

THE WOMAN OF 25,000 SHOES

A REAL ROMANCE OF THE BUSINESS WORLD



A WOMAN never knows what she can do until she is put to the test. The test came to Susan Daniels comparatively early in her married life. Her husband was in business downtown. He had contracts with most of the big shoe concerns. A fair number of persons who buy shoes wear out the soles before the uppers are impaired, and find it advantageous to have the shoes repaired rather than buy new ones. Sometimes there is an imperfection in the upper, and an artistic bit of mending will make the shoe as good as new or nearly so.

Mrs. Daniels' husband had his workshop in the heart of the business district and shoe people sent their repair jobs to him. His workmen half-soled and heeled, or full-soled and heeled, or patched the uppers, or made such alterations as were necessary, and the shoes went back to the dealers. The shoe men got a stiff price and Mr. Daniels got a fair price. He did such a large volume of business that he made a good deal of money. Millions of shoes are sold in New York each year. Tens of thousands are repaired. Mr. Daniels had the work of a majority of the big companies whose stores are scattered about Manhattan, Brooklyn and The Bronx.

But just when things seemed brightest for him in a business way his health failed. A physician told him he couldn't stand the rigors of the winters in New York. He went to Florida. When he returned in the Spring he seemed a little better, but that Summer he had to go to Saratoga, and the next winter he had to go to Florida again, and the next Summer he had to go to the Adirondacks. Then he died.

Illness is an awful drain. Winters in Florida and Summers in Saratoga and the Adirondacks are very expensive. A business, no matter how well organized, will go to pieces unless it has a directing head who watches after its affairs with care and intelligence. The first Winter that Mr. Daniels went to Florida Mrs. Daniels went to the shop. She knew nothing about business, and her husband's line she thought, however, she might be of some use. If the business did not go on and did not make money the physicians' bills could not be met, the nurses could not be paid and her husband could not stop at the hotels where he would receive the best of food and attention.

Mr. Daniels was opposed to her going to the shop, but she was so insistent that he humored her. She might do some good and she couldn't do much harm, he thought. It eased her mind a bit to think she was doing something

for the general welfare. She never had kept books and could not tell good leather from bad. It was better for her to be at the office and nominally, at least, acting as the head of the establishment, she believed, than to remain at home brooding over her husband's illness and wondering how he was getting on among strangers in the South.

After a time she learned how to keep the accounts and gradually she picked up a little knowledge about the other ends of the business. Her husband had an excellent foreman, a conscientious, able, good man, who was devoted to his employer and who sympathized with the efforts of the wife to do what little she could to safeguard the business.

Mr. Daniels resumed charge of affairs after his first Winter in the South, but had to give up within a few months and go away. The second Winter his condition was so serious that all the details were kept from him, so he would have no business worries to bother about. That second Winter, Mrs. Daniels learned so much of the office and shop work that she felt competent to assume control in full. She kept the books, looked after the correspondence, directed the work of the employees, made collections and did everything just as her husband had done. She worked many hours a day, saved every penny she could, and practiced the most rigid economy—down-town and up-town.

There was greater and greater need for earnings. Illness is very expensive. It is excessively so when physicians of the highest reputation are called and everything that medical skill and love can suggest is done to save or prolong a life. When Mr. Daniels died nearly all the money that had come from the business was gone. She had nothing left except the business, and its value was dependent entirely upon how she managed it. There was nothing that might be termed a plant, and what worth there was to the establishment consisted of that elastic and sometimes intangible thing known as good will.

It is 11 years since Mr. Daniels died. The 11 years have taught much to the widow. It was not long after her husband's death that she had a reason for fright. There were some other persons in the repair line who looked with rather jealous eyes upon the trade her husband had built up. They thought it was a good opportunity, now that he was dead, to get hold of it. They did not believe a woman was fitted for such a business. They were men who had got their work from the big shoe companies, they knew about what it cost her to make repairs, and they could give a pretty shrewd guess as to how much profit she was making. She did all her work by hand. She believes there is no comparison between the virtue of hand sewing and machine work, and the men who wanted to get the trade away from her knew they could do the repairs cheaper and that they could afford to underbid her. They went to the big companies and submitted proposals. The

figures they presented must have been quite attractive, although the companies had a rake-off under their contracts with Mrs. Daniels that should have been satisfying. There must be a lot of profit in the shoe business if the margin is as large on the sale of a new shoe as it is on the repair of an old one.

