# of EXPERIENCE

Asking for a Job

DEAR Voice of Experience:

Please tell me how to overcome the fear of going into a place and asking for a job. When I finally do get outside the place in question, and I know they are hiring people, for me to go in would be similar to entering a cage of lions. A great fear overpowers me which leaves my mouth dry, my body trembling and lost to all power of speaking intelligently or convincingly.

Bashfulness, nervousness, self-consciousness and a number of unpleasant attributes common to the sensitive and moody type of person, have become an insurmountable barrier to me, and these together with people saying I am lazy and, never will amount to anything, make me very discouraged. In reality I am not lazy, just fearful.

Until last year I was very hopeful, but an article that appeared in the newspaper has taken the wind out of my sails. The article was in answer to a letter sent in by a man who is my exact type; namely, having no initiative, too good-natured and unable to assume responsibilities. The psychiatrist who answered the letter went on to say that it was psychologically impossible for a person of this type to ever make a decent living. If this is true it seems I am beaten before I start. Isn't this true, Voice of Experience?

—EDWARD L.

Edward, you are beaten before you start—if you think you are beaten. What we are and how we react to our environment are the result of complex influences, and in your case it would benefit us nothing to delve deeply into the possible causes of your fearful self-consciousness. Suffice it to say that the influences which have made you the kind of person you are, are nearly all controllable. As far as the personality is concerned, nothing is done that cannot be undone. No one is so cynical and malicious that self-knowledge of that fact and driving determination will not make it possible to transform into a sympathetic and optimistic person. No one is so timid and self-effacing but that his own recognition of his failings will not prove a base for operating effectively against them.

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You have undoubtedly misinterpreted the psychiatrist who said you would never make a success of living. It is true that if you remain transfixed with self-conscious fear of human contact you will have a hard time facing life, but there is no earthly reason why you should let yourself stay thus handicapped.

I would ask you to keep one important fact in mind as you go about re-orienting yourself. You are never the person you see through the distorted eyes of your own vision. You place too much importance on yourself. Your reactions make you the center of the universe, whereas in reality you are only an atom in the flux of faces that comprise mankind. You must learn to see yourself as others do—in the context of humanity. Alleys are not on you, Edward, and certainly no one but yourself knows that your mouth is dry and the palms of your hands are wet with perspiration. Those physiological reactions are not important to anyone but yourself, so why translate them in terms of fear and timidity? There isn't a time when I'm called upon to address a large assembly that I do not undergo such a reaction. That is quite natural, but by application we can overcome these manifestations and even profit by them, for they egg us on to achievement and effectiveness that would not be possible otherwise.

I've talked to many well-known actors on the subject of stage fright, and not a few of them have confessed that they are regularly besieged with a terrible sense of fright, loss of voice, dryness of the mouth, etcetra. And, furthermore, all this serves to make them try that much harder to put over a good performance.

You, too, Edward, must accept your physical sensations of self-consciousness. You can best do it by understanding you are not by any means a freak, but that we all have your trouble in some degree. It is human. It is a healthy sign of normal balance. So, gather up your forces of resistance and see yourself from the outside. Set your mind to it and let your spirit be reined by the bite and lash of your ambition. You can overcome your self-consciousness and be all the better for it.—Copyright 1937.

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"You're not superhuman," he said. "And you've been doing three men's work all winter. What have you got but your nerves anyhow? You're not a factory! How long is it since you've had a real night's sleep? Look at your hands."

Chris held them out, and they were not steady. "Funny!" he said.

"Better get away."

"Get away, with bills all over the place and two rents to pay?"

That was the nearest he had ever come to disloyalty to Katie, that mention of her bills. For Katie was spending money now, upholding her position, talking about buying a car, patronizing beauty shops, and spending hours each day on her dressing. Two maids in the house, one wearing a uniform and cap and opening the door unwillingly to city rates. Cards on the table for dinner, big and still bigger bills at the daily market. And collections poor. Chris sending out his bills like shooting arrows into the air, and times hard. Bread lines in the lower part of town near the river, a few near riots, a deputy sheriff brought into the hospital badly beaten.

Then one hot day in the operating room, closing up after an appendectomy, Chris felt himself go dizzy, as though all the blood had left his head. He finished and went out, to find his legs soft under him and the floor apparently receding.

A week later he and Lawrence were off for a rest, and the tight band around his head had already loosened. Cramped in his berth at night, he slept like a baby on the train. They stopped in Toronto to buy tackle and then started north, being dropped at their shack by the steamer. Chris stood on the bank and breathed deep of the crisp air.

"Ted," he said, "that's the first real lungful of air I've had in four years."

Chris and Ted were away when war broke out in Europe. Chris, rowing out to meet the weekly boat with their supplies, brought the news back, and Ted upset the potatoes he was peeling for dinner.

"How I'd like to go!"

Chris put down the paper and got ready to clean some fish. "I imagine it won't last long," he said. "Damn fish anyhow. I'm growing scales."

They dismissed it at that. They were camping alone in a wooden shack far from civilization. They lived mostly in bathing suits and in canoes, and both men were brown and strong. Chris' big muscles bulged from long portages, and his hands were steady again. At night they built a smudge by the river bank and sat there, talking or silent.

That night when the war news came, Chris did not go to bed. He sat alone for a long time on the river bank while the fire burned low and then went out. The river in front and the pine woods behind seemed to cut him off from life.

Death. War meant death. He stirred uneasily, seeing those men he had known and liked in Vienna now facing death; the bearded Hofrats, the eager young Docents, the sentry at the gate of the hospital, even the porter with his military mustache. All equal now in what they faced.

