

"Dear Jim:

"When mothers have kids, is it serious? How sick do they get, and can you have a baby without getting sick, and if you get sick how long does it last?

"Jack Dennis"

I waved at Jim until he saw me, and then I tossed the note. He had to jump out of his seat and reach for the ceiling to get it. It was a swell catch. While he read the note, I watched him. He nodded that he would answer right away. After a while his note came sailing across the room, and I took it easy with one hand.

It said:

"Dear Jack:

"You can't have a baby without getting sick. The reason I am an orphan is because it happened to my mother. She died.

"Jim Henderson"

THAT was enough for me. I got my books together and walked out of study hall without even telling Miss Jason where I was going. I got outside and started running. It was about eight miles to home. I took a streetcar to the city limits. Then I began thumbing rides. For a while I didn't have any luck. When I thought of Mother lying there, it made me so mad I shook my fist at the automobiles that wouldn't give me a lift. Finally a big white roadster with a girl driving slowed down. She was a honey, real swell looking. She was on her way to play golf at the Country Club. When I told her Mother was sick, she stepped on the gas till we were doing eighty-five. She pulled into our driveway and let me off right at our front door.

I ran in. In the library Dad and Doctor Fenton were talking. I peeked through the drapes and saw them at the fireplace. They didn't seem worried about anything. Dad had his back to me, pouring soda into Doctor Fenton's glass. They were laughing. I tiptoed past the door and started upstairs. The third stair made a squeal like a mouse when my foot pressed down. Dad heard it. He and Dr. Fenton came to the door.

He said, "Jack!"

"I want to see Mother," I said.

"Come down, son." Doctor Fenton smiled. "She's sound asleep."

Dad said, "Come down here, Jack."

I walked down. Dad took my shoulders. I knew what he was going to say. He looked over his shoulder at the library clock.

"Why aren't you in school?"

"It's Mother," I said.

Dad shook his head and smiled at Doctor Fenton. "Doc," he said, "my powers of persuasion are fruitless. Will you inform this truant that his mother is in no danger? This morning at breakfast I attempted it myself; but, as you can see, he comes bobbing up again, skeptical and unconvinced."

"Come here, son," Doctor Fenton said.

He walked back to the library, and I followed with Dad. The doctor sat in the red-leather chair and finished his drink. I noticed he was drinking plain soda; but Dad had whisky in his glass, and Dad only drank whisky when he was worried or had a big case in court. Doctor Fenton put his glass down and took my hand.

"Son," he said, "what business am I in?"