

THE COST

By

DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

Author of

“The Master-Rogue”

“Golden Fleece, etc.”

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I.

A FATHER INVITES DISASTER.

Pauline Gardiner joined us on the day that we, the Second Reader class, moved from the basement to the top story of the old Central Public School. Her mother brought her and, leaving, looked round at us, meeting for an instant each pair of curious eyes with friendly appeal.

We knew well the enchanted house where she lived—stately, retreated far into large grounds in Jefferson Street; a high brick wall all round, and on top of the wall broken glass set in cement. Behind that impassable barrier which so teased our young audacity were flower-beds and “shrub” bushes, whose blossoms were wonderfully sweet if held a while in the closed hand; grape arbors and shade and fruit trees, haunted by bees; winding walks strewn fresh each spring with tan-bark that has such a clean, strong odor, especially just after a rain, and that is at once firm and soft beneath the feet. And in the midst stood the only apricot tree in Saint X. As few of us had tasted apricots, and as those few pronounced them better far than oranges or even bananas, that tree was the climax of tantalization.

The place had belonged to a childless old couple who hated children—or did they bar them out and drive them away because the sight and sound of them quickened the ache of empty old age into a pain too keen to bear? The husband died, the widow went away to her old-maid sister at Madison; and the Gardiners, coming from Cincinnati to live in the town where Colonel Gardiner was born and had spent his youth, bought the place. On our way to and from school in the first weeks of that term, pausing as always to gaze in through the iron gates of the drive, we had each day seen Pauline walking alone among the flowers. And she would stop and smile at us; but she was apparently too shy to come to the gates; and we, with the memory of the cross old couple awing us, dared not attempt to make friends with her.

She was eight years old, tall for her age, slender but strong, naturally graceful. Her hazel eyes were always dancing mischievously. She liked boys' games better than girls'. In her second week she induced several of the more daring girls to go with her to the pond below town and there engage in a raft-race with the boys. And when John Dumont, seeing that the girls' raft was about to win, thrust the one he was piloting into it and upset it, she was the only girl who did not scream at the shock of the sudden tumble into the water or rise in tears from the shallow, muddy bottom.

She tried going barefooted; she was always getting bruised or cut

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lid and stood in the deep, wasted hollows of his eye-sockets.

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A DESPERATE RALLY.

When he awoke again he felt that he should get well rapidly. He was weak, but it seemed the weakness of hunger rather than of illness. His head was clear, his nerves tranquil; his mind was as hungry for action as his body was for food.

"As soon as I've had something to eat," he said to himself, "I'll be better than for years. I needed this." And straightway he began to take hold of the outside world.

"Are you there, Pauline?" he asked, after perhaps half an hour during which his mind had swiftly swept the whole surface of his affairs.

The nurse rose from the lounge across the foot of the bed. "Your wife was worn out, Mr. Dumont," she began. "She has—"

"What day is it?" he interrupted.

"Thursday."

"Of the month, I mean."

"The seventeenth," she answered, smiling in anticipation of his astonishment.

But he said without change of expression, "Then I've been ill three weeks and three days. Tell Mr. Culver I wish to see him at once."

"But the doctor—"

"Damn the doctor," replied Dumont, good-naturedly. "Don't irritate me by opposing. I shan't talk with Culver a minute by the clock. What I say will put my mind at rest. Then I'll eat something and sleep for a day at least."

The nurse hesitated, but his eyes fairly forced her out of the room to fetch Culver. "Now remember, Mr. Dumont—less than a minute," she said. "I'll come back in just sixty seconds."

"Come in forty," he replied. When she had closed the door he said to Culver: "What are the quotations on Woolens?"

"Preferred twenty-eight; Common seven," answered Culver. "They've been about steady for two weeks."

"Good. And what's Great Lakes and Gulf?" Culver showed his surprise. "I'll have to consult the paper," he said. "You never asked me for that quotation before. I'd no idea you'd want it." He went to the next room and immediately returned. "G. L. and G. one hundred and two."

Dumont smiled with a satisfied expression.* "Now—go downtown—what time is it?"

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“Eight o’clock.”

“Morning?”

“Yes, sir, morning.”

“Go down-town at once and set expert accountants—get Evarts and Schuman—set them at work on my personal accounts with the Woolens Company. Tell everybody I’m expected to die, and know it, and am getting facts for making my will. And stay down-town yourself all day—find out everything you can about National Woolens and that raiding crowd and about Great Lakes and Gulf. The better you succeed in this mission the better it’ll be for you. Thank you, by the way, for keeping my accident quiet. Find out how the Fanning-Smiths are carrying National Woolens. Find out—”

The door opened and the plain, clean figure of the nurse appeared. “The minute’s up,” she said.

