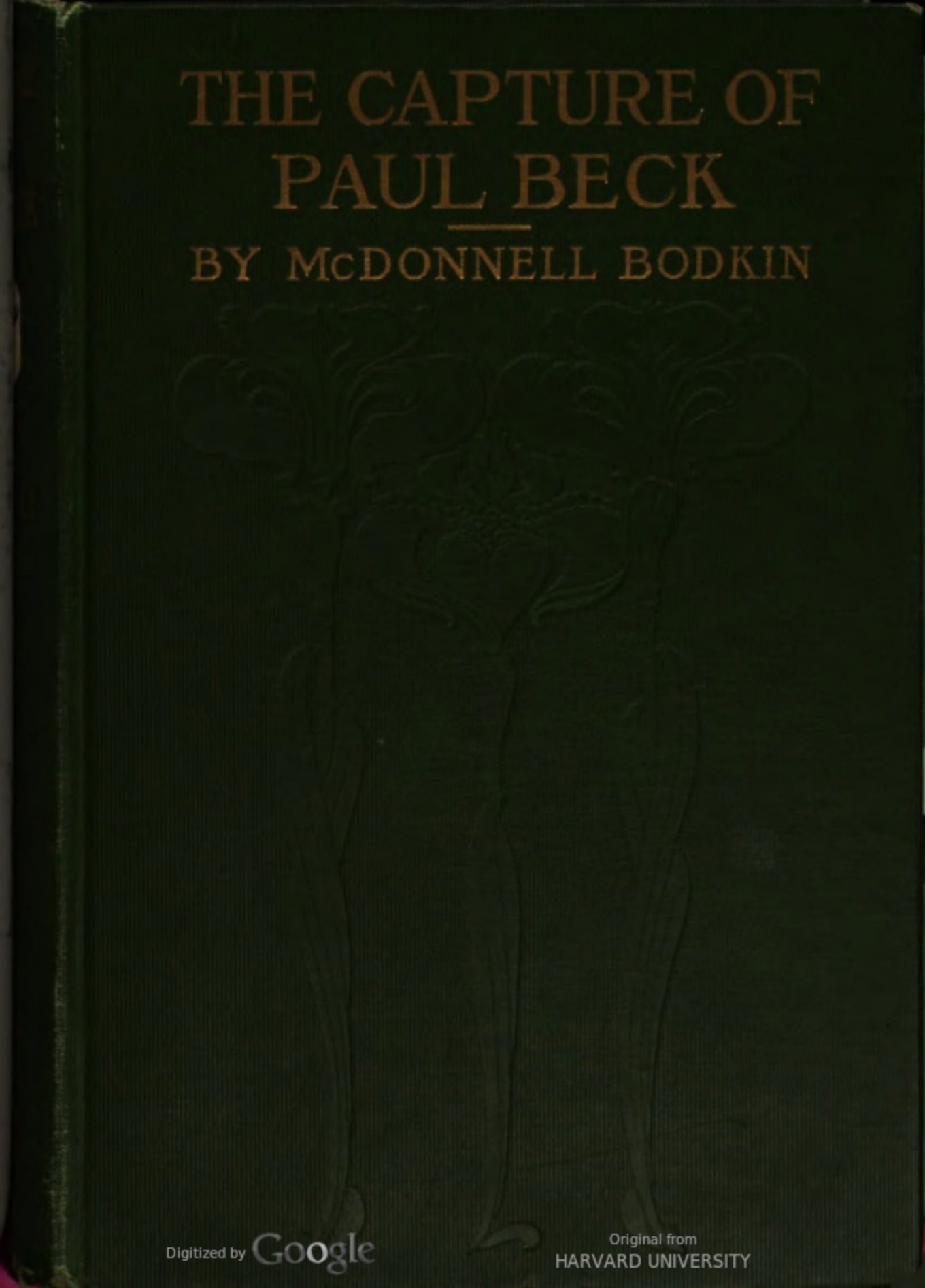
THE CAPTURE OF PAUL BECK

BY McDONNELL BODKIN



Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The gift of
In Memory Of
Gardiner Martin Lane
HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE CAPTURE OF PAUL BECK

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS

Crown 8vo, cloth.

THE QUESTS OF PAUL BECK

"The devilish ingenuity of Mr Bodkin's criminals is such as to make the nervous tremble for a world without Paul Beck."—*Yorkshire Daily Observer.*

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

gliding with perfect ease by the side of the rushing, rocking hansom.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE CAPTURE OF PAUL BECK

BY

McDONNELL BODKIN

AUTHOR OF "THE QUESTS OF PAUL BECK

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
1911

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

23544.19.110

[All rights reserved]

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	A PROPOSAL	1
II.	A FRIEND IN NEED	18
III.	BOOM AND CRASH	30
IV.	A RESCUE	40
V.	A TRANSFORMATION	50
VI.	LOST AND FOUND	68
VII.	A RICH REVENGE	80
VIII.	ATTACK	93
IX.	DEFENCE	108
X.	THE SIGNED PHOTOGRAPH	120
XI.	TO THE RESCUE	133
XII.	A FALSE ALARM	144
XIII.	TURNING THE TABLES	159
XIV.	A WARNING	171
XV.	LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM	181
XVI.	A GAME OF BRIDGE	191
XVII.	AN ARMISTICE	201
XVIII.	PLOTTING	212
XIX.	COUNTER PLOTTING	221
XX.	AN ENCOUNTER	231
XXI.	OUTWITTED	243
XXII.	TRIUMPHANT	255
XXIII.	A TRUCE	269
XXIV.	A WOMAN'S WILL	277
XXV.	TRAPPED	289
XXVI.	IN A HURRY	302

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

THE CAPTURE OF PAUL BECK

CHAPTER I

A PROPOSAL

"Don't say 'No' right away, that's all I ask. I'm sorry I spoke. It was just like my infernal cheek—I beg your pardon—I mean it was sheer presumption. I know well I'm not fit to tie your shoe-string. But have a little pity on a chap. I couldn't hold in; upon my soul I couldn't. Don't refuse me straight away; give me a little hope. I don't want you to say 'Yes.'"

"You don't want me to say 'Yes'?"

The words came out softly one by one in a little ripple of mocking laughter. The wretched young man, who had plunged headlong into an unpremeditated proposal and was floundering beyond his depth, raised his eyes for the first time from the carpet to the face of the girl. It was a face to justify his fervour. The cheeks were flushed rosy red

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

before his ardent gaze; the sweet, sensitive lips quivered a little, but two merry imps of laughter danced in the depths of the clear brown eyes.

A wild hope sprung to life in his heart. "Oh, Norma, is it possible? Can you? Will you?"

"But you don't want me to say 'Yes,'" more softly than before.

Then he knew, and took his answer from those sweet lips without resistance. A delicious glow of love and triumph warmed his whole being. The ordeal was over. He had won. The love his soul longed for was his for ever. Nothing else in the whole world mattered now. At that instant those two tasted the supreme bliss that makes human life worth living, even if there were nothing before or after—the entrancing ecstasy of first love which God has given as his best gift to man.

"Oh! you foolish boy," she said, as she touched the hair from his forehead timidly, yet with a familiarity that made him tingle with delight, "you might have known I loved you better than ever you'll love me. I was only waiting for you to speak to tell you so."

For a little while he was dizzy with his delight. "She loves you, she loves you," a voice seemed to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cry with the quick beating of his heart. He held her to him close and kissed her unresisting lips till the full assurance of her love came to him with a flood of rapturous delight. They were alone in the world in their sublime, delicious selfishness, with no thought outside themselves—unborn to-morrow and dead yesterday were both forgotten. They lived their whole, full life in the swiftly-passing moments. The dimly-lit drawing-room with its subdued glow of rich colours was as the temple of their love.

The man woke first from this ecstatic trance, impatient for still greater bliss. For the woman, the present was all-sufficient.

"Norma," he whispered in the small pink ear, "when will we be married?"

"Never! never! if you hold me like that. I'm afraid of you. Why, we are not even regularly engaged yet, and you talk of marriage. We may never marry."

"What!" he cried, with a twinge of his old nervousness. "You're jesting. Of course we are engaged. I'll prove it to you. Now, are we? Now?"

"I cannot help myself, you are stronger than I am. But I don't consider myself really engaged till

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

father knows. I have no mother to tell," she added a little wistfully. "I never missed my mother more than now."

"You need miss no one when you are mine, darling. I will settle the engagement right away. Your father is in his study, I suppose. Will you wait here till I come back?"

"Yes, I'll wait. I've said that I'm not at home to anyone. But mind this, Mr Armitage—well, Phil then—if dad won't have you, I won't; so you must be awfully nice to him for my sake."

"Oh, that will be all right," he answered with ready confidence from the door. "He and I are good friends."

