

# Richard the Brazen

... By ...  
**CYRUS TOWNSEND  
BRADY,**  
Author of "For the Freedom of the Sea," "The Southerners," Etc.,  
AND  
**EDWARD PEPPE,**  
Author of "A Broken Honor," "The Prince Chap," Etc.

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Continued from last week.

"Mr. Renwyck, what you say is no doubt based on sound judgment and business and—er—legislative experience; yet, on the other hand, it strikes me that you are taking rather a heavy risk for the sake of mere money."

"Ah," cried the old financier, with a snap of his heavy jaw, "now you've struck it! And I don't mind telling you the real reason. It isn't the money. Hang the money! I'm doing this to get even with one man—one man who represents the Houston, Matagorda City and Gulf Railroad and Improvement company, just as I represent the Longmatt Development and Construction company. He isn't a friend of mine—at least no longer—and, by George, I've got him! And what's more, I'm going to squeeze him till his body is as dry as the state of Texas! I think you told me that you knew his son. The old man's name is Bill Williams."

Richard's brain was in a whirl. The Houston, Matagorda City and Gulf Railroad and Improvement company was his father's pet, the darling of his heart. He had worked over it, slaved over it and owned the controlling interest, in which he had invested an enormous sum. If what Mr. Renwyck said was true the coming crash would overwhelm his father completely. Not only had that gentleman invested his own money in the company, but he had induced his friends to join with him, and well Richard knew that his father would feel responsible for their loss. Again, the young man was not the kind of man who could stand neckly by and see his dear old dad bested by an enemy! With a mental gasp he realized that he stood in possession of information by which he could turn the tables on Jacob Renwyck and watch Bill Williams get the squeezing.

"Jerusalem, how dad will laugh!" he mused, then bit his tongue at a sudden thought which came to him. He could not tell his father!

To pose as an English nobleman for the sake of a joke or even to win a girl was one thing; to receive a man's confidence in that capacity and by means of it detach him from the major portion of his fortune was quite another. Richard's mind was made up instantly. A confession of his deceit would cause a scene beyond doubt, and, moreover, his hope of winning Miss Harriet would fade in the general wreck, but even with this depressing fact in view he could not for an instant bring himself to be branded as a swindler and a thief.

"Mr. Renwyck," he began, but the daring speculator once more checked the good intention.

"Now, my dear Croylund," he begged, "I don't want you to go into this thing prematurely. Sleep on it. Think it over tomorrow, and we'll talk about it again in the evening. I'm going to town in the morning to attend a quiet meeting of the new company's stockholders. I will then be in a position to show you even more clearly where we stand. Let's go to bed." He linked his arm through Richard's and started across the grass. "By the way, I have a new team of horses coming out tomorrow on trial. I should like to get your opinion of them before I buy."

The light of dawn found Richard still staring at the ceiling and wondering how he could get out of the tangle. No longer was he justified in concealing his identity on any pretext. He must confess to Mr. Renwyck. But how could he do that when everything was progressing so favorably, when he was making so good an impression both on Mr. Renwyck and, as he hoped, his daughter? How could he throw away his opportunity there? On the other hand, how could he see his dad walk blindly into the mouths of a set of New York sharks? Over and over he turned the questions till his brain grew addled and his head was aching viciously. One of two things he must do. But which? What good would a confession do anyway? To tell his father afterward would not make him less culpable. He turned and twisted in his bed, but found no solution of the problem. The questions hit each other like wild express trains on a single track, and the solitary engineer had no earthly chance to jump.

"Now, it's this way," he murmured to his ruffled pillow—"when an irresistible force meets an invulnerable body—heavens! I wish we'd given those blasted Englishmen a bigger licking than we did in '70!"

## CHAPTER IX.

**B**REAKFAST the next morning did not pass pleasantly for Richard, who began to detest the role he was assuming with all his honest American heart—honest until this mad idea of substitution obsessed him, that is. First of all, he wanted to get away by himself and think the thing out undisturbed by troublesome surroundings. He determined to go for a long ride—alone, if possible—and with a good horse under him perhaps his brain would work and

devise some loophole of escape. Fatuous dream! There was no loophole. He would palter with the truth no longer. No! He would speak at once and get the worst part of it over. Then he would be free—free from his own conscience—and she would be hopelessly and forever lost to him. Well, he couldn't help it; his heart would break, but it had to be done, whatever the consequences to himself and the heart aforesaid.

