

SO BIG

CHAPTER XIII—Continued

By EDNA FERBER

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The words, spoken in their sweet clear voices, fell unobtrusively from their pretty lips. All very brief and un-inhibited and free. That, they told you, was the main thing. Sometimes Dirk wished they wouldn't work so hard at their play. They were forever getting up pageants and plays and large festivals for charity; Venetian fetes, Oriental bazaars, charity balls. In the programme performance of these many of them sang better, acted better, danced better than most professional performers, but the whole thing always lacked the flavor, something of professional performance. On these affairs they lavished thousands in costumes and decorations, reviving in return other thousands which they soberly turned over to the cause. They found nothing ludicrous in this. Spasmodically they went into business or semi-professional ventures, defying the conventions. Paula did this, too. She or one of her friends were forever opening blouse shops; starting Gift Shoppe; burgeoning into tea rooms decorated in crude green and vermilion and orange and black; announcing their affiliation with an advertising agency. These adventures blossomed, withered, died. They were the result of post-war restlessness. Many of these girls had worked indefigably during the 1917-1918 period; had driven service cars, managed ambulances, nursed, scrubbed, conducted canteens. They missed the excitement, the satisfaction of achievement.

They found Dirk fair game, resented Paula's proprietorship. Susans and James and Kates and Betty and Sally—plain old-fashioned names for modern, erotic misses—they talked to Dirk, danced with him, rode with him, flirted with him. His very unattainable-ness gave him piquancy. That Paula Storm had him fast. He didn't care a hoot about girls.

"Oh, Mr. DeJong," they said, "your name's Dirk, isn't it? What a slick name! What does it mean?"

"Nothing, I suppose. It's a Dutch name. My people—my father's people—were Dutch, you know."

"A Dirk's a sort of sword, isn't it, of pondard? Anyway, it sounds very keen and cruel and fatal—Dirk."

He would flush a little (one of his assets) and smile, and look at them, and say nothing. He found that to be all that was necessary.

He got on enormously.

Between the girls he met in society and the girls that worked in his office there existed a similarity that struck and amused Dirk. He said, "Take a letter, Miss Ronch," to a slim young creature as exquisite as the girl with whom he had danced the day before; or ridden or played tennis or bridge. Their very clothes were faultless imitations. They even used the same perfume. He wondered, idly, how they did it. They were eighteen, nineteen, twenty, and their faces and bodies and desires and natural equipment made their presence in a business office a paradox, an absurdity. Yet they were capable, too, in a mechanical sort of way. They were mechanical jobs. They were lovely creatures with the minds of fourteen-year-old children. Their hair was shining, perfectly undulated, as fine and glossy and tenderly curling as a young child's. Their breasts were flat, their figures singularly sexless like that of a very young boy. They were wise with the wisdom of the serpent. Their legs were slim and sturdy. Their mouths were smiling, soft, pink, the lower lip a little curled back, petal-wise, like the moist mouth of a baby that has just finished nursing. Their eyes were wide apart, empty, knowledgeable. They managed their private affairs like generals. They were cool, remote, disdainful. They reduced their boys to desperation. They were brigands, desperadoes, pirates, taking all, giving little. They came, for the most part, from sordid homes, yet they knew, in some miraculous way, all the fine arts that Paula knew and practiced. They were careless, pliant, bewildering, lovely, dangerous.

Among them Dirk worked immune, aloof, untouched. He would have been surprised to learn that he was known among them as Frosty. They admired and resented him. Not one that did not secretly dream of the day when he would call her into his office, shut the door, and say, "Loretta" (their names were burleskian monstrosities, born of grafting the original appellations onto their own idea of beauty in nomenclature—hence Loretta, Imogene, Nadine, Natalie, Ardella), "Loretta, I have watched you for a long, long time and you must have noticed how deeply I admire you."

It wasn't impossible. Those things happen. The movies had taught them that. Dirk, all unconscious of their pitiless all-absorbing scrutiny, would have been still further appalled to learn how fully aware they were of his personal and private affairs. They knew about Paula, for example. They knew about Dirk, for example. They despised her for the way in which she openly displayed her feeling for him (how they knew this was a miracle and a mystery, for she almost never came into the office and dispensed all her telephone talks with him). Selina had been in his office twice, perhaps. On one of these occasions she had spent five minutes chatting socially with Ethelinda Quinn, who had the face of a De Vinci cherub and the soul of a man-eating shark.