As it closed behind him she switched on the electric light and made for the big Chippendale mirror that filled one panel of the room. Vanity? Not a bit of it. She wanted to see the girl he loved. In that broad mirror she saw a girl worthy of any man's love. She hardly knew herself at first. She had never seen that face before; that strange sweet face, rosy with love's kisses; and brown eyes, warm with the dawn of love.

After a moment the light in her own eyes frightened her and kindled her cheek to a rosier red. Instinctively she switched off the light, dropped

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

languidly on the soft couch, trembling with vague, delicious hopes and fears, and hugging the mysterious little god close to her virginal bosom.

"Come in," cried the sharp voice of Mr Theophilus Lee, and Phil Armitage walked confidently into the spacious, well-appointed study. From his big roll-top desk Mr Lee rose, tall and thin and straight, to greet him, but there was no cordiality in his greeting. The hand he offered was nerveless and chill. The cold grey eyes questioned the intruder courteously but coldly. Mr Lee wore his gold spectacles low down near the bridge of his long, sharp nose, and had a disconcerting trick of looking over them unexpectedly, straight into a visitor's eyes.

Poor Phil Armitage's confidence began to evaporate. He had never been treated in this fashion before by Mr Lee, who, standing himself, let his visitor stand, and whose cold, questioning attitude said plainer than words, "What is your business, sir? Tell it and go."

"It is about your daughter, Mr Lee," stammered out poor Phil.

"My daughter! ah, indeed! And what about my daughter, Mr Armitage?"

There was no hint in his voice that he divined his errand; nothing but polite surprise that the young

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

man should have anything to say or ask about his daughter.

His tone stung the suitor to courage. "I came, Mr Lee," he said very quietly—no stammer now, no nervousness—"to ask your permission to marry your daughter."

Mr Lee's long face remained for a moment quite expressionless, and he drew his thin hand softly over his pointed beard as though he were stroking a pet dog.

Phil felt himself wondering vaguely how this could be his Norma's father.

Then the cold grey eyes met his over the gold-rimmed glasses with stealthy suddenness.

"You have already spoken to my daughter of this?" he asked sharply.

"Only a moment ago."

"You consider that honourable, of course?"

"I don't understand you."

"Oh! I suppose not. You know my daughter is an only child and an heiress?"

"I never gave the matter a thought."

"Of course, of course, but you knew the fact when you came here to make love to her. Having inveigled her into a promise you come here to ask me for her hand and fortune."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"I didn't; I don't. I tell you now I don't want a farthing of her fortune."

"There is no use whatever in indulging in mock heroics, Mr Armitage, they don't affect me in the least. You know as well as I do that my fortune goes with my girl."

His voice warmed a little at the word. "The world, I know, calls me a hard man, because I have worked hard and made a big pile honestly and because I wasted none of it. But no one has ever called me a hard father. Young man, you say you love my daughter. You don't love her a hundredth part as well as her father does. All I am or have is hers. If Norma were to marry a beggar or a blackguard it would be hers just the same; but she shan't marry a beggar or a blackguard if I can help it."

It was a curious sight if there was anyone to see it. The feeble, cadaverous old man quietly heaping insult after insult on the young athlete who could have crushed him with a grip, could have killed him with a blow.

The young fellow bit his lip hard and clenched his hands tight, as though by strong physical effort, to keep down the hot, strong passion that pressed for an outlet. "He is an old man; he is her father," he kept repeating to himself.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

For a moment or two he could not find his voice. "I trust, Mr Lee," he said at last, with a calmness and a coolness that surprised himself, "that I am neither a blackguard nor a beggar. In a year or so I will have got my profession of electrical engineer, and I am promised a good appointment. Meanwhile, I have twenty thousand pounds of my own to go on with."

"Twenty thousand," sneered the old man. "You are willing to set that huge sum against the two hundred thousand that my girl will have the day she is married? How generous of you! A good commercial speculation! Love and prudence run together with you, Mr Armitage. You don't want money, of course; you don't value it, of course. The disinterested young man never does when he wants to marry an heiress! Well, I do believe in money. People call me a miser. I suppose you have often called me a miser yourself. There, you needn't answer. I don't care two straws whether you did or not. If it be miserly to believe in money's worth and money's power *I am* a miser."

He sank back into a chair exhausted by his own vehemence. His face had suddenly grown grey. There was a bluish tint in his lips and a queer catch in his voice when he spoke again.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"You may sit down," he said, pointing to a chair. "I will finish this thing out while I'm at it and not let it keep on worrying me." He leaned back in his chair and wiped his clammy face with his handkerchief. But he went on relentlessly:

"I believe in money for myself and for my girl. I want her to have everything that money can buy, and that's pretty nearly everything there is. Well, she can have it if she chooses. Abraham Lamman has asked her to be his wife, and I have given my consent if he can get hers."

Young Armitage was taken completely aback by this announcement. "Have you told Lamman," he blurted out, "that I—"

The father cut him short. "You?" he said with stinging contempt. "Why should I mention you?"

"I only meant he is a friend of mine."

"Does that mean he must marry or not marry as you wish? Does it mean I must have your leave to choose a son-in-law?" Then contempt flared again into anger. "I tell you straight, young man, I want my daughter to marry Lamman. Anyhow, I don't want her to marry you. When you have a hundred thousand in your own right you may ask me again. Not till then. Now go."

"May I see your daughter before I go?"

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Mr Theophilus Lee stared at him steadily for a moment before he answered. "Certainly," he said coldly. "I suppose you would contrive to see her anyhow. Best get the business over. I can trust my daughter. When you do see her kindly tell her the truth."

With this parting shot he swung round his office chair to the desk and wrote, or made pretence to write, while Armitage got out of the room as best he could.

The girl heard his step on the stairs and leaped up from her chair.

"Well?" she cried impetuously, "you were very long. Did he—" Then even in that dim light she saw his face, and with love's keen eyes read its meaning.

"Oh! Phil, what is it? He hasn't refused? You haven't quarrelled? Tell me quickly!"

"Your father has treated me like a dog, Norma," he answered bitterly. "I was at his mercy. He knew I could not resent it from him. He called me a fortune-hunter, a beggar, a blackguard, and almost a liar in so many words. He wants you to marry the millionaire, Abraham Lamman."

"Oh!" It was a pitiful little gasp, almost a sob,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

but he was too absorbed in his own grievance to comfort her.

"I might have had a chance if the millionaire hadn't turned up. Now I'm the beggar and blackguard that is sneaking after your fortune. A man may be a blackguard all right if he has the millions, it doesn't count against him. No, I shouldn't say that either," he added remorsefully, "for Abe Lamman is a very good friend of mine and as straight a chap as there is going."

"I hate the very sight of the man!" she broke out impetuously. Strange to say young Armitage did not resent this aspersion on his friend.

"You won't marry him, Norma?" he urged eagerly.

"Not for the world! How dare you ask such a question?"

"My own darling!" he said. Then he took his own marriage for granted. "Our troubles will soon blow over. Your father may be a bit annoyed at first, but he will come round right enough when we are married. The sooner the better."

He drew her towards him as he spoke and she didn't resist. For a moment he thought the trouble was indeed over.

"Phil," she whispered, "we must wait. Don't

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

you see we must? I could not go against his wishes. I will coax him round in time, but meanwhile we must wait."

"Wait! wait!" he cried impatiently, "what do you mean by wait, Norma? How long?"

"How can I tell? Until I get father to consent."

"But if he won't?"

"Oh, he will. I know he will. I know him better than you, Phil."

Her voice was not as confident as her words. Perhaps it was because she knew her father only too well.

The impatient lover's ear caught the hint of a doubt. "But if he won't," he persisted, "will you promise to marry me in three months—well, in six months? That's long enough. Will you promise?"

His eagerness forgot to be gentle. It was a demand he made, not an entreaty. He spoke as one who had a right and meant to enforce it. The spirit of revolt rose in her to meet his insistence.

"No," she answered shortly and coldly, "I will promise you nothing of the kind. I'll never marry without my father's consent."

"Then you don't love me as you said you did. You have deceived me; you don't know what real love is."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"And you do!" There was pitiless scorn in her voice though she spoke gently. "A half an hour ago you were all humility. You only asked for leave to wait and hope. Now, because I was fool enough to show my love you take the first chance to insult me."

"To insult you, Norma!"

"Yes, to insult me, to tell me I am fickle and false. You say I do not know what love means. Very well, I accept your verdict. There is no more to be said. Now I hope you are satisfied."

Every word stung him all the more sharply that dimly in the bottom of his heart he felt they were deserved. But for the moment that feeling only served to rasp his temper. Shame made his anger more bitter.

"I suppose that means my dismissal?" he said.

"If you so choose."

"Well, good-bye, Miss Lee."

"Good-bye," with a stately little nod.

He fumbled for his hat and stick, feeling vaguely that he was a clown and a brute, ready to kick himself for boorishness, ready to fall on his knees for pardon, but all the time driven sullenly forward by his temper.

"Good-bye," he repeated sullenly, and made

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

across the room for the door without looking round.