Fully determined—so he thought—on this desperate course, he volunteered to drive Mr. Renwyck to the station in the trap. They would start early and drive slowly. There would be time. He would tell the old shark all and defy him to wreck Bill Williams with any underhand scheme. He would claim to have come to Irvington for the very purpose of unearthing the conspirators. He would join forces with his dad and fight Jacob Renwyck in the open, flinging aside discretion, love,

It was hard to think all this, and it would be harder still to say it. As he considered it the pendulum of his thoughts swung to the other extreme. Could he lay love aside? How sweet she looked in her simple morning gown—over which some artist of dress creation had labored days to produce that effect of artless innocence had he but known it—as she smiled and passed him those delicious rolls, as if it were breakfast food he lacked. He wanted her more than anything else on earth. She was worth a thousand harbor companies. His dad would understand and forgive after seeing her. But would conscience understand and forgive?

I am afraid Lord Croylund did not shine as a table companion that morning, and his muttered excuse about a headache seemed too feminine for credulity. When an irresistible force meets—

The drive to the station was rapid and brief. The undecided Richard did not speak after all. His host persisted in doing all the talking, which was mainly enlarging on that precious scheme of his.

"Au revoir!" said Mr. Renwyck, stepping from the trap. "That's my train. Think over my proposition and let me know this evening. I'll send the veterinary out to look at Hawk today. Goodby, Croylund."

Richard drove slowly back. None of the ladies was about when he arrived, so he wandered into the billiard room. He was knocking the balls around aimlessly when he was suddenly accosted by the one person in the world whose company he least desired.

"Good morning, Lord Croylund," called Mr. Michael Corrigan from the doorway. "I just came over to look you up."

Now, what did he want? Well, whatever it was, he would find the Texan was not to be bluffed. Richard's spirits actually rose. This was something tangible that threatened, and Richard loved to deal with the real. It was the abstract that involved him in difficulties that he hated.

"That's very kind of you, indeed," drawled Richard, with a ring of challenge in his voice which the lawyer did not fail to note with concealed amusement. "Fond of billiards?"

"Oh, in a way, yes. I'm most too short and fat to play without the bridge, but I'll take a cue from you with pleasure if I may."

"Now, I wonder if he means anything by that remark," thought Richard as he handed him the stick. The game began briskly, but soon languished, as did the conversation, Richard making an occasional brilliant shot and missing the easy ones. Mr. Corrigan, by steady, consistent play ran up a good score and between times watched his opponent out of the corners of his eyes.

"I shouldn't say you were up in your usual form, Lord Croylund. Sleep well?"

"No," said Richard, eagerly seizing the opportunity to speak the whole truth and nothing but it. "I didn't."

"Too bad!" murmured the little man, with an exaggerated sympathy that did not impose on his victim, while he gravely chalked his cue. "American beds are hard to get used to, eh?" He received no answer and leaned across the table for a difficult shot, paused and regarded the young man thoughtfully. "Lord Croylund, I am after a certain piece of information and have reason to believe that you can give it to me."

"I shall be pleased, I am sure," said Richard, with admirably simulated indifference, although he was never more keenly alive to the possibilities of a situation in his life.

The little man laid his cue upon the table, dusted his hands and planted himself squarely in front of the pseudo nobleman.

"What—in your opinion—is the most approved method—of branding a heifer?"

admit nothing, deny everything. There was no law of business, honor or love to compel him to confess anything to Mr. Corrigan.

"Branding a heifer?" repeated Richard vacantly while he screwed in his monocle and stared at his companion. "Really—'pon my word—!"

Michael Corrigan burst into a laugh. "Come, come, Dick"—How good that monosyllable sounded after this cursed Croylund business! Now he could understand why Bills hated to be called Woolsey. "It won't do," continued Corrigan genially. "I'm too old a bird to be caught with such salt. Out with it, boy! What's the meaning of this tomfoolery?"

