

The Main Chance

BY
Meredith Nicholson

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CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

Saxton was walking beside Raridan in the lower hall. He felt an impulse to express gratitude for his rescue from the loneliness of the twilight; but Raridan, talking incessantly, and with hands thrust easily into his trousers' pockets, led the way into the reading room.

"Hello, Wheaton, I didn't know you were at home," he called to a man who sat reading a newspaper, and who now rose on seeing a stranger with Raridan. "This is Mr. Saxton, Mr. Wheaton."

"Oh, yes," said the man introduced as Wheaton. "I wondered whether I shouldn't see you here. Mr. Porter told me you had come."

Wheaton seemed very serious, and had not much to say. He had just come home from a serious trip to the western part of the State, he said, on an errand for his bank. He was tall, slim and dark. There was a suggestion of sleepy indifference in his slack eyes, though he had a well-established reputation for energy and industry.

"Mr. Porter told me you were quartered here. I hope they can make you comfortable. I'm personally relieved that you have come. Your Boston friends were getting very impatient with us. We shall do all in our power to aid you; but of course Mr. Porter has said all that to you."

His smile was by a movement of the lips, and his eyes did not seem to participate in it. He did not refer again to possible business relations with Saxton, but turned the conversation into general channels. They sat together for an hour, Raridan, as was his way in any company, doing most of the talking. They seemed to have the club house to themselves. Now and then one of the negro servants came and looked in upon them sleepily. A clerk at the desk in the hall read in peace. A party of young people could be heard entering by the side door set apart for women; and muffled echoes of their gaily reached the trio in the reading room.

"That's back in the incurables' ward," said Raridan, in explanation to Saxton. "It isn't nice of you to speak of the gentler sex in that way," admonished Wheaton.

"Oh, there are girls and girls," said Raridan, wearily. "It does seem to me that Mabel Margrave is always hungry. Why can't she do her eating at home?"

"He's simply jealous," Wheaton remarked to Saxton. "He always acts that way when he hears a girl in the ladies' dining room, and doesn't dare go back and break in on some other fellow's party."

"When you show signs of mental decay, it's time for us to go home, Wheaton," Raridan held out his hand to Saxton. "I'm glad you're here, and you may be sure we'll try to make you like us. Wheaton and I live in a barracks around the corner, with a few other homeless wanderers. I hope to see you there. Don't be afraid of the Chinaman at the door. My cell is up one flight and to the right."

"And don't overlook me there," Wheaton interposed. "I suppose we shall see you down town very often. Mr. Raridan is the only man in Clarkson who has no visible means of support. The rest of us are pretty busy; but that doesn't mean that we shan't be glad to see you at the Clarkson National."

CHAPTER III.

William Porter lived well, as became a first citizen of Clarkson. His house stood at the summit of a hill near the end of Varney street, and the gradual slope leading up to it was a pretty park, whose lawn and shrubbery showed the intelligent care of a good gardener. The dry air was still hot as John Saxton climbed the cement walk which wound over the slope at the proper degree to bring the greatest comfort to pedestrians. The green of the lawn was grateful to Saxton's eyes, which dwelt with relief on the fine spray of the rotary sprinklers that hissed coolly at the end of long lines of hose. Interspersed among the indigenous scrub-oaks were elms, maples and cedars, and the mottled bark of white birches showed here and there. The lawn was broken by beds of canna, and it was evident that the owner of the place had a taste for landscape gardening and spent his money generously in cultivating it. The house itself was of red brick dating from those years in which a Mansard roof and a tower were thought indispensable in serious domestic architecture. There was a broad veranda on the river side, accessible through French windows of the same architectural period.

A maid admitted Saxton and left him to find his own way into the drawing-room, through which a breeze was blowing pleasantly from across the valley. Saxton sat in a deep wicker chair, mopping his forehead. He heard a light step crossing the hall, and a girl, still singing softly to herself, passed back of him to a little stand which stood by one of the drawing room windows. The back of the wicker chair hid him; she was wholly unconscious that any one was there. The

breath of the sweet peas which she was distributing suddenly sweetened the cool air of the room. Seeing that the girl did not know of his presence in the house, and that she would certainly discover him when she turned to go, he rose and faced her.

"I beg your pardon!"

"Oh! The sweet peas fell to the floor, and the girl looked anxiously toward the hall door.

"I beg your pardon," Saxton repeated. "I think—I fear—I wasn't announced. But I believe Mr. Porter is expecting me."

"Yes?" The girl looked at John for the first time. He was taking the situation seriously, and was sincerely sorry for having startled her. "Father will be here very soon, I think." She moved toward the door with dignity, ignoring the fallen flowers, and Saxton stepped forward and picked them up.