“One second more, please. Close the door.” When she had obeyed he went on: “See Tavistock—you know you must be careful not to let any one at his office know that you’re connected with me. See him—ask him—no, telephone Tavistock to come at once—and you find out all you can independently—especially about the Fanning-Smiths and Great Lakes and Gulf.”

“Very well,” said Culver.

“A great deal depends on your success,” continued Dumont—“a great deal for me, a great deal—a very great deal for you.”

His look met Culver’s and each seemed satisfied with what he saw. Then Culver went, saying to himself: “What makes him think the Fanning-Smiths were mixed up in the raid? And what on earth has G. L. and G. got to do with it? Gad, he’s a *wonder!*” The longer Culver lived in intimacy with Dumont the greater became to him the mystery of his combination of bigness and littleness, audacity and caution, devil and man. “It gets me,” he often reflected, “how a man can plot to rob millions of people in one hour and in the next plan endowments for hospitals and colleges; despise public opinion one minute and the next be courting it like an actor. But that’s the way with all these big fellows. And I’ll know how to do it when I get to be one of ’em.”

As the nurse reentered Dumont’s bedroom he called out, lively as a boy: “*Something* to eat! *Anything* to eat! *Everything* to eat!”

The nurse at first flatly refused to admit Tavistock. But at half-past nine he entered, tall, lean, lithe, sharp of face, shrewd of eye, rakish of mustache; by Dumont’s direction he closed and locked the door. “Why!” he exclaimed, “you don’t look much of a sick man. You’re thin, but your color’s not bad and your eyes are clear. And down-town they have you dying.”

Dumont laughed. Tavistock instantly recognized in laugh and look Dumont’s battle expression. “Dying—yes. Dying to get at ’em. Tavistock, we’ll kick those fellows out of Wall Street before the

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middle of next week. How much Great Lakes is there floating on the market?"

Tavistock looked puzzled. He had expected to talk National Woolens, and this man did not even speak of it, seemed absorbed in a stock in which Tavistock did not know he had any interest whatever. "G. L. and G.?" he said. "Not much—perhaps thirty thousand shares. It's been quiet for a long time. It's an investment stock, you know."

Dumont smiled peculiarly. "I want a list of the stock-holders—not all, only those holding more than a thousand shares."

"There aren't many big holders. Most of the stock's in small lots in the middle West."

"So much the better."

"I'm pretty sure I can get you a fairly accurate list."

Tavistock, Dumont's very private and personal broker, had many curious ways of reaching into the carefully guarded books and other business secrets of brokers and of the enterprises listed on the New York Stock Exchange. He and Dumont had long worked together in the speculative parts of Dumont's schemes. Dumont was the chief source of his rapidly growing fortune, though no one except Culver, not even Mrs. Tavistock, knew that they had business relations. Dumont moved through Tavistock secretly, and Tavistock in turn moved through other agents secretly. But for such precautions as these the great men of Wall Street would be playing with all the cards exposed for the very lambs to cock their ears at.

"I want it immediately," said Dumont. "Only the larger holders, you understand."

"Haste always costs. I'll have to get hold of a man who can get hold of some one high up in the Great Lakes dividend department."

"Pay what you must—ten—twenty thousand—more if necessary. But get it to-night!"

"I'll try."

"Then you'll get it."

He slept, with a break of fifteen minutes, until ten the next morning. Then Tavistock appeared with the list. "It was nearly midnight before my man could strike a bargain, so I didn't telephone you. The dividend clerk made a memory list. I had him verify it this morning as early as he could get at the books. He says at least a third of the road is held in small lots abroad. He's been in charge of the books for twenty years, and he says there have been more changes in the last two months than in all that time. He thinks somebody has sold a big block of the stock on the quiet."

Dumont smiled significantly. "I think I understand that," he said. He glanced at the list. "It's even shorter than I thought."

"You notice, one-third of the stock's tied up in the Wentworth estate," said Tavistock.

"Yes. And here's the name of Bowen's dividend clerk. Bowen is

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traveling in the far East. Probably he's left no orders about his Great Lakes—why should he when it's supposed to be as sound and steady as Government bonds? That means another fifty thousand shares out of the way for our purposes. Which of these names stand for the Fanning-Smiths?"

"I only recognize Scannell—James Fanning-Smith's private secretary. But there must be others, as he's down for only twenty-one thousand shares."

"Then he's the only one," said Dumont, "for the Fanning-Smiths have only twenty-one thousand shares at the present time. I know that positively."

