

BEGUILING DREAMS

BY
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CHAPTER 1 Calvin, Indiana 1915

Like the other county seat towns shaped from the rich black soil of the great prairie as America moved west, Calvin's courthouse sat amidst a quadrangle. Hewn from a nearby northeastern Indiana quarry, the two-story courthouse was sturdily constructed of limestone blocks.

Surrounding the courthouse were two-and-three-story buildings in an area referred to as "the Square," and it soon became the heart of the town.

In mid-May of 1915, the budding leaves of the elm trees were just beginning to open; little spear-shaped sprouts cutting through the bark. Collectively, they cast a greenish haze around the Square as the morning dew lingered on the brick streets and sidewalks.

Seventeen-year-old Hank Braddock—tall, athletic, angular—walked toward his place of work with long, quick strides. He wore a cloth cap, knickers and a homemade tweed jacket that was a bit snug. He occasionally rubbed at two pimples that marred his lantern-shaped jaw. Just as he made the turn toward the newspaper office, he saw Mr. Wentworth approaching on the opposite side of the street. Short, broad-shouldered, and in his fifties, Mr. Wentworth had been Hank's former teacher and advisor on the school newspaper. Hank stopped and waited for the older man to cross the street.

When they met, Mr. Wentworth said, "Hi, Hank. All set for the big city?"

Hank looked down into the wise and craggy-lined face of his mentor, then took off his cap and ran a hand through his thick, straight, sandy colored hair. "I guess you haven't heard. I'm not going."

"Not going? What about the appointment for a copy boy's position we got for you at the *Chicago Tribune*?"

"I canceled it," Hank mumbled, looking at the ground.

"Oh, is that so?"

Hank thought he saw disappointment mixed with surprise cross Mr. Wentworth's face.

“All the skills you learned reporting for the school newspaper going to waste, are they?” asked the old man. His voice sounded hurt, but his tone was affable. “Thought your dream was to become a reporter.”

Hank squeezed his cap a little harder. “That was my dream. Well, still is. Almost. You see, right after graduation last Friday, Mr. Smith came up to me and said if I continued selling advertising for him, he’d work in some reporting assignments as we go along. And Becky....Well, Becky told me she never wanted to go back to Chicago. You know, that’s where they’re from.” Hank studied Mr. Wentworth’s face for his reaction.

Mr. Wentworth managed a weak smile. “Well, son, I’m sorry to hear that. Working for a paper like the *Chicago Tribune* would’ve been a great opportunity. I hope you let Mr. Jacobs know you weren’t coming?”

“Yes, sir, I did. I sent him a telegram. And I really appreciate your part in all of this. I mean helping me get the appointment and all. I really do. It’s just I was planning to live with my Uncle Bill up there, you know, then I found out he’s changing jobs and moving. I didn’t know anybody else up there. And then Mr. Smith offered me this job. I figured I’d probably get to be a reporter faster right here.”

Mr. Wentworth studied Hank’s face and his voice softened. “I know, son, I know. Sometimes dreams have a way of finding their own destiny. I’m sure you’ll get to be a good reporter one way or the other—and the work at *The Bee* is a good start.”

“Yeah, I guess that’s right, Mr. Wentworth. Thanks.”

Mr. Wentworth nodded and smiled. “Well, good luck, my boy,” he said, patting Hank on the shoulder before moving on.

Watching Mr. Wentworth walk away, Hank replaced his cap and sighed. He felt like he’d let Mr. Wentworth down. It wasn’t as though he hadn’t given it a lot of thought. After all, he had gone over the problem a hundred times in his mind and always seemed to come up with the same conclusion: to stay in town. He turned toward the newspaper office trying to reassure himself he had made the right decision.

Halfway down the street, Hank could see the story-and-a-half brick building that housed the newspaper office.

French windows ran along the front and a sign that read *The Webster County Bee* covered the width of the building. The doorway came directly under the “B.” Mr. Smith’s 1911 Model T Ford sat next

to the curb.

Just inside, a long counter ran along the front. Customers placed their classified ads there and the boys got the papers for their weekly routes. It had become blackened from years of newspapers sliding across its surface. Two desks sat behind the counter along with a big pot-bellied stove. Its low fire took away the morning chill.

