

The Main Chance

BY

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THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

They spent the day in the saddle riding over the range. The ridiculous character of the Poindexter undertaking could not spoil the real value of the land. There was, Saxton could see, the making here of a great farming property; he felt his old interest in outdoor life quickening as he rode back to the house in the evening.

Snyder cooked supper for both of them, while Saxton repaired a decrepit windmill which had been designed to supply the house with water. He had formed a poor opinion of the caretaker, who had no well-defined duties. There was nothing for any one to do, unless the range were again stocked and cattle raising undertaken as a serious business. Saxton was used to rough men and their ways. He had a happy faculty of adapting himself to the conversational capacities of illiterate men, and enjoyed drawing them out and getting their point of view; but Snyder's was not a visage that inspired confidence. He had a great shock of black hair and a scraggy beard. He lacked an eye, and he had a habit of drawing his hand around in order to accommodate his remaining orb to any necessity. He did this with an insinuating kind of deliberation that became tiresome in a long interview.

"This place is too fancy to be of much use," the man vouchsafed. "You may find some dude that wants to plant money where another dude has dug the first hole; but I reckon you'll have a hard time catching him. A real cattleman wouldn't care for all this house. It might be made into a stable, but a horse would look ridiculous in here. You might have a corn crib made out of it; or it would do for a hotel if you could get dudes to spend the summer here; but I reckon it's a little hot out here for summer boarders."

"The only real value is in the land," said Saxton. "I'm told there's no better on the river. The house is a handicap, or would be so regarded by the kind of men who make money out of cattle. Have you ever tried rounding up the cattle that strayed through the fences? The Poindexter crowd must have branded their last calves about two years ago. Assuming that only a part of them was sold or run off, there ought to be some two-year-olds still loose in this country and they'd be worth finding."

"Yer jokin' I guess. These fellers around here are good fellers, and all that, but I guess they don't give anything back. I guess we ain't got any cattle coming to us."

"Who've you been reporting to, Snyder?"

"How's that?"

"Who have you been considering yourself responsible to?"

"Well, Jim Wheaton at the Clarkson National hired me, and I reckon I'd report to him if I reported to anybody. But if you're going to run this shebang and want to be reported to, I guess I can report to you."

"I want you to report to me," said John, quietly. "In the first place, I want the house and the other buildings cleaned out. After that the fences must be put in shape. And then we'll see if we can't find some of our cows. You can't tell; we may open up a real ranch here and go into business."

"Well, if you're the boss I'll do it your way. I got along all right with Wheaton."

Saxton determined to leave for Clarkson the following morning, and formulated in his mind the result of his journey and plans for the future of the incongruous combination of properties that had been entrusted to him. He sat for an hour looking out over the moonlit valley. He followed the long sweep of the plain, through which he could see for miles the bright ribbon of the river. A train of cars rumbled far away, on the iron trail between the two oceans, intensifying the loneliness of the strange house.

"I seem to find only the lonely places," he said aloud.

In the morning he ate the breakfast of coffee, hardtack and bacon which Snyder prepared. Snyder rode with him to the railway station.

"Give my regards to Mr. Wheaton," he said, as Saxton swung himself into the train. "You'll find me here at the old stand when you come back."

"A queer customer and undoubtedly a bad lot," was Saxton's reflection.

When Saxton had written out the report of his trip he took it to Wheaton, to get his suggestions before forwarding it to Boston. He looked upon the cashier as his predecessor, and wished to avail himself of Wheaton's knowledge of the local conditions affecting the several properties that had now passed to his care. Wheaton undoubtedly wished to be of assistance, and in their discussion of the report, the cashier made many suggestions of value, of which Saxton was glad to avail himself.

"As to the Poindexter place," said Saxton finally, "I've been advertising it for sale in the hope of finding a buyer, but without results. The people at headquarters can't bother about the details of these things, but I can't see why we should maintain a caretaker. There's nothing to take care of. That house is worse than useless. I'm going back in a few days to see if I can't coax home some of the cats we've entitled to, and then I suppose we may as well dispense with Snyder."

"I don't see that there's anything else to do," Wheaton answered. "I've been to the ranch, and there's little personal property there worth caring for. That

man Snyder came along one day and asked for a job and I sent him out there thinking he'd keep things in order until the Trust Company sent its own representative here."

There were times when Wheaton's black eyes contracted curiously, and this was one of the times.

"I don't like discharging a man that you've employed," Saxton replied.

"Oh, that's all right. You can't keep him if he performs no service. Don't trouble about him on my account. How soon are you going back there?"

"Next week some time."

Saxton was not surprised when he returned to the ranch to find that Snyder had made no effort to obey his instructions. He made his visit unexpectedly. He reached the house in the middle of the morning and found the front door bolted and barred on the inside. After some pounding he succeeded in bringing Snyder to the door, evidently both surprised and displeased at his interruption.

