

SO BIG



By EDNA FERBER

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Chapter XII

In town Dirk lived in a large front room and above on the third floor of a handsome old-fashioned three-story-and-basement house. He used the front room as a living room, the alcove as a bedroom. He and Selma had furnished it together, discarding all of the room's original belongings except the bed, a table, and one fat comfortable faded old armchair whose brocade surface hinted a past grandeur. When he had got his books ranged in open shelves along one wall, soft-shaded lamps on table and desk, the place looked more than livable; lived in. During the process of furnishing Selma got into the way of coming into town for a day or two to prowling the auction rooms and the second-hand stores. She had a genius for this sort of thing; hated the spick-and-span varnish and veneer of the new furniture to be got in the regular way.

She enjoyed these rare trips into town; made a holiday of them. Dirk would take her to the theater and she would sit entranced. Strangely enough, considering the lack of what the world calls romance and adventure in her life, she did not like the motion pictures. "All the difference in the world," she would say, "between the movies and the thrill I get out of a play at the theater. My, yes! Like fooling with paper dolls when you could be playing with a real live baby."

The day was marvelously mild for March in Chicago. Spring, usually so coy in this region, had flung herself at them head first. As the massive revolving door of Dirk's office building fanned him into the street he saw Paula in her long low sporting roadster at the curb. She was dressed in black. All feminine fashionable and middle-class Chicago was dressed in black. All feminine fashionable and middle-class America was dressed in black. Two years of war had robbed Paris of its husbands, brothers, sons. All Paris walked in black. America, untouched, gayly borrowed the smart habiliments of mourning and now Michigan boulevard and Fifth avenue walked demurely in the gloom of crepe and chiffon; black hats, black gloves, black slippers. Only black was "good" this year.

Paula smiled up at him, patted the leather seat beside her with one hand that was absurdly thick-fingered in its fitted glove. "It's cold driving. Button up tight. Where'll we stop for your bag?" He climbed into the seat beside her. Her manipulation of the wheel was viceroyal. The roadster slid in and out of traffic like a fluid thing, an enamel stream, silent as a swift current in a river. When his house was reached, "Ta coming up," she said. "I suppose you haven't any tea?" "Gosh, no! What do you think I am? A young man in an English card?"

"Now, don't be provincial and Chicagoish, Dirk." They climbed the three flights of stairs. She looked about. Her glance was not disapproving. "This isn't so bad. Who did it, she did. Very nice. But of course you ought to have your own smart little apartment with a Jap to do you up. To do that for you, for example?" "Yes, arn't. He was packing his things—not throwing clothes into it, but folding them delfly, neatly, as the son of a wise mother packs. "My salary just about keep him in white sea house coats."

"Ta going to send you some things for your room, Dirk?" "For God's sake don't!" "Why not?" "Two kinds of women in the world. I learned that at college. Those who don't see things for their rooms and those that don't." "You're very rude." "You asked me. There! I'm all right. He snipped the lock of his bag. "I'm sorry I can't give you anything. Haven't a thing. Not even a glass of wine and a—what is it they say in Europe?—oh, yeh—a biscuit."

"The roadster again Paula maintained a serene and steady speed for the remainder of the drive. "We call the place Stormwood," Paula told him. "And nobody outside the near family knows how fitting that. Don't scowl. I'm not going to tell you my marital woes. And don't you ask for it. . . . How's the butter?" "You don't like it? The work?" "I like it well enough, only—well, we see we leave the university architectural course thinking we're all going to be Stanford Whites or Cass Gillems, tossing off a Woolworth building and making ourselves famous overnight. I've spent all yesterday and today planning a drygoods box that's going up on the corner of Milwaukee

avenue and Ashland, west."

"And ten years from now?"

"Ten years from now maybe they'll let me do the plans for the drygoods box all alone."

"Why don't you drop it?"

He was startled. "Drop it! How do you mean?"

"Chuck it. Do something that will bring you quick results. This isn't an age of waiting. Suppose, twenty years from now, you do plan a grand Gothic office building to grace this new and glorified Michigan boulevard they're always shouting about! You'll be a middle-aged man living in a middle-class house in a middle-class suburb with a middle-class wife."

"Maybe"—slightly nettled.

They turned in at the gates of Stormwood. A final turn of the drive. An avenue of trees. A house, massive, pillared, porticoed. The door opened as they drew up at the entrance. A maid in cap and apron stood in the doorway. A man appeared at the side of the car, coming seemingly from nowhere, greeted Paula civilly and drove the car off. The glow of an open fire in the hall welcomed them. "He'll bring up your bag," said Paula. "How're the babies, Anna? Has Mr. Storm got here?"

"He telephoned, Mrs. Storm. He says he won't be out till late—maybe ten or after. Anyway, you're not to wait dinner!"

Paula, from being the limp, expert, fearless driver of the high-powered roadster was now suddenly very much the mistress of the house, quietly observant, giving an order with a lift of the eyebrow or a nod of the head. Would Dirk like to go to his room at once? Dinner at seven-thirty. He needn't dress. Just as he liked. Everything was very informal here. They roughed it. (Dirk had counted thirteen servants by noon next day and hadn't been near the kitchen.)

