

THE FORTUNE HUNTER

NOVELIZED BY
LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE FROM THE PLAY
OF THE SAME TITLE BY
WINCHELL SMITH
COPYRIGHT, 1910, BY WINCHELL SMITH AND LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE



In one of Rudyard Kipling's writings he tells of "the ship that found herself," and in "The Fortune Hunter" we have the fascinating narrative of "a youth who found himself." The youth is like the ship—he had to have his career laid straight before his career began to make substantial headway. The story of Nat Duncan is one that in dramatic form, as written by Winchell Smith, has attracted the attention of thousands of playgoers throughout the country. As a novel, written by Louis Joseph Vance, it becomes a narrative of profound appeal to the young and old and especially to those of us who in our youth dwell in a rural district far enough removed from the metropolitan centers to be practically a world in itself and to itself. Usually it is the country lad who ventures into the great cities to seek fortune and fame's favor. But here we find a down to date city youth, who, a failure at everything he had undertaken, invades the rural districts to make a millionaire of himself. That which befalls him prompted a great New York newspaper editor to say, "Every American should read this great story," for "The Fortune Hunter," in spite of its enjoyable humor, subtly pointed by its talented authors, teaches the vital lesson of the need of charity and tolerance for the less fortunate of human beings.

A faint smile lightened his expression and made it quite engaging. "Did afternoon," Spaulding surveyed him swiftly, then leered his fat little fingers and contemplated them with detached interest. "Just get in, Duncan?"



BETTY GRAHAM.

ing down my weekly checks, had luck to you not to have a man who could earn them."

"You mean?"

"I mean I can't sell your line."

"Why?"

"God only knows. I want to badly enough. It's just general incompetence, I presume."

"What makes you think that?"

Duncan smiled bitterly. "Expertise," he said.

"You've tried—what else?"

"A little of everything, all the jobs open to a man with a knowledge of Latin and Greek and the higher mathematics—shipping clerk, timekeeper, cashier, all of 'em."

"And yet Kellogg believes in you."

Duncan nodded dolefully. "Harry's a good friend. We roomed together at college. That's why he stands for me."

"He says you only need the right opening—"

And nobody knows where that is except my fortunate employers. It's the back door going out for mine every time. Oh, Harry's been a prince to me. He's found me four or five jobs with friends of his, like yourself. But I don't seem to last. You see, I was brought up to be ornamental and to regular rather than useful, to blow about in motercars and keep a valet busy sixteen hours a day, and all that sort of thing. My father's failure—you know about that?"

Spaulding nodded. Duncan went on gloomily, talking a great deal more freely than he would have talked at any other time—suffering, in fact, from that species of auto-hypnosis induced by the sound of his own voice recounting his misfortunes which seems especially to affect a man down on his luck.

"That smash came when I was five years out of college—I'd never thought of turning my head to anything in all that time. I'd always had more coin than I could spend—never had to consider the worth of money or how hard it is to earn. My father saw to all that. He seemed not to want me to work; not that I hold that against him. He'd an idea I'd turn out a genius of some sort or other, I believe. Well,

he failed and died all in a week, and I found myself left with an immense wardrobe, expensive tastes, an impractical education and not a cent to my name. I was too proud to look to my friends for help in those days—and perhaps that was as well. I sought jobs on my own. Did you ever keep books in a first market?"

"No," Spaulding's eyes twinkled behind his large, shiny glasses.

"But what's the use of my telling you?" Duncan made an effort to rise, and deeply remembered himself.

"You're out, go on."

"I didn't mean to. Mostly, I presume, I've been blundering round an explanation of Kellogg's kindness to me, in my usual ineffectual way, but I felt an explanation was due you, as the latest to suffer through his misplaced interest in me."

"Perhaps," said Spaulding, "I am beginning to understand. Go on, I'm interested. About the fish market?"

"Oh, I just happened to think of it as a sample experience, and the last of that particular brand. I got \$9 a week and earned every cent of it inhaling the atmosphere. My board cost me \$6 and the other \$3 afforded me a chance to demonstrate myself a captain of finance, paying laundry bills and clothing myself, besides buying luncheon and such like small matters. I did the whole thing, you know, one afternoon of beer a day and made my own cigarettes. Never could make up my mind which was the worst. The hours were easy, too; didn't have to get to work until 5 in the morning. I lasted five weeks at that job before I was taken sick. Shows what a great constitution I've got."

"And then?"

"Oh!" Duncan roused. "Why, then I fell in with Kellogg again; he found me trying the open air cure on a bench in Washington square. Since then he's been finding me one berth after another. He's a sure enough optimist."

Spaulding shifted uneasily in his chair, stirred by an impulse whose unwisdom he could not doubt. Duncan had assuredly done his case no good by painting his shortcomings in colors so vivid; yet somehow, strange as it seemed, he liked him the better for his open hearted confession.