His hand was on the door knob when he felt a touch on his shoulder that thrilled him through and through.

Her light step had made no sound on the thick carpet. She blushed and trembled as he faced round with the gratitude of a sudden reprieve in his face.

"No! no!" she cried, "please don't touch me. I'm much too ashamed of myself. There, just sit down—no, not so close—in that chair and listen to me. I could not bear that we should part in anger, even if we have to part. I believe you like me. Well, yes, don't stir, I believe you love me, and that it was your love that made you seem rough with me just now. It is not fair for me to be angry with you for that."

"I deserve to be kicked," protested Armitage.

"Father has been saying nasty things to you, and you are angry naturally with him. But try to see with my eyes for a moment. He loves me and I love him. He has earned my love. Oh! dear, how well he has earned it. He may be nasty to other people, never, never to me. I never had a mother to remember. She died when I was a baby; he has been father and mother to me. I

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

never could even think of a wish that he didn't grant it. When I had scarlet fever and the doctors gave me up for dead he nursed me through it, more patient and gentle than any woman. The doctors said he saved my life and I believe them. Do you wonder, Phil, I love him; that I want to please him? He has never punished me when I was a naughty child. He wouldn't think of punishing me if I were to marry you to-morrow."

"So he said," groaned poor Phil. He meant to be straight, though he felt his hopes slipping away from him.

"I knew it without his saying. He wouldn't even be angry with me, but it would break his heart to think I cared so little for him as to do it against his wish. His heart is not strong and my disobedience might kill him. Now, do you wonder that, even for you, I cannot hurt his great love?"

"You are an angel, Norma, and I am a selfish brute not worthy to kiss your feet."

It may be her smile dissipated his humility for he caught her in his arms, and well—it was not her feet he kissed.

"You'll wait for me?" he whispered.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"For a hundred years, Phil."

"Not quite so long as that, I hope," he cried ruefully, and they both laughed, for it is hard to kill hope in the young. "Did I tell you that your father would give his consent if I had one hundred thousand pounds?"

"But you haven't, dear?"

"But I might make it. Abe Lamman told me that he sometimes makes a hundred thousand in a week."

"Oh! Abe Lamman!"

There was thorough dislike and contempt in the three words. She couldn't say more in a long speech.

"I don't want you to like him, darling. Indeed, I'd much prefer you didn't, all things considered. But he has been a good friend to me and may give me a useful hint."

"Don't trust him, Phil."

"So far and no further than I have reason to. Don't you be afraid, Norma. I fancy I know my way about as well as Abe. Wish me good luck and good-bye."

That good-bye was a very long and complicated business, but it ended at last. As the street door closed behind him the girl noticed a little locket,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

that had fallen from his chain, lying on the carpet. She picked it up and touched the spring. The lid flying open showed her own face. "Oh! you lucky girl," she whispered, and kissed it softly and hid it in her bosom.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

A FRIEND IN NEED

"In the name of good fortune what brings *you* to the City, old chap? Whatever it is you are heartily welcome to yours truly, doubly welcome if I can be of service."

There was hearty welcome in every tone of the big man's voice, in every line of his broad, strong, good-humoured face. "Sit yourself down there, old man." With a strong hand on his chest he flung our friend Phil Armitage back into a deep, cosy arm-chair and set a box of cigars beside him. "Light up, Phil. They're the mildest money can buy, warranted to promote appetite. You'll lunch with me, of course? I'll chuck business for the day and give you a regular City half-holiday lunch. Now, if there is anything I can do for you meantime, get it off your chest at once."

Abe Lamman, with his kindly voice and big, strong, clumsy figure, that was the despair of Bond Street tailors, was the last person in the world that anyone

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

would dream of taking on the view for a successful money-grubber. His office was like the man—big, untidily comfortable. There was a golf-bag in one corner and a fishing-rod in another. A huge roll-top desk with a telephone attachment filled the centre of the room. A tape machine clicked away in a corner with such a litter of paper ribbons as a conjurer takes from his hat littered beneath it. The appearance of the man, the atmosphere of his snuggery, suggested confidence and courage.

Phil Armitage felt to the full the cheerful, encouraging influence of place and man.

"It's a bit cheeky of me, Abe," he said, "to come to you at all, for I've just discovered we are rivals."

For a moment Lamman's genial face darkened as a sun from a swift-passing cloud, and the brows came down in a sudden frown over his eyes.

But his self-control was wonderful. His face was smiling; his voice placid when he spoke.

"Miss Lee?" he asked quietly.

Armitage nodded.

"I thought so, I feared so. You are not come to challenge me to a duel, Phil? You don't want me to resign my pretensions and all that kind of thing?"

"Well, not exactly," said Armitage. He was glad that the other man seèmed to take the affair so

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

lightly. "I don't in the least want to quarrel with you unless you insist."

"I'm glad of that," cried Lamman, cheerily, in his big, hearty voice. "A fair field then and the best man wins. I'm desperately fond of the little girl, Phil. You can understand that."

At the sudden earnestness in his voice Armitage felt a thrill of something like remorse. "I'm awfully sorry for you, old chap," he faltered. "I had no idea you were so hard hit, but Miss Lee and I are engaged."

Plainly Lamman was stunned by the news. He leant his head on his hands so that Armitage couldn't see his face, and remained so a full half minute, motionless, without speaking, till Armitage felt the strain of the silence like a physical pain. Then, still without a word, Lamman got up and paced the room twice very slowly.

"Phil," he said at last, gripping his shoulder, "I won't deny that this hurts, but if I'm not to get the girl there is no one I'd sooner see get her than you. I congratulate you, old man. When is it to be?"

"I don't know," said Phil, awkwardly.

"About when, I mean?"

"Still I don't know. To be quite frank, the father does not want me. He wants you, or rather—you'll

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

forgive me for putting it so plainly—he wants your money."

"I can understand that," said Lamman, slowly. "But you have money enough to marry on."

"Money enough for Norma—God bless her!—but not money enough for old Lee. He has fixed a hundred thousand pounds as the minimum."

"That's not so very hard to come by," retorted Lamman, smiling a little scornfully.

"Not for you who are a born money-maker, who have got hold of Aladdin's wonderful lamp and bring it down with you to the Stock Exchange. I haven't the gift."

"Everyone cannot have everything," said the other, a little bitterly. "You've got your share. I'd swop willingly."

Armitage did not seem to notice the bitterness. "I say, old man," he went on hesitatingly, "I came here thinking you might do me a good turn. It's hardly fair, I know, but as you said you would prefer me to anyone else you might perhaps—"

"What?" demanded Lamman, impatiently, for Armitage stumbled long over the next word.

"Well, I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind giving me a tip or two on the Stock Exchange. I have over twenty thousand I could put to-morrow into any-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

thing you recommend. I never wanted to make money before, but I'm aching to do it now. A straight tip and a big coup would set me all right with old Lee."

Lamman eyed him whimsically, a curious smile tightening his lips. "Well, you certainly are a cool young man. You want me to cut my own throat, to forfeit my own last chance, to help my rival to what I want myself."

"But really you have no chance at all," protested Armitage, eagerly. "Norma—Miss Lee—told me she would not marry you under any circumstances. You haven't the ghost of a chance, whatever happens to me."

"That's as it may be. Girls have been known to change their minds. But one thing is certain. If the girl marries you I've no chance, and that's what you want me to help you to."

"No, I don't want you, if you take it that way," retorted Armitage, stiffly. "I can wait or have a try off my own bat. Anyhow, you have no chance."

"Easy does it," said the good-natured Lamman; "keep the lid on your pepper-box, old chap. I didn't say I wouldn't help you, and I don't say I will. This is a thing that wants to be thought out. But we've talked enough for one sitting, and the

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

debate is getting too hot. I move the House do now adjourn. You must lunch, dine and theatre with me to-day and to-night. There is a devilish clever thing, *The Bear Squeeze*, at the Criterion. We will resume controversial business here at twelve o'clock to-morrow. Not another word till then."

Armitage found Lamman, not for the first time, the most generous and judicious of hosts. They lunched simply on oysters, brown bread-and-butter, and a pint of Guinness's stout in its "native pewter." They dined gloriously at "The Epicures' Club," as Lamman said, "on claret." There was no other wine at dinner or after it, and they wound up with a bottle that held imprisoned in its ruddy glow the sunshine of a hot summer a quarter of a century ago. It was the best wine, even in the "Epicures"—wine worth half a sovereign a glass; a wine of which, as Lamman plaintively remarked to his friend, there were only five dozen bottles now left in the world.

Lamman had forbid smoking until the wine was finished, but they lit up at the coffee and liqueurs, and as the two men sauntered, with cigars alight, from Pall Mall to the Strand in the gentle afterglow of an autumnal sunset Armitage felt pleasantly confident and at ease with the world.