It had come at last, then! No confession would be necessary. With a sudden revulsion of feeling Richard experienced a great sense of relief. Fortune had decided for him.

"Mr. Corrigan," said Richard, holding out his hand—he knew when he was beaten—while his features became radiant with smiles, "when you came through that door awhile ago I wished you safely in hades. Let's get out into the sunshine. I want to make a clean breast of it, for, to tell you the truth, I'm in the devil of a pickle."

Mr. Corrigan laughed again and led the way through the front hall. On the veranda they met Miss Harriet coming from the garden with her arms full of fresh cut roses.

"Going for a walk?" she asked. "If you wait a moment I'd like to join you."

"Young person," said her uncle with mock severity, "there is hardly enough of Lord Croylund to go around, it seems. I've got him for half an hour, and I'm going to keep him! Shoot!"

He took Richard's arm and led him along the gravel path.

"Is that the reason?" he whispered, slyly jerking his thumb in the direction of his niece. Richard blushed. "Oh, you young dog! Well, I can't blame you, Dick. Great girl, isn't she?"

They had now reached a shaded bench in a secluded part of the grounds, where they seated themselves and prepared for the confessional.

"You see," began the fat little lawyer, who seemed to exude good humor from every pore, "at first I couldn't exactly make out what you were up to, you scamp, so I drew you out on our friend Napoleon. You are not well up on the history or the statuary of your beloved country, Dicky, boy. Brush up!"

Richard laughed and asked: "But you were on to me when I took that paddock fence, weren't you? It gave me the creeps when I heard your compliment."

"Of course I was," assented Mr. Corrigan, shaking with amusement. "You don't suppose I lived in Texas two years for nothing but my health! And on your own father's ranch too! I had been told that Renwyck had 'captured a real live nobleman.' I was just strolling over to have a peep at him, when, lo and behold, I find him tearing around a horse lot on one devil as if another were after him!" Mr. Corrigan paused to chuckle. "But, Dick," he said presently, "you made one grave mistake."

"What was that?"

"You should have worn a two foot sombrero, scooped up Harriet's handkerchief at a mad gallop, fired off a brace of guns and plugged holes in Renwyck's hat. Then they would have known you were an Englishman. Now, let's have your story."

Richard looked at him, divided between seriousness and amusement.

"But how did you know that it was I?"

"Deduction," smiled the lawyer.

"I don't understand."

"It's simple. Had a letter from your father a few days since in which he told me you were in New York and



"Come, come, Dick. It won't do," continued Corrigan genially.

asked me to look after the tenderfoot. When I saw you ride I guessed. When I heard you talk I knew, for, Dicky, boy, as an Englishman you might pass muster in Rio Janeiro, but as an actor—well, you'd starve!"

"But the others—do they suspect?"

"Not a bit, I believe. They're dazzled, blinded by your coronet. Few Americans in New York can see straight in the presence of a lord. You're safe so far."

"Thank heaven!"

"Don't count too much on the blindness of one, however."

"And that one?"

"Harriet. But fire away. I'm listening."

Richard thereupon recounted his adventures, beginning with the cattle stampede at home and his willingness to come north in the hope of finding the girl. He told of his meeting with the real Lord Croylund and how that gentleman had coolly taken the name of Richard Williams. Then he made a clean breast of his own deception and narrated every detail of his experiences, with the exception of his business conversation with Mr. Renwyck last night.

During the recital the lawyer fairly bubbled over with amusement. Applauding each experience with a series of delighted chuckles. That Richard was pulling wool over the eyes of Jacob Renwyck was a keen joy to the little man, who vividly pictured the chagrin of his brother-in-law when the comedy came to an end. He loved Harriet dearly, and now as he looked at the handsome, manly boy before him he confessed in his heart that a match between them would please him beyond expression.

"My boy," he laughed, "it's simply glorious! And now that you have a friend at court it ought to work out beautifully. Don't mind if I bullying you a little. It will only make Jacob take your side. What is the next feature on the programme?"