He was roused by the sound of a paddle, to see the leaden sheet of the river breaking into small waves at his feet. A canoe came out of the darkness, an Indian driving it rapidly and beaching it almost at his feet. He had brought a telegram, and Chris read it by the flare of a lighted match.

It read: "Father shot and in critical condition. Can you come?" and it was signed "Beverly."

He went out that night with the Indian guide, leaving Ted to break up the camp. Hour after hour he sat cramped in the canoe, watching the darker shadows of the woods as they moved past with horrible slowness. He offered to paddle, but the Indian gruffly refused, and at last he settled back, thinking of that ironic twist by which he hated and fought Staunton Lewis and now was hastening to try to save him.

It was daylight when they reached the settlement, and Chris sent off his wire to Beverly. He was weary and unshaven, but by taking a local at once he could catch the limited, and so he went as he was. Already Canada was at war, the railroad bridges under guard, the faces of the people clouded and broding. But the train seemed to crawl. When it stopped, he could hardly sit in his seat. He felt as if he must get out and push it, hurry it along; not because Staunton Lewis might be dying, but because Beverly had called him and he was on the way.

Two days later Chris operated. Grant was ill, and Beverly had insisted that they wait for Chris. Lewis had been shot in the abdomen, and it was a case to try a man's very soul. The New York surgeon Jerry had sent for was opposed to an operation at all.

"What's the use? He won't stand up under it," he said.

Chris put the situation up to Beverly, white and quiet, with deep black circles under her eyes. She seemed thinner than when he had known her, but her gaze was as direct as ever.

"You understand," he said. "He may come out. He may not. In any case—"

"It's his only chance, isn't it?"

"I think so. Yes."

"Then do it, Chris."

But Lewis had more stamina than any one had suspected. He had the will to live, too. For a week Chris hardly left him day or night. The fight raged. Sometimes the man in the bed had the advantage, and death seemed to retire into a dark corner to wait for the next round. Then it would come closer again, lean over the bed, seem to spread its black shadow over man and bed and room. Chris could almost see it there, and he would try with all his will power to thrust it back.

Part of the time Lewis was conscious. Then Chris would occasionally find his eyes on him, ironic and slightly mocking, as if he said:

"Why do it? You don't like me, and I don't like you. I'm not afraid to die."

Sometimes he would find Jerry Ames in the room, tall and smiling, and his father-in-law fixing on him a look of concentrated venom. Indeed, one of the first indications of recovery was when Lewis ordered Jerry out of the room. Not directly. He spoke to the nurse.

"Get my son-in-law out of the room and keep him out," he said distinctly. "And send in the orderly."

It was the first indication he had ever given of his dislike for Jerry and his distrust of him. He was smiling faintly when Jerry went out, and still smiling when he turned his head and looked at Chris.

"Go on home, man," he said weakly. "Good lord, I haven't adopted you."

"I'm going when I'm good and ready," said Chris. "Do you think I'm going to throw away a week's work?"

"I suppose that's what I am —a good job, eh?"

"That's all. But a damned good job, if I do say it," said Chris, grinning.

They understood each other after that. It was talk Lewis could comprehend. Then one night, abruptly, he stared up at Chris with unwinking directness.

"What are you going to charge for all this?"

"All the tariff will stand! I need it," said Chris cheerfully.

On the first day Lewis was able to sit up in bed and wrote Chris a check for ten thousand dollars. Chris folded it up and put it in his pocket.

"Well?"

Chris grinned down at him. "If you think you're worth as much as that to the world, I'm not arguing. I'd figured on a thousand."

"You're an impudent young scamp," said Lewis, but later on the nurse, coming in, found him grinning to himself.

It was about that time that Chris had his first talk with Beverly since her marriage. She took him home from the hospital in the limousine. Both of them showed the wear and tear of the fight, and Chris leaned back in his corner and yawned.

"Sorry, I'm tired, Beverly."

"Of course you know how I feel, Chris. There aren't any words—"

"Don't thank me. I've done a job and been paid for it. That's my business."

She stirred. "Don't be hard, Chris. I can't seem to get near you. You shut me out when I try. Do you hate me so much, or is it just that I don't matter?"

Continued Tomorrow

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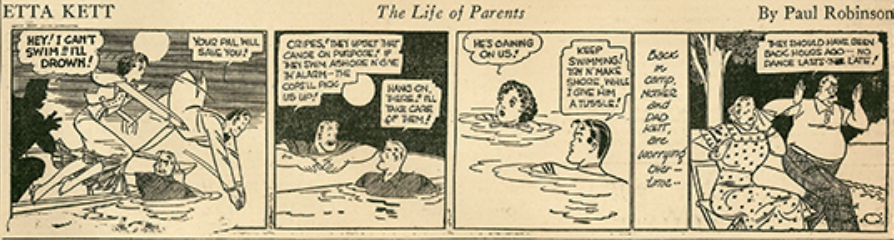

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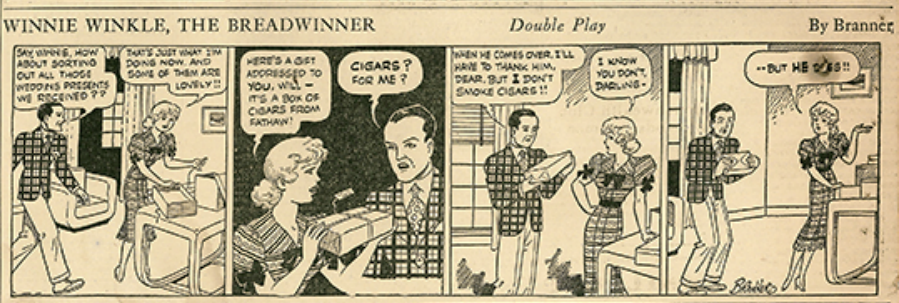

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