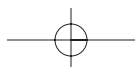


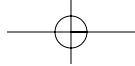
# Chapter 19. Between High School and College

## I

After graduating from high school at the end of January, Josy used the next several weeks to prepare for college entrance exams. She would take them in April and after that look for a temporary job till college began in September.

The exams took a full day, from nine in the morning till four in the afternoon, with a one-hour break for lunch. In the morning everyone took the required tests for English and Math. Then after lunch came three more tests; her choices were French, History, and Physics. A couple weeks later, the University of Pennsylvania informed her that she had





been accepted for admission the coming September.

It was then that she heard from a girl whose parents her family knew casually. Jessie Stone, rough featured and deep voiced but with a ready smile, was some two years older than Josy. She was one of the brightest people Josy had ever met. Two years earlier on graduating from Gratz High, Jessie had been offered five scholarships. She had accepted the one from Bryn Mawr College. Now she was phoning to suggest that, having read some of Josy's poetry in the *Spotlight* and *Scholastic Magazine*, she felt Josy should also apply to Bryn Mawr. Jessie would be happy to arrange an interview for her there, offering to show her around campus and even take her to the interview. Touched by all this attention and flattered by such interest, Josy agreed.

They met early one morning, riding all the way to Bryn Mawr by trolley, subway and then suburban train. It took close to two hours to get there. Once on campus, Jessie delivered her to the office where she would be having her interview.

The Dean was pleased to hear that Josy had taken five majors during her last year in high school.

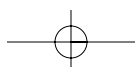
"Four years of French is a good beginning," she smiled. "So many girls try to get in here with only three years of a foreign language, and of course we have to turn them away. However," she continued, "I see from your record that you're still missing the classical languages."

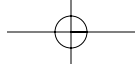
Without waiting for a reply, she picked up the phone, dialed a number, then spoke in monosyllables for a few minutes. Finally she hung up, beaming.

"Well, you're in luck," she announced. "They're willing to accept you if you make up your deficiency. You'll have to take two courses before we can enroll you, one in Latin, the other in Greek. We can schedule those right here on campus this coming summer. That way you'll be all caught up and you can start with us in the fall."

Somewhat taken aback, Josy thanked her, but declined, explaining that she would prefer to stay with her original decision to enter Penn in September. The Dean appeared shocked and dismissed her coolly. Jessie, waiting outside, expressed her extreme disappointment. She insisted that Josy was making a terrible mistake and, all the way back home, she kept elaborating on what wonderful opportunities Josy would be missing.

\* \* \* \* \*





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It had been disconcerting for the past couple months to have no fixed daily routine as she had in school. She felt somewhat lost, in limbo, apprehensive about the upcoming college experience, wondering if it would provide the security and contentment she had so enjoyed at Gratz High. There were still four months to go till September. To fill in the time and gain some experience and money, she went in search of a job. In the *Evening Bulletin* she noticed an ad from a factory on the 3500 block of Ridge Avenue. This was only a five-minute bus ride from home. They needed somebody in an assembly line to solder metal cogs onto various parts of machinery. She decided to apply. Without even asking for credentials they told her to report the next day.

Pleased at having found employment so easily, she arrived at the factory early next morning and without any training was put right to work on the assembly line. She lasted exactly one day. The work itself bored her to distraction, while the filth, congestion, roar of machinery, and the airlessness inside the huge crowded room sapped every bit of her energy. She arrived home that night exhausted to the bone, depressed beyond measure, actually dizzy from weariness. It turned out that she had a fever, and she called in next morning to tell them she would not be back. Then she spent the next two days in bed.

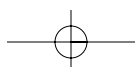
As soon as she felt better, she began answering ads again, none of which even got her an interview. Utterly defeated, she began to understand why people who were unemployed experience such self-doubt and despair. Although she had never thought about it before, suddenly she realized the importance of a college education, if for nothing else than to avoid ever having to do this kind of work again. Then just as she was beginning to give up hope completely she came upon a notice in the paper that caught her eye. The Winston Publishing Company was looking for an office clerk, no experience required. She hurried to answer the ad.

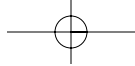
When she learned that the building was in a seedy part of town across the street from a strip-tease theater, the Troc, she hesitated. Then swallowing her uneasiness, she decided to go for the interview anyway.

"How much money shall I ask for," she demanded.

"Nothing less than sixteen dollars a week," her father advised.

When she arrived at Tenth and Arch Streets she saw a long line of men across the street waiting to get into the Troc for the afternoon burlesque show. Hurriedly she turned into the old run-down Winston Building, deliberately averting her eyes from this shoddy crew, a couple of whom had noticed her and were starting to call out to her. Taking the elevator up to the seventh floor, she found a small lobby where she gave her name to a





receptionist. Then she took a seat on a bench opposite the elevator. To calm her anxiety while waiting, she forced herself to concentrate on the exposed cranks and bolts outside the elevator shaft, trying to remember enough from her physics course to determine just how the contraption worked.