The play justified its reputation. *The Bear*

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Squeeze was a light and sparkling little comedy of financial and social intrigue, from which the stock-broking hero, Stephen Rhober, emerged triumphant. In that big, kind-hearted, straightforward financier, whose simplicity was more than a match for fraud, Armitage found a striking resemblance to his friend, Abe Lamman. The friends parted that night in hilarious good-humour. But Lamman was grave as a judge when Armitage called by appointment next day about noon at his office.

He handed him his cigar box silently. Lamman's cigars were justly famous, and in silence they smoked for a five minutes. Then Lamman spoke.

"See here, old man," he said slowly, "I wish you'd let me back out.

"Do, if you want to," said Armitage, shortly.

"Don't put it in that way; it's for your sake I'm anxious."

"Oh! if that's it, never mind me. I see you have got something good up your sleeve."

"Something I believe to be good. But it is not by any means a dead cert."

"Is anything certain on the Stock Exchange?"

"Well, no, if you put it that way. Nothing big is, anyway."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Are you going into this yourself?" asked Armitage.

"Baldheaded."

"Then I go too; that is, if you let me."

"Now, you mustn't get riled if I point out it is not quite the same thing your plunging and mine. A loss that would hardly hurt me might ruin you."

"I'll take my chance of that."

"All right then," said Lamman; "if you will you must. Honestly I may say," he added with manifest reluctance, "I don't think there is much danger. But I have a condition to make."

"Fire away."

The big man was plainly embarrassed. "Armitage," he began awkwardly at last, "I want to be quite straight with you. I have not given up all hope of Norma Lee. As I said before, I don't mean to give up until you two are married and done for. That is to say if you are married. Don't look so black, old man, try to put yourself in my place for a minute. Anyhow, straight talk is the best. If this coup comes off and you clear enough, you mean to marry her right away?"

The other nodded.

"That don't suit my book. I want my chance. Girls change their minds."

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Norma is not of that kind."

"So much the better for you then. So much the easier my condition. Will you promise, if you pull off this game, to wait six months—well, three months then? I don't want to be a dog in the manger."

Armitage paused for a moment. "Done," he said, and stretched out his hand.

Lamman caught it in a cordial grasp.

"Now to business," he said briskly. "From the information I have received Amalgamated Gold wants buying. You have heard of the Amalgamated Gold Co., Ltd?"

"I cannot say I have, unless I tell a lie."

"Well, you are out of everything. Amalgamated Gold is going to be the biggest boom for many a day on the Stock Exchange. A lot of American bosses have gathered together a handful of mines, good and bad, old and new, and sent them booming. The five-dollar shares were at ten a week after issue. They dropped again to five dollars in a month. I believe they are only falling back for a jump higher than the first."

"I see," said Armitage, knowingly; "the mines have proved better than was expected."

Lamman regarded him with good-humoured amusement.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Well, you are green! Why, the mines, or the gold in the mines if there is any, don't matter in the least. The men that are manipulating the market—the richest and smartest in the States, I believe—are engineering another big rise, and I mean to get into that elevator on the ground floor."

"And for me?"

"You come too, if you are willing to risk it. The word is buy, buy, buy and keep on buying. Here is a wire I'm just sending to my American agent. The cypher is plain when you know the key word. Mine is Norma. Don't look so black; I didn't know about you when I chose it. I mean to put the message on the cable at once. One cannot be too careful, or, for that matter, too smart. Every minute may mean a thousand pounds when the shares once begin to jump."

"Could you buy for me?"

"One off there. You must act through your own brokers—Samson & Locke, I think. But mind you don't give me away or you'll upset the apple cart."

"You may trust me. When shall I begin?"

"No time like the present. Do it now. I read that in a little book the other day—smart little book too. The fellow said it was the secret of success."

They walked together to a quiet office close by, where Lamman handed in his message. Armitage

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

noticed with a start that the clerk who took it bore a strange resemblance in face and figure to himself. Armitage was clean shaved, and the clerk wore a neat moustache and a short pointed beard. But all the same, in figure and face the resemblance was very remarkable. It struck him too as curious that neither Lamman nor the clerk himself seemed to notice it.

Lamman parted with him at the door of the office, and he went on alone to his own respectable brokers.

Mr Samson—grave, sedate and silver-haired—was amazed when Philip Armitage came to him with instructions to plunge to the limit of twenty thousand pounds on Amalgamated Gold.

"It is a big order, Mr Armitage," he said, regarding him paternally through his gold spectacles. "I have heard that Amalgamated Gold are rather—ahem—a speculative security."

"I'm taking the risk," answered Armitage.

"But, my dear young man, you have given me no instructions. What is your limit? Shall I buy for cash or account?"

"You are very kind, Mr Samson, but I really don't know much of these details. I want you to buy and keep on buying as far as twenty thousand pounds will run to. I leave the rest to you."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Then I'll buy for account," he began, "and when the cover runs off—"

"You'll forgive me," interrupted Armitage, "I'm a child in those matters. I leave myself entirely in your hands," and he bolted.

"He seems very confident," mused Mr Samson. "He must have some information. I'll risk a little flutter myself." So he bought a substantial block of Amalgamated Gold on his own account before he placed Phil Armitage's order at a fractional advance.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

BOOM AND CRASH

PHIL ARMITAGE, for the first time in his life, took to studying the Stock Exchange lists. He passed lightly over the columns of his newspaper that were used to hold him—Parliament or sport for the most part, he was an amateur statesman and a practical cricketer—and buried himself in the money columns of the *Times*.

For the first few days Amalgamated Gold lay quite still and torpid. Then they began to show a fitful life—nothing to speak of, a little move this way and that, backwards and forwards, over the border line of par. Then, quietly at first, the boom began. Fraction by fraction the shares crept steadily up in the market to a premium. One-eighth, one-fourth, one-half was reached, and still they climbed upwards.

Armitage was no longer content with the *Times* money column. He watched the progress on the tape at his club. The fever of the gambler was hot in his veins. Soon the magnitude of the boom

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

began to attract general notice. The papers speculated on its progress. All sorts of wild rumours were afloat. The men at the club knew all about it.

"Amalgamates had struck it rich at Johannesburg," one man declared.

"No, at Coolgardie," another interrupted.

"They were taking the gold in lumps from mines in West Australia," declared a third; "the shares would go to fifty—to a hundred dollars, see if they didn't."

The croakers at the club—the men who were sorry they hadn't bought in at first and were afraid to buy in now—were certain the market was rigged, and prophesied a crash. Our friend Phil smiled superior as he listened to their cackle. He felt himself in the know. The folly of the outsiders amused him.

He chanced to meet Lamman one day in the street, but the big stockbroker was in a hurry and had only a word or two with him.

"Well," he said, as Armitage gripped his hand warmly, "are you satisfied?"

"Will they go higher?" asked Armitage.

Lamman laughed a reassuring laugh. "How can I tell? I'm not a prophet. But if you want to sell at present prices I'll take your little lot off your hands, and I think I'm entitled to the preference. Gambling

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

is not good for young men who are not used to it. It gets on their nerves."

"What are you doing?" asked Phil.

"Buying," said Lamman, with an encouraging wink, and was off at a great pace.

For the moment Phil was satisfied, but the big stakes, as Lamman anticipated, had got on his nerves.

When the five-dollar shares stood for a day at eleven he called at the office of his brokers.

Mr Samson received him with most flattering effusion. "I congratulate you, Mr Armitage," he said, "most heartily. You have shown wonderful judgment. You will forgive me if I attempted to discourage you, but I really did not know this kind of thing was in your line."

Phil Armitage was very young. He accepted the compliment as if he had really done something wonderful. "Oh! that's all right, Mr Samson," he said casually, with a slightly superior air. "I knew what I was about. I just dropped in now to find how I stand."

"Certainly, my dear sir," said the broker, obsequiously moving to the door. "Jenkins," he called to the outer office, "will you kindly bring me Mr Armitage's account. That will do, Jenkins; you need not wait."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

He spread the book out on the table. "Let me see. On the day your order was given we purchased two blocks to account at—"

Armitage interrupted politely: "I won't trouble you for the details, Mr Samson. Can you tell me how I stand now—I mean, how much I would make if I sold out?"

"Then you think they have touched the limit?" queried Mr Samson, "that there is danger of a fall?" He asked the question anxiously, yet with a curious deference too, as a veteran worshipper might consult the latest oracle.

Again Armitage accepted the situation. He smiled mysteriously and shook his head wisely. "I did not say that, Mr Samson. I merely asked you for a little information."

"I beg your pardon if I have been indiscreet, but I thought perhaps — just a moment, if you please. I will give you the figures you want in a moment."

He busied himself with a gold pencil-case and a half sheet of notepaper. "Here are the figures you want—roughly. We have twenty thousand shares to your account. The average profit is about six dollars—perhaps a shade over. If you decide to take your profit at the current price, Mr Armitage,

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

you will realise, within a few hundred one way or the other, twenty-four thousand pounds nett profit."