The companies charge the customer \$1.25 for half-soleing and heeling. Mrs. Daniels did the work for the companies for 85 cents. The companies charged their patrons \$1.50 for full soleing and heeling. Mrs. Daniels did the work for the companies for 90 cents. That was not all. She did all patching for the companies for nothing. The gentlemen who wanted to take Mrs. Daniels' business away from her cut the price on half-soleing and heeling to 75 cents or lower. Their price for full soleing and heeling was cut proportionately. Mrs. Daniels urged upon the companies the value of hand repairing over machine repairing and explained that the profit to her under the contracts was only reasonable. She was willing to shave her figures a little, but not to the extent necessary to meet the competitors. Some of the companies considered the subject at length, and then informed her that if she did not meet their prices they would take their work from her. In a business way this ultimatum forced upon Mrs. Daniels the most desperate situation she ever had to encounter. By giving up hand work and putting in machines she could cut the price to her competitors' level, but she would lower the grade of her work. If she persisted in sewing by hand she would lose the contracts and the bulk of her business and probably would be forced to the wall. She is mild of voice and not strong physically, but she has a lot of courage. She stuck to her standard. She let the contracts go.

It was mighty hard and uphill work for a long time after that. Possibly there were times when she thought it would have been better if she had submitted. It is bitter to have to discharge men who have worked for you for years. It is difficult sometimes to meet the pay rolls when there is the greatest need of showing a good front. Not all the shoe companies deserted her, however, and some of those that abandoned their contracts sent a little work to her. There were a lot of old customers, too, who were men who had given their trade to her husband long before she had ever been in the office. They wanted their shoes repaired in the old-fashioned way, which had been the custom of the house from its establishment. Best of all, however, there was a dealer down in the Wall-street district who makes shoes for bankers and brokers, millionaires and men of much money.

He placed for less than \$5. Usually she studied how people walked. She used her brains. She worked early and late, and slowly but surely she made progress. She had to be very economical at this time. Every dollar had to be watched, but when she was on secure ground at last she gave evidence of the fact that her vision was broadening, and she proceeded to take advantage of it.

There are a lot of athletic clubs in New York and vicinity. There are a great number of gymnasiums. Gentlemen who go in for physical culture and who have ideas on the line of what they call the "military art of self-defense," are fond of swatting a punching bag now and then. A punching bag will stand just about so much of ill treatment, and then it will protest by bursting a seam or ripping itself open. Mrs. Daniels let all the athletic club managers, all the gymnasium instructors, and all the other people interested in punching bags, know that she could doctor a sick punching bag until it was fit to bout with Jim Jeffries, and she was not alone. As proof of the correctness of her statement she has stitched thousands of punching bags back to usefulness. Trainers and coaches have a habit of getting cut, or bruised or burst. She entered the field of repairing traveling bags. There are hundreds and hundreds of

thousands of baseballs used in the United States each year. Some of them get ripped or torn before they have been used an hour. She makes a specialty of restoring baseball covers to their original condition. It was natural, perhaps, that other branches of the sporting business should come to her. She has one department now for the repair of baseball shoes, golf shoes, rowing shoes, bowling shoes, running shoes. She probably does more work of this character than any dozen other persons. Catchers' gloves, fielders' gloves, rootballs and anything or everything in the leather line in sporting games she repairs. She has taken up, too, repair work in rubber footwear, but mostly, so far, in rubber soles and rubber heels.