"What!" Tavistock showed that he was astounded. "I knew James Fanning-Smith was an ass, but I never suspected him of such folly as that. So they are the ones that have been selling?"

"Yes—not only selling what they owned but also—However, no matter. It's safe to say there are less than a hundred and fifty thousand shares for us to take care of. I want you to get me—right away—options for fifteen days on as many of these remaining big lots as possible. Make the best terms you can—anything up to one hundred and twenty-five—and offer five or even ten dollars a share forfeit for the option. Make bigger offers—fifteen—where it's necessary. Set your people to work at once. They've got the rest of to-day, all day to-morrow, all day Sunday. But I'd rather the whole thing were closed up by Saturday night. I'll be satisfied when you've got me control of a hundred thousand shares—that'll be the outside of safety."

"Yes, you're reasonably sure to win, if you can carry that and look after offerings of fifty thousand in the market. The options on the hundred thousand shares oughtn't to cost you much more than a million. The fifty thousand you'll have to buy in the market may cost you six or seven millions." Tavistock recited these figures carelessly. In reality he was watching Dumont shrewdly, for he had believed that the National Woolens raid had ruined him, had certainly put him out of the large Wall Street moves.

"In that small drawer, to the left, in the desk there," said Dumont, pointing. "Bring me the Inter-State National check-book, and pen and ink."

When he had the book he wrote eight checks, the first for fifty thousand, the next five for one hundred thousand each, the last two for two hundred and fifty thousand each. "The first check," he said, "you may use whenever you like. The others, except the last two, will be good after two o'clock to-day. The last two can be used any time after eleven to-morrow. And—don't forget! I'm supposed to be hopelessly ill—but then, no one must know you've seen me or know anything about me. Spread it as a rumor."

Tavistock went away convinced, enthusiastic. There was that in Dumont which inspired men to their strongest, most intelligent ef-

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forts. He was harsh, he was tyrannical, treacherous even—in a large way, often cynically ungrateful. But he knew how to lead, knew how to make men forget all but the passion for victory, and follow him loyally. Tavistock had seen his financial brain solve too many “unsolvable” problems not to have confidence in it.

“I might have known!” he reflected. “Why, those fellows apparently only scotched him. They got the Woolens Company away from him. He lets it go without a murmur when he sees he’s beaten, and he turns his mind to grabbing a big railway as if Woolens had never existed.”

Just after his elevated train passed Chatham Square on the way down-town Tavistock suddenly slapped his leg with noisy energy and exclaimed half-aloud, “By Jove, of course!” to the amusement of those near him in the car. He went on to himself: “Why didn’t I see it before? Because it’s so beautifully simple, like all the things the big ’uns do. He’s a wonder. So *that’s* what he’s up to? Gad, what a breeze there’ll be next week!”

At eleven o’clock Doctor Sackett came into Dumont’s bedroom, in arms against his patient.

“You’re acting like a lunatic. No business, I say—not for a week. Absolute quiet, Mr. Dumont, or I’ll not answer for the consequences.”

“I see you want to drive me back into the fever,” replied Dumont. “But I’m bent on getting well. I need the medicine I’ve had this morning, and Culver’s bringing me another dose. If I’m not better when he leaves, I agree to try your prescription of fret and fume.”

“You are risking your life.”

Dumont smiled. “Possibly. But I’m risking it for what’s more than life to me, my dear Sackett.”

“You’ll excite yourself. You’ll—”

“On the contrary, I shall calm myself. I’m never so calm and cheerful as when I’m fighting, unless it’s when I’m getting ready to fight. There’s something inside me—I don’t know what—but it won’t let me rest till it has pushed me into action. That’s my nature. If any one asks how I am, say you’ve no hope of my recovery.”

“I shall tell only the truth in that case,” said Sackett, but with resignation—he was beginning to believe that for his extraordinary patient extraordinary remedies might be best.

Dumont listened to Culver’s report without interrupting him once. Culver’s position had theretofore been most disadvantageous to himself. He had been too near to Dumont, had been merged in Dumont’s big personality. Whatever he did well seemed to Dumont merely the direct reflection of his own abilities; whatever he did ill seemed far more stupid than a similar blunder made by a less intimate subordinate—what excuse for Culver’s going wrong with the guiding hand of the Great Man always upon him?

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In this, his first important independent assignment, he had at last an opportunity to show his master what he could do, to show that he had not learned the Dumont methods parrot-fashion, but intelligently, that he was no mere reflecting asteroid to the Dumont sun, but a self-luminous, if lesser and dependent, star.