He decided to bathe and change into dinner clothes and was glad of this when he found Paula in black chiffon before the fire in the great beamed room she had called the library. Dirk thought she looked very beautiful in that diaphanous stuff, with the pearls. Her heart-shaped face, with its large eyes that slanted a little at the corners; her long slim throat; her dark hair piled high and away from her little ears. He decided not to mention it.

Dirk told himself that Paula had known her husband would not be home until ten and had deliberately planned a tete-a-tete meal. He would not, therefore, confess himself a little nettled when Paula said, "I've asked the Emerys in for dinner; and we'll have a game of bridge afterward. Phil Emery, you know, the Third. He used to have it on his visiting card, like royalty."

The Emerys were drygoods; had been drygoods for sixty years; were accounted Chicago aristocracy; preferred England; rode to hounds in pink coats along Chicago's prairie and started suburban prairies. They had a vast estate on the lake near Stormwood. They arrived a trifle late. Dirk had seen pictures of old Phillip Emery ("Phillip the First," he thought, with an inward grin) and decided, looking at the rather anemic third edition, that the stock was running a little thin. The dinner was delicious but surprisingly simple; little more than Selma would have given him, Dirk thought, had he come home to the farm this week-end. The talk was desultory and rather dull. And this chap had millions, Dirk said to himself. Millions. No scratching in an architect's office for this lad.

At bridge after dinner Phillip the Third proved to be sufficiently the son of his father to win from Dirk more money than he could conveniently afford to lose.

Theodore Storm came in at ten and stood watching them. When the guests had left the three sat before the fire. "Something to drink?" Storm asked Dirk. Dirk refused but Storm mixed a stiff highball for himself, and then another. The whisky brought no flush to his large white impassive face. He talked almost not at all. Dirk, naturally silent, was loquacious by comparison. But while there was nothing heavy, unwhit about Dirk's silence, this man's was oppressive, irritating. His pained, his large white hands, his great white face gave the effect of bleached bloodless bulk. "I don't see how she stands him," Dirk thought. Husband and wife seemed to be on terms of polite friendliness. Storm excused himself and took himself off with a word about being tired, and seeing them in the morning.

After he had gone: "He likes you," said Paula.

"Important," said Dirk. "If true."

"But it is important. He can help you a lot."

"Help me how? I don't want—"

"But I do. I want you to be successful. I want you to be. You can be. You've got it written all over you. In the way you stand, and talk, and don't talk. In the way you look at people. In something in the way you carry yourself. It's what they call force, I suppose. Anyway, you've got it."

"Has your husband got it?" "Theodore! No! That is—"

"There you are. I've got the force, but he's got the money."

"You can have both." She was leaning forward. Her eyes were bright, enormous. Her hands—those thin dark hot hands—were twisted in her lap. He looked at her quietly. Suddenly there were tears in her eyes. "Don't look at me that way, Dirk." She huddled back in her chair, limp. She looked a little haggard and older, somehow. "My marriage is a mess, of course. You can see that."

"You knew it would be, didn't you?" "No. Yes. Oh, I don't know. Anyway, what's the difference, now? I've

not trying to be what they call an influence in your life. I'm just fond of you—you know that—and I want you to be great and successful. It's maternal, I suppose."

"I should think two babies would satisfy that urge."

"Oh, I can't get excited about two pink healthy lumps of babies. I love them and all that, but all they need is to have a bottle stuffed into their mouths at proper intervals and to be bathed, and dressed and aired and slept. It's a mechanical routine and about as exciting as a treadmill."

"Just what do you want me to do, Paula?"

She was eager again, vitally concerned in him. "It's all so ridiculous. All these men whose incomes are thirty—forty—sixty—a hundred thousand a year usually haven't any qualities, really, that the five-thousand-a-year man hasn't. Somebody has to get the fifty-thousand-dollar salaries—some advertising man, or bond salesman or—why, look at Phil Emery! He probably couldn't sell a yard of pink ribbon to a schoolgirl if he had to. Look at Theodore! He just sits and blinks and says nothing. But when the time comes he doubles up his fat white fist and mumbles, 'Ten million,' or 'Fifteen million,' and that settles it."

Dirk laughed to hide his own little mounting sensation of excitement. "It isn't quite as simple as that, I imagine. There's more to it than meets the eye."

"There isn't! I tell you I know the whole crowd of them. I've been brought up with this moneyed pack all my life, haven't I? Pork packers and wheat grabbers and peddlers of gas and electric light and dry goods. Grandfather's the only one of the crowd that I respect. He has stayed the same. They can't fool him. He knows he just happened to go into wholesale beef and pork when whole-sale beef and pork was a new game in Chicago. Now look at him!"

"Still, you will admit there's something in knowing when," he argued.

Paula stood up. "If you don't know I'll tell you. Now is when. I've got Grandfather and Dad and Theodore to work with. You can go on being an architect if you want to. It's a fine enough profession. But unless you're a genius where'll it get you! Go in with them, and Dirk, in five years—"

"What?" They were both standing, facing each other, she tense, eager; he relaxed but stimulated.