Mrs. Daniels is as proud of her business as if she was the head of a great and fashionable establishment in Fifth or Madison avenue. She prides herself not only on being the only woman in her line in America, but of doing the biggest business of any one in that field. She has her offices and her shop on the fourth floor of a big skyscraper in Fulton street. Each year shows a larger and larger business done by her. She gets a moderate amount of trade from the big shoe companies, but she is so secure in her private trade and in the business of dealers outside of the big companies that new she is serene. She repairs from 25,000 to 50,000 shoes a year. The number of punching bags, traveling bags, baseballs, baseball shoes, golf shoes, rowing shoes, bowling shoes and the like that she makes over in the course of a year would fill a warehouse. She is at home in the office or in the shop. She knows leather and she knows shoes. She has a lot of workmen and she treats them well. She is prosperous and completely independent. She is a thoroughgoing business woman of today, but she has become one from necessity and not from choice. As she looks back now, Mrs. Daniels realizes that, in clinging to the standard that was old-fashioned and honest, she did the wisest thing of her business career. It was a struggle, time of despair, but it was the right and the only way. Had she been weak enough to try to meet competition by installing machines, and doing machine work, she probably never would have had the measure of success that has come to her in clinging to the better method. She has won respect and confidence, and has made herself secure. Her business is a queer one for a gentlewoman, but she has given an humble example of business enterprise, business courage and business honesty that may serve as a guide to many other women who are entering the varied fields of business in these days. (Copyright, 1912, by Richard Spillane.)

A Dealer in Furniture—A Coup in Chancy Finance

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

MR. JOHN BLINKER sat in his little upholstering establishment in Schoonover avenue and worked industriously upon a mahogany settee he was recovering for a wealthy customer. As he hammered he pondered over the limited field which the business of an upholsterer affords, and a man of energy and ambition, and the surer stirred dissatisfaction within his mind. Mentally he blamed his father for choosing such a narrow path for his footsteps; aloud he ridiculed himself for following the trade for so many years without seeking a higher post than the very discontent within him was certain proof of his ability to fill. "Hard work, smiting a tack with an upholstering hammer, and a man of energy and ambition, and the surer stirred dissatisfaction within his mind. Mentally he blamed his father for choosing such a narrow path for his footsteps; aloud he ridiculed himself for following the trade for so many years without seeking a higher post than the very discontent within him was certain proof of his ability to fill. "Hard work, smiting a tack with an upholstering hammer, and a man of energy and ambition, and the surer stirred dissatisfaction within his mind. Mentally he blamed his father for choosing such a narrow path for his footsteps; aloud he ridiculed himself for following the trade for so many years without seeking a higher post than the very discontent within him was certain proof of his ability to fill."

As he uttered the observation he turned, and discovering that a gentleman had entered the shop, he dropped his hammer and advanced to the little counter. The stranger was a well-dressed man with a shrewd, clean-shaven face from which two gray eyes critically surveyed Blinker as he approached.

"Good morning, sir," said the upholsterer cheerfully. "Very fine morning."

The visitor nodded slightly. "Mr. Blinker?" he inquired.

Mr. Blinker bowed. "At your service, sir," he answered.

The visitor puffed quietly at a cigar, the fragrance of which informed the upholsterer that it was not of the nickel variety by means of which he soothed his own discontent.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" said Blinker.

The stranger leaned across the counter and answered in a low tone: "I have an important commission for you, Mr. Blinker, that is if you care to undertake it."

The upholsterer stood to attention. "I'll be pleased to undertake it," he said eagerly.

"That's good," murmured the other. "That's very good."

Again he smoked in silence, regard-

ing the tradesman the while as if weighing up his capabilities for the work he had in view. The silence made Blinker uneasy, while his imagination so started him by spinning tasks and surer stirred dissatisfaction within his mind. The visitor's next remark came as a welcome relief.

"They tell me," he said, pleasantly, "that you are the best judge of fine furniture in Manhattan."

Blinker's facial area became a corrugated stretch of smile wrinkles. "I know a good piece when I see it," he said.

"I believe that," said the stranger. "Although I do not wish to make use of your knowledge in this instance, I want a man who has judgment, and with that judgment has an eye that can tell a Chippendale from a woodblock. Do you understand?"

Blinker nodded. He felt relieved at knowing that the task was in his own hands. He called for tact and judgment. I want you to purchase a chair from a lady who is residing in this block, and she has some little difficulties to overcome. First, we must find a way of obtaining a view of the chair so that we can make an offer without exciting suspicion, and that in itself is a difficult job. Secondly, the lady, in all probability, has no desire to sell the chair, and as I am prepared to offer a high price for it, I want a man who can allay her suspicion by finding something about the chair that would give an excuse for the high figure. Do you see what I mean?"

"What?" Blinker asked. "You mean to bluff her about the points," he stammered. The mystery was affecting Blinker's nerves, and his breath came in short gasps.

The visitor slapped him playfully on the back. "You understand," he laughed, "and let me tell you right here, Blinker, that if you swing the deal there is \$100 in it for you."

He allowed this scrap of information sufficient time to soak into the

upholsterer's brain before disturbing him with other details, then he turned to the much-scarred desk and opened a packet of papers he took from his pocket.

"This chair," he said, impressively, "is the property of a lady named Rexford living in the Riverdale apartments. The upholsterer gave a little gurgling of astonishment and the other stopped speaking.

"What is it?" he asked, as Blinker moistened his dry lips. "Did you say 'Rexford,' sir?"

"The stranger nodded, swelling with the importance of the news he was going to convey, "she is a customer of mine now."

The other stared for a moment, then he sprang forward excitedly and grasped the upholsterer by the shoulder. "Do you mean that?" he cried.

"Is she, tell me?"

"His excitement was contagious. The round eyes of Blinker bulged dangerously from their sockets as he stood up and made a rush into the shop.

"There!" he shouted, holding up a small Venetian cabinet. "That's hers! She had it brought here yesterday and gave me special instructions about the way it was to be fixed up."

"Why—why," stammered the stranger, "this is splendid! Don't you see? Why, man, she will give us a chance to get inside to have a look at the chair I want! Do you understand, Blinker? You must carry this into the flat—carry it yourself, and then you've got a big hope of spotting the chair and making an offer."

"That's so," gurgled Blinker. "If I get into the house it will give me a chance to look around."

"Can you take that cabinet now?" asked the stranger. "You can? Then let us get down to business."

He sorted the papers with trembling fingers and selecting one upon which a big upholstered chair was carefully drawn in pen and ink, he handed it to the tradesman.

"This is it," he cried. "Study that well, Blinker. You can't mistake that chair, can you? Not another like it in the land. It's upholstered in antique velvet, and the arm-rests are uncommon, see?"

Blinker studied the drawing carefully. "I guess I'd know that chair if I met it," he murmured, handing back the sheet. "Just tell me what I have got to do to earn my hundred, and we'll go ahead."

The stranger took a large roll of bills from his pocket and placed them on the desk. His manner showed intense excitement, and the mind of the upholsterer wondered greatly as he stood by.

"This," cried the chair-seeker, stripping a \$100 bill from the roll, "is your commission if you get the goods, and here is the bunch to bid with. There's three hundred there—three hundred, Blinker! Don't offer that at first, but go up to it, man! Do you understand? Don't mess it up. You've got the chance to see it and get it, and there's the money for you if you bring it back."

Blinker had removed his apron while listening to the instructions, and now the excited stranger put the small cabinet into his arms and rushed him to the door, breathing words of caution

and advice as to the best way of making the bids without exciting the suspicion of the owner.

Half an hour passed before Blinker returned, and when he entered the shop the stranger seemed to divine with a single glance the fact that his mission had been unsuccessful, and Blinker immediately started to spit out excuses for his failure.

"It wasn't my fault," he gasped. "I offered her the whole lot, the entire \$300, but she wouldn't sell."

The stranger groaned.

"She says she'll have to see her husband," continued the excited tradesman, "and he won't be home for two days."

The chair hunter collapsed. "Two days!" he cried. "She might as well have said two years! I'm going to Europe tomorrow—going tomorrow, Blinker!"

He looked so miserable that the upholsterer started to pour out fresh excuses.

"I did the best I could, sir," he stammered. "I really did. I tried all sorts of ways when I saw the chair—it's in the drawing-room, sir—but she was stubborn."

"The visitor took the roll of notes that was handed to him and rose wearily. "I know you did your best, Blinker."

He murmured, "and I'm going to give you \$10 for your effort. If I can put off my trip for two days I'll come back and see what I can do then. It's my bad luck, Blinker, just my bad luck."

He waved the upholsterer's thanks aside, shook his hand warmly, and then with a somewhat dejected air walked off down the street.

Blinker returned to the shop, and still holding the \$10 bill in his hand, sat down to consider the happening. Now that his excitement had cooled it seemed like a dream to him. The chair was worth at the outside \$25, and he rubbed his head as he searched for a reason why a sane man would offer \$300 for it. Then there was the \$100 commission. The upholsterer was confronted with a mystery that he could not fathom.

He walked up and down the shop, vainly seeking a solution. The anxiety and disappointment displayed by the stranger convinced him that there was something mysterious in the incident. Why did he want the chair? Blinker asked himself the question a thousand times, but his weary brain had no answer. He felt sure that it wasn't sentiment that impelled him. Something in the shrewd face of the man told him that he was a person foreign to sentiment, and yet there was no other explanation for the wild extravagance. The upholsterer was adrift on a sea of doubt.

"There's something in it," he muttered, "there's something" about that chair that I'd give a dollar to know, something."

He stooped and picked up a slip of paper that, a year or two ago, had been tucked in the little office, and he whistled softly as he did so. The slip was the one bearing the pen and ink sketch of the chair, but now it was the writing upon the other side of the sheet that attracted his attention. The slip had evidently been part of a letter, and as Blinker held it close to his face he read the following:

"Traced the chair from the Gotham Storage Company, and there is absolutely no doubt about it. Mrs. Rexford bought it at a sale held there on January 15, and she still holds it. The back opens by a secret spring concealed in an acorn of the central carving, and the six thousand dollars drawn by Quinlivan on the day before his death are hidden there. Make every effort to obtain possession of it. Spare nothing. Get it, get it. The money is there and it's mine."

Blinker gasped. His first impulse

was to restore the letter to its proper owner, and he dashed to the door and looked down the street in the direction taken by the stranger. But the chair seeker had disappeared. The excited upholsterer rushed to the corner of the block, but he found no trace of his visitor, and walking in a semicircle he turned back toward the shop.

Suddenly he stopped. A question had sprung into his mind and his brain grew dizzy. Why hurry after the stranger? The information on the slip of paper was already known to him, and he would only be annoyed at finding that Blinker had become possessed of his secret.

The upholsterer moved slowly toward his shop. He glanced at the paper in his hand and sighed deeply.

"Six thousand dollars!" he muttered. "Six thousand dollars! It isn't his and it isn't hers. It belongs to the first one as can get it." He gave a little cry of joy and fear and raced madly up the street.

It was 2 o'clock that afternoon when the gray-eyed stranger who had visited Blinker's establishment some four hours previous rose from a lounge in a well-furnished apartment in Sixty-fourth street and opened the door in response to a long ring. A pleasant faced woman brushed past him with a smile, and the man whistled softly.

"Great, Blinky," he cried, opening the door and following the woman into an inner room: "Is the deal over so quickly, old girl?"

The woman laughed. "You must have acted your part well today," she said. "He was back with two friends directly after lunch, and I hooked three fifty out of them. I paid the landlady for the full month, and I was out of the house before they had carried the chair down to Blinker's shop."

The man picked up the roll of bills that she tossed over to him, and counted them carefully.

"Selling chairs is a profitable business, Nell," he murmured softly. "How many does this make for the month? Five! The devil! Do you know, old woman, this country is ruined by the desire of the working people to get rich quickly, and in their endeavors to do so they use every questionable method that fate brings before their eyes. I think I'll open a bottle and drink success to Blinker's end."

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