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Dora Sends a Successor

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After His Sister Died Came the Check That Might Have Saved Her Life; and He Knew What His Sister Would Have Wanted Him to Do With the Money.

HENDERSON looked at the check which had fallen out of the envelope he had just opened, and his stern young lips curled sardonically. Then, very slowly he bent, picked it up from the floor, unfolded it, and read the amount on its face. As he did so his eyes unconsciously widened. The check set forth the astounding fact that the Bank of New Amsterdam was to pay to David Henderson the sum of \$500. Despite himself, and for one instant only, the young blood sang in David Henderson's veins. Then resolutely he suppressed its music. The awful irony of the receipt of the check at just this time entered his soul, and he deliberately seized the fact and turned it around, as it were, as if it were the blade of a knife. A week ago—even a few days ago—that check would have meant more to him than life itself. It might have meant his sister's life—the dear, beautiful life of the one living creature who belonged to him, whom he had adored, whom he had tried, and failed, to support, and who had died, he now reminded himself with set teeth, through lack of a few hundred

bars. Food, at least such food as she could eat, he had been able to give her. He had kept a roof over her head and warm clothing on her bed. He had found a doctor, and a good one, who was sufficiently altruistic to make daily visits to the sick-room and to wait indefinitely for his fees. But the "change" this doctor was always prescribing, the delicacies he hinted at, the trained nurse the sick girl should have had—all these things were far beyond the reach of Dora Henderson's twin brother. This was not because he had not worked. He had worked day and night. Every moment when he was not beside her bed—and few nurses could have served the invalid better than her brother had done—he was at his desk table in the corner of the combined living room and sickroom, writing, writing, writing. Most of his work came back to him, in bloated envelopes and accompanied by printed slips. Occasionally—just often enough to keep actual want from the shabby three-room flat—a check had drifted across its threshold—a chance affair, it always seemed, with something of the aimlessness of an autumn leaf blown in by a casual breeze. Sometimes the check was made out for \$25; one in a great while for \$50. On one stupendous occasion, duly celebrated by the brother and sister, during the early stages of Dora's long illness, a check had come for \$100. No drifting autumn leaf this, but a glorious thunderbolt, a thing that magnificently shook the foundations of the flat and the very souls of its occupants.

How happy that check had made Dora—not because of what it would bring to her, which was all her brother thought of—but because it meant appreciation of David's work by the real editor of a real magazine. Privately Dora did not consider the senders of the \$25 and \$50 checks real editors. True, they appreciated her brother's genius as their great-er benefactors did not; but they showed their appreciation rarely and in such niggardly ways! Whereas the editor who sent \$100 had also sent a real letter, asking the privilege of beholding more of Mr. Henderson's work. That privilege had promptly been vouchsafed him. He saw much of Mr. Henderson's work—too much, perhaps, for he saw all of it, and there was a great deal. And, it being the nature of finite beings to weary of too much of anything, the editor had apparently wearied of Henderson's work. Certainly he took no more of it, and his first interested personal notes had soon given place to the curt, printed rejection slips. Semingly he had made up his mind that David Henderson was a one story man, that his one story was out of him, and that there was nothing more left to expect.

This was the point at which David had almost given up—at which he would wholly have given up but for two things. One of these things was Dora's influence, the other was Dora's need. Left to himself David would have dropped literature for snow shoveling or catch digging or any other occupation which provided a sure income, however small. But Dora would have none of this. Dora made him swear that he would keep to his real work. Also—and this was a vital point—Dora was not in a condition which permitted her to be left alone. As he could not employ a nurse, he himself must nurse her and, within immediate reach of her, earn what he could toward their joint support. His work was Dora's big interest. He read it to her—every line of it—and Dora, listening, wondered why the world talked of Galsworthy and Arnold Bennett and Mrs. Wharton while her gifted brother was on earth.

Then, just five days ago, Dora had died, painlessly and beautifully, with her hand in that of her beloved brother and her dimming eyes on his face. Just before the end she

had said something which David now recalled with a boyish gulp.

"You are going to be very successful, Davy," she told him, "and your success is coming soon. I'm so glad I was with you through all the early struggle, for you have always made me feel that I wasn't a burden to you but an inspiration. Bless you for it! I loved feeling that, Davy; and wherever I am I am going to try to keep right on till some one else comes—the right girl. Do—you—know—Davy—I seem—to—see her. She is coming soon—"

That was the last message, though for a long time David sat very still, holding the chilling hand in his own, afraid to move, hoping and praying that Dora would speak again. Then darkness came and he aroused himself to do the things that must be done. The first thing to do was to sell the furniture of the three-room flat. The proceeds of this, he hoped, would pay the funeral expenses, and they did, though the second-hand furniture dealer who stalked into the little home the next morning at David's invitation and fingered and appraised the former possessions of the silent figure on the bed couch seemed gloomily doubtful as to whether they would do it. They paid for a simple funeral indeed, which left David homeless and with a little less than \$3 in his pocket. A neighbor across the hall offered him a bed for a few days, till he could "turn around," as that altruist put it, and David had spent the few days receiving his returned manuscripts and haunting the dismantled rooms that still seemed so full of his sister's presence.

It was in the empty living room in which she had died

Idiot and dawdler! He had held the story—that editor—more than a fortnight. He had had it, therefore, during Dora's last week on earth, during the time when, conceivably, she might still have been saved. Yes, he had jolly well taken his time to the story; and now here was the check, too late for Dora, and, therefore, too late for David. He would have liked to call at that editor's office and force that check down that editor's throat.