The smell of the ink and the familiar surroundings eased Hank's mind a little. Bins of pica type sat along the east wall perpendicular to the marble table where the type was set into galleys. The room behind the table held the old printing press. It was quiet at the moment, but on Fridays, when the paper went to print, it came alive.

The steam engine that powered the press was housed behind the newspaper building in a tiny stone cabin, one of the oldest structures in Calvin. That's where Don, one of the three typesetters, shoveled coal into the engine's belly, making it pop and hiss as it sent steam through its arteries of pipes into the pressroom.

In the pressroom itself, Ben and Mort, the other two typesetters, would stand on ladders feeding single sheets onto a drum-like roller that made a half-turn down and a half-turn back. It was Hank's job to take the hot printed sheets and stack them into piles. On Saturday morning, the sheets would be folded into the final product and passed out to the paperboys.

This morning Ben, Don and Mort stood behind the marble table setting type. Their fingers were just a blur of motion. Ben, the lead man, had learned to set type on the high school newspaper and was said to be the best typesetter the school had ever had. Mr. Smith had hired him right after graduation and in the intervening twelve years had grown to depend on him.

"Morning," Hank called, pushing his way through the gate at the end of the counter.

"Morning," the three typesetters responded. Only Ben looked up.

Next to the room containing the press was the utility room in which large drums of ink and miscellaneous junk were stored. It also contained the sink where the men washed up and the cordoned-off indoor bathroom. Mr. Smith's office with its rows of bookshelves and filing cabinets completed the rooms in the back of the building. His desk was positioned to allow him a view of the counter so he could make sure the customers were being waited on properly. Two of Mr. Smith's editorials that had won state awards were framed and hung

on the back wall along with a picture of another newspaperman, Benjamin Franklin.

Near the door sat the ticker. Occasionally, it would spit out a roll of wire-service copy that kept Calvin in touch with Indianapolis and the rest of the world. Bound copies of every edition of *The Bee* going back to when Mr. Smith had started the newspaper thirty-three years ago were stored in the dusty loft.

Hank made his way to his desk, flipping his cap onto the hall tree as he passed it. The makings of the week's ads stared back at him. He had sold advertising for *The Bee* ever since the day when, as a sophomore, he had come in to sell Mr. Smith an ad for the school newspaper.

Hank's presentation impressed Mr. Smith so much he not only bought an ad, but gave Hank the advertising job. So Hank gave up his paper route and learned how to do paste-up, working part-time during the school year and full-time during the summer.

Hank sat down and started putting together an ad for Elmer's Feed Store that featured "clean steer manure."

Mr. Smith came out of his office. He was in his late sixties with a wiry frame and white hair, and in his hand he clutched several sheets of copy. "Good morning, Henry."

Hank spun his swivel chair around and looked up into Mr. Smith's gray eyes; eyes that could change like the clouds to reflect his demeanor—dark and stormy or light and airy. "Good morning, sir."

"I made an appointment for you with Mr. Larson at eleven."

Hank looked up at the Seth Thomas clock hanging on the wall. It was a few minutes before nine. "That's fine, sir. I'll be there."

Mr. Smith walked over to the marble table and laid his copy on its corner before coming back to the hall tree. Putting on his black suit coat and black homburg, he said, "I'll be over at the courthouse as usual, if anybody wants me."

"Yes, sir. I'll tell anyone looking for you that's where you are."

Hank watched him all the way out the door and across the span of windows. *Man, I wish it was me going to the courthouse to dig up some dirt.*

Mrs. Snyder interrupted his dream. She walked past the windows and pushed her way through the door. A heavysset woman, her braided, graying, brown hair was wrapped into a bun at the back of her head and her nose was sunken at the bridge and rose into a fleshy blob. Her dark blue eyes reflected a stubborn loyalty. She

waddled through the gate, half stooped over, panting and lugging a big handbag. There was a wheeze in her high soprano voice.

“Morning, boys.”

“Morning, Mrs. Snyder,” four male voices responded.

Hank focused on his ad as she passed behind him, though he watched her out of the corner of his eye. At her desk, she dropped her handbag onto the floor and plunked down in her chair, her legs straddled. She stared at him until he looked up.