Selina always talked to everyone.

for a week or ten days at a stretch, and indulged in what she called an orgy. At such times Julie Arnold would invite her to occupy one of the guest rooms at the Arnold house, or Dirk would offer her his bedroom and tell her that he would be comfortable on the big couch in the living room, or that he would take a room at the University club. She always declined. She would take a room in a hotel, sometimes north, sometimes south. Her holiday before her, she would go off roaming gaily as a small boy on a Saturday morning, with the day stretching gorgeously and adventurously ahead of him, sallies down the street without plan or appointment, knowing that richness in one form or another lies before him for the choosing. A sociable woman, Selina, savoring life, she liked the lights, the color, the rush, the noise. Her years of grinding work, with her face pressed down to the very soil itself, had failed to kill her zest for living. She prowled into the city's foreign quarters—Italian, Greek, Chinese, Jewish.

She loved the Michigan boulevard and State street shop windows in which haughty waxed ladies in glittering evening gowns postured, fingers elegantly crooked as they held a fan, a rose, a program, meanwhile smiling condescendingly out upon an envious world flattening its nose against the plate glass barrier.

She penetrated the Black belt, where Chicago's vast and growing negro population shifted and moved and stretched its great limbs ominously, reaching out and in protest and overflowing the bounds that irked it. Her serene face and her quiet manner, her bland interest and friendly look protected her. They thought her a social worker, perhaps; one of the uplifters. She bought and read the Independent, the negro newspaper in which herb doctors advertised magic roots. She even sent the twenty-five cents required for a box of these, charmed by their names—Adam and Eve roots, Master of the Woods, Dragon's Blood, High John the Conqueror, Jezabel Roots, Grains of Paradise.

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She Liked to Stroll Along the Crowded Sidewalks.

that. It isn't safe. This isn't High Prairie, you know. If you want to go round I'll get Salk to drive you."

"That would be nice," she said, mildly. But she never availed herself of this offer.

She would go over to South Water street, changed now, and swollen to such proportions that it threatened to burst its confines. She liked to stroll along the crowded sidewalks, lined with crates and boxes and barrels of fruits, vegetables, poultry. Startling foreign faces predominated now. Where the red-faced overalled men had been she saw now lean muscular lads in old army shirts and khaki pants and scuffed puttees wheeling trucks, loading boxes, charging down the street in huge rumbling auto vans. Their faces were hard, their talk terse. Any one of these, she reflected, was more vital, more native, functioned more usefully and honestly than her successful son, Dirk DeJong.

"Where 'r beans?"

"In th' ol' beanery."

"Tough."

"Best you can get."

"Keep 'em."

Many of the older men knew her, shook hands with her, chatted a moment friendly. William Talcott, a little more dried up, more wrinkled, his sparse hair quite gray now, still leaned up against the side of his doorway in his shirt sleeves and his neat pepper-and-salt pants and vest, cigar, unlighted, in his mouth, the heavy gold watch chain spanning his middle.

"Well, you certainly made good, Mrs. DeJong. Remember the day you came here with your first load?"

Oh, yes. She remembered.

"That boy of yours has made his mark, too. I see. Doing grand, ain't he? Wa-al, great satisfaction having a son turn out well like that. Yes, sirree! Why, look at my dater Carlene!"

Life at High Prairie had its savor, too. Frequently you saw strange visitors there for a week or ten days at a time—boys and girls whose city galls

gave way to a rich tan; tired-looking women with sagging figures who drank Selina's cream and ate her abundant vegetables and tender chickens as though they expected these viands to be momentarily snatched from them. Selina picked these up in odd corners of the city. Dirk protested against this, too. Selina was a member of the High Prairie school board now. She was on the Good Roads committee and the Truck Farmers' association valued her opinion. Her life was full, pleasant, prolific.

Chapter XIV

Paula had a scheme for interesting women in bond buying. It was a good scheme. She suggested it so that Dirk thought he had thought of it. Dirk was head now of the bond department in the Great Lakes Trust company's magnificent new white building on Michigan boulevard north.

Its white towers gleamed pink in the lake mists. Dirk said it was a terrible building, badly proportioned, and that it looked like a vast vanilla sundae. His new private domain was more like a splendid bookless library than a business office. It was finished in rich dull walnut and there were great upholstered chairs, soft rugs, shaded lights. Special attention was paid to women clients. There was a room for their convenience fitted with low restful chairs and couches, lamps, writing desks, in mauve and rose. Paula had selected the furnishings for this room. Ten years earlier it would have been considered absurd in a suite of business offices. Now it was a routine part of the equipment.