"Allow me," the girl took them from him, a little uncertainly and guardedly, then returned to the vase and placed the flowers in it.

"Thank you very much," she said. "I think I hear my father now." She went to the outer door and opened, inclining her head slightly as she passed John, who also heard Mr. Porter's voice outside. He was remonstrating with the gardener about the position of the sprinklers, which he wished reset in keeping with ideas of his own.

"Well, Evelyn?" he said, as he came up the steps. Saxton could hear the young woman making an explanation in low tones to her father. Mr. Porter stood suddenly in the door.

"Well, this beats me," he began, effusively, coming forward and wringing Saxton's hand. "I'm not going to try to explain. I simply forgot, that's all." He took Saxton's arm and turned him toward the door where the girl still stood, smiling.

"Evelyn, this is Mr. Saxton. He's come to dine with us, but I forgot all about it. See here, Evelyn, you've got to square this for me," he concluded, and she came forward and shook hands with Saxton.

"I don't know how it can be squared. This is only one of father's lapses. Mr. Saxton, you may be sure he didn't mean to do it."

"No, indeed," declared Porter, "but I'm ashamed of myself." He waved the young people to seats and vanished into the hall.

Porter returned and launched into sta-



THE GIRL PASSED TO A LITTLE STAND.

statistics as to the number of trees that had been planted in the State by school children during the past year. The maid came to announce dinner, and Porter called on as he led the way to the dining room. As they were taking their seats a boy of 12 took the place opposite Saxton.

"This is my brother Grant," said Miss Porter. "The boy was shy and silent and looked frail. The efforts of his sister to bring him into the talk were fruitless. When his father or sister spoke to him it was with an accented kindness. He would not talk before a stranger, but his face brightened at the humor of the others."

"You'd better get Mr. Saxton to tell you how much fun ranching is," said Porter, turning to the boy, who at once became interested in Saxton.

"I'm going to be a ranchman," the lad declared. "Father's going to buy me the Poindexter ranch some day."

"That's one of Mr. Saxton's properties. Maybe he'd trade it to you for a tin whistle."

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Saxton. "Just wait until you see it. It's pretty bad."

"The house must have been charming," said Miss Porter.

"And that's about all it was," replied her father.

It was warmer outside than in, but Porter pretended that it was pleasant out of doors, and insisted that there was always a breeze on the hill at night. Raridan appeared at the step presently. They all rose as he came up, and he said to Saxton as he shook hands with him: "I see you've found the way to headquarters. All roads lead up to this Alpine height—and I fear—I fear—that all roads lead down again," he added, with a doleful sigh, and laughed. He began making himself greatly at home. He assured Mr. Porter, with amiable insolence, that his veranda chairs were the most uncomfortable ones he knew, and went to fetch himself a better seat from the hall.

"Mr. Raridan likes to be comfortable," said Miss Porter in his absence.

"But he finds pleasure in making others comfortable, too," Saxton ventured.

"Oh, he's the very kindest of men," Miss Porter affirmed.

"What a nuisance you are, Warry," said Porter, as the young man fussed about to find a place for his chair. "We were all very easy here till you came. Even the breeze has died out."

Saxton got up to go presently and Raridan rose with him. He and Saxton went down the walk together.

"They seem to have struck up an acquaintance," observed Mr. Porter.

"Mr. Saxton is very nice," said Evelyn. "Oh, he's all right," said her father, easily.

CHAPTER IV.

John Saxton trotted his pony through a broken gate into a great yard that had once been sown in blue grass, and at the center of which lay the crumbled ruins of a fountain. Before he could make his presence known, a frowsy man in corduroy emerged from the great front door and came toward him.

"My name's Saxton, and you must be Snyder,"

"Correct," said the man, and they shook hands. "Walk in and help yourself." He led the pony toward the out-buildings, while Saxton viewed the pile before him with interest. He had been making a careful inspection of all the properties that had fallen to his care. This had necessitated a good deal of traveling. He had begun in Colorado and worked eastward, going slowly, and getting the best advice obtainable as to the value of his principals' holdings. Much of their property was practically worthless. Title had been gained under foreclosure to vast areas which had no value. A waterworks plant stood in the prairie where there had once been a Kansas town. The place was depopulated and the smokestack stood as a monument to blighted hopes. Ranch houses were inhabited by squatters, who had not been on his books at all, and who paid no tribute to Boston. He was viewed with suspicion by these tenants, and on inquiry at the county seats, he found that they were lawless men, and that it would be better for him to let them alone. It was patent that they would not pay rent, and to eject them merely in the maintenance of a principle involved useless expense and violence.