“I guess you saw your name in my ‘Just Folks’ column last week,” she said.

He made himself not look at the fleshy white insides of her legs. “Yes, ma’am, I saw my name along with the other graduates. Thank you.”

Mrs. Snyder sighed heavily. “I suppose you’re glad to be out of school?”

Hank said, “You bet I am. It seems funny, though, knowing I’m not going back there in the fall.”

“I guess there’s something about a classroom. Maybe it’s the chalk smell that gets into your blood.”

“Well, to me it’s knowing that all the kids are leaving. You think everything will be the same, but then you start thinking ‘Penny’s going away to become a teacher and Barney’s going to go to Purdue, probably,’ and so on. Pretty soon, you think not many of the kids will be left and everything will be different.” Hank found himself staring at Mrs. Snyder’s wart. Dark errant hairs stuck out from it and he wondered why she didn’t cut them. It reminded him of one of his mother’s pincushions.

Mrs. Snyder stared out the window. “Well, that’s why I like writing my column—trying to keep tabs on it all.” She picked up her bag from the floor and set it in her lap, rifling through its contents. She pulled out several scraps of paper rolled into little balls, placing them on her desk.

Hank applied some glue to a cutout and slid it into place, watching her from the corner of his eye. That isn’t what a real reporter would do, he thought. A real reporter would use a reporter’s notebook like Mr. Smith does.

After Mrs. Snyder had gone through the entire contents, she swung around and began flattening out the paper balls. “Let’s see. Mrs. Grunwald’s sister, Blanche, is coming in for the Grunwald’s twentieth wedding anniversary, and...”

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Hank's head snapped up to check the clock. "Shoot! It's almost eleven! I gotta go get Mr. Larson's ad."

"All right, Henry," Mrs. Snyder mumbled.

Hank jumped up, grabbed his ad book off the corner of his desk and headed out the door. As he passed the Majestic Theater, he was brought up short by the sensuous eyes of Theda Bera staring at him from a full-color poster taped to the window. Her heavy-lidded eyes and round red lips sent a warm charge through his body.

"Wow!" The word came out in the form of a growl.

He forced his attention to the second playbill. A group of soldiers stood in a muddy trench, their faces etched in misery. The Great War Film represented the second part of a double-bill, all for 20 cents.

With one more longing look at Theda Bara, he continued on his way. A block later, going across Washington Street, he checked the windows of the Paris Hotel. As expected, the green awnings hadn't been put up on the front of the building yet. Ever since he could remember, those green awnings had signaled the coming of summer.

Hank passed the alley and crossed the street before he stepped inside Larson's Grocery Store, one of two grocery stores in town. The smell of fresh-ground coffee permeated the air. Dave, Mr. Larson's tall copper-haired son, was busily stocking the shelves. Dave had played center on the basketball team while Hank had worked his way up to becoming their point-guard by practicing his shooting long after the others had gone home. They had made it to state finals twice. The second time they had gotten all the way to the championship game, but lost to a team outmatching them in size and bench strength. Even so, they only lost by three points.

"Hi, Dave. Is your Dad in back?"

Dave looked up. "Yeah, he's waiting on you."

Hank went through the storeroom door. It was dark inside except for a stream of yellow light pouring from a room in the far corner. He had to wait for his eyes to adjust. Everything was divided into orderly sections. Barrels, stacks of boxes, and gunny sacks of flour and sugar were all separated into squares. Through the maze, he found the path to the lighted doorway. A naked light bulb hung from the ceiling. Mr. Larson was seated at his large desk that seemed to take up half of the small office. He wore a green eyeshade that contrasted starkly with his white hair. He looked up and smiled as

Hank came in.

“Nice seeing you, Mr. Larson.” Hank sat down next to the desk and flipped open his ad book. “What’ve we got cooking today?”

Mr. Larson pulled out some bills of lading and began scrutinizing them. “Well, let’s see. I’ve got some sweet corn coming up from Arkansas. I’ll run that at two ears for a dime.”

Hank jotted down the item and the price. “Great! That’s a real nice price. And that’ll go over real good this time of year.”

“What else?” Mr. Larson muttered. “Oh, yes, I’ve got some tomatoes coming up, too. Why don’t we run those at, let’s say, a dime apiece.”