Finally an older man came out from one of the offices and sat down beside her. He questioned her about her background, work experience, and high school classes. Finally gathering that she had never taken even one commercial course, that she was unable to type, and that she knew absolutely nothing about office equipment, he fell silent and stared at her sadly. She sensed that he was about to dismiss her when she suddenly volunteered, "I took five major subjects instead of the usual four in high school last year."

He continued to gaze at her silently. Finally he spoke. "You know, I think I'm going to give you a chance after all. You probably won't last here more than two weeks, but somehow you remind me of my daughter. She can't do anything either. We pay fourteen dollars a week."

"No, I need to ask for sixteen," Josy spoke up firmly, proud that she sounded so self-assured.

After a moment's hesitation, he sighed. "Very well, sixteen," he replied, rising. "Report to my secretary," and indicating the elderly lady sitting behind a desk near his office, he disappeared.

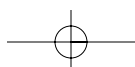
Pleased with herself, but quivering from nervousness, Josy reported to work the following day. The office proved stuffy and small. Showing her to a small table, the secretary indicated a machine called a comptometer, showed her a few keys to punch, and then, pointing to a stack of papers, ordered, "Work on those," before disappearing.

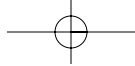
She did the best she could. Her job was to tabulate and print out the salary list of other workers in the company. It proved monotonous and uninteresting, but every time she got tired of it, she reminded herself that this was still preferable to the soldering and assembly line she had left behind at the factory.

Each morning she got out of bed reluctantly, slowly dressed in a suit, blouse, and stockings, grudgingly downed a glass of orange juice at Malvina's insistence, then left to take the A bus into town, where she was due to arrive at eight forty-five.

"You're going to be late," her mother nudged her every morning and, indeed, the first few days she arrived at the office barely on time. Then, without saying a word, Malvina set the kitchen clock ten minutes ahead.

"I don't know what you were so worried about this morning," Josy would call out





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every evening when she arrived home around six o'clock. "I got there with at least ten minutes to spare!"

The man who had hired her proved to be right. Exactly two weeks to the day after she had started, he called her in to his office and announced, "You're fired!"

When she asked why, he replied, with a withering look, "We need someone who can type."

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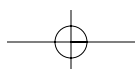
The next few days she spent dejected, following one newspaper lead after another with no success. She felt sure there would never be another job available.

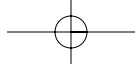
Then suddenly she came upon an ad from the United States Signal Corps. They were looking for workers of all types, and no experience was needed. Taking the A bus in the opposite direction from Center City, she then changed to a trolley car outside the Budd Company on Hunting Park Avenue and finally arrived at an elongated one-story building on Henry Avenue in Germantown. Here they examined her application, asked a few questions, and then offered her a job wrapping packages. Since the country was at war, workers were desperately needed to pack supplies for shipping all over the United States and even to factories, depots, and army posts overseas. The pay would be thirty-five dollars a week, more than double what she had been earning at the Winston Publishing Company. She accepted eagerly.

When she came home and told her parents, they were less than enthusiastic. Her schedule would involve working a different shift each month. She would start with the day shift, from 8 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon. Then the following month they would switch to the "graveyard" shift from midnight to 8 A.M. (this especially displeased her mother). The month after that came the "swing" shift (from 4 in the afternoon to midnight). Through all three shifts she would have to work seven consecutive days, then get the eighth day off.

To counter her parents' misgivings she pointed out that the pay was too good not to accept, and after all, she would be doing her small part to help in the war effort. What finally convinced them was that it would be only temporary, just for four months till she started college. Reluctantly they agreed.

She started the day shift May 1st. After just one orientation session of about two hours, she began the actual job. Standing at a long table side by side with several other





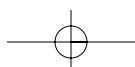
men and women, most of them older, she began packaging electric and construction equipment, then labeled the parcels for shipping. The others were noisy blue-collar folk, the women given to foul language and snide innuendoes as much as the men. The favorite joke around the table got repeated every time a woman went into the back supply closet for wrapping paper, tape, or felt cloth. Then the fellows would snicker and call out in unison, "Oh, you're going in there to get felt?" They would all roar with laughter, slapping each other on the back, never tiring of the same line over and over.

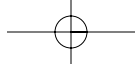
Generally the job took little concentration, and few workers exerted themselves. The women sat in groups on a cart whenever they got the chance, sometimes waiting for supplies to arrive, other times just loafing. Meanwhile the men used this opportunity to comment on the respective clothes, anatomies, and physical appearance of the women in as much detail as possible.

In addition to half an hour for lunch, everyone got two fifteen-minute breaks, one mid-morning, the other halfway through the afternoon. Then they bought refreshments at the candy machines and exchanged even more gossip. Josy learned that the noisiest two women were sisters, one married and boasting of her many encounters with men, the other single and claiming to be just as experienced. They both had an eye out looking for a prospective husband for the unmarried one, and had little to say to Josy after learning that she had no single brothers, cousins, or male relatives available. The month of May passed uneventfully, and she was satisfied just to be employed instead of "pounding pavements" in search of a job.