Richard frowned thoughtfully, rose and began to pace up and down.

"Mr. Corrigan," he burst forth, "I haven't told you the worst part of it. What makes it the more impossible, I don't see how I can. It would be—well, it would be a sort of breach of confidence."

"Anything serious?"

"Yes, very. That's why I didn't sleep last night. Matters have come to such a pass that I feel I must tell Mr. Renwyck who I am and take my medicine like a burglar caught in the act."

Mr. Corrigan's face fell.

"I am exceedingly sorry to hear that." He thought for a moment, then looked up with a confidential and contagious smile. "See here! I wouldn't have you betray a confidence for anything in the world, my boy, but there are two ways of looking at every question. Why not engage me as your lawyer? Every scoundrel—forgive me—has a right to counsel, and you need not hesitate to bare your aching heart. Come, Dick, I'll accept one of Lord Croylund's excellent cigars as a retainer, and we'll get right down to business."

Richard brightened visibly. He handed a cigar, held a light and said:

"It's whipping the devil around the stump, I suppose, but I see no other way out of it. I do need advice, and need it bad. I'll tell you all about it on one condition."

The lawyer nodded, puffed at his cigar and gazed up into the thick leaved tree above his head, while Richard continued:

"The condition is that what I am about to tell you must be kept an absolute secret, no matter what your judgment happens to be. Promise that and I'll talk; otherwise I'm a clam."

"Dick," said the old gentleman, "I have followed the legal profession for thirty-two years, and few of my clients have found cause to complain of my discretion. This is a first rate cigar, and I'm going to earn it. What is troubling you?"

The moment Mr. Corrigan understood the proposition which Mr. Renwyck had made to Richard on the previous evening he choked with laughter until him vigorously on the back, while the balance of the narrative was so punctuated with his chuckles and gasps that it was concluded with some difficulty.

Richard was handicapped in his full appreciation of the joke, which appeared to him to be a very serious matter indeed. When his story was finished he observed solemnly:

"You see, Mr. Corrigan, it's this way. If I keep my mouth shut Mr. Renwyck will make it hot for dad. If I telegraph dad and give him the tip, why, just as sure as a gun, he'll turn around and wipe up the earth with Mr. Renwyck. I'm in a red-hot saddle, Mr. Corrigan, with my feet tied underneath. I've just got to sit and blister. I can't see dad done up, but I'd rather do that than play a low down trick on a man who trusts me. And in any event I stand to lose the young lady. In my place what would you do?"

"Do!" shouted the little man, while huge tears trickled down his face and filled the creases of his double chin. "Do! Why, I'd do Jacob Renwyck; that's what I'd do. Go for him, Dicky boy! All's fair in love and Wall street. He isn't a lamb, I tell you. He's a ram, and a butter at that! Shear him, my boy, shear him to the skin!"

"I can't," said Richard quietly.

"Can't! The devil you can't! Why not?"

"Mr. Corrigan," said the Texan earnestly, "in business it may be a common thing to take advantage of another man when you can, and it may be foolish on my part to decline, but I tell you, sir, if I did a thing like that I could never look Miss Harriet in the face. To me it means more than money or dad or anything else. I may be a poor Englishman and a mighty bad actor, but I can't forget that I'm still a gentleman."

Richard looked his companion squarely in the eye and turned on his heel. He was about to stride angrily away when he felt two short plump

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arms clasped tightly around his waist and heard a laughing voice murmur in his ear:

"Oh, Dicky, Dicky, what a bully little minister you have spoiled! Sit down, young man, and let me tell you one thing soberly." He half dragged, half pushed Richard to a seat upon the bench and stood above him, resting two plump hands upon his shoulders. The laughter now was gone, and in its place came a wondrous tenderness. "My boy," he said, "I'd rather have seen you as you stood just now than

as the owner of all deep water harbors that were ever dredged. You came here to win Harriet, and you're going to get her if I have to sit on Jacob Renwyck while you run off with the girl on Hawk—a la Lockinvar! God bless you, boy! I—I love you for what you said, and now I'm going to tell you something else."

(To Be Continued)

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