“That’s good! Wait’ll I tell my Mom you’re going to have fresh tomatoes. She’ll make a beeline over here.”

“Yes, they should go over fairly well. Let’s see, now... Okay, let’s run pork ‘n’ beans, a dime a can. Why, by George, we’ll just have a dime sale, won’t we?”

“Great idea! I’ll head the ad Dime Sale. Mr. Larson, do you want a brand name for the pork ‘n’ beans?”

“Oh, sure. I’m glad you reminded me. Stokley’s.”

“Got it.”

“Mr. Conner has been after me to promote the local product. You have those Cornucopia plates, don’t you?”

“Are you kidding? If we didn’t, Mr. Conner would bring them by himself—maybe two sets, just in case the first set broke.”

Mr. Larson chuckled. “Yeah, he probably would at that. So, why don’t you put, in big letters, ‘Your Choice,’ and then underneath put, ‘green beans, peas, and corn.’ No, wait a minute. I don’t want canned corn in the ad if I’m going to have fresh corn. Why don’t we go with carrots instead.”

“Okay, that’ll read ‘Conner’s Cornucopia,’ ‘your choice’ in large letters, ‘green beans, peas or carrots, 10 cents a can.’ Is that right, Mr. Larson?”

“That’s got it, Hank. That’ll do it for this time.”

Hank and Mr. Larson stood up in unison and shook hands.

“See you at church on Sunday, sir.”

“Yes, see you Sunday.”

Hank left the door ajar just as he had found it and stepped outside the store just as the Cribbs family arrived in their buckboard pulled by two homely mules. Hank stepped next to the curb.

“Morning, Mary. Josh.”

“Mornin’,” they said.

Hank helped Mary step down to the sidewalk as the two children, a boy and girl, hopped from the wagon and ran into the store giggling.

Mary wore a calico dress with a matching long-billed hat. “We heard you was going to stay on at the *Bee* and do some reportin’.”

Hank chuckled, “Yep, haven’t done any yet, of course, this being my first day.”

She searched his eyes with her own. “Why is it you want be a reporter so bad, Hank?”

Josh, a portly man with a dark eyes and a bushy beard, got down from the wagon, and after tying the reins to a post, stepped next to his wife. Having heard his wife’s question, he, too, peered at Hank.

A little embarrassed at the sudden attention, Hank looked down at the brick sidewalk, then looked up. “Oh, it’s just that I love words, I guess. That, and I remember an article Mr. Smith wrote back when I was a paperboy. Everyone was standing out on the sidewalk waiting for it.”

“What was the article about?” Mary asked.

“A little girl was reported lost. She had wandered off. They found her the next morning snuggled up to a stray dog that had kept her from freezing. The girl’s parents were so happy they ended up taking their daughter and the stray dog back home with them.”

“Oh, yes, I do remember that.” She looked up at her husband.

“Don’t you remember that, Josh?”

A tear formed in Josh’s eye. He looked down at the sidewalk and nodded.

Mary pulled a list out of her pocket. “I better go inside and git Dave busy on these here supplies.”

Hank stepped closer to Josh. “You gonna work out at the cannery this year?”

“I reckon. Soon as they git some produce out there. Not much else to do. Ain’t been no raise out there in two years.”

Both men turned at the sound of an engine. It was Mr. Conner, dressed in a duster and goggles, driving his yellow Packard roadster. Hank whistled as it turned the corner, “Man, that’s some fine car he has.”

Josh’s voice took on a sour tone. “We bought it for him.”

“Yeah, I guess Mr. Conner is known for being frugal.”

Josh snorted. "There's frugal and then there's cheap. I believe a man ought to be paid for the work he's done, that's all."

"Can't argue with you there. I heard right now you're helping the Simpson family by putting in their crops."

Josh looked up at the sky. "Yep, gonna start tomorrah if it don't rain. I tol' Mary she better git to writing that grocery list cuz once I start plowin', that'll be it for a spell."

"Any word on ole man Simpson?"

"He ain't healing none too fast from that auto accident where that axle broke clean in two."

"That's too bad. At least you're there to help them out. I better go so I won't be late for lunch."

