

68 THE BUTTER AND EGG MAN

Look out for Mr. Jones here till we come back!
He's a regular partner. Come on, Mac.

[LEHMAN and MAC slip quickly out the center door; before they know it PETER and JANE find themselves facing each other. There is a moment's pause.]

BEGIN

JANE

It wasn't much of an introduction, was it?

PETER

I don't mind if you don't.

JANE

[Another pause.]

Mr. Lehman says you've invested money in the play.

PETER

Yes, I—did put some in.

JANE

I hope it'll be very successful.

PETER

[Rather stiffly.]

Thank you.

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JANE

[Leading the conversation.]

I've often wondered how it would feel to be able to do that.

PETER

You mean to be a producer?

JANE

Anyhow, to have enough money to be one.

PETER

It—doesn't feel any way in particular.

JANE

Then if I had a great deal of money—well, like you—I might go ahead and *be* one.

PETER

[Not quite getting the full implication, but coming close enough to be disturbed.]

How's that?

JANE

I say, if I could afford to risk part of the money, I'd be a producer.

PETER

Risk it? Don't you think it's a good business, putting plays on?

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JANE

Well, of course, it depends. You see—

PETER

[Now a little frightened.]

But this—this play of Mr. Lehman's—it's good, isn't it? I mean, you think it'll be a hit?

JANE

[A new doubt has come to her; regards him, then speaks.]

Tell me something.

PETER

Don't you?

JANE

[Now sparring for information.]

It—it will be a hit, of course. But—I'm sure you wouldn't care, would you? A millionaire like you?

PETER

Who—me? I'm not anything like that. It was all I could do to—well, I hope it turns out all right.

JANE

[Still sizing him up.]

You're not a New Yorker, are you, Mr. Jones?

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PETER

No, I'm from Ohio.

JANE

Oh!

PETER

Chillicothe.

JANE

Well—

[She stops, uncertain as to how to phrase it.]

PETER

Huh?

JANE

You—you haven't been connected with the theatrical business before, then?

PETER

Oh, yes. I had a company—that is, we made several productions in Chillicothe, sort of.

JANE

I see.

PETER

[Anxiously.]

It's all right, isn't it? Mr. Lehman's play, I mean? You don't think anything could happen to it?

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JANE

No, it isn't that, but—

PETER

It sounded great, I thought. But it'd be terrible if it wasn't a go.

JANE

What I was going to ask you was—of course it isn't any of my business, but—I was wondering how you happened to be here. In this office, I mean. How you ever happened to pick the theatrical business to invest in.

PETER

Oh, I don't know. It's always appealed to me.

JANE

Did you give Mr. Lehman—much money?

PETER

Why? There isn't anything the matter, is there?

JANE

No, no! The only reason I asked—

PETER

Oh, if there were! Plays do make a lot of money, don't they?

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JANE

I'm sure it'll be all right. You mustn't worry.

PETER

All right. If you feel that way, why—all right.

JANE

Well, I—I appreciate your trusting me, of course, but—

PETER

Why—you're being here is one of the reasons I went into it, partly.

JANE

How's that?

PETER

I say, I felt pretty sure it was all right or you wouldn't be connected with it.

JANE

[*Slowly.*]

I'm not sure that I understand.

PETER

Well, when you came in, while they were here, you—sort of smiled at me. That is, I thought you did—maybe you didn't.

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JANE

You did it because—I smiled?

[*He starts to protest.*]

Oh, it's all right, only—it just makes me feel a good deal of responsibility, that's all.

[*A pause.*]

Was it *all* your money, that you invested?

PETER

Oh, no! I've got—some left. A little.

JANE

Money you'd—saved?

PETER

We couldn't save much. I didn't earn enough.

JANE

Your folks, you mean?

PETER

Mother and grandfather. You see, we were all living together in Chillicothe, and I was working in the hotel there. Sort of in the office. Grandfather had this money he'd saved, and then last June he died. And he left the money to us—mother and me.

JANE

Was it much?

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PETER

Oh, yes. Twenty-two thousand, four hundred dollars.

JANE

How much did you—invest?

PETER

Well, first I want to tell you. You see, if you just take the interest on that, why, it isn't very much to get along on. Then Mr. Madden—that's the man at the hotel—he heard I was getting this money, only he thought it was more—and he was sort of tired of running the hotel, anyhow—and he said if I could pay him fifty thousand dollars he'd let me have it. It makes a lot of money.

JANE

I see.

PETER

That's when I thought, if I could take this money we had and make more out of it, quickly—everything would be fine. So of course I thought of the theatrical business, because I'd read about that sort of thing happening—and anyhow I'd been connected with it, sort of. Mother thought too it would be a good thing, and so I left fourteen hundred dollars with her, and I came to New York to look around. That was last week.

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JANE

You brought twenty-one thousand with you?

PETER

Well, the bank there put it in a bank here for me.
So all I had to do was give Mr. Lehman a check.

JANE

For—all of it?

PETER

Oh, no. Only twenty thousand.

[She rises, angrily.]

What's the matter?

JANE

Nothing.

PETER

You're not—going, are you?

JANE

[Still half afire with rage at LEHMAN.]

Yes, I—I think I must.

PETER

Well, much obliged for coming in and talking to
me.