Dirk's private office was almost as difficult of access as that of the nation's executive. Cards, telephones, office boys, secretaries stood between the caller and Dirk DeJong, head of the bond department. You asked for him, uttering his name in the ear of the six-foot statuesque detective who, in the guise of usher, stood in the center of the marble rotunda eyeing each visitor with a coldly appraising gaze. This one padded softly ahead of you on rubber heels, only to give you over to the care of a glorified office boy who took your name. You waited. He returned. You waited. Presently there appeared a young woman with inquiring eyebrows. She conversed with you. She vanished. You waited. She reappeared. You were ushered into Dirk DeJong's large and luxurious inner office. And there formally fled.

Dirk was glad to see you; quietly, interestedly glad to see you. As you stated your business he listened attentively, as was his charming way. The volume of business done with women clients by the Great Lakes Trust company was enormous. Dirk was conservative, helpful—and he always got the business. He talked little. He was amazingly effective.

Ladies in the modish black of recent bereavement made quite a somber procession to his door. His suggestions (often originating with Paula) made the Great Lakes Trust company's discreet advertising rich in results. Neat little pamphlets written for women on the subjects of saving, investments, "You are not dealing with a soulless corporation," said these brochures. "May we serve you? You need more than friends. Before acting, you should have your judgment vindicated by an organization of investment specialists. You may have relatives and friends, some of whom would gladly advise you on investments. But perhaps you rightly feel that the less they know about your financial affairs, the better." To handle trusts, and to care for the securities of widows and orphans, is our business.

It was startling to note how this sort of thing mounted into millions.

"Women are becoming more and more used to the handling of money," Paula said, shrewdly. "Pretty soon their patronage is going to be as valuable as that of men. The average woman doesn't know about bonds—about bond buying. They think they're something mysterious and risky. They ought to be educated up to it. Didn't you say something, Dirk, about classes in finance for women?"

"But would the women come?"

"Of course they'd come. Women will accept any invitation that's engraved on heavy cream paper."

The Great Lakes Trust had a branch in Cleveland now, and one in New York, on Fifth avenue. The drive to interest women in bond buying and to instruct them in finance was to take on almost national proportions. There was to be newspaper and magazine advertising.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

When Pedagogues Kicked

Scotland's army of schoolmasters in the year 1782 sent a memorial to parliament pointing out that while their average income was £13 a year that of a plowman was £14 to £16. No relief was granted until 1802, when the Schoolmasters' act was passed, and their income was legally fixed at "not under 300 merks (£16 13s. 4d) nor over 400 merks (£24 4s. 6d)." The heritors had also to provide a house, "which need not contain more than two rooms, including the kitchen, and with ground for a garden or not more than a quarter of a Scots acre, or two bolls of meal as its equivalent." They were highly indignant at being obliged to "erect palaces for dominies," but legal compulsion could no longer be ignored. Thereafter, conditions were at least good enough to prevent schoolmasters from resigning their office to become headless—as had actually happened during the darkest days!

Giant Pumpkin

A 30-pound pumpkin was grown in a California field which, when turned into pies, made 125 of the delectable

Week-End Outfit in One Suitcase

The conquering heroine of the pre-sports era was an earnest believer in the strength of numbers and her week-end sallies into strange countries were never ventured without the accompaniment of a wardrobe that was as extensive as it was pretentious. Those were the days, writes a fashion correspondent in the New York Herald-Tribune, when quantity was the measure of smartness and when no occasion was too trivial to demand a change of costume. Starting with the morning frock, a summer's day which did not witness at least four distinct costumes was counted among the lost, and the enterprising demoiselle who could improve upon that number was at once the envy of her sisters and the glowing light of social gatherings. Manifestly, it was impossible to pack the necessary wardrobe within the limited confines of a single suitcase, and the pleasure-bent week-end was compelled to travel, laden heavily with luggage or else run the risk of being occasionally out of the picture.

