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On His Hands

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SLOANE slouched back in his chair and regarded his demi-stasse, the while he paused in his narrative. He was pensive. He bit his lower lip and slowly shook his head.

“So I think the poor kid liked me pretty much,” said Sloane.

His companion was impressed and sympathetic. “It certainly sounds that way, Tod,” said Blakely. “I think I know how you feel. I know I—”

Sloane disregarded Blakely’s comment. “She said she’d resign from college and marry me right away,” Sloane went on. “She told me that when I had her down for the Navy game. Yep. Even then she wanted to quit college. Which, of course, would have meant my quitting too. But I’m not the kind of a guy to wreck two lives that way. I mean to say, what would we have lived on? If the family stopped my allowance now, why, I wouldn’t have a cent till I’m twenty-one, see?”

“Yeah,” said Blakely, “that’s the hell of it. I know I practically had—”

“So I didn’t want to get off on the wrong foot about this thing and wreck two lives. This love-in-a-cottage stuff is swell—if you have the cottage. But for God’s sake, I owe Wetzell four hundred dollars, and around college I owe another four hundred dollars or five hundred dollars. See, it wouldn’t have been fair to myself, and it wouldn’t have been fair to this poor kid. I couldn’t earn my living right off the bat. There wasn’t any use making us both unhappy on account of money. So I figured out, why not take a look at her family? Get the dope on what kind of people she comes from. Then if they looked O.K., why, I could talk to my Old Man and maybe they’d let us get married and give us something to start on.”

“That was sensible,” said Blakely.

“Uh-huh,” conceded Sloane. “So at Christmas I told the Old Man I was going out to Chicago to visit the Tuckers.”

“Oh, yes. Elinor Tucker. Sure, I know Elinor. Swell girl.”

Sloane glared. “Well, yes. Not only Elinor, though. The whole family. My Old Man and Mr. Tucker went to college together, and I went to prep school with Brick Tucker. So I

said I was going out there and I wired Brick all about what I was going to do, so he wouldn't spill the beans, and off I went to Dayton, Ohio." Sloane smiled reminiscently and shook his head.

"Well, she met me at the station, in a 1921 Pierce limousine. That was a pretty good start, because no damn *nouveau-riche* family has a 1921 Pierce limousine. They'd have a brand-new shiny wagon, all brass. So that old Pierce was a good sign. But still there was that unfortunate name. You couldn't tell if she was one of the real old German families or just a pork-packer's daughter.

"Anyhow, it was about three in the afternoon, and we drove out to the country club, instead of going right to her house. We had quite a scene. Poor kid.

"Then we went to her house to dress for some party. The little I saw of the house was O.K. Nice furniture and nice magazines lying around and so on. But I didn't see anybody but her father. Her mother was at a bridge and her kid sister was at dancing school. Which didn't prove anything, because out there every respectable kid in town gets invited to dancing school. But her father was the guy that had me guessing.

"I met him just as I came downstairs. The babe was still dressing, so when I went in the library her father was there. He looked up and smiled and reached out his paw and said, 'Hello there, my boy. You're the Tod Sloane I've been hearing so much about.' So he told me to sit down and asked me if I wanted a drink or a butt. Made me feel at home. We talked about nothing particular, but he kept up that 'my boy' stuff. Why, my Old Man never called me 'my boy' in his whole life. Gauss calls me 'my boy' when he's on the verge of firing me the hell out of college. But I couldn't dope this guy. I thought maybe the babe maybe dropped a hint that we were going to get married, but I couldn't be sure.

"Well, I didn't find out much more. The babe's father went to M.I.T., which might make him a Cabot or an ironworker, and I didn't have the nerve to ask where he went to prep school. Then the kid herself appeared and we went to this party.

"The party didn't prove anything either. It was a swell party. Good food, and champagne—which I never touch—and a good band. Saw a couple people from Princeton but nobody I

really knew. The right kind of people were nice to the kid and she was cut in on all the time, but that only proved something I know, namely, that she is a damned attractive babe. Why else would I bother with her?

"I stayed in dear old Dayton, Ohio, two days, and if you must know, didn't learn a god-damn thing. Of course, then I had to go to Chicago because that's where I told the family I was going.

"Don't let anybody kid you about Chicago. It's a swell Princeton town, Chicago. Naturally I played around with Elinor Tucker while I was there. Then I came back to New York until college opened, meanwhile writing to the babe in Dayton and she writing to me. We planned to meet in New York either in January, if she could make it, or February.

"Well, one thing and another came up and we didn't get to see each other in New York. I think the poor kid sort of suspected that I wasn't so sure about her family. In any case, the whole affair just dwindled away to nothing. I haven't laid eyes on her since I was in Dayton. And who do you think I've been seeing every time I get up to New York? . . . Elinor Tucker! Absolutely. She's going to a Miss Comstock's music school. Just an excuse to be in New York, of course."

"Elinor's in New York, eh?" Blakely asked. "Say, tell me. How's Elinor?"

Sloane looked intently, kindly at Blakely, and smiled. "Well, to tell you the truth, Blake, the first thing I know I'll have *her* on my hands!"