"Well," Spaulding stammered awkwardly.

"Yes; of course," said Duncan promptly, rising. "Sorry if I tired you."

"What do you mean by 'Yes, of course'?"

"That you called me in to fire me—and so that's over with. Only I'd be sorry to have you sore on Kellogg for saddling me on you. You see, he believed I'd make good, and so I did in a way; at least I hoped to."

"Oh, that's all right," said Spaulding uncomfotably. "The trouble is, you see, we've nothing else open just now, but if you'd really like another chance on the road I—well, I'd be glad to speak to Mr. Atwater about it."

"Don't you do it!" Duncan counselled him sharply, aghast. "He might say yes. And I simply couldn't accept; it wouldn't be fair to you, Kellogg or myself. It'd be charity, for I've proved I can't earn my wages, and I haven't come to that yet. No!" he concluded with determination and picked up his hat.

"Just a minute," Spaulding held him with a gesture. "You're forgetting something—at least I am. There's a month's pay coming to you. The cashier will hand you the check as you go out."

"A month's pay?" Duncan said blankly. "How's that? I've drawn up to the end of this week already, if you didn't know it."

"Of course I knew it. But we never let our men go without a month's notice or its equivalent, and—"

"No," Duncan interrupted firmly—"no; but thank you just the same. I couldn't—I really couldn't. It's good of you, but—now," he broke off abruptly, "I've left my accounts, what there is of them, with the bookkeeping department, and the checks for my simple trunks. There'll be a few dollars coming to me on my expense account, and I'll send you my address as soon as I get one."

"But, look here!" Spaulding got to his feet, frowning.

"No," reiterated Duncan positively, "there's no use. I'm grateful to you for your toleration of me and all that, but we can't do anything better now than call it all off. Goodby, Mr. Spaulding."

Spaulding nodded, accepting defeat with the better grace because of an innate conviction that it was just as well after all. And, furthermore, he admired Duncan's stand, so he offered his hand—an unusual condescension. "You'll make good somewhere yet," he asserted.

"I wish I could believe it." Duncan's grasp was firm since he felt more assured of some humanity latent in his late employer. "However, goodby."

"Good luck to you," rang in his ears as the door put a period to the interview. He stopped and took up the battered suit case and rusty overcoat which he had left outside the junior partner's office, then went on, shaking his head. "Much obliged," he said huskily to himself, "but what's the good of that. There's no room anywhere for a professional failure, and

that's what I am, just a ne'er-do-well. I never realized what that meant really before, and it's certainly taken me a damn' long time to find out. But I know now, all right."

Depositedly he went down to the sidewalk and merged himself with the crowd, moving with it, though a thousand miles apart from it, and presently diverging, struck across town toward the North street subway station.

"And the worst of it is he's too sharp not to find it out—if he hasn't by this time—and too decent by far to let me know if he has. It can't go on this way with us. I can't let him. Got to break with him somehow—now—today. I won't let him think me what I've been all along to him. Bless his foolish heart!"

There was no depreciation of Kellogg's goodness in his mood, simply determination no longer to be a charge upon it. To contemplate the sum total of the benefits he had received at Kellogg's hands since the day when the latter had found him ill and half starved, friendless as a stray pup, on the bench in Washington square staggered his imagination.

He could never repay it, he told himself, save inadequately, little by little—mostly by gratitude and such consideration as he purposed now to exhibit by removing himself and his distresses from the other's ken. Here was an end to comfort for him, an end to living in Kellogg's rooms, eating his food, busying his servants, spending his money, not so much borrowed as pressed upon him.

There crawled in his mind a clammy memory of the sort of housing he had known in past days, and he shuddered inwardly, smothering again the effluvia of dank oilcloth and musty carpets, of fishballs and fried ham, of old style plumbing and of \$9 a week humanity in the unwashed raw, the odor of misery that permeated the lodgings to which his lack of means had introduced him. He could see again, and with a painful vividness of mental vision, the degenerate "brownstone fronts" that mask those haunts of wretchedness, with their flights of crumbling brownstone steps leading up to oaken portals lugged with flaking paint, flanked by squares of soiled note paper upon which inept hands had traced the warning, not "Abandon hope all ye who enter here," but "Furnished rooms to let with board."

And to this he must return, to that treadmill round of blighted days and joyless nights must set his face.

Alighting at the Grand Central station, he packed the double weight of his luggage and his cases a few blocks northward on Madison avenue ere turning west toward the bachelor rooms which Kellogg had established in the roaring Forties, just the other side of the avenue—Fifth avenue.

