

# The Main Chance

BY  
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## CHAPTER XXII.

There was much to do, and John Saxton had been back and forth twice between the ranch house and the village before the sun had crept high into the heavens. The little village had been slow to grasp the fact of the tragedy at its doors which had already carried its name afar. There was much to do and yet it was so pitifully little after all! Warry Raridan was dead, and eager men were scouring the country for his murderer; but John Saxton sat in the room where Warry had died. It seemed to John that the end had come of all the world. He sharpened his grief with self-reproach that he had been a party to an exploit so foolhardy; they should never have attempted a midnight descent upon an unknown foe; and yet it was Raridan's own plan.

Saxton had ministered to the boy Grant with characteristic kindness. Grant knew now of Warry's death, and this, with his own sharp experiences, had unnerved him. He clung to Saxton, and John soothed him until he slept, in one of the upper chambers.

Wheaton stood suddenly in the door, and beckoned to Saxton, who went out to him. They had exchanged no words since that moment when the old bishop's prayer had stilled the room where Warry Raridan died. Through the events of the morning hours, Wheaton had been merely a spectator of what was done—Saxton had hardly noticed him, and glancing at Wheaton now, he was shocked at the look of great age that had come upon him.

"I want to speak to you a minute," you and Bishop Delafield," said Wheaton. The bishop was pacing up and down in the outer hall, which had been quietly cleaned and put in order by men from the village. Wheaton led the way to the room once used as the ranch office.

"Will you sit down, gentlemen?" He spoke with so much calmness that the others looked at him curiously. The bishop and Saxton remained standing, and Wheaton repeated, sharply, "Will you sit down?" The two men sat down side by side on the leather-covered bench that ran around the room, and Wheaton stood up before them.

"I have something to say to you, before you—before we go," he said. "Their silence seemed to confuse him for a moment, but he regained his composure. He looked from Saxton to the bishop, who nodded, and he went on:

"The man who killed Warry Raridan was my brother," he said, and waited. Saxton started slightly; his numbed senses quickened under Wheaton's words, and in a flash he saw the explanation of many things.

"He was my brother," Wheaton went on quietly. "He had wanted money from me. I had refused to help him. He carried away Grant Porter thinking to injure me in that way. It was that, I think, as much as the hope of getting a large sum for the boy's return."

A great quiet lay upon the house; the two men remained sitting, and Wheaton stood before them with his arms crossed, the bishop and Saxton watching him, and Wheaton looking from one to the other of his companions. Contempt and anger were rising in John Saxton's heart; but the old bishop waited calmly; this was not the first time that a troubled soul had opened its door to him.

"Go on," he said, kindly.

"My brother and I ran away from the little Ohio town where we were born. Our father was a harness maker, I hated the place. I think I hated my father and mother." He paused, as we do sometimes when we have suddenly spoken a thought which we have long carried in our heart but have never uttered. The words had elements of surprise for James Wheaton, and he waited, weighing his words and wishing to deal justly with himself. "My brother was a bad boy; he had never gone to school, as I had; he had several times been guilty of petty stealing. I joined him once in a theft; we were arrested, but he took the blame and was punished, and I went free. I am not sure that I was any better, or that I am now any better than he is. But that is the only time I ever stole."

Saxton remembered that Warry had once said of James Wheaton that he would not steal.

"I wanted to be honest; I tried my best to do right. I never expected to get as well as I have—I mean in business and things like that. Then after all the years in which I had not seen anything of my brother he came into the bank one day as a tramp, begging, and recognized me. At first I helped him. I sent him here; you will remember the man Snyder you found here when you came," turning to Saxton. "I knew you would not keep him. There was nothing else that I could do for him. I had new ambitions; his voice fell and broke, "there were—there were other things that meant a great deal to me—I could not have him about. It was he who assaulted me one night at Mr. Porter's home two years ago, when you," he turned to the bishop, "came up and drove him away. After

that I gave him money to leave the country and he promised to stay away; but he began blackmailing me again, and I thought then that I had done enough for him and refused to help him any more. When Grant Porter disappeared I knew at once what had happened. He had threatened—but there is something—something wrong with me!"

These last words broke from him like a cry, and he staggered suddenly and would have fallen if Saxton had not sprung up and caught him. He recovered quickly and sat down on the bench.