On June 1st, her group switched to the "graveyard" shift, and the change proved miserable. Lunchtime came halfway through the shift, at four in the morning. Everyone was half-asleep, and only a couple of the more stalwart men downed any food. They also got two breaks, one at 2 A.M., the other at 6 A.M., when some of them bought snacks just to keep awake.

Josy often wondered how efficient the work done on the graveyard shift really turned out to be. During the first three weeks they all walked around like robots, bumping into one another, eyes glazed, and by the end of the shift, chattering incoherently. By the time she arrived home, it was close to nine in the morning. Malvina would always be waiting, insisting that she eat a normal breakfast, but all Josy wanted to do was fall into bed and sleep till late afternoon. She had little appetite for any meals, and saw few of her friends because, on the one occasion when she did go out with them in the evening, she arrived for work exhausted even before she had wrapped her first package. By eleven at





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night, when her parents were just preparing to go to bed, there she was leaving for work. It was a dull existence, more exhausting each night. She kept consoling herself with the thought that this would last for only one month of her life. Still, the further into the month she got, the harder it was to keep going.

Then came July, and she sighed with relief as her group went into the swing shift. But now what surprised her was how unpleasant this turned out to be. Getting home and going to bed at 1 A.M, she would end up sleeping till about 10 in the morning, when she got up, ate breakfast and, before she knew it, lunch. By then she had only a couple hours left before leaving for work at 3. This left no time for seeing friends or doing much of anything. Also, she found that between having a late breakfast, a normal lunch, a snack before leaving for work, two breaks and supper on the job itself, and finally a snack on arriving home after midnight, she seemed to be eating all the time, which left her feeling continuously lethargic.

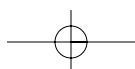
It was an extremely lonely period, and the only thing she could think of to do during the short afternoons before work was to read. She would carry a folding chair to the park a block away, and sit there outdoors with a book. It was at this time that she came upon that early work by Dostoievsky, the novel he had written around age twenty, called *The Insulted and Injured*. From the first page she loved it so intensely that she decided it was the best book she had ever read. In her lonely state it completely filled her soul. By the time she finished, she nearly wept with a deep sense of loss at having to part from its characters, whom she had actually come to think of as her own personal friends.

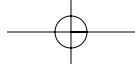
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Her supervisor at the Signal Corps was a middle-aged man named Oliver. He was particularly hostile to her, perhaps because he found out that she was college-bound, and also perhaps because she never participated in the rough humor around her. When she reminded him during the last week of August that she would be leaving on September 1st he turned especially nasty, taking every opportunity to find fault and scold her for things she never did.

On August 31st she finally made the rounds to say good-bye to her co-workers.

"You're lucky!" they exclaimed. "Getting out of this hell-hole! You timed it just right. Just when we go back on night duty, you leave."





The next day, September 1st, they were due to go back on the graveyard shift again. "Now you don't have to put in even one more night on the graveyard shift!" observed one of them.

"Yes, she does," Oliver, listening close by, interjected. Smugly he announced, "Labor Day is not a recognized holiday for government workers. It's wartime. So she does have to come in tomorrow, and" (with a smirk) "by then we'll be back on graveyard shift!"

He seemed to take extra pleasure in this, glad to have inflicted another inconvenience. Josy reminded him that she had already given her notice and that the Personnel Department had all her records arranged for August 31st as her final day.

"Well, you'll just have to get them rearranged," he retorted. "And if you don't, I'll see to it that you get a black mark on your record for disobeying supervisor's orders!"

Arguing with him to no avail, she suddenly stopped in mid-sentence. "Wait a minute!" she cried out. "I just remembered! I just put in seven consecutive days. That means I'm entitled to my eighth day off. Which comes tomorrow! That would be September 1st, wouldn't it?"

As he stared in disbelief, she continued, "Of course I'll follow your orders, Oliver! I'll go get my records rearranged right now so I can leave one day later just as you asked me to. That way I'll also get the extra day's pay. And I still won't have to be here tonight for the graveyard shift, will I, since it happens to be my day off! Thank you so much for reminding me!"

He glared in fury, but there was nothing he could do. Later that afternoon, when she returned from the Personnel Office after arranging for the necessary changes, she made it a point to find Oliver and inform him that, thanks to him, she had just learned some other interesting news. Adding this one extra day to her record would give her not only that additional day's salary, but it would also automatically put her into the status of "permanent" employee, even though she was leaving. As such she would be entitled to collect extra money for vacation time, sick leave, and insurance benefits, all of which she would have lost out on had she left just one day earlier as planned. It amounted to an additional five hundred dollars!

Furious, Oliver nursed his anger in silence, realizing that had it not been for him she would never have gained these benefits. And since she was following his instructions to the letter, there was nothing he could do to harm her record.

"Thank you again for all your help, Oliver!" she smiled sweetly as she bade him a final good-bye at the end of that afternoon.