Armitage gasped. The figure took his breath away. Twenty-four thousand pounds in a week! What a simple thing money-making was after all. In a month, if all went well, it would run to hundreds of thousands.

"Shall I realise for you?" asked Mr Samson. There was a suppressed note of personal eagerness in his voice.

For the moment Armitage was perplexed. One word and the twenty-four thousand pounds was his. But the twenty-four thousand pounds might grow in another week to fifty thousand pounds; to one hundred thousand or two hundred thousand pounds. Some of the papers he had been reading had confidently predicted the shares would go to a hundred dollars. For all his assumption of knowingness he was, as he had said, a child in these matters. He felt he must consult Lamman again. He had kept aloof from his friend after that chance meeting. He had an uneasy feeling in the back of his mind that it was hardly fair to appeal to him. The help the other man gave him so generously galled a little. But once again interest cried down conscience. "Hang it,"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he muttered half aloud, " as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. I'll chance it."

" I beg your pardon," said the surprised Mr Samson, " I did not quite catch your remark."

" I beg yours, sir," said Armitage, a little confused, " I was speaking to myself—it is a bad habit I've got. No, Mr Samson, I won't sell just now. I rather think Amalgamates will go a bit higher. You shall hear from me again in a day or two."

He wondered at his own outward coolness as he bade the broker good day and walked down the street. He felt the pulses throbbing in his temples. Familiar places seemed new and strange. The accustomed bustle of the streets filled him with a queer surprise, as if he had suddenly wakened in a new world. The change was in himself. The gambler's fever was in his blood. He was giddy at the thought of this great wealth so easily and so rapidly accumulated. The deference shown him by the old financier Samson helped the intoxication. In some curious, illogical fashion he took credit to himself for the courage and intelligence that had achieved this dazzling success.

He had traversed a mile of crowded streets, walking with his head high up amongst the clouds, when a sudden thought sobered and chilled him.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

This strange wealth was fairy gold. It might vanish as suddenly as it came. He knew very little of stockbroking, but this he knew—there were falls as well as rises in the market, and at any moment a sudden fall might sweep away his huge winnings. As the thought struck him he stood stock still in the thronged pathway, and the crowd jostled angrily round him as a stream round a rock in mid-current. For a moment he stood there unheeding, held by an absorbing debate in his own mind. Should he return to the broker, sell out and lay hands on the wealth that had come to him? Should he call on his friend, Abe Lamman, for advice? He had still an uneasy feeling that he had taxed a rival's friendship too far and a strong repugnance to tax it further. He would go back to Mr Samson. He turned and walked a dozen paces backwards to the broker's office. Then by a sudden impulse, before he was conscious that he had changed his mind, he hailed a cab and gave the driver Abe Lamman's address.

Lamman was delighted to see him. "Half expected you'd call, old chap. Well?" The one word meant a lot.

"I should have called long ago," Armitage protested awkwardly, "but I did not want to worry you. You are a wonder. How can I thank you?"

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Don't try. A hint one way or another costs me nothing. I have made a bit on this deal myself and hope to make more before I'm through with it."

Armitage saw the opening made for him and plunged in. "Then you would advise me to hold on a little longer?" he asked.

The other took him up abruptly. "No," he answered gravely, "I won't advise you one way or the other. I won't take the responsibility. You mustn't have to blame me afterwards if by a miracle anything goes wrong."

Armitage smiled at the way the broker had let his opinion slip without meaning it. It was plain that if he gave advice at all it would be hold on.

He was half ashamed of his own cunning which had caught Lamman unawares.

"You don't think the stock is likely to fall?" he asked, smiling.

"I think it is almost certain to," Lamman answered.

Armitage stared in surprise.

"There are always these ups and downs," the other went on, "before a boom settles steadily at top price. Then it is time for speculators to clear out and investors to come in."

The indication was plain enough, though Lamman

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

did not seem conscious of having given it. He might safely hold on through ups and downs for a further rise. He had got the advice he wanted.

"Well, good-bye, old man," he said, "and a thousand thanks for the hint. I'm heartily ashamed of having asked it under the circumstances."

"You needn't be then," retorted Lamman, "all's fair in love and war. I'm glad you asked and glad I gave. You're heartily welcome to what you make out of it."

"What are you going to do yourself?"

"Get out, you sly thief," said Lamman, laughingly, "that would be telling. How do you know but I might be tempted to give you a crooked tip?"

"I've no fear of that anyway. Good-bye again, old chap."

Next day, when the shares began to sag in the market, Armitage read the money article in the *Times* with complacency in the intervals of an excellent breakfast at his well-appointed chambers, and congratulated himself on his interview with his friend.

He congratulated himself again when next morning the shares turned the corner and rose to nineteen dollars—the highest point they had yet touched. Like a host of other speculators he resolved to sell

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

out the moment the round numbers were reached. But that moment never came.

About noon the tape in the club told him that the prices were again sagging. They seemed to waver for a while—rising and falling. Then suddenly the bottom fell out of the market, and they tumbled through into space. Down! down! they went, without change or pause—pushed and kicked and banged by the triumphant bears.

There was wild tumult and panic in New York, hardly less violent in Throgmorton Street. Men lost their humanity and became fierce, howling, wild beasts.

In Wall Street one man shot a triumphant manipulator in the moment of his triumph and blew out his own brains on the floor of the house. Three losers went stark, staring mad. Such a financial cyclone had never swept through the street before. When evening came the bubble was burst, the fraud exposed; the shares of the Amalgamated Gold were not worth the paper they were written on, and incidentally, Philip Armitage was ruined.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

A RESCUE

"Back from the jaws of death."

ARMITAGE was stunned by the unexpected disaster. He did not realise it at first. He did not want to realise it. He kept the thought from him as a man stricken by a fatal disease keeps from him the thought of the inevitable death near at hand. That evening he did what he never did before and never did again. He deliberately drowned his consciousness in wine. Returning from the tumult in Throgmorton Street, to which he had been drawn from the club in the wild desire to know the worst, he carried up to his bedroom three bottles of champagne, switched on the electric light, locked the door and drank steadily till sleep came.

But he paid dearly for the brief respite. After a few hours of troubled sleep he woke slowly to consciousness. The vague dreams with which his sleep had been harassed receded very slowly. He wondered to find the electric light glaring in his room;

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

he wondered to find himself dressed. Then with a suddenness that was like a stab of physical pain the memory of his disaster returned, aggravated by the sickening feeling that he had met it like a coward. For hours he lay staring dismally into the blank future in which he could find no ray of hope. He was ruined by his own rank folly. It was not his fortune alone was lost, but his love. Her father had held his poverty a bar when he was comparatively rich. What hope was there for him as a pauper? He could not hold the girl to her promise. He would write and release her. He tossed restlessly from side to side as those dismal thoughts shook him, as a wretch tosses in the throes of a restless fever.

But by-and-by the manliness that was in him asserted itself. He began to look the future in the face resolutely. A new life opened for him, a life of hard work and hardship. He steadied himself to meet it. Heretofore his life had been happy, self-indulgent, enervating. An orphan, his own master, healthy, strong, good-looking, good-natured and good-humoured, reasonably clever, a favourite with men and women, with sufficient money to get all the pleasure he wanted, working just enough to give zest to his enjoyments, he had drifted with the stream till his great love for Norma Lee checked

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

and captured him. Now, as he communed dismally with himself through the night till the grey glimmer of the dawn mingled with the glare of the electric light, he was willing to give everything up except the girl he loved. This was the one regret that wrenched his heart. She was lost to him. She should pass out of his life which her presence had enraptured. She would belong to another than him. He clenched his hands tight at the thought. But hope dies hard in the young. He couldn't quite shut out the hope, that some supreme good fortune might give her to him even yet.

A stinging cold bath restrung his quivering nerves, and he went down to breakfast with a good appetite; a man must eat even if he is ruined.

There were three letters on the table. He pounced on the smallest first. It was very short. Yesterday he would have thought it very sweet; to-day it stabbed him.

"DEAR PHIL,—I will be at home and alone to-day at twelve.—Your loving NORMA.

"*P.S.*—Father knows."

He dare not trust himself to keep the appointment. He felt he would play the coward and claim her

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

love, and he felt she would love him the more warmly because he was ruined: would be more willing—not less—to come to him as a pauper.

"No," he muttered angrily, "I'm not that sort of a cad anyway. I'll drop her a line telling her everything. When I leave here I'll leave no address. I'll cut myself completely adrift."

The second letter was from Lamman, short, manly, straightforward, like the man.

"DEAR ARMITAGE"—it ran,—"I cannot forgive myself if I have let you in for trouble. I have been hoping all yesterday you sold out—at least a part of your holding in Amalgamateds—in time. I have been kicking myself that I did not tell you to get out with your winnings. The sharpest of us are fools sometimes. I have been pretty hard hit myself, but I can stand it. If I can help you in any way don't spare me.—Your friend,

"A. LAMMAN."