Dumont was in a peculiarly appreciative mood. "Why, the fellow's got brains—good brains," was his inward comment again and again as Culver unfolded the information he had collected—clear, accurate, non-essentials discarded, essentials given in detail, hidden points brought to the surface.

It was proof positive of Dumont's profound indifference to money that he listened without any emotion either of anger or of regret to the first part of Culver's tale, the survey of the wreck—what had been forty millions now reduced to a dubious six. Dumont had neither time nor strength for emotion; he was using all his mentality in gaging what he had for the work in hand—just how long and how efficient was the broken sword with which he must face his enemies in a struggle that meant utter ruin to him if he failed. For he felt that if he should fail he would never again be able to gather himself together to renew the combat; either he would die outright or he would abandon himself to the appetite which had just shown itself dangerously near to being the strongest of the several passions ruling him.

When Culver passed to the Herron coterie and the Fanning-Smiths and Great Lakes and Gulf, Dumont was still motionless—he was now estimating the strength and the weaknesses of the enemy, and miscalculation would be fatal. At the end of three-quarters of an hour Culver stopped the steady, swift flow of his report—"That's all the important facts. There's a lot more but it would be largely repetition."

Dumont looked at him with an expression that made him proud. "Thanks, Culver. At the next annual meeting we'll elect you to Giddings' place. Please go back down-town and—" He rapidly indicated half a dozen points which Culver had failed to see and investigate—the best subordinate has not the master's eye; if he had, he would not be a subordinate.

Dumont waved his hand in dismissal and settled himself to sleep. When Culver began to stammer thanks for the promised promotion, he frowned.

"Don't bother me with that sort of stuff. The job's yours because you've earned it. It'll be yours as long as you can hold it down—or until you earn a better one. And you'll be loyal as Giddings was—just as long as it's to your interest and not a second longer. Otherwise you'd be a fool, and I'd not have you about me. Be off!"

He slept an hour and a half, then Pauline brought him a cup of beef extract—"A very small cup," he grumbled good-humoredly. "And a very weak, watery mess in it."

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As he lay propped in his bed drinking it—slowly to make it last the longer—Pauline sat looking at him. His hands had been fat and puffy; she was filled with pity as she watched the almost scrawny hand holding the cup to his lips; there were hollows between the tendons, and the wrist was gaunt. Her gaze wandered to his face and rested there, in sympathy and tenderness. The ravages of the fever had been frightful—hollows where the swollen, sensual cheeks had been; the neck caved in behind and under the jaw-bones; loose skin hanging in wattles, deeply-set eyes, a pinched look about the nostrils and the corners of the mouth. He was homely, ugly even; except the noble curve of head and profile, not a trace of his former good looks—but at least that swinish, fleshy, fleshy expression was gone.

A physical wreck, battered, torn, dismantled by the storm and fire of disease! It was hard for her to keep back her tears.

Their eyes met and his instantly shifted. The rest of the world saw the man of force bent upon the possessions which mean fame and honor regardless of how they are got. He knew that he could deceive the world, that so long as he was rich and powerful it would refuse to let him undeceive it, though he might strive to show it what he was. But he knew that she saw him as he really was—knew him as only a husband and a wife can know each the other. And he respected her for the qualities which gave her a right to despise him, and which had forced her to exercise that right. He felt himself the superior of the rest of his fellow-beings, but her inferior; did she not successfully defy him; could she not, without a word, by simply resting her calm gaze upon him, make him shift and slink?

He felt that he must change the subject—not of their conversation, for they were not talking, but of their—her—thoughts. He did not know precisely what she was thinking of him, but he was certain that it was not anything favorable—how could it be? In fact, fight though she did against the thought, into her mind as she looked, pitying yet shrinking, came his likeness to a wolf—starved and sick and gaunt, by weakness tamed into surface restraint, but in vicious teeth, in savage lips, in jaw made to crush for love of crushing, a wicked wolf, impatient to resume the life of the beast of prey.

By a mischance unavoidable in a mind filled as was his he began to tell of his revenge—of the exhibition of power he purposed to give, sudden and terrible. He talked of his enemies as a cat might of a mouse it was teasing in the impassable circle of its paws. She felt that they deserved the thunderbolt he said he was about to hurl into them, but she could not help feeling pity for them. If what he said of his resources and power were true, how feeble, how helpless they were—pygmies fatuously disporting themselves in the palm of a giant's hand, unconscious of where they were, of the cruel eyes laughing at them, of the iron muscles that would presently contract that hand and—she shuddered; his voice came to her in a confused

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murmur.

"If he does not stop I shall loathe him again!" she said to herself. Then to him: "Perhaps you'd like to see Langdon—he's in the drawing-room with Gladys."