Those unscientific times are past, due partly to the comparative unavailability of the summer mode, partly to a more enlightened attitude on the part of the gentle traveler, and partly to the general vogue of sports-wear. Fashion no longer contents itself with seasonal changes—it is continually undergoing minute evolutions and the hallmark of haute chic demands small monthly wardrobe changes instead of the voluminous semi-annual acquisitions that characterized the past. The modern Parisienne does not burden herself with many clothes at a time—her annual number of frocks is, perhaps, greater than ever before, but they are added at diverse periods as the occasion demands, and as they are added, other costumes are either discarded or revamped to coincide with the smartest and latest dicta of the mode.

Wardrobe Should Fit Suitcase.

The result is a wardrobe which is always chic and never cumbersome and which is comfortably sufficient unto the three days of the sportive week-end. Indeed, the greatest boon to the modern week-end habit has been the general simplification of fashion. You simply cannot pack frills and furbelows into a suitcase. If you appear with a wardrobe trunk or a plurality of suitcases your hostess immediately becomes apprehensive and you can hardly blame her. Obviously, then, the ideal week-end wardrobe must be modified to suit a single suitcase and the present status of the mode makes that task no longer a problem.

Apparently the dressmakers were thinking of the feminine week-end when they evolved those delectable jumper suits that are the prop of every smart woman's existence nowadays. Whether it is made of kasha, crepe de chine or foulard, the jumper frock is the easiest garment to fold that has appeared on the modern hor-

requirements. These crease less readily than cotton and they shake out into charming folds as soon as they are hung up in a roomy cupboard.

After games the most usual occupation is bridge, and for this you will require a change. But let it be a change into a frock that, but for its color and material, might almost be worn for tennis or golf itself. The smartest clothes of the present season all have that sports allure. Even your dinner dress should have such a simple cut that if you put it on in the daytime nothing could be easier than an impromptu game, quite possible in its straightline simplicity.

A charming idea for the bridge frock is the new jabot idea. It is an excellent suggestion, for there should be something reminiscent of the jabot in your week-end case—it is so typical of the present season's tendencies. It can be carried out in georgette crepe or chiffon and there is no need to adhere severely to plain material. The wild riots of flowers that are scattered over a beige or black ground are a charming feature of summer chiffons. They have this additional advantage—if your rubber is prolonged until the dinner gong sounds, you may appear dressed, fresh, ready for dinner and even the dance following without looking very much as if you had kept on your afternoon frock, for with child-



Ensemble of Floral Print, Suitcase for Week-End Wear.

fon it is difficult to say where the afternoon ends and the evening begins.

When you intend to include a really formal evening affair during your week-end visit, put in a straight-fringed frock.

You might include a little shawl to throw over the shoulders—it is a real boon on those delightful summer nights when one feels tempted to stroll in the garden between dances. Paris insists on some dainty accessory on these occasions—not from a practical point of view, but because it adds a balancing feminine triviality to the slender lines of the July evening frocks.

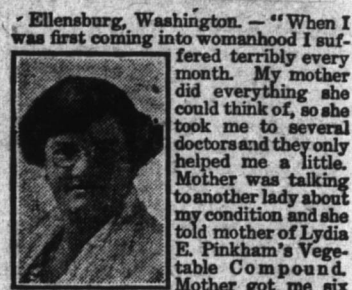
Easily Packed Incidental.

It is advisable to reduce shoes and other accessories to a minimum when you are paying a week-end visit. Keep a small extra bag for your shoes, and you can also use it for last minute remembrances, for even the most methodical of us invariably leave out something of which we think frantically when straps are fastened and keys put into the handbag. Often enough it is just the pair of shoes that goes with the particular frock around which the week-end wardrobe is constructed. Fashion has been liberal in late years by sanctioning gold, silver or blond satin shoes to be worn with every kind of evening gown. Now the mode is changing and the slipper should match the frock. This is an additional complication, but it is essential in a surrounding which places a premium on smart clothes. In less formal places you may choose a pair of blond satin shoes and wear them with your bridge frock as well as in the evening.

Above all other things, remember that costumes worn in Rome should always be Roman. The habit of swimming upstream has no place in modern fashions and it is particularly inappropriate in the short-visiting week-end. If you are going to visit at some mountain resort which prides itself on a certain lack of convention, leave that Paton robe du soir at home and forget that very Parisian chapeau by Lewis. And conversely, if your journey's end be at some watering place where fashion is the alpha and omega, don't attempt to convert the frivolous populace by wearing clothes that are plain and commonplace. The mode has places for its missionaries, but the week-end habit is not one of them.

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