

DARK VICTORY

PARSONS Hello, Steele. Now don't start being cantankerous! It's not my fault--how the devil did I know she'd take it into her head to do a thing like this! When are you leaving?

STEELE In eleven minutes.

PARSONS When does your train go?

STEELE One-thirty.

PARSONS Can't you possibly take a later one?

STEELE No.

PARSONS Why not?

STEELE The later trains don't make connections.

PARSONS Stop fiddling with those books and listen to me a minute. I'm not attempting to persuade you to give up on your fool plan. I've tried everything I could on that score and failed.

STEELE Thank God for that.

PARSONS There's no use-- you're too set in your ways--too Yankee--too stubborn and too old, but I am going to ask you a favor.

STEELE After that? No wonder you've made a success!

PARSONS I want you to stay over and give this girl a thorough examination.

STEELE I can't.

PARSONS I knew you'd say that!

STEELE Of course you knew it--if you knew anything. By the way--congratulations on the stage effects.

PARSONS I don't want your irony--I want your help! It's terribly important. Why, her mother is Mrs. Robert Traherne of---

STEELE I don't give a damn who her mother is. I'm leaving at one-thirty.

PARSONS Put it off a day.

STEELE Parsons, I've quit New York practice. I closed my office two weeks ago. And I've absolutely refused to see another patient. Sorry, but I can't make any exceptions.

PARSONS But what's one day?

STEELE Do you remember the day you were married?

PARSONS Of course I do!

STEELE Yes--but do you remember your anticipation on that day?

PARSONS Why--I--er--dammit--Of course I do!

STEELE Well--this is my day of days--and when I leave Grand Central I'm leaving a life that's over and done with, and I'm starting a new one--I can't see her now--it's too late--but I have a few minutes and if it's of any help to talk over the case--fire ahead!

PARSONS Have you read the history?

STEELE This gossip sheet?--"Widow of the late wire manufacturer."

PARSONS Never mind about that now.

STEELE All right, what's your diagnosis?

PARSONS Frankly, I don't know. But I do know the girl is desperately ill; I've been watching her like a hawk--and she's losing ground each day.

STEELE Haven't you any line on it at all?

PARSONS If I had to guess, I'd say some obscure internal injury--but I can't put my finger on it. There's nothing to go by--I can't get anything out of her.

STEELE Won't talk--eh?

PARSONS No--no cooperation.

STEELE Is she usually irritable like this?

PARSONS No--not ordinarily.

STEELE You say she's been having persistent headaches?

PARSONS Yes. Ever since the accident.

STEELE When did you first see her?

PARSONS About an hour after she was thrown. She evidently rode home; had breakfast, and seemed all right. Then apparently she had a fainting spell.

STEELE Did she actually faint or was she just very dizzy?

PARSONS I couldn't make it out. She resented my examination and wasn't very explicit.

STEELE What about her heart?

PARSONS My God, it was in awful shape--perfectly ragtime--

STEELE Valvular?

PARSONS No. Just very irregular--and she was perspiring quite alot.

STEELE Sounds like nicotine poisoning--probably smoked her head off the night before.

PARSONS Nicoti---Good Lord!

STEELE What's the matter?

PARSONS That's precisely what it was--nicotine poisoning--I never thought of it--but surely that--

STEELE You're quite right. That's not the real trouble.--You say she's a crack horsewoman?

PARSONS The best.

STEELE Then why was she thrown?

PARSONS Well, it was a queer sort of accident. You see, she and a chap named Ronnie McVicker were riding cross-country---They were making for an open gate. She was on his right. As they came near the gate, McVicker kept well over to the left to give her room; but instead of riding through the opening, she went head on for the fence--as though she hadn't seen it.

STEELE What's that?

PARSONS McVicker said she held her horse straight for the fence about six feet from the opening. Naturally the animal shied and threw her.

STEELE You're certain she was on his right side?

PARSONS Yes, why?

STEELE Hm---Why haven't you kept her in bed?

PARSONS I've tried to.

STEELE What do you mean?

PARSONS You don't know that girl--why, yesterday she got up, went to lunch and the matinee and played contract all evening.

STEELE What matinee?

PARSONS Revival of "Cyrano", I think. Why?

STEELE Oh, nothing.

PARSONS No one can do anything with that girl. I'd have dropped the case weeks ago if it weren't that I'm an old family friend.

STEELE How long have you known her?

PARSONS I brought her into the world. I looked after her father when he died.

STEELE I see. Well--on ;the whole I think your best bet's to get in touch with Findlay.

PARSONS Findlay's in Europe.

STEELE all right; then get Parke.

PARSONS I don't want Parke or any of the rest of them. Dammit, they're no better than I am. I want you.

STEELE Can't be done.

PARSONS Steele, I could cheerfully murder you!

STEELE I'm sure you'd do it painlessly--in your best bedside manner and with real swagger--and who could ask more?

PARSONS Steele: you're always crying about the lack of human contact between doctor and patient--Well, there's humanity waiting for you in that room--you can't turn your back on it now.

STEELE Why should I upset my plans for some spoiled, undisciplined Long Island flapper?

PARSONS Because it's a doctor's business to cur sick people--because she'll die if you don't--because I'm an old friend of yours and I'm desperate.

STEELE Very well--I'll see her--but I warn you I'm going to catch that train. I'll do what I can. Miss Wainwright!

PARSONS You're the court of last appeal.

STEELE I can't promise anything.