"I sent for him two hours ago. Yes, tell him to come up at once."

As she took the cup he detained her hand. She beat down the impulse to snatch it away, let it lie passive. He pressed his lips upon it.

"I haven't thanked you for coming back," he said in a low voice, holding to her hand nervously. "But you know it wasn't because I'm not grateful, don't you? I can hardly believe yet that it isn't a dream. I'd have said there wasn't a human being on earth who'd have done it—except your mother. No, not even you, only your mother."

At this tribute to her mother, unexpected, sincere, tears dimmed Pauline's eyes and a sob choked up into her throat.

"It was your mother in you that made you come," he went on. "But you came—and I'll not forget it. You said you had come to stay—is that so, Pauline?"

She bent her head in assent.

"When I'm well and on top again—but there's nothing in words. All I'll say is, you're giving me a chance, and I'll make the best of it I've learned my lesson."

He slowly released her hand. She stood there a moment, without speaking, without any definite thought. Then she left to send Langdon.

"Yes," Dumont reflected, "it was her duty. It's a woman's duty to be forgiving and gentle and loving and pure—they're made differently from men. It was unnatural, her ever going away at all. But she's a good woman, and she shall get what she deserves hereafter. When I settle this bill for my foolishness I'll not start another." Duty—that word summed up his whole conception of the right attitude of a good woman toward a man. A woman who acted from love might change her mind; but duty was safe, was always there when a man came back from wanderings which were mere amiable, natural weaknesses in the male. Love might adorn a honeymoon or an escapade; duty was the proper adornment of a home.

"I've just been viewing the wreck with Culver," he said, as Langdon entered, dressed in the extreme of the latest London fashion.

"Much damage?"

"What didn't go in the storm was carried off by Giddings when he abandoned the ship. But the hull's there and—oh, I'll get her off and fix her up all right."

"Always knew Giddings was a rascal. He oozes piety and respectability. That's the worst kind you have down-town. When a man carries so much character in his face—it's like a woman who carries so much color in her cheeks that you know it couldn't have come

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from the inside.”

“You’re wrong about Giddings. He’s honest enough. Any other man would have done the same in his place. He stayed until there was no hope of saving the ship.”

“All lost but his honor—Wall Street honor, eh?”

“Precisely.”

After a pause Langdon said: “I’d no idea you held much of your own stock. I thought you controlled through other people’s proxies and made your profits by forcing the stock up or down and getting on the other side of the market.”

“But, you see, I believe in Woolens,” replied Dumont. “And I believe in it still, Langdon!” His eyes had in them the look of the fanatic. “That concern is breath and blood and life to me, and wife and children and parents and brothers and sisters. I’ve put my whole self into it. I conceived it. I brought it into the world. I nursed it and brought it up. I made it big and strong and great. It’s mine, by heaven! *Mine!* And no man shall take it from me!”

He was sitting up, his face flushed, his eyes blazing. “Gad—he does look a wild beast!” said Langdon to himself. He would have said aloud, had Dumont been well: “I’m precious glad I ain’t the creature those fangs are reaching for!” He was about to caution him against exciting himself when Dumont sank back with a cynical smile at his own outburst.

“But to get down to business,” he went on. “I’ve eleven millions of the stock left—about a hundred and twenty thousand shares. Gladys has fifty thousand shares—how much have you got?”

“Less than ten thousand. And I’d have had none at all if my mind hadn’t been full of other things as I was sailing. I forgot to tell my broker to sell.”

Dumont was reflecting. Presently he said: “Those curs not only took most of my stock and forced the sale of most of my other securities; they’ve put me in such a light that outside stockholders wouldn’t send me their proxies now. To get back control I must smash them, and I must also acquire pretty nearly half the shares, and hold them till I’m firm in the saddle again.”

“You’d better devote yourself for the present to escaping the grave. Why bother about business? You’ve got enough—too much, as it is. Take a holiday—go away and amuse yourself.”

Dumont smiled. “That’s what I’m going to do, what I’m doing—amusing myself. I couldn’t sleep, I couldn’t live, if I didn’t feel that I was on my way back to power. Now—in the present market I couldn’t borrow on my Woolens stock. I’ve two requests to make of you.”

“Anything that’s possible.”

“The first is, I want you to lend me four millions, or, rather, negotiate the loan for me, as if it were for yourself. I’ve got about that amount in Governments, in several good railways and in the proper-

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ty here. The place at Saint X is Pauline's, but the things I can put up would bring four millions and a half at least at forced sale. So, you'll be well secured. I'm asking you to do it instead of doing it myself because, if I'm to win out, the Herron crowd must think I'm done for and nearly dead."