"Good old chap," Armitage thought to himself; "decent of him to offer it, but he is the last man living I would take help from. It wasn't fair to have gone to him at all, knowing what I did. I have got what I deserved. If I could stand any man

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

marrying—" The sentence snapped short with a pang at the thought of any man but himself married to Norma.

Mr Samson's note, the third on the table and the last read was precise and dry. There was an account enclosed with figures which Armitage didn't in the least understand, and an intimation at the end that there was a balance due of £129, 7s. 4d. from Armitage's twenty thousand pounds, for which Mr Samson would be happy to forward a cheque on request.

The letter, though formal, was polite. Mr Samson had sold out his own little block of Amalgamates quite close to the top price and so could afford to be good-natured.

The note sent Armitage to a calculation of ways and means. When he had finished his breakfast—and not a bad breakfast, all things considered—he made a short calculation with pencil and paper of his assets and liabilities. He had twenty-seven pounds to current account and two hundred on deposit receipt. His debts were small. It was his fad to pay ready money. When every farthing he owed was paid he would at least have two hundred pounds to go on with.

That would give him time, he thought, to look

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

about him. Then he took an inventory of his own capabilities. He was studying in a desultory way to be an electrical engineer, but he loitered on the way and turned off the course as one invention or another attracted him. Now it was the aeroplane, now it was wireless telegraphy. He had devised a flying machine on paper. He could operate a telegraph instrument through wire or ether. Surely, he thought, he could turn his accomplishments into money—enough money at least to keep him.

When he had written his three short letters he went out to have a look about for something to do.

For three successive weeks he looked about for something to do and found nothing. Nobody seemed to want the commodities he had for sale. He got tired of answering advertisements and applying for situations. All his friends gave him their opinion with friendly candour about his folly. Many of them were liberal in good advice—none of them had anything else to offer. Strangers inquired where he had worked before, and then bowed him out more or less politely. There was no room anywhere for beginners.

So the weeks dragged on to months. He had changed his chambers for cheap lodgings in Mornington Terrace, close to Euston Station. He lived

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

cheaply, shunning his former acquaintances, but still the two hundred pounds was slipping rapidly through his fingers. Never in his life had he been able to keep a tight grip on money, and the habit is not one to be easily or quickly acquired.

One evening late he strolled along the broad pavement by the Marble Arch with a reasonably good cigar between his lips. "You can't possibly get a decent cigar for less than eightpence," he pleaded in excuse for his extravagance, "and smoking helps a fellow to think." By way of compensation he had dined on a roll and a glass of milk. He was an injudicious economist.

His thoughts, as he walked, were busy with the troublesome problem of a livelihood, but in a half-conscious fashion he watched a young fellow that walked a little unsteadily about a score of yards in front of him—a well-dressed young fellow with a good figure that struck Armitage as being curiously familiar. He wasn't exactly tipsy, but he walked with a studied steadiness that showed he was conscious of a centre of gravity and had some trouble in keeping it in its right place. Armitage was close up when the man in front suddenly, without looking from right to left, stepped sideways off the pavement into the traffic, recklessly as a bather

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

plunges into a rough sea. A motor driven at a smart pace came throbbing close behind. The driver hooted furiously. The man heard, and turned and swayed irresolute for a moment. To step back on the pathway was the easy and obvious thing to do. Instead, he made a dart to cross the track of the motor. The space beyond was clear of traffic, but before he reached it he stumbled and fell almost under the wheels. The driver crammed on the brakes, but the machine was going too fast.

It had almost touched the prostrate body when, with a desperate side leap, Armitage shot across the road, stooped and gripped the fallen man by the collar as he passed, and slid him from beneath the advancing wheels. So close he passed that his elbow, as he stooped, struck the glaring lamp of the motor. He was almost in time, not quite. The man's body slid from under the machine, but one of his trailing legs was caught by the wheel, which lifted and rolled slowly over it, crushing the flesh and snapping the bone like a pipe shank.

The yell of agony rang shrill through the still air, and drew a crowd running from all directions. The motor stopped stock still, panting excitedly, and the big fur-enveloped man in it jumped out, his kindly face as pale as paper.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Is he dead?" he whispered to Armitage, who had drawn the quivering body clear of the car and was standing over it.

"I think not; I hope not," answered Armitage, eagerly. "I fancy I feel his heart beat."

"Sure," broke in a third voice, with the nasal drawl of the Yankee, "no knock-out this round, friend. Leg in two pieces, that's all is the matter with me."

With a groan the prostrate man half raised himself on his elbow and looked up. Armitage gave a cry of surprise. The face, pale and distorted with pain, was the face of the telegraph clerk which had struck him as so like his own.

The motorist saw the likeness too. "A brother, sir?" he said to Armitage, who shook his head.

The victim smiled a very one-sided smile and tried to speak, but pain conquered pluck, and the poor wretch collapsed in a limp heap and lay in a dead faint on the road.

"Quick!" cried the motorist, "lift him in, we must get him to the hospital. This car is smoother than any ambulance and a deal faster." Even at this exciting moment the car owner's irrepressible pride in his car showed in his voice.

He flung open the door, and with Armitage to

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

help lifted the limp body tenderly. "There, stretch him full length on the front seat, I'll drive standing; plank a cushion under the hurt leg—so. Lucky he has fainted; we'll have him at Guy's in no time. You'll come too, sir? Hadn't time to mention it, but never saw anything pluckier than the way you waltzed in and yanked him from under the wheels. All right, constable," to the constable, who bore down with stately stride, scattering the crowd, "you clear the way for us. Here's my card, and there is my number. 'Twasn't my fault this time, but cannot expect you to take my word for that. I'm bringing the poor devil to hospital; broken leg, I think. Shove these chaps out of the way; see you later."

As he spoke the machine crept slowly into motion; aided by the constable it pushed its way through the crowd into the open road and whirred smoothly and swiftly away in the direction of Guy's Hospital.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER V

A TRANSFORMATION

THE accident proved nothing worse than a simple fracture readily reduced. When Armitage called to see the patient next day he found him lying on the flat of his back, calmly contemplating his left leg cased in plaster of paris, pale, but cheerful and voluble.

"Sit down there, old chap—there in the light, where I can have a good look at you. You held me back out of heaven, I hear, when I was half way through the golden gate, but I bear no grudge. I'm in no hurry there yet awhile. This old ball with its crowd of jolly sinners is good enough for me." He took breath and ran on before Armitage could say a word. "The policeman has just been here. I told him it was no fault of old Goggles; decent old chap; offered to come down handsomely if I wanted money, which I don't. Besides, it was I ran into the car. I'd have come out in another world, he tells me, if it weren't for you. I'm not good at the thankee

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

stunt, but if ever you feel like running into an automobile give me the chance to pull you out. Shake! "

He stretched out a long arm from under the bed-clothes.

Armitage had another little spasm of surprise when their hands met. They were identical as the features and figure. The two men seemed to have been cast in the same mould.

The pale face on the pillow smiled wanly. "Yes," he answered Armitage's look, "we might have been brothers. I wish we were. I have got none. Say, you'd like to know who I am and all about me, and how I came under the wheels of the automobile? The last is simple enough. I'd been celebrating. The extra bottle of 'fizz' at dinner knocked me over. But that's the wrong end of the story. Let me begin with an introduction to the hero. Cyril M. Littledale at your service, 7 West Avenue, New York, and Log Hut, Long Island, late telegraph clerk in His British Majesty's service. You see it's this way. I wanted to marry the governor's typist last Fall—the dearest little girl in the world, but that's by the way. The governor is a millionaire in dry goods. He wouldn't hear of it. Neither he nor I would give in. He said he'd get rid of the girl.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

I told him that was low, downright mean. The fault was mine, I said, and I'd go.

"The governor is straight. He told me to go to the devil, so I went. But the girl stayed and he gave her an increase and treated her better than ever.

"I got a sit. in the post-office. I could operate all right, and I knew a chap who knew another who knew your head boss, and he just jobbed me in. Irene—that's my girl's name—wrote twice a week, but I hadn't a line from the governor for over a year. Yesterday he cabled five thousand dollars with the message 'Come back and marry your girl.' You don't wonder I celebrated? No?"

Armitage was keenly interested in the story. Plainly this young fellow had grit. He felt in a curious way proud of his other self.

"I saw you before when you were a telegraph clerk. I came into the office with a friend of mine, Mr Abraham Lamman."

"Oh! I know old Abe," retorted the other, irreverently, "as sharp as a reaping hook and as crooked. He always handed in his messages at our place. I got curious about it, made inquiries on the other side of the herring pond, and found out."

"Found out what?"

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

"Abe. I know his tricks and his ways. He wears the Standard Oil Collar, though it wants sharp eyes to see it round his bull neck. What Abe don't know is not worth knowing."

There was a tone in his voice that told more clearly than his words that he thought Mr Abraham Lamman's intelligence was much in excess of his honesty.

