world. What could such a little bit of a lass do without "a father"?

"It's upset thee, lass," he said. "It's upset thee."

He saw her slim hands curl themselves into small, firm fists as they rested on her lap.

"I can't bear to think that ill can be said of him, even by a wastrel like Captain Palliser," she said. "He's MINE."

It made him fumble caressingly at her big knot of soft red hair.

"Thine, is he?" he said. "Thine! Eh, but tha did say that just like thy mother would ha' said it; tha brings the heart i' my throat now and again. That chap's i' luck, I can tell him--same as I was once."

"He's mine now, whatever happens," she went on, with a firmness which no skeptic would have squandered time in the folly of hoping to shake. "He's done what I told him to do, and it's ME he wants. He's found out for himself, and so have I. He can have me the minute he wants me--the very minute."

"He can?" said Hutchinson. "That settles it. I believe tha'd rather take him when he was i' trouble than when he was out of it. Same as tha'd rather take him i' a flat in Harlem on fifteen dollar a week than on fifteen hundred."

"Yes, Father, I would. It'd give me more to do for him."

"Eh, eh," he grunted tenderly, "thy mother again. I used to tell her as the only thing she had agen me was that I never got i' jail so she could get me out an' stand up for me after it. There's only one thing worrits me a bit: I wish the lad hadn't gone away."

"I've thought that out, though I've not had much time to reason about things," said Little Ann. "If he's gone away, he's gone to get

something; and whatever it happens to be, he'll be likely to bring it back with him, Father."