

# THE FORTUNE HUNTER

Novelized by  
**LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE**  
From the Play of the  
Same Name by  
**WINCHELL SMITH**

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(Continued from last Saturday.)

Y, when I saw him later, had no difficulty in realizing that it had never been made by a tailor whose place of business was more than five doors removed from Fifth avenue. He was tallish, but not really tall, and carried himself with a slight stoop which took away from his real height. Tracey says he had a way of looking at you as if he was smoking inside at some joke he'd heard a long time ago, and I don't know but that's a fairly apt description of his ordinary expression. He had a way, too, of nodding jerkily at you—just once—to show he recognized you or understood what you were driving at; at other times he carried his head a trifle to one side and slightly forward. He was a man you wouldn't forget, somehow, though what there was about him that was remarkable nobody seemed to know.

He noticed that jerky way in answer to Will Bigelow's "decent" and without saying anything took the pen and started to register. He had to stop, however, for Tracey was pressing him so close upon the right that he couldn't get any play for his elbow, and after a minute or two in asked Tracey politely would he mind stepping round to the left, where to could see just as well. So Tracey did. Then he wrote his name in a good round hand, "National Duncan N. Y."

"I'd like a room with a bath," he told Will, "something simple and cheap, within the means of a man in moderate circumstances."

Will thought he was joking at first but he didn't smile, so Will explained that there was a bathroom on the third floor at the end of the hall though there wasn't much call for it. "I could give you a room next to that," he said, "but you wouldn't want it, I guess."

"Why not?" asked the mysterious stranger.

"Because," said Will, "it isn't near the sample room."

"That doesn't make any difference I'm on the wagon."

The only sense Will could get out of that was that the young man was traveling for a buggy house and hadn't brought any samples with him. "I thought," he allowed, "as how you'd be wanting a place to display your samples, but of course if you're in the wagon business—"

"Oh," said Mr. Duncan, "I thought you meant the 'sample room' over there." He nodded toward the hall.

"That's what you call the dispensary of intoxicating liquors in this part of the country, is it not?"

Will made a noise resembling an affirmative and as soon as he got his breath explained that traveling men generally wanted a sort of a show room next to theirs and that that was called a sample room too.

"But I'm not a traveling man," said the mysterious stranger. "So I shall have as little use for the one as this other."

"Then the room on the third floor'll do for you," said Will. "How long do you calculate on staying?"

"That will depend," said Mr. Duncan, "on day or so, perhaps longer, until I can find comfortable and more permanent quarters."

In his amazement Will lubbed the pen so hard into the potato beside the ink well that he never could get the nib out and had to buy a new one. "You don't mean to say you're thinkin' of coming here to live?" he gasped.

"Yes, I do," said the young man apologetically. "I don't think you'll find me in the way. I shall be very quiet and unobtrusive. I'm a student looking for a quiet place in which to pursue my studies."

"Well," said Will, "you've found it, all right. There ain't no quieter place in Pennsylvania than Radville, Mr. Duncan. I hope you'll like it," he said, sarcastic.

"I shall endeavor to," said the young man. "And now may I go to my room, please? I should like to renovate my travel stained person to some extent before dinner."

"You'll have time," said Will. "Dinner's at noon tomorrow. I guess you're thinkin' about supper. That's ready now. Here, Tracey, you carry this gentleman's things up to No. 43."

I have never been able to understand how we failed to hear of it at Miss Carpenter's before. I'd expect that was the hour when, having finished supper and my first evening pipe, I started down town to the City of Ice, intending to stop in at the Bigelow House on the way and confound Will with the list of the day's happenings. Main street was pretty well crowded for that hour. I remembered nothing, and most of the town-folk were grouped together on the corners, underneath the lamps, discussing something rather excitedly. I paid no particular attention, realizing that between Chesner, Pete Whiting, Roland Barnette's suit and the checker game

they had enough on their minds, so I wasn't until I walked into the Bigelow House office that I either heard or saw anything of the mysterious stranger.

Will Bigelow was in his usual place behind the desk and looked, I thought, rather disgruntled. His reply to my "Howdy, Will?" sounded somewhat snappish. But he got out of his chair and moved round the end of the desk just as the young man came out of the dining room door. Then Will pulled up, and I realized that he was calling my attention to the stranger.

Will grabbed my arm without saying anything and pulled me into the bar.

"Hello!" I said as he went round behind and opened the cigar case. "What's up?"

He took out two boxes of the finest five-centers in town and placed them before me. "Them's up," he said. "You win. Have one."

It staggered me to have him give in that way. I had been looking forward to a long and diverting dispute. "I guess you've heard everything worth hearing about today's history," I said, disappointed, as I selected the least unpleasant looking of the cigars.

"No, I haven't," he said. "I don't have to hear anything. What earned you that smoke took place right here in this office. Here," he said, striking a match for me.

I had been trying to put the cigar away so that I might dispose of it without hurting Will's feelings, but he had me, so I recklessly poked the thing into the automatic clipper and then into my mouth. "What do you mean?" I asked, putting

"Come long outside," said Will, and we went out on the porch just in time to see Mr. Duncan going wearily up stairs to his room. "I mean," said Will, "him." And then he told me all about it.

"But things like that don't happen every day," he wound up defensively. "I'll go you another cigar on tomorrow."

"No, you won't," I said indignantly and furtively dropped the infamous thing over the railing.

### CHAPTER V.

THE next morning I went out for a walk. I lingered a moment outside Sam Graham's old and much neglected drug store,

thinking of the change that had come over it since the death of Margaret Graham, Betty's mother, for, despite its out of