Armitage flushed with annoyance at this bitter badinage. There was no man more loyal than he to his friends.

The Yankee's quick eyes saw and read. "Beg pardon, old chap," he cried penitently, "didn't know he was a friend of yours."

"As good a friend as ever a man had," Armitage retorted warmly. "He did me a good turn the other day. At least, that is to say, he meant it for a good turn, though—"

Littledale eyed him sharply while he hesitated. "Sure?" he drawled slowly. For the life of him he could not keep the mocking note out of the long-drawn-out word.

"Indeed, you're all wrong," the other cried eagerly.

"Why, I said nothing."

"But you thought the more, like the sailor's

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

parrot. You thought I was tricked. Come! I'll tell you the whole story. I won't have you thinking ill of old Abe."

He told the whole story, skimming lightly over the love episode, but hiding little from the keen eyes that watched out of the pale face in the bed. "In a way." Armitage concluded, "you are mixed up in it in a way yourself. We went into your office that day. Do you remember?"

"Rather! About four months ago. I remember too. I took a liking to you at first sight, and wondered what you were doing in that company."

"It was to you that Lamman gave his message to buy Amalgamated Gold."

"To *sell* Amalgamated Gold," replied the other with emphasis. "I remember the message as well as if it were yesterday—'Sell Amalgamated Golds and keep on selling till they burst.'

"Easy on, old chap," for Armitage bounced up from his seat, "take it cool. There ain't no sense in getting riled, and I'm not in first-class training for a fight. 'Strike me, but hear me,' as the old chap said in the Latin grammar long ago. May the next motor that comes along cut me in two if I'm not telling you the naked truth. This is how it was. I had a dull time at the blamed post-office, and for

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

amusement sake I took to studying cypher. I had always a taste that way since I read Poe's ripping story, *The Gold Bug*, when I was a kid. I used to copy some of the cypher messages I took in and sit up at night over them. I worried out old Abe's system at last, though it was the toughest job of the lot. In that way I came to know a deal about him. The message you mention I particularly remember, because I was tempted to send the tip to the governor. I didn't, and it wasn't wanted. The governor sold Amalgamates from start to finish. Sorry if I've vexed you, old chap," he ended penitently, "but the truth's the truth and it's as well you should have it straight."

It was impossible to doubt him. Even as he was speaking Armitage's quick memory, once set on the track, found a hundred little trifles in his talks with Lamman to confirm the story.

So he had been played with like a silly child, duped, ruined under pretence of friendship. A sudden wave of fury sent the hot blood to his face. His rage almost choked him. "The confounded scoundrel!" he stammered.

"That's right," said the voice from the bed approvingly, "he's all that and more."

"The cursed, treacherous dog! I should like to

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

strangle him. I shall give him a bit of my mind when we meet."

"I say 'No' to that. Keep every bit of your mind to yourself. The less Abe knows about it the better. Strangling him no doubt might be good biz., but it would be troublesome to do and troublesome when it was done. I think I see a better way. It's in a bit of a tangle at present. I must have time to puzzle it out. Now, off you pop! The doc. says I must talk little and sleep much if I'm to go back to Irene in two months, and I mean to go back, you bet."

When Armitage strolled back to his shabby lodgings and sat there far into the night making pretence to read, as an idle boy studies, with his mind elsewhere, rage and self-contempt raged continuously in his heart. What a knave Lamman had been, but what a fool himself. How he had fallen headlong into the open pit and never guessed the treacherous hand that pushed him in.

He was one of those men void of suspicion, who believe all men honest, all women true; whom it is hard, almost impossible, to convince of treachery, but whom once convinced it is impossible to appease. His wrath against Lamman hurt and frightened him. He felt as if he could

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

have strangled the plausible scoundrel with his bare hands.

Then slowly his mood changed, and self-contempt mastered all other feeling in his heart. He had been a fool in the business—a weak, reckless fool. By a rogue's treachery or a fool's folly—what did it matter? He had got what he deserved. He had made his own bed and must lie on it.

He was still in this mood when, after a restless night, he visited Littledale next morning at the hospital.

The Yankee eyed him shrewdly. The man could not play the part of an invalid. Tied there to the bed by his rigid leg he was quick, alert and cheerful, brimming over with exuberant life.

"Well, double," he cried, as he grasped the other's hand tightly, "do you still want to get even with friend Abe? No?"

"I trust I shall never see the scoundrel again. I could not keep my hands off him if I did."

A shade of disappointment flitted across Littledale's face—brief as a shadow of a bird on the ground. "Is it as bad as that? I was thinking of a plan that might help; kind of poetical justice; a Roland for his Oliver; tit for tat and part fair. Well, you needn't shake your head. If you won't, you won't.

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Let us talk of something else. What do you mean to do with yourself? Now, don't get up on your high horse. I want to help if I may. Let me say for the first and last time I owe you my life. There is no man puts a bigger premium on my life than I do. I don't hope ever to pay the principal debt, but I'd like to pay a trifle by way of interest if you will let me."

Strong feeling underlay his light words. Armitage was touched by his manifest sincerity.

In his turn he tried to pass the matter off lightly. "A hand on your coat collar is all you've to thank me for."

"A life risked and a life saved. Well, we'll let it go at that. I can see with half an eye you are down on your luck. You must let me help you one way or another or I'll burst."

"Seems to me you're in a worse way yourself than I am."

"Me! Oh, I'm all right. I am as snug as a bug in a rug. I've had a cablegram from the boss this morning and another from Irene. They two are as thick as thieves. Call each other father and daughter already. Coming events, you know. I'm all right if the old man don't cut me out with Irene. The doc. says the leg will be well as ever

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

in two months. If I lie up for two months I'm in clover."

"Two months on the broad of your back. Do you call that clover?"

"Why not, sonny? Game legs do not a prison make, nor surgeons' splints a cage. So long as you can keep your mind going you are free, and mine has been galloping since we met. Minding other people's business is always lively work. I want to put you through. There is no use offering you money, though? I've enough, as you know, for two. No, I thought not. You want to earn your own bread honourable and independent. Nod if I am right."

Armitage laughed and nodded. "You couldn't get me the sit. you have thrown up?" he asked jestingly.

The Yankee caught at the word with sudden seriousness. "I haven't thrown up the place," he protested, but there was a twinkle in his eye that belied the sober face. "On the contrary, I have applied for leave and got it. I applied yesterday, enclosing surgeon's certificate that I would be fit to resume duty in two months. I told you I have a pal in the office. I got the leave; here's the letter. Two months leave on full pay."

"But I thought you were going home to your

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

father and Irene," cried Armitage, utterly bewildered at this change of front.

"Sure," drawled the other.

"Then how can you keep this place?"

"I must find a substitute. Don't look at me like that, old man, or I must laugh at you, and laughing shakes the leg up and makes it feel bad. You're to be the substitute. There's room enough on the globe for two Cyril Littledales. One in the Old World, one in the New. You'll be the Old World Cyril if you don't mind."

"But I can't see—"

"Oh, yes, you can, if you get on your spectacles. We two are twin brothers. Why, I myself can hardly tell one from the other. I shall clean shave and you grow a beard and moustache. You must learn to write like me and talk like me. You've got two months to learn. When the time is up you take my name and place and no one will be a pennyworth the wiser. See!"

The madcap project appealed to Phil Armitage in his reckless frame of mind. He objected feebly, but the other resolutely overruled his objections.

"You want to earn your bread; well, earn it. You want to disappear; well, vanish into me. 'Not

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

honest,' you say. Why not? What does it matter to the Government who does the work so long as it is well done? "

Suddenly another objection occurred to Armitage which made him flush with anger. "I should see that scoundrel Lamman constantly. I could not keep my hands off him."

"No, you wouldn't, unless you are aching for a sight of him. I only once saw the chap, at the same time I saw you. I had heard of him from the governor. He is the Standard Oil man in London. He has the best financial information in Europe, spends a hundred thousand a year on spies, has them in every big workshop or laboratory. I wanted a peep at him and I took it. But you need never move, unless you want to, from the cosy little room behind the public office. The messages will be brought to you by a girl—a dear little girl. If it hadn't been for Irene I don't know what would have happened. You have your Norma to keep you out of trouble."

"Don't jest on that subject, like a good chap."

"Sorry. But at anyrate you may have a chance peep at your girl so long as you live in the same village."

There was a minute's silence. Armitage stared at the ground, the other watched him eagerly. "It's

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

a wild plan—a dangerous one," he said at last, sorely tempted and wavering.

"Not the least," retorted the Yankee. "You can shave your beard and come back to yourself any time you choose. Say 'Done' at once, and have done with it."

"Done!" cried Armitage, with sudden reckless resolution. "It don't much matter what becomes of me."

But all the same he found more enjoyment in the prospect of the adventure than he cared to confess as, day after day, he prepared for the part he had to play. Littledale was an indefatigable tutor and learned while he taught. The man was a born mimic, and often he startled Armitage with the very echo of his own gestures, voice or laughter.