"Sure thing. See ya, Hank."

"Yeah, see ya Josh."

Two blocks south of the Square, Hank rounded the corner and spotted Rebecca Price on the other side of the street.

"Hey, Becky!" he yelled, breaking into a sprint as she turned up her walk.

She swirled and looked at him. Although only sixteen, a senior in the coming school year, she had a mature figure that was bosomy, yet not fat. Her lips were full and pouty, her face doll-like with wide rosy cheeks. Ringlets of raven-black hair curled around her face contrasting with her creamy complexion. Hank's class ring dangled from a gold chain around her neck.

Hank came to a stop and she smiled up at him showing even white teeth. "How's your first day going?" Becky asked.

"Oh, fine. Doesn't feel any different than it did before."

"You'll be glad you stayed, Hank. You wait and see."

"Yeah, I probably will. Just hope Mr. Smith gives me some reporting assignments soon."

"I'm sure he will."

"Say, I went by the theater this morning. Saw that some war footage is going to be playing."

A frown crossed Becky's face and she turned away slightly.

"Yeah, but Theda Bara is also in a film. It's a double-feature but I can't remember the name of it... It's supposed to be good, though."

Her face brightening, she turned back. "Oh?" she exclaimed with an air of anticipation.

"I thought you might like to go Saturday night."

She wrinkled her nose. "Sure. But I have to ask Daddy first."

Hank began walking backwards on a diagonal line. "Okay. I'll check back with you later."

"That'll be fine," she hollered over her shoulder.

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The Presbyterian Church stood on the corner next to the two-story parsonage constructed of matching brick. Inside the house, Hank wound his way into the kitchen where hash was sizzling in the frying pan. Mrs. Braddock stood over it, spatula in hand. "That smells great, Mom. Can I help you with something?"

Her head reached the top of her son's shoulder. Her oval face, green eyes and ash blond hair formed neatly into a bun suggested a schoolmarm rectitude she had carried into the role of being a pastor's wife. "Oh yes, dear. You may set the table. I'm running late. The Temperance Sisters are coming next Sunday and I was helping your father look up all the twelve-year-olds. That's when you signed the pledge, wasn't it?"

Hank grabbed three plates. "Yes, it was."

"Do you still carry it in your wallet?"

"Yes, I have it with me all the time, Mom."

"Your father will be along soon."

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Shakelton's Drug Store, generally called Shakey's, stood on the corner of the Square. Palmolive Soap, Wild Root Cream Oil and Waverly's Tonic were displayed in the front windows and more panels continued around the corner. Further down, a huge Coca-Cola advertisement was painted on the brick facing. A glass cigar counter sat inside the door on top of which rested a large brass cash register. Novelties hung along the wall including a wrinkle eradicator and a Magic Flesh Builder and Cupper claiming to give women a "wellrounded, beautiful plump appearance." All sorts of remedies lined the shelves, such as Dr. Hammond's Tar Expectorant for consumption, lime water, Carter's pills and various liniments. A magazine rack stuffed with newspapers and periodicals was sandwiched between the two shelves.

Mr. Shakelton stood behind the prescription counter mixing some cough syrup for Mrs. Petrie, the photographer's wife. A perennial customer, she sat on the bench reading a magazine. On the other side of the room, newly installed black booths took up the corner and ran back to where the long soda fountain began.

Hank's friend and fellow graduate Barney Nestler stood behind

the soda fountain grinning. His blond hair was already receding, making his round face seem even larger. His massive arms and shoulders showed why he had been Calvin's top wrestler. He had an easy-going manner about him which was why Mr. Shakelton had hired him as a soda jerk. Yet, on the mat, he surprised his opponents with his aggressive style of wrestling.

"Hey, Hank, how're the ads going?" Barney called out.

Hank cut through the booths and hopped onto a stool. "Pretty good. I sold three today besides Mr. Larson's. So that's not bad."

"Not bad at all. You wanna Coke?"

"Yeah, that's fine. I asked Becky to go to the movies Saturday night. As usual she's got to ask her dad. And I suppose Derrie has to go along."

Barney placed the drink in front of Hank. "Yeah, that way I guess he knows you aren't likely to try anything."

"You're right about that. He's a conniving little creature."