"This certainly beats them all," Saxton muttered aloud.

He had reached in his itinerary what his papers called the Poindexter property. He had found that the place was famous throughout this part of the country for the idiosyncrasies of its sometime owners, three young men who had come out of the East to show how the cattle business should be managed. They had secured an immense acreage and built a stone ranch house whose curious architecture imparted to the Platte Valley a touch of medievalism that was little appreciated by the neighboring cattlemen. One of the owners, a Philadelphian named Poindexter, who had a weakness for architecture, contributed the buildings and his two associates bought the cattle. There were one thousand acres of rolling pasture here, much of it lying along the river, and a practical man could hardly have failed to succeed; but theft, disease, in the herd and inexperience in buying and selling, had wrought the ranchmen's destruction. Before their money was exhausted, Poindexter and his associates lived in considerable state, and entertained the friends who came to see them according to the best usages of Eastern country life within, and their own mild approximation of Western life without. Tom Poindexter's preceptor in architecture, an elderly gentleman with a sense of humor, had found a pleasure which he hardly dared to express in the medieval tone of the house and buildings.

"There's a remnant of the Poindexter herd out there somewhere," Wheaton had said to Saxton. "The fellow Snyder, that I put in as a caretaker, ought to have gathered up the loose cattle by this time; that's what I told him to do when I put him there."

Saxton turned and looked out over the rolling plain. A few rods away lay the river, and where it curved nearest the house stood a group of cottonwoods, like sentinels drawn together for colloquy. Scattered here and there over the plain were straggling herds.

There was much in the place to appeal to Saxton's quiet humor. The house was two stories high and there was a great hall, with an immense fireplace at one end. The sleeping rooms opened on a gallery above the hall. An effort had been made to give the house the appearance of Western wildness by introducing a great abundance of skins of wild beasts—a highly dishonest bit of decorating, for they had been bought in Chicago. Under one wing of the stairway, which divided to left and right at the center of the hall, was the dining room; under the other was the ranch office.

"Those fellows thought a good deal of their stomachs," said Snyder, as Saxton opened and shut the empty drawers of the sideboard.

"I suppose our mortgage covers the sunset, too," Saxton said. Nearly every portable thing of value had been removed, and evidently in haste; but the heavy oak chairs and the table remained. Snyder did his own modest cooking in the kitchen, which was in great disorder. The floor of the office was littered with scraps of paper. The original tenants had evidently made a quick settlement of their business affairs before leaving. Snyder did his own modest cooking in the office on the long bench that was built into one side of the room, and a battered valise otherwise marked it as his lodging place. Saxton viewed the room with disgust; it was more like a kennel than a bedroom.

"My ranching wasn't so bad after all," he muttered. "If you have a pony we'll take a ride around the fences."

(To be continued.)

To every revolution of its driving wheels a locomotive gives four pulls. Driving wheels average about twenty feet in circumference.



Water for the Bees.

Give the bees plenty of water. They need a great deal and will fly a long distance to get it.

If there is no running stream or lake of pure water near it is well to place a pail of fresh water near the apiary every day.

Bees use water to dilute the heavy, thick honey left over from winter to make it suitable for the young larvae and also to make the cell wax pliable.

Bees should be protected from the wind on the north and west by a close-set hedge or high fence.

All the weeds should be kept down in front of the hives. Mow a plot 6 feet wide and then cut the weeds and grass close to the ground with a hoe.

An hour once a week spent on the care of the bees will bring larger returns for the effort than any other labor on the farm.

A newspaper man in Chicago, who lives a few miles out in the country, last year sold \$225 worth of honey to three big hotels. He says he did not spend more than an hour a week looking after his bees during the season.

-F. and D. Journal.

Feed for Chickens.
Feed chickens the first day or two upon a mixture of bread crumbs grated fine and hard-boiled egg chopped fine. Keep water before them in a small fountain, so they can drink but not get into it. In a few days feed upon rolled oats, finely cracked corn and any small seeds. Add a

Value of a Small Stream.
An interesting example of the value of a small stream for light and power purposes may be found near Sacramento, Cal. A trout stream has been dammed up and the power in the form of electricity has been used for doing such light work as washing and ironing, also for cooking and lighting in the home of the owner. As the stream

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for several seasons the land washes but little and the vines grow better and bear better. The cow peas make sufficient cover, so one does not get into the mud when pruning in wet weather in late winter or early spring. Whether grown in the orchard or vineyard the peas should usually be plowed under the following spring. In this way they protect the soil without losing any essential part of their fertilizing value.

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