"Try it and see what, will you? Will you, Dirk?"

"I don't know, Paula. I should say, my mother wouldn't think much of it."

"What does she know? Oh, I don't mean that she isn't a fine, wonderful person. She is. I love her. But success! She thinks success is another acre of asparagus or cabbage; or a new stove in the kitchen now that they've brought gas out as far as High Prairie."

He had a feeling that she possessed him; that her hot eager hands held him though they stood apart and eyed each other almost hostilely.

As he addressed that night he thought, "Now what's her game? What's she up to? Be careful, Dirk, old boy."

As he lay in the soft bed with the satin coverlet over him he thought, "Now what's her little game?"

He awoke at eight, enormously hungry. He wondered, uneasily, just how he was going to get his breakfast. She had said his breakfast would be brought him in his room. He stretched luxuriously, sprang up, turned on his bath water, bathed. When he emerged in dressing gown and slippers his breakfast tray had been brought him mysteriously and its contents lay appetizingly on a little portable table. There were flocks of small covered dishes and a charming individual coffee service. A little note from Paula: "Would you like to take walk at about half-past nine? Stroll down to the stables. I want to show you my new horse."

The distance from the house to the stables was actually quite a brisk little walk in itself. Paula, in riding clothes, was waiting for him.

She greeted him. "I've been out

fat car of his."

They went into the coach house, a great airy white-washed place with glittering harness and spurs and bridles like jewels in glass cases. It gave Dirk a little hopeless feeling. He had never before seen anything like it.

Paula laughed up at him, her dark face upturned to his.

Something had annoyed him, she saw. Would he wait while she changed to walking things? Or perhaps he'd rather drive in the roadster. They walked up to the house together. He wished that she would not consult his wishes so anxiously. It made him sulk, impatient.

She put a hand on his arm. "Dirk, are you annoyed at me for what I said last night?"

"No."

"What did you think when you went to your room last night? Tell me. What did you think?"

"I thought: 'She's bored with her husband and she's trying to vamp me. I'll have to be careful.'"

Paula laughed delightedly. "That's nice and frank. . . . What else?"

"I thought my coat didn't fit very well and I wished I could afford to have Peel make my next one."

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(To Be Continued)

THEY ARE GROWING TREES FOR GROWING CHILDREN

Word from S. Rex Black Tells of Reforestation

The work of reforesting California has commenced in earnest. S. Rex Black is a part of the system. Mr. Black is remembered by residents of Mill Valley as a former ranger on Mt. Tamalpais. The following article in regard to his work was received last week:

Another forest planting season has been torn off the calendar and in place of it there has been hung up a new reforestation record for California, according to the statement of S. R. Black, secretary of the California Forest Protective Association. Hundreds of thousands of little redwoods, Douglas fir, cedar and spruce have been set out on cut-over lands by operating lumber companies to replace the mature trees that have been manufactured into lumber. The scene of action is now changed from planting trees on the hillsides to planting seeds in the nurseries in preparation for next winter's transplanting. Millions of seeds have already been gathered, either from the cones of trees felled by the loggers or from the hordes that squirrels lay up for the proverbial rainy day and which always contain many times the seed that Mr. Squirrel can possibly eat.

Following are the lumber companies who are carrying on this active reforestation program together with the number of trees planted this past winter: Albion Lumber Co., 150,000; Casper Lumber Co., 150,000; Union Lumber Co., 32,000; Mendocino Lumber Co., 143,000; Glen Blair Redwood Co., 37,400; Pacific Lumber Co., 219,850; Little River Redwood Co., 190,450; Hammond Lumber Co., 215,000; Northern Redwood Lumber Co., 30,900.

Over ten young trees have been planted for every old tree cut. The young seedlings used in the work are raised in nurseries located at Fort Bragg and Casper in Mendocino county and at Scotia in Humboldt county. These nurseries are co-operatively maintained by the lumber companies and seedlings are furnished at the cost of raising them. Present plans call for the establishment this summer of another nursery at Albion to take care of the increased demand for seedlings which exceeded the supply this last season. According to Black visitors are always welcome at the nurseries and a trip into the redwoods is really not complete without a visit to these "factories" where the new redwoods are produced.

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10:40 a.m.	*11:40 a.m.	11:30 a.m.	*12:43 p.m.		*1:35 p.m.
11:40 a.m.	*12:40 p.m.	12:30 p.m.	*1:43 p.m.	*3:40 p.m.	4:35 p.m.
1:40 p.m.	2:40 p.m.	*2:30 p.m.	*4:43 p.m.	*4:40 p.m.	*5:35 p.m.

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Lv. Muir Woods	Ar. Summit	Lv. Summit	Ar. Muir Woods
1:40 p.m.	2:40 p.m.	*11:43 a.m.	*12:30 p.m.
		*1:46 p.m.	*2:23 p.m.
		*3:00 p.m.	*3:50 p.m.

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