Langdon was silent several minutes. At last he said: "What's your plan?"

Dumont looked irritated—he did not like to be questioned, to take any one into his confidence. But he restrained his temper and said: "I'm going to make a counter-raid. I know where to strike."

"Are you sure?"

Dumont frowned. "Don't disturb yourself," he said coldly. "I can arrange the loan in another way."

"I'm asking you only for your own sake, Jack," Langdon hastily interposed. "Of course you can have the money, and I don't want your, security."

"Then I'll not borrow through you." Dumont never would accept a favor from any one. He regarded favors as profitable investments but ruinous debts.

"Oh—very well—I'll take the security," said Langdon. "When do you want the money?"

"It must be covered into my account at the Inter-State National—remember, not the National Industrial, but the Inter-State National. A million must be deposited to-day—the rest by ten o'clock tomorrow at the latest."

"I'll attend to it. What's your other request?"

"Woolens'll take another big drop on Monday and at least two hundred and fifty thousand shares'll be thrown on the market at perhaps an average price of eighteen—less rather than more. I want you quietly to organize a syndicate to buy what's offered. They must agree to sell it to me for, say, two points advance on what they pay for it. I'll put up—in your name—a million dollars in cash and forfeit it if I don't take the stock off their hands. As Woolens is worth easily double what it now stands at, they can't lose. Of course the whole thing must be kept secret."

Langdon deliberated this proposal. Finally he said: "I think brother-in-law Barrow and his partner and I can manage it."

"You can assure them they'll make from six hundred thousand to a million on a less than thirty days' investment of four millions and a half, with no risk whatever."

"Just about that," assented Langdon—he had been carefully brought up by his father to take care of a fortune and was cleverer at figures than he pretended.

"Do your buying through Tavistock," continued Dumont. "Give him orders to take on Monday all offerings of National Woolens, preferred and common, at eighteen or less. He'll understand what to do."

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“But I may be unable to get up the syndicate on such short notice.”

“You must,” said Dumont. “And you will. You can get a move on yourself when you try—I found that out when I was organizing my original combine. One thing more—very important.

Learn for me all you can—without being suspected—about the Fanning-Smiths and Great Lakes.”

He made Langdon go over the matters he was to attend to, point by point, before he would let him leave. He was asleep when the nurse, sent in by Langdon on his way out, reached his bed—the sound and peaceful sleep of a veteran campaigner whose nerves are trained to take advantage of every lull.

At ten the next morning he sent the nurse out of his room. “And close the doors,” he said, “and don’t come until I ring.” He began to use the branch telephone at his bedside, calling up Langdon, and then Tavistock, to assure himself that all was going well. Next he called up in succession five of the great individual moneylenders of Wall Street, pledged them to secrecy and made arrangements for them to call upon him at his house at different hours that day and Sunday. Another might have intrusted the making of these arrangements to Culver or Langdon, but Dumont never let any one man know enough of his plan of battle to get an idea of the whole. “Now for the ammunition,” he muttered, when the last appointment was made. And he rang for Culver.

Culver brought him writing materials. “Take this order,” he said, as he wrote, “to the Central Park Safety Deposit vaults and bring me from my compartment the big tin box with my initials in white—remember, *in white*—on the end of it.”

Three-quarters of an hour later Culver returned, half-carrying, half-dragging the box. Dumont’s eyes lighted up at sight of it. “Ah!” he said, in a sigh of satisfaction and relief. “Put it under the head of the bed here. Thanks. That’s all.”

The nurse came as Culver left, but he sent her away. He supported himself to the door, locked it. He took his keys from the night-stand, drew out the box and opened it. On the mass of stocks and bonds lay an envelope containing two lists—one, of the securities in the box that were the property of Gladys Dumont; the other, of the securities there that were the property of Laura Dumont, their mother.

His hands shook as he unfolded these lists, and a creaking in the walls or flooring made him start and glance round with the look of a surprised thief. But this weakness was momentary. He was soon absorbed in mentally arranging the securities to the best advantage for distribution among the money-lenders as collateral for the cash he purposed to stake in his game.

Such thought as he gave to the moral quality of what he was doing with his sister’s and his mother’s property without asking their

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consent was altogether favorable to himself. His was a well-trained, "practical" conscience. It often anticipated his drafts upon it for moral support in acts that might at first blush seem criminal, or for soothing apologies for acts which were undeniably "not quite right." This particular act, conscience assured him, was of the highest morality—under his own code. For the code enacted by ordinary human beings to guide their foolish little selves he had no more respect than a lion would have for a moral code enacted by and for sheep. The sheep might assert that their code was for lions also; but why should that move the lions to anything but amusement? He had made his own code—not by special revelation from the Almighty, as did some of his fellow practitioners of high finance, but by especial command of his imperial "destiny." And it was a strict code—it had earned him his unblemished reputation for inflexible *commercial* honesty and *commercial* truthfulness. The foundation principle was his absolute right to the great property he had created. This being granted, how could there be immorality in any act whatsoever that might be necessary to hold or regain his kingdom? As well debate the morality of a mother in "commandeering" bread or even a life to save her baby from death.