Barney laughed. "I remember when Becky came to town and all the guys were after her, including me, you just sat back and didn't say much."

"Right. It was that first game of the season and Dave threw me one of his famous no-look passes. Caught the guy guarding me flat-footed and I hit a real good shot. Nuthin' but twine. I turned to go up court and there's Becky in the stands jumping up and down, clapping and staring at me real hard. So then I used to wait for her to come out of her front door and I started walking her to school. It just kinda took off after that." Hank's glee changed to a woeful expression. "Say, I saw Mr. Wentworth this morning."

"Yeah?" Barney asked, expectantly.

"Man, I should've called him or gone to see him when I canceled that appointment."

"Why? Was he mad?"

"I wouldn't say mad exactly. Hurt maybe." Hank sipped his drink. "I've always kind of thought he resented coming back here when his mother took ill and he had to leave the foreign service."

"That's pretty much what everybody says. Heck, his mom has been the same for as long as I can remember."

"I used to love to sit in his classroom and hear him talk about all those places he'd visited. It was like taking a trip without leaving town."

"Eh-h, it kind of bored me to be honest with you."

Hank stared at his friend in disbelief. "Bored? You were bored?"

"Yeah, I don't know what's so great about going over to Europe or wherever."

"Man, you're gonna be an engineer. You can go anywhere in the world!"

"I know. But I wouldn't even be trying to go to Purdue if I could become an engineer without leaving town."

"Say, what about Purdue? Heard anything?"

"Not yet. I just sent back that form the wrestling coach sent me. You know the one that saw me take second at the state finals."

"Man, I'm gonna miss you around here."

"You know I won't even be going if I don't get that scholarship."

"Aw, you'll get it, Barney. You've got to be the best wrestler we've ever had here." Hank looked up at the clock and sighed. "Well, I better go. I can probably get in a couple more ad calls." He swallowed the last of his drink and stood up.

"You mind making ad calls?"

Hank looked out the window, then looked back. "Oh, I dunno. I don't mind it so much. Just lots rather be reporting and writing." He left a nickel on the counter and headed for the door. "Let me know when you hear back from Purdue."

"I will," Barney shouted after him.

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Hank had just turned the corner, heading home, when Mrs. McNeil called to him in her usual stern voice from the top of the church's steps.

"Hello, Hank."

He waited for her on the sidewalk. "Hi, Mrs. McNeil."

She came down the steps. "I was just visiting with your father. I gave him a wonderful poem I found in a magazine. I thought he might want to read it from the pulpit. It's about the sufferings of a wife with an alcoholic husband."

Because her husband was head of the water district, Mrs. McNeil could wear the latest fashions. With her hemline just below the knee and wearing a wide hat loaded with cloth flowers, she came down the steps and stood next to him. As her head tilted back, the rays of the sunset reflected off her glasses. "My, to see all you children up there getting your diplomas made me and Mr. McNeil feel so old," she said, her voice taking on a feebleness at the end. The McNeils' daughter Penelope, whom everyone called Penny, had been

class valedictorian. Looking him up and down, her voice returned to normal. "Yet you all turned out so good."

Hank stared back at her. Since coming to Calvin at the age of five when Reverend Braddock had become pastor of the church, it seemed Mrs. McNeil had been constantly tattling on him. Now, it was as though she was taking credit for his "turning out so good." He decided to say nothing.

"I suppose you know Penny is working for Mr. Atkins, the attorney."

"No, ma'am, I didn't. She's still planning to go to Normal School, isn't she?"

"Oh lands, yes. This is just for the summer since his other secretary ran off, got married and left him in the lurch." Mrs. McNeil started down the street.

Hank kept pace with her. "Yes, she married Brian Daugherty, a teller at the bank."

With a sardonic smile on her face, Mrs. McNeil said, "I don't know what they're going to live on. Love, I guess."

Hank stopped at the walk that led to the parsonage. "Oh, they'll do all right. Brian's a smart boy."

Mrs. McNeil paused. "You apparently have more faith in him than I do. Well, I better get going. I still have supper to fix." She continued down the street and called over her shoulder, "Please say hello to your mother for me."

"I will. Nice seeing you."

"Nice seeing you, Hank."