"Howdy, boss," was the salutation of the frosty custodian; "I wasn't feeling just right to-day and was takin' a little nap."

The great hall showed signs of a carcass. The dirt had increased since Saxton's first appearance. Empty bottles that had been doing service as candlesticks stood in their greasy shrouds on the table. Saxton sat down on a bag, which had evidently been recently emptied. He resolved to make quick work of Snyder.

"How many cattle have you rounded up since I was here?" he demanded.

"Well, to tell the truth," began Snyder, "there ain't been much time for doing that since you was here."

"No; I suppose you were busy mending fences and cleaning house. Now you have been drawing forty dollars a month for doing nothing. I'll treat you better than you deserve and give you ten dollars bonus to get out. I believe the pony in the corral belongs to you. We'll let it go at that. Here's your money."

"Well, I guess Mr. Wheaton hired me, he'd better fire me."

"Yes, I spoke to Mr. Wheaton about you. He understands that you're a go."

"He does, does he?" Snyder replied with a sneer. "He must have forgot that I had an arrangement with him by the year."

"Well, it's all off," said Saxton, rising. He began throwing open the windows and doors to let in fresh air.

"Well, I guess I'll have to see Mr. Wheaton," Snyder retorted, finding that Saxton was paying no further attention to him. He collected his few belongings, watching in astonishment the violence with which Saxton was gathering up and disposing of rubbish.

"He seems to be more interested in Wheaton than Wheaton is in him," observed Saxton to himself.

Saxton spent a week at Great River. He hired a man to repair fences and put the house in order. He visited several of the large ranch owners and asked them for aid in picking out the scattered remnants of the Poindexter herd. Nearly all of the volunteers to help, with the result that he collected about one hundred cattle and sold them at Great River for cash. He expected to see or hear of Snyder in the town but the fellow had disappeared.

CHAPTER V.

James Wheaton was 35 years old, and was reckoned among the solid business men of Clarkson. He had succeeded far beyond his expectations and was fairly content with the round of the ladder that he had reached. He never talked about himself and as he had no intimate friends it had never been necessary for him to give confidences. His father had been a harness-maker in a little Ohio town; he and his older brother were expected to follow the same business; but the brother grew restless under the threat of enforced apprenticeship and prevailed on James to run away with him. They became tramps and enjoyed themselves roaming through the country, until finally they were caught stealing in a little Illinois village and both were arrested.

James was discharged through the generosity of his brother in taking all the blame on himself; the older boy was sent to a reformatory alone. James then went to Chicago, where he sold papers and blacked boots for a year until he found employment as a train boy, with a company operating on various lines running out of Chicago. This gave him a wide acquaintance with Western towns, and incidentally with railroads and railroad men. He grew tired of the road, and obtained at Clarkson a position in the office of Timothy Margrave, the general manager of the Transcontinental, which, he had heard, was a great primary school for ambitious boys.

He attended night school, was assiduous in his duties, and attained in due course the dignity of a desk as which he took the cards of Margrave's callers, indexed the letter books and copied figures under the direction of the chief clerk. After a year, hearing that one of the Clarkson National Bank's messengers was about to resign, he applied for this place. Margrave recommended him; the local manager of the news agency vouched for his integrity, and in due course he wended the streets of Clarkson with a long bill-book, the outward and visible sign of his position as messenger. He was steadily promoted in the bank and felt his past receding farther and farther behind him.

When, at an important hour of his life, Wheaton was promoted to be paying teller, he was in the receiving teller's cage. He had known that the more desirable position was vacant and had heard his fellow clerks speculating as to the possibility of a promotion from among their number. Thompson, the cashier, had a nephew in the bank; and among the clerks he was thought to have the best chance. They all knew that the directors were in session, and several whose tasks for the day were finished, lingered later than was their wont to see what would happen. Wheaton kept quietly at his work; but he had an eye on the door of the directors' room, and an ear that insensibly turned toward the annunciator by which messengers were called to the board room. It rang at last, and Wheaton wiped his pen with a little more than his usual care as he waited for the result of the summons. This was on his twenty-fifth birthday.

"Mr. Wheaton!" The other clerks looked at one another. The question that had been uppermost with all of them for a week past was answered. Thompson's nephew slammed his book shut and carried it into the vault. Wheaton put aside the balance sheet over

which he had been lingering and went into the directors' room. There had been no note of joy among his associates. He knew that he was not popular with them; he was not, in their sense, a good fellow. When they rushed off after hours to the ball games or horse races, he never joined them. When their books did not balance he never volunteered to help them. As for himself, he always balanced, and did not need their help; and they hated him for it. This was his hour of triumph, but he went to his victory without the cheer of his comrades.