His kingdom! His by discovery, his by adroit appropriation, his by intelligent development, his by the right of mental might—his! Stake his sister's and his mother's possessions for it? Their lives, if necessary!

Than John Dumont, president of the Woolens Monopoly, there was no firmer believer in the gospel of divine right—the divine right of this new race of kings, the puissant lords of trade.

When he had finished his preparations for the money-lenders he unlocked the door and sank into bed exhausted. Hardly had he settled himself when, without knocking, Gladys entered, Pauline just behind her. His face blanched and from his dry throat came a hoarse, strange cry—it certainly sounded like fright. "You startled me—that was all," he hastened to explain, as much to himself as to them. For, a something inside him had echoed the wondering inquiry in the two women's faces—a something that persisted in reverencing the moral code which his new code had superseded.

XXVII.

THE OTHER MAN'S MIGHT.

At eleven o'clock on Monday morning James, head of the Fanning-Smith family, president of Fanning-Smith and Company, and chairman of the Great Lakes and Gulf railway—to note his chief titles to eminence up-town and down—was seated in his grandfa-

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ther's office, in his grandfather's chair, at his grandfather's desk. Above his head hung his grandfather's portrait; and he was a slightly modernized reproduction of it. As he was thus in every outward essential his grandfather over again, he and his family and the social and business world assumed that he was the reincarnation of the crafty old fox who first saw the light of day through the chinks in a farm-hand's cottage in Maine and last saw it as it sifted through the real-lace curtains of his gorgeous bedroom in his great Madison Avenue mansion. But in fact James was only physically and titularly the representative of his grandfather. Actually he was typical of the present generation of Fanning-Smiths—a self-intoxicated, stupid and pretentious generation; a polo-playing and racing and hunting, a yachting and palace-dwelling and money-scattering generation; a business-despising and business-neglecting, an old-world aristocracy-imitating generation. He moved pompously through his two worlds, fashion and business, deceiving himself completely, every one else except his wife more or less, her not at all—but that was the one secret she kept.

James was the husband of Herron's daughter by his first wife, and Herron had induced him to finance the syndicate that had raided and captured National Woolens.

James was bred to conservatism. His timidity was of that wholesome strength which so often saves chuckle-heads from the legitimate consequences of their vanity and folly. But the spectacle of huge fortunes, risen overnight before the wands of financial magicians whose abilities he despised when he compared them with his own, was too much for timidity. He had been born with a large vanity, and it had been stuffed from his babyhood by all around him until it was become as abnormal as the liver of a Strasburg goose—and as supersensitive. It suffered acutely as these Jacks went climbing up their bean-stalk wealth to heights of magnificence from which the establishments and equipages of the Fanning-Smiths must seem poor to shabbiness. He sneered at them as "vulgar new-comers;" he professed abhorrence of their ostentation. But he—and Gertrude, his wife—envied them, talked of them constantly, longed to imitate, to surpass them.

In the fullness of time his temptation came. He shivered, shrank, leaped headlong—his wife pushing.

About ten days before the raid on National Woolens there had drifted in to Dumont through one of his many subterranean sources of information a rumor that the Fanning-Smiths had stealthily reduced their holdings of Great Lakes to twenty-one thousand shares and that the property was not so good as it had once been. He never permitted any Wall Street development to pass unexplained—he thought it simple prudence for a man with the care of a great financial and commercial enterprise to look into every dark corner of the Street and see what was hatching there. Accordingly, he sent an in-

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quiry back along his secret avenue. Soon he learned that Great Lakes was sound, but the Fanning-Smiths had gone rotten; that they were gambling in the stock of the road they controlled and were supposed in large part to own; that they were secretly selling its stock "short"—that is, were betting it would go down—when there was nothing in the condition of the property to justify a fall. He reflected on this situation and reached these conclusions: "James Fanning-Smith purposes to pass the autumn dividend, which will cause the stock to drop. Then he will take his profits from the shares he has sold short and will buy back control at the low price. He is a fool and a knave. Only an imbecile would thus trifle with an established property. A chance for some one to make a fortune and win a railroad by smashing the Fanning-Smiths." Having recorded in his indelible memory these facts and conclusions as to James Fanning-Smith's plunge from business into gambling, Dumont returned to his own exacting affairs.