More slowly but not less surely Armitage mastered the quiet drawl and faint nasal twang of his friend, and imitated his handwriting so that it was impossible to tell the two apart.

Littledale plied him with every detail of his life at his lodgings and at the telegraph office, so that he might slip at once into his new identity. "They won't have seen me for two months," he said, "and they will be all the more ready to take you on trust."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

One day, when the two months had slipped into the last week, Littledale said, "You don't want any more lessons. You're me right through from the top knot to the toe nails. Irene would marry right off if you asked her in that voice. But there is another little thing I'd like to show you—a rather interesting little thing. You may remember I told you I had mastered the cypher of your friend Mr Lamman."

"Curse Lamman!" Armitage growled.

"Right oh!" replied Littledale, cheerily, "a stronger word if you like, but all the same his cypher is interesting and ingenious."

"Curse himself and his cypher!" Armitage retorted ungraciously. "I don't want to hear any more about either of them. You might guess without telling that it is not a particularly pleasant topic for me. A man doesn't want to be reminded every other moment that he made a fool of himself."

But Littledale was curiously persistent. "Don't be pig-headed," he replied good-humouredly, "you can never tell when a scrap of knowledge will turn in handy. Now, if you had known this cypher at the time—"

He chucked himself in the middle of the sentence. "To oblige me," he went on persuas-

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ively. "I'm a bit vain of the way I picked out the puzzle."

At that Armitage yielded at once. He had the reward of his good-nature for he was delighted with the combined simplicity and ingenuity of the cypher and amazed at the acuteness that solved it.

"I cannot understand how you got inside the thing," he said.

Littledale was flattered. "They say that any cypher the mind of man can invent, the mind of man can unriddle. There are Johnnies I am told in the British Museum that can read the signs that the savages scratched on the stones with hands that are dust for five thousand years. Lamman's cypher belongs to no system. It is his own invention, I believe. That made it as hard to open without the key as it is easy with it. You can read it now without trouble?"

"Perfectly."

"And write it? Try if you can write it. Let me have a letter to-morrow in that cypher. You may take the key with you."

"But why?"

"Just to oblige me. I have a whim for it. Perhaps"—he spoke more slowly, as if watching his words.—"perhaps some time we might

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

have occasion to communicate with each other in cypher."

"It's not likely," laughed Armitage, "this is my last conspiracy." But he added good-naturedly, "I'll do it if you want me."

Littledale smiled to himself, reading the letter next morning in the quiet lodgings into which he had moved from the hospital. "Yes," he muttered, as he put the paper into his pocket-book, "I think it will work out all right when the time comes."

He had another surprise for Armitage the day before they were to swop selves.

"My name is not Littledale," he said abruptly.

"No?"

"Very much no. Nor Cyril either. I'm Carl Thornton. My father is known on Wall Street as Old Thorns. I took the other name because I thought it sounded good. Here's my address. Get it by heart thoroughly. See that you know it to-morrow and the day after; then burn it. Now, I want you to do me a great favour if ever you get the chance."

"That's not likely, I'm afraid."

"But you'll promise?"

"Of course I'll promise."

Digitized by Google

Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The other hesitated for a moment as if at a loss how to frame his request.

"I have told you my father is one of the big guns in Wall Street. He runs fifteen stores in New York. He has more money than he knows what to do with, but he loves a flutter on the street as boys love pitch-and-toss."

"You want to tell him my case as a dreadful example?"

"Well, not exactly. You see, the firm is to be Thornton & Son from this out, and the son is a bit of a gambler as well as the father."

"Well, gamble away. You can afford to amuse yourself."

"I intend to, and I want you to cable me a straight tip if you ever come across one."

"Me! You're laughing at me."

"'Pon my soul I'm not. You think it unlikely, impossible." Armitage nodded. "Well, I think it possible, perhaps likely. I want you to remember your promise. You take no responsibility. We act on our own judgment. If we win you get half the winnings."

"But, I say—"

"Oh! I know," his friend cut him short. "You say you won't take the money. But on your

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

own showing there isn't the remotest chance of your being offered it, so we need not fight over shadows."

"As you put it that way, all right. I'm to share the first pot of gold you find under the rainbow."

"That you help us to find under the rainbow," corrected his friend, smilingly. "It's a bargain, and don't you forget it."

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VI

LOST AND FOUND

THE conspiracy worked like a charm. Armitage gradually transferred his goods and chattels to Thornton's lodgings from his own. Finally he gave up the key and drove away with his portmanteau and a parcel of books—the last remnant of his belongings. That evening the friends had a sumptuous farewell dinner at the Savoy, where Thornton slept. The excitement of the adventure was hot upon both, and they talked far into the night. Armitage had a feeling that it was all a curious dream from which he would wake presently, but Thornton kept him well up to his part with a coolness that forbade revolt.

Next morning they changed clothes. Thornton shaved clean, bade his friend a hearty good-bye, and drove off in a hansom to catch the boat train for Liverpool, leaving Phil Armitage, with beard and moustache, transformed into Cyril Littledale, behind him.

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Armitage had wondered why the restless Yankee, who generally caught his train in motion, had given himself such ample time. Thornton had put his questions by unanswered with vague talk of farewell visits to be paid, and he never guessed the mad freak that was in the mind of the reckless Yankee.

But as the hansom turned the corner Thornton rapped the trap door with the handle of his umbrella, and when a big, red face filled the aperture he called out Abe Lamman's city address.

The surprised but ever-genial Abe received his dear friend Armitage with effusion, gripping him by both hands, and Armitage's double was not less cordial.

Lamman, it appeared, had been broken-hearted at his disappearance.

'I even feared," he said—"I don't want to tell what I feared sometimes. I used to be awake at nights thinking what had become of you. I was tortured with the idea it was I that put you in the hole, though with the best intentions, and I felt bound to help you out. If there is anything in the world I can do to help, tell me. I was hit hard myself by those cursed Amalgamateds, harder than I care to think about. Still, if—"

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The other cut him short with the news that he started that afternoon for New York.

Lamman professed himself astounded and dismayed. It was devilish hard, he told him again and again, to have to break up his old life and part with his old friends. He even tried to make the sham Armitage change his mind, and waxed the more vehement the more he saw the other determined. Finally he came to see it was the best thing that could be done, and he again made generous offer of a loan, which was gratefully refused.

"Say what!" he cried cordially, "I have a great mind to shut up shop and run with you to Liverpool. Egad! I'll do it."

He did it. The two travelled down together, second-class. Poor Armitage's funds would not run to first. They lunched together, but Armitage insisted on paying his share. Lamman went with him on board and chatted with him until the moment the gangways were raised and the huge ship began to swing round slowly and point her nose towards the west, and all the time no doubt dawned on him that it was the real Armitage he was seeing off safely out of the country.

Thronton kept the fraud up to the last, waved him good-bye from the railings across the widening

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

gap of water, and then rewarded himself for his exertions by a long drink in the smoking-room.

"If Armitage only keeps up his end of the game," he thought, as he put down the big tumbler half empty, "it's a sure win."

Meanwhile, Armitage was accepted at the telegraph office with a readiness which surprised and delighted him. He found that he had always been a great favourite. His substitute was a surly boor, and the postmaster and the postmaster's daughter were delighted to have the good-humoured Yankee back again. Indeed, the girl's welcome was so hearty that Armitage was tempted to the belief that the claims of the distant Irene were not always sufficiently remembered.

It is strange how easily life slips into a new routine like a wheel into a groove, and how easily and how smoothly it moves along. In a week Armitage was familiar with his new duties; in a month they had grown to be second nature. His work was light; his little room was his own, and there were hours at a stretch when he could sit in his chair and read hard, undisturbed by telegram sent or received. There is nothing more impossible than to work or idle in moderation. The two things are like oil and water—they won't mix. They must be taken turn about

Digitized by Google Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY

or not at all. Armitage, the gentleman at large, when he was complete master of his own time, could only find an hour or so every second day for study. Armitage, the telegraph clerk, read a steady average of five hours a day. The hard work blunted, as nothing else could, the pangs of despairing love. It was like a strong narcotic dulling the pain it could not cure. Early in the days of his weary search for employment he had read of the death of Theophilus Lee. He read it with unmixed pity for the daughter and no hope for himself. She had given him a peep into her heart that evening that seemed so long ago, and the soreness of his own injuries was forgotten in his sorrow for her. He had at the time to hold hard to his resolution; to withstand his longing to go to her or to write to her, in some way to comfort her in her great grief. But pride for once conquered love. He would not justify the dead father's bitter taunt. He would not go as a pauper to the heiress, for he knew that at the first glance of her reproachful eyes his manhood would melt away like a barrier of ice and the warm tide of love sweep him from his resolve.

So pride, struggling against love, held him back and tortured while it held.

In the new life, as has been said, hard work and

Digitized by Google
Original from HARVARD UNIVERSITY