Later, when need arose for creating the position of assistant cashier, it was natural that the new desk should be assigned to Wheaton. He was faithful and competent; neither Porter nor Thompson had a son to install in the bank; and, as they said to each other and to their fellow directors, Wheaton had two distinguishing qualifications—he did his work and he kept his mouth shut.

In the course of time Thompson's health broke down and the directors ordered him away to New Mexico, and again there seemed nothing to do but to promote Wheaton. Thompson wished to sell his stock and resign, but Porter would not have it so; but when, after two years, it was clear that the cashier would never again be fit for continuous service in the bank, Wheaton was duly elected cashier and Thompson was made vice president.

The relations between Porter and Wheaton were strictly of a business character. This was not by intention on Porter's part. He assumed that at some time he or Thompson had known all about Wheaton's antecedents; and after so many years of satisfactory service, during the greater part of which the bank had been protected against Wheaton, as against all the rest of the employees, by a bonding company, he accepted the cashier without any question. Before Evelyn's return he had one day expressed to Wheaton his satisfaction that he would soon have a home again, and Wheaton remarked with civil sympathy that Miss Porter must now be "quite a young lady."

"Oh, yes; you must come up to the house when we get going again," Porter answered.

Wheaton had seen the inside of few houses in Clarkson. He had a recollection of having been sent to Porter's several times, while he was still an errand boy in the bank, to fetch Porter's bag on occasions when the president had been called away unexpectedly. He remembered Evelyn Porter as she used to come as a child and sit in the carriage outside the bank to wait for her father; the Porters stood to him then, and now, for wealth and power.

Raridan had a contempt for Wheaton's intellectual deficiencies; and praise of Wheaton's steadiness and success vexed him as having some sting for himself; but his own amiable impulses got the better of his prejudices, and he showed Wheaton many kindnesses. When the others at The Bachelors' nagged Wheaton, it was Raridan who threw himself into the controversy to take Wheaton's part. He took him to call at some of the houses he knew best, and though this was a matter of propriety he knew nevertheless that he preferred Wheaton to the others in the house. Wheaton was not noisy nor pretentious and the others were sometimes both.

Wheaton soon found it easy to do things that he had never thought of doing before. He became known to the forist and haberdasher; there was a little Hambletonian at a certain liveryman's which Warry Raridan drove a good deal, and he had learned from Warry how pleasant it was to drive out to the new country club in a runabout instead of using the street car, which left a margin of plebeian walking at the end of the line. But while he acquired the superficial graces, he did not lose his instinctive thrift; he had never attempted to plunge, even on what his associates at The Bachelors' called "sure things;" and he was equally incapable of personal extravagance. If he bought flowers he sent them where they would tell in his favor. If he had five dollars to give to the Ice Fund for the poor, he considered that when the newspaper printed his name in its list of acknowledgments, between Timothy Margrave, who gave fifty dollars, and William Porter, who gave twenty-five, he had received an adequate return on his investment.

(To be continued.)

Women and the Stage.

David Belasco was in his best mood at a dinner preceding his vacation—his first vacation in twenty long, hard years. In the course of a learned review of barefoot dancing, problem plays and suchlike outcroppings of stage history, he smiled and said:

"It may be true, as some have claimed, that immoral plays are due to the immoral taste of woman. Yes, that may be true; but, gentlemen, did you ever watch at the theater an elderly, staid, perhaps somewhat unprepossessing wife, brooding over a husband a little younger than herself? These wives, surely, are no supporters of the immoral stage spectacle. Such a wife sat in one of my theaters during the production of a drama. The heroine, a beautiful girl, said at a dramatic moment:

"Merciful heavens, I am undone!"

"The wife rose hurriedly.

"Come, Clarence," she murmured, sternly. "We've had enough of this. I'm not going to have you drinkin' in any Salome dance or disrobin' act."

A Business Secret.

Mr. Isaacs—I sell you dot coat at a grand sacrifice.

Customer—But you say that of all your goods. How do you make a living?

Mr. Isaacs—Mein freint, I makes a schmall profit on de paper and string.—New York Weekly.

He Beat It.

"Where did you steal that mat from?" demanded the policeman as he seized the tramp.