He rose and passed his hand across his damp forehead. Of course, that wasn't the way to feel. It was not the way Dora would wish him to feel. That sort of thing got him nowhere. Therefore he must not continue to feel that way. But one thing was certain. The \$500, since it was not for Dora, was not for him. He must try to find some way of spending it which would do for some one else what it had failed to do for him and Dora. The wild thought of putting up an expensive block of granite to Dora's memory had perished almost before it was born. That would be ironical—as ironical as the check—but it would not please Dora. No, the money must be spent in a different way. It should be a rather unusual and effective way. It must not be a perfunctory way! Therefore, it would not do to endorse the check and send it to some charity. That would be too easy. He himself ought to choose the beneficiary. That would give him something to do. He had done nothing since the funeral except walk the floor of the deserted flat and throw rejection slips into the empty fireplace. It was time he took up life again, as Dora would have wished

Also, he now recalled a detail which, that morning, he had observed without fully taking it in. His host was becomingly interested in his plans for the future. He had asked several vital questions about them. Yes, it was time David bestirred himself. With a deep sigh he straightened to his five feet nine, adjusted his 24-year-old shoulders to the burden of existence, walked unsteadily to the door, and turned on the threshold for a last look at the room he would never enter again. Perhaps it was because he felt so queer that morning and because his eyes were dim that he saw what clearer vision could not have shown him—the recumbent figure of Dora on her couch, no longer ill, no longer suffering, nor yet in the awful peace of her last two days there; but pain-free and smiling and giving him the quick little cheerful nod of farewell which always accompanied one of his brief exits from the house.

He stumbled along the dark passage into his temporary quarters, found his hat and coat, left a penciled note of thanks for his late host, and plunged out into the February day. It was snowing and subconsciously the fact appealed to him. It seemed right and fitting that it should be snowing. He could not have endured the cheerfulness of sunshine and clear skies.

Without knowing where they were going, his feet turned to the north. He had not eaten that day, but he had no impulse to eat. Neither had he an impulse to look up new quarters for himself—a single room somewhere, in which he could work and sleep. He must find some such shelter, of course, but that little matter could be attended to later. At present he felt too queer to attend to anything. He found himself drifting in the direction of the park. What he wanted, he finally decided, was to go somewhere and sit down. His knees felt weak, and there was still that unusual veil over his vision. He would get to the park and find a bench in some quiet spot and sit there for a long time. Perhaps, if it was very quiet, he could sleep. He had not had much, if any, sleep for more than a week, nor had he had much food. Every scrap of food, every drop of milk, he had saved for Dora, in the morbid fear that the limited food and cash supply might not outlast the sick girl. He had experienced all sorts of morbid sensations during that last week. He was experiencing them still, but now they had ceased to matter. Dora was at peace and what happened to him would not count.

He walked a long distance, as one in a dream. Then he became aware that some subconscious impulse had rightly directed his steps. He was in the park, in one of the narrow side paths, and then not far away, was something that through the falling snow presented the outlines of a rustic bench. He stumbled to it and sank down. He was really feeling very odd, but the fact did not concern him. He would be quiet for a while. He would close his eyes and rest.

But just as he was closing them the bench creaked under the abrupt movement of another body. Some one else was sitting on that bench, some one he had failed to observe when he himself dropped down upon it. The discovery brought a conscious emotion—a sense of disappointment, even of irritation. For one blessed moment he had felt as much alone here as in a primeval forest and now he had a companion. With all the benches in the park from which to choose—for surely few pedestrians were out on a day like this—no other bench save the one he was occupying would do for the fellow at his side. He was thinking quite clearly now. The surprise, the irritation, had had a stimulating effect upon his mental processes. He sat up and turned coldly unwelcoming eyes upon his companion. Then the eyes widened and their expression changed. His companion was not another fellow, but a girl—a girl who looked very young and pathetic and frightened, and who shrank



"For God's sake make up your mind to trust me!"

that he had opened the letter and found the wonderful check, and the ironic coming of that financial life line seemed only emphasized by the listening silence of the place. Dismantled though it was, however, David felt more at home there than anywhere else. Now, seated on the edge of an empty woodbox, he raised his elbows from his knees and his face from his cupped hands and looked at the corner which still held the room's solitary piece of furniture, Dora's couch bed. Was she indeed lying there? Almost he believed she was as he stared at it with his reddened eyes. If she was there, there was something she still wished him to do. What was it? The urgent message seemed to come to him in her familiar, whispered, breathless tones. Read the letter. Was that it? He felt that it was. He spread out and read the typewritten sheet:

"My dear Mr. Henderson: My congratulations on this latest story. It is good. Indeed it is unusually good. Moreover, it suggests an admirable series of stories, written around the same characters. I am sending you our check for \$500, with the understanding that we are to have the first reading of the series, and that the stories, if acceptable, will be paid for at the rate we have made for this first one."

"Sincerely yours,"
The signature was that of the editor who had sent the \$100 check and whose interest had then so abruptly perished. Apparently it was now rekindled. How Dora would have rejoiced! Possibly she was rejoicing. But David himself could not rejoice. All he could do was to put that \$500 into terms of comforts for Dora—the comforts she might have had if it had come in time. His arrival now was nothing short of ghastly. He could hardly endure the sight of it. His impulse was to destroy it, and the letter that had come with it, and the editor who had written the letter.