The elevator boy, knowing him of old, neglected to announce his arrival, and Duncan had his own key to the door of Kellogg's apartment. He let himself in with furtive stealth. As was quite right and proper, Kellogg's man Robbins was in attendance, a stupefied Robbins, thunderstruck by the unexpected return of his master's friend and guest. "Good Lord!" he cried at sight of Duncan. "Beg your pardon, sir, but—but it can't be you!"

"Your mistake, Robbins. Unfortunately it is," Duncan surrendered his luggage. "Mr. Kellogg in?"

"No, sir. But I'm expecting him any minute. He'll be surprised to see you back."

"Think so?" said Duncan dully. "He doesn't know me if he is."

"You see, sir, we thought you was out west."

"So you did," Duncan moved toward the door of his own bedroom, Robbins following.

"It was only yesterday I posted a letter to you for Mr. Kellogg, sir, and the address was Omaha."

"I didn't get that far. Fetch along that suit case, will you please? I want to put some clean things in it."

"Then you're not staying in town overnight, Mr. Duncan?"

"I don't know. I'm not staying here anyway." Duncan switched on the lights in his room. "Put it on the bed, Robbins. I'll pack as quickly as I can. I'm in a hurry."

"Yes, sir; but I hope there's nothing wrong."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

looked at his watch. "Two o'clock, sir, but it can't be you."

"I'm in a hurry."

"Then you lose," returned Duncan grimly. "Everything's wrong." He

floor a tangled miscellany of shirts, socks, gloves, collars and ties.

"Didn't you like the business, sir?"

"No, I didn't like the business, and it didn't like me. It's the same old story, Robbins. I've lost my job again, that's all."

"I'm very sorry, sir."

"Thank you, but that's all right. I'm used to it."

"And you're going to leave, sir?"

"I am, Robbins."

"I—may I take the liberty of hoping it's to take another position?"

"You may, but you lose a second time. I've just made up my mind I'm not going to hang around here any longer, that's all."

"But," Robbins ventured, hovering about with exparting solicitude—"but Mr. Kellogg'd never permit you to leave in this way, sir."

"Wrong again, Robbins," said Duncan shortly, annoyed.

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir." With the instinct of the well trained servant Robbins started to leave, but hesitated. He was really very much disturbed by Duncan's manner, which showed a phase of his character new in Robbins' experience of him. Ordinarily reversed

such as this had seemed merely to serve to put Duncan on his mettle, to infuse him with a determination to try again and win out, whatever the odds, and at such times he was accustomed to exhibit a mad irresponsibility of wit and a gaiety of spirit (whether it were a mask or not) that only rivaled his high good humor when things ostensibly were going well with him.

Intermittently, between his spasms of employment he had been Kellogg's guest for several years, not infrequently for months at a time, and so Robbins had come to feel a sort of proprietary interest in the young man, second only to the regard which he had for his employer.

"Beg pardon, sir," he advanced, hesitant, "but perhaps you're just feeding a bit blue. Won't you let me bring you a drop of something?"

"Of course I will," said Duncan emphatically over his shoulder. "And get it now, will you, while I'm packing? And, Robbins?"

"Sir."

"Only put a little in it."

"A little what, sir?"

"Seltzer, of course."

"Thank you, sir."

"You're welcome, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

"Good night, sir."

to question his return; he was to be counted upon for met, was Kellogg. Now he stammered surprise by turning to the fourth member of the party.

"Nat," he said, "I want you to meet Mr. Bartlett. Mr. Bartlett, Mr. Duncan."

A wholesome smile dawned on Duncan's face as he encountered the blank blue stare of a young man whose very smooth and very bright red face was admirably set off by sun-bleached dress.

"Great Scott!" he cried, warmly pressing the back of his hand that drifted into his. "Willy Bartlett—after all these years?"

A sudden animation replaced the vacuous stare of the blue eyes. "Duncan," he stammered. "I say, this is Pippin."

"As bad as that?" Duncan essayed an ancient almost English and nodded his appreciation of it, something which Bartlett missed completely.

He was very young—a very great deal younger, Duncan thought, than when they had been classmates, what time Duncan shared his rooms with Kellogg, very much younger and suffering exquisitely from oversophistication. His draw barely escaped being inimitable. His air did not escape it. "Smitten with my old trouble," Duncan appraised him—"too much money. Heaven knows I hope he never recovers."

As for Willy, he was momentarily more nearly human than he had seemed from the moment of his first appearance. "You know," he blurted—"this is simply extraordinary. I say, you chaps, Duncan and I haven't met for years, not since he graduated. We belong to the same frat, you know, and had a jolly time of it, if he was an upper class man. No side about him at all, y' know, absolutely none

could. "Why the blood waters of excitement, please?" he inquired, accepting a glass.

From across the room Larry Miller's voice sounded. "Are you ready, gentlemen? We'll drink to him first, and then he can drink to his royal little self. To the boy who's getting on in the world! To the junior member of L. J. Bartlett & Co."