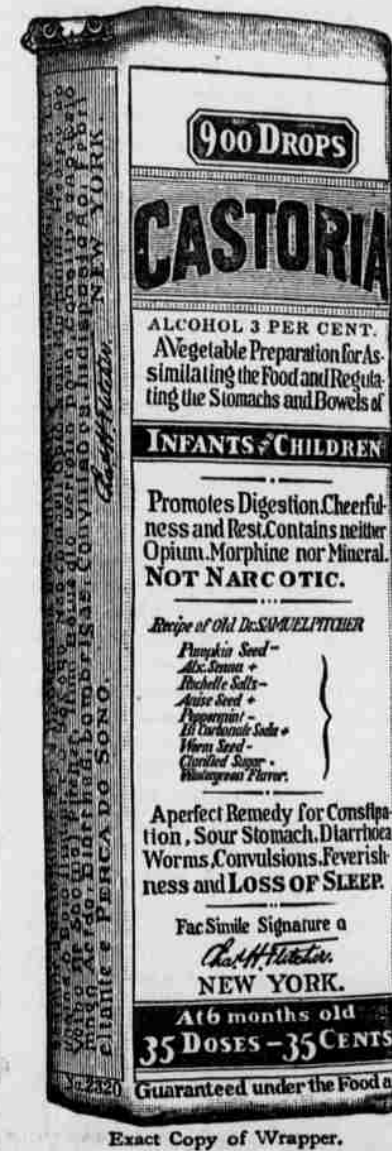
"I didn't steal it," said the tramp, "A lady up the street gave it to me and told me to beat it."—Judge.

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Letters from Prominent Physicians addressed to Chas. H. Fletcher.

Dr. F. Gerald Blattner, of Buffalo, N. Y., says: "Your Castoria is good for children and I frequently prescribe it, always obtaining the desired results."

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Dr. E. J. Dennis, of St. Louis, Mo., says: "I have used and prescribed your Castoria in my sanitarium and outside practice for a number of years and find it to be an excellent remedy for children."

Dr. S. A. Buchanan, of Philadelphia, Pa., says: "I have used your Castoria in the case of my own baby and find it pleasant to take, and have obtained excellent results from its use."

Dr. J. E. Simpson, of Chicago, Ill., says: "I have used your Castoria in cases of colic in children and have found it the best medicine of its kind on the market."

Dr. R. E. Eskildson, of Omaha, Neb., says: "I find your Castoria to be a standard family remedy. It is the best thing for infants and children I have ever known and I recommend it."

Dr. L. R. Robinson, of Kansas City, Mo., says: "Your Castoria certainly has merit. Is not its age, its continued use by mothers through all these years, and the many attempts to imitate it, sufficient recommendation? What can a physician add? Leave it to the mothers."

Dr. Edwin F. Pardee, of New York City, says: "For several years I have recommended your Castoria and shall always continue to do so, as it has invariably produced beneficial results."

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Diplomacy.
"Isn't there some talk that Gringo is going to enter the ministry?"
"The ministry? Why—O, I see. That's what he really wants, but he intends to try for a consulship first."—Chicago Tribune.

His Speedometer.
Inquisitive Person—How do you tell how fast you are going?
Chauffeur—I watch the expression of the faces of the policemen as I whiz past them.

Averages All Right.
Tenant (of flat)—One of the radiators in that large room of mine is always cold, winter and summer.
Janitor (with a scowl)—Well, I've heard you say that the other one is always hot, winter and summer. Ain't it a stand-off?

His Usual Way.
The new waitress sidled up to a dapper young man at the breakfast table, who, after glancing at the bill, opened his mouth, and a noise issued forth that sounded like the ripping off of all of the cogs on one of the wheels in the power house. The new waitress made her escape to the kitchen. "Fellow out there insulted me," she said. The head waiter looked at him. "I'll get it," he said. "That's just the train caller ordering his breakfast."—Argonaut.

A Life Lesson.
"Jones says that he always gets to the bottom of anything he undertakes."
"Don't doubt it. At school he was always at the foot of the class."—Baltimore American.

A Purist at Large.
"Let me see—the census gives your town about 6,000 doesn't it?"
"No, sir; our town gives the census 6,000."

A Wife's Reply.
"Clifford," asked the teacher, "who wrote the Junius letters?"
"I—I don't know, ma'am," answered the terrified little boy. "I didn't!"

Where They Don't Muzzle 'Em.
Suburbanite—You are half an hour late this morning.
Letter Carrier—Yes, ma'am; the sections of stovepipe I have to wear inside my trousers legs on account of the dogs you keep along this street hamper my movements, ma'am.—Chicago Tribune.

Escaping by a Technicality.
Teacher—Tommy, what is an improper fraction?
Tommy—You don't expect me to mention it 'fore all these people, do you?

There Are Others.
"Blings is afraid that he may be prosecuted for polygamy."
"Why, he is married to only one person, ain't he?"
"That is what he thought for a while, but now it appears that he married her whole family, and there are seven of them."—California Weekly.

Merely Friendly.
Elderly Relative—Mortimer, what are your intentions in regard to Miss Aulion?
Scapgrace Nephew—Strictly honorable and praiseworthy, uncle.
Elderly Relative—I am glad to hear that, Mortimer. I was afraid you were going to try to persuade her to marry you.—Chicago Tribune.

Bad BLOOD

"Before I began using Cascarets I had a bad complexion, pimples on my face, and my food was not digested as it should have been. Now I am entirely well, and the pimples have all disappeared from my face. I can truthfully say that Cascarets are just as advertised; I have taken only two boxes of them."
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