He had himself begun the race for multi-millions as a gambler and had only recently become *almost* altogether a business man. But he thought there was a radical difference between his case and Fanning-Smiths'. To use courageous gambling as a means to a foothold in business—he regarded that as wise audacity. To use a firm-established foothold in business as a means to gambling—he regarded that as the acme of reckless folly. Besides, when he marked the cards or loaded the dice for a great Wall Street game of "high finance," he did it with skill and intelligence; and Fanning-Smith had neither.

When the banking-house of Fanning-Smith and Company undertook to finance the raid on National Woolens it was already deep in the Great Lakes gamble. James was new to Wall Street's green table; and he liked the sensations and felt that his swindle on other gamblers and the public—he did not call it by that homely name, though he knew others would if they found him out—was moving smoothly. Still very, very deep down his self-confidence was underlaid with quicksand. But Herron was adroit and convincing to the degree attainable only by those who deceive themselves before trying to deceive others; and James' cupidity and conceit were enormous. He ended by persuading himself that his house, directed and protected by his invincible self, could carry with ease the burden of both loads. Indeed, the Great Lakes gamble now seemed to him a negligible trifle in the comparison—what were its profits of a few hundred thousands beside the millions that would surely be his when the great Woolens Monopoly, bought in for a small fraction of its value, should be controlled by a group of which he would be the dominant personality?

He ventured; he won. He was now secure—was not Dumont dispossessed, dispoiled, dying?

At eleven o'clock on that Monday morning he was seated upon

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his embossed leather throne, under his grandfather's portrait, immersed in an atmosphere of self-adoration. At intervals he straightened himself, distended his chest, elevated his chin and glanced round with an air of haughty dignity, though there was none to witness and to be impressed. In Wall Street there is a fatuity which, always epidemic among the small fry, infects wise and foolish, great and small, whenever a parietic dream of an enormous haul at a single cast of the net happens to come true. This parietic fatuity now had possession of James; in imagination he was crowning and draping himself with multi-millions, power and fame. At intervals he had been calling up on the telephone at his elbow Zabriskie, the firm's representative on 'Change, and had been spurring him on to larger and more frequent "sales" of Great Lakes.

His telephone bell rang. He took down the receiver—"Yes, it's Mr. Fanning-Smith—oh—Mr. Fanshaw—He listened, in his face for the first few seconds all the pitying amusement a small, vain man can put into an expression of superiority. "Thank you, Mr. Fanshaw," he said. "But really, it's impossible. We are perfectly secure. No one would venture to disturb us." And he pursed his lips and swelled his fat cheeks in the look for which his father was noted. But, after listening a few seconds longer, his eyes had in them the beginnings of timidity.

He turned his head so that he could see the ticker-tape as it reeled off. His heavy cheeks slowly relaxed. "Yes, yes," he said hurriedly. "I'll just speak to our Mr. Zabriskie. Good-by." And he rang off and had his telephone connected with the telephone Zabriskie was using at the Stock Exchange. All the while his eyes were on the ticker-tape. Suddenly he saw upon it where it was bending from under the turning wheel a figure that made him drop the receiver and seize it in both his trembling hands. "Great heavens!" he gasped. "Fanshaw may be right. Great Lakes one hundred and twelve—and only a moment ago it was one hundred and three."

His visions of wealth and power and fame were whisking off in a gale of terror. A new quotation was coming from under the wheel—Great Lakes one hundred and fifteen. In his eyes stared the awful thought that was raging in his brain—"This may mean—" And his vanity instantly thrust out Herron and Gertrude and pointed at them as the criminals who would be responsible if—he did not dare formulate the possibilities of that bounding price.

The telephone boy at the other end, going in search of Zabriskie, left the receiver off the hook and the door of the booth open. Into Fanning-Smith's ear came the tumult from the floor of the Exchange—shrieks and yells riding a roar like the breakers of an infernal sea. And on the ticker-tape James was reading the story of the cause, was reading how his Great Lakes venture was caught in those breakers, was rushing upon the rocks amid the despairing wails of its crew, the triumphant jeers of the wreckers on shore.

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put it into words—except to say—just—Pauline!”

She drew a long breath; her gaze met his. And in her eyes he saw a flame that had never shone clearly there before—the fire of her own real self, free and proud. “Once you told me about your father and mother—how he cared—cared always.”

“I remember,” he answered.

“Well—I—I,” said Pauline, “I care as she must have cared when she gave him herself—and *you*.”

THE END.