"Let us drop this now," said Saxton, standing over him; "it's no time—"

"There's something wrong with me," said Wheaton, huskily, without heeding, and Saxton drew back from him. "I was a vain, cowardly fool. But I did the best I could," he passed his hand over his face, and his fingers crept nervously to his collar, "but it wasn't any use! It wasn't any use!" He turned again to the bishop. "I heard you preach a sermon once. It was about our opportunities. You said we must live in the open. I had never thought of that before," and he looked at the bishop with a foolish grin on his face. He stood up suddenly and extended his arms. "Now I want you to tell me what to do. I want to be punished! This man's blood is on my hands. I want to be punished!" And he sank to the floor in a heap, repeating, as if to himself, "I want to be punished!"

There are two great crises in the life of a man. One is that moment of disclosure when for the first time he recognizes some vital weakness in his own character. The other comes when, under stress, he submits this defect to the eyes of another. James Wheaton hardly knew when he had realized the first, but he was conscious now that he had passed the second. It had carried him like a high tide to a point of rest; but it was a point of helplessness, too.

"It isn't for us to punish you," the bishop began, "and I do not see that you have transgressed any law."

"That is it! that is it! It would be easier!" moaned Wheaton. John turned away. James Wheaton's face was not good to see.

"Yes, it would be easier," the bishop continued. "I can see that in going back to Clarkson many things will be hard for you—"

"I can't! Oh, I can't!" He still crouched on the floor, with his arms extended along the bench.

"But that is the manly thing for you. If you have acted a cowardly part, now is the time for you to change, and you must change on the field of battle. I can imagine the discomfort of facing your old friends; that you will suffer great humiliation; that you may have to begin again; but you must do it, my friend, if you wish to rise above yourself, and you may depend upon my help."

The old man had spoken with emphasis, but with great gentleness. He turned to Saxton, wishing him to speak.

"The bishop is right. You must go back with us, Wheaton." But he did not say that he would help him. John Saxton neither forgot nor forgave easily. He did not see in this dark hour what he had to do with James Wheaton's affairs. But the Bishop of Clarkson went over to James Wheaton and lifted him up; it was as though he would make the physical act carry a spiritual aid with it.

"We can talk of this to better purpose when we get home," he said. "You are broken now and see your future darkly; but I say to you that you can be restored; there's light and hope ahead for you. If there is any meaning in my ministry it is that with the help of God a man may come out of darkness into the light again."

There was a moment's silence. Wheaton sat bent forward on the bench, with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands.

"They are waiting for us," said Saxton.

A special train was sent to Great River, and the little party waited for it on the station platform, surrounded by awed villagers, who stood silent in the presence of death and a mystery which they but dimly comprehended. Officers of the law from Clarkson came with the train and surrounded Bishop Delafield, Wheaton and Saxton as they stood with Grant Porter by the rude bier of Warry Raridan. The men answered many questions and the sheriff of the county took the detectives away with him. Margrave had sent his private car, and the returning party were huddled in one end of it, save John Saxton, who sat alone with the body of Warry Raridan. The train was to go back immediately, but it waited for the west-bound express which followed it and passed the special here. There was a moment's confusion as the special with its dark burden was switched into a siding to allow the regular train to pass. Then the special returned to the main track and began its homeward journey.

John sat with his arms folded, sunk into his great-coat, and watched the gray landscape through the snow that was falling fast. The events of the night seemed like a hideous dream. It was an inconceivable thing that within a few hours so dire a calamity could have fallen. The very nearness of the city to which they were bound added to the unreality of all that had happened. But there the dark burden lay; and the snow fell upon the gray earth and whitened it, as if to cleanse and remake it and blot out its color and dread. The others left Saxton alone; he was nearer than they; but late in the afternoon, as they approached the city, Captain Wheelock came in and touched him on the shoulder. Bishop Delafield wished to see him. John rose, giving Wheelock his place, and went back to where the old man sat staring out at the snow. He beckoned Saxton to sit down by him.

"Where's Wheaton?" the bishop asked. John looked at him and at the other men who sat in silence about the car. He went to one of them and repeated the bishop's question, but was told that

Wheaton was not on the train. He had been at the station and had come aboard the car with the rest; but he must have returned to the station and been left. John remembered the passing of the west-bound express, and went back and told the bishop that Wheaton had not come with them. The old man shook his head and turned again to the window and the flying panorama of the snowy landscape. John sat by him, and neither spoke until the train's speed diminished at a crossing on the outskirts of Clarkson. Then suddenly, hot at heart and with tears of sorrow and rage in his eyes, Saxton said, so that only the bishop could hear:

"He's a coward!"

The Bishop of Clarkson stared steadily out upon the snow with troubled eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

Porter insisted that Margrave should not have the Traction Company at any price, though the general manager of the Transcontinental was persistent in his offers. As Margrave did not care to deal with Porter, who was not, he complained, "an easy trader," he negotiated with Fenton and Saxton. After several weeks of ineffectual effort he concluded that Fenton and Saxton were almost as difficult. He called Saxton a "stubborn brute" to Saxton's face; but offered to continue him in a responsible position with the company if he would help him with the purchase. He still wanted to control the company for political reasons, but there was also the fact of his having invested the money of several of his friends in the Transcontinental directorate, prior to the last annual meeting.

These gentlemen had begun to inquire in a respectful way when Margrave was going to effect the coup which he had been assuring them, he had planned. They had, they were aware, no rights as against the bondholders; and as Margrave understood this perfectly well, he was very anxious to buy in the property at receiver's sale for an amount that would satisfy Porter and his allies, and give him a chance to "square himself," as he put it. This required additional money, but he was able to command it from his "people," for the receiver had demonstrated that the property could be made to pay. While these negotiations were pending, Saxton and Fenton were able to satisfy their curiosity as to the relations which had existed between Wheaton and Margrave. Margrave had no shame in confessing just what had passed between them; he viewed it all as a joke, and explained, without compunction, exactly the manner in which he had come by the shares which had belonged to Evelyn Porter and James Wheaton.

When Saxton came back from Colorado, Porter was ill again, and Fenton was seriously disposed to accept a price which Margrave's syndicate had offered. Margrave's position had grown uncomfortable; he had to get himself and "his people" out of a scrape at any cost. His plight pleased Fenton, who tried to make Porter see the irony of it; and this view of it, as much as the high offer, finally prevailed upon him. He saw at last the futility of securing and managing the property for himself; his health had become a matter of concern, and Fenton insisted that a street railway company would prove no easier to manage than a bank.

Porter was, as John had said, "a peculiar brick," and after the final orders of the court had been made, and Saxton's fees allowed, Porter sent him a check for five thousand dollars, without comment. Fenton made him keep it; Porter had done well in Traction and he owed much to John; but John protested that he preferred being thanked to being tipped; but the lawyer persuaded him at last that the idiosyncrasies of the rich ought to be respected.

Porter felt his burdens slipping from him with unexpected satisfaction. He grew jaunty in his old way as he chided his contemporaries and friends for holding on; as for himself, he told them, he intended "to die rested," and he adjusted his affairs so that they would give him little trouble in the future. The cottage which he had bought on the North Shore was a place they had all admired the previous summer. Porter had liked it because there was enough ground to afford lawn and flower beds which he cultivated with so much satisfaction at home. The place was called "Red Gables," and Porter had bought it with its furniture, so that there was little to do in taking possession but to move in. The Whipples were their first guests, going to them in mid-July, when they were fully installed.

The elder Bostonians whom Porter had met the previous summer promptly renewed their acquaintance with him. He had attained, in their eyes, a new dignity in becoming a cottager. The previous owner of "Red Gables" had lately failed in business and they found in the advent of the Porters a sign of the replenishing of the East from the West, which interested them philosophically. Porter lacked their own repose, but they liked to hear him talk. He was amusing and interesting, and they had already found his prophecies concerning the markets trustworthy. The ladies of their families heard with horror his views on the Indian question, which were not romantic, nor touched with the spirit of Boston philanthropy; but his daughter was lovely, they said, and her accent was wholly inoffensive.

So the Porters were well received, and Evelyn was glad to find her father accepting his new lot so complacently. She and Mrs. Whipple agreed that he and the general were as handsome and interesting as any of the elderly Bostonians among their neighbors; and they undoubtedly were so.

## (To be continued.)

One day, however, "I wonder what produces that tired feeling in spring?" "I guess it's something about the summer vacation," said an American.

Put to Other Use. Crawford—So your wife doesn't make mince pies any more? Crabshaw—No. She uses all the odds and ends around the house as trimmings for her hat.—Puck.

Naturally. "I was mimicking Professor Bore yesterday and he caught me." "What did he say?" "Told me to stop making a fool of myself."—The Wasp.

Her Only Chance. "You must not interrupt me when I am speaking, Ethel." "Why, that's the only time I can interrupt you, mamma."—Yonkers Statesman.

Has Had Training. Mrs. Church—You say she was a war correspondent once? Mrs. Gotham—Yes, she was secretary of a woman's club.—Yonkers Statesman.

Congress refused United States Commissioner of Education Brown's request for \$3,000 to study a "certain phase of child life, but granted \$15,000 for a scientific study of clams.

Won Her Over. "His wife used to be strongly opposed to his playing poker and now she likes to have him play." "Yes, he plays better than he used to."—Houston Post.

They Were Too Hasty. Those Africans who named Mr. Roosevelt Bwana Tombo really ought to see Mr. Taft, who is a great deal bwanier and has a tumbo twice as large.—Uncle Remus Magazine.

His Experience Useful. The prodigal son, repentant, or, at any rate, weary, of the diet of husks forced upon his kind by a vigilant police system, had experienced a change of heart and joined the church. The good sisters were discussing his desirability.

"But," expostulated Mr. Straightface, with a fine and virtuous display of righteousness, "he was a common gambler—what they call a bunco steerer." "Isn't it lovely!" exclaimed Mrs. Up-to-date. "What a help he will be in getting up our church fair!"—Philadelphia Record.

Victorious Even unto Death. As most of us know, P. T. Barnum died but a few months after his competitor in the "show" business, Adam Forepaugh.

When Barnum arrived at the pearly gates he was welcomed by Forepaugh, who exclaimed exultingly, "Well, Pete, I got ahead of you this time!"

P. T. did not answer, but smiled as he pointed to a large bill posted near the main entrance. It read: "Wait for Barnum—Coming Soon."—Success Magazine.

Under Certain Circumstances. "Is it true, doctor," asked the summer girl, "that eating cucumbers will remove freckles?" "Of course," replied Dr. Kidder, "in certain circumstances." "Really! What circumstances?" "Well, provided the freckles are on the cucumbers."—Answers.

What Ailed Daysey Mayme. Daysey Mayme Appleton was reading a newspaper last night when suddenly she gave a scream and fell to the floor in a dead faint. Now, according to the looks and tradition Daysey Mayme fainted because she read the announcement of an old sweetheart's marriage or death (and it would turn out afterward, according to the books and tradition, that he was a cousin of her old sweetheart by the same name). But real life is so unlike the books and tradition. Upon being revived Daysey Mayme related that she saw hosiery advertised for 27 cents that she had paid 35 cents for the day before.—Athlon Globe.

Unanswerable. "Pardon me, Dr. Nextly, but it is simply preposterous for you to want to marry my daughter. You are more than twice as old as she is." "I know that, Mr. Sykes, but when she has been a preacher's wife ten or fifteen years she will look fully as old as I do."—Chicago Tribune.

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Next Best Thing. "How does your husband manage in the winter when the automobile season is over?" "Fine. He takes up bowling, and tries to kill the pinboys."—Puck.

All the Conventions. Mr. Stoplate had showed Miss Teruleep all his limitations of famous actors, and she had made a bluff at applauding. Then he asked, "Do you think I ought to go on the stage?"

"Oh, you don't have to go on a stage, if you're thinking of going," she answered. "We are inside the city limits, and an owl car goes every half hour."

Shortly after that, he went.—Cleveland Leader.

A Space Filler. The elevator in the department store was about to start on its upward trip, when a fleshy customer came waddling toward it. "Room for three more," said the elevator starter. "Step inside, madam. That will be all." "Clip! Clip! Clip!" went his castanets.

King Edward, when Prince of Wales, never voted on any political question; but he always voted for the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, which was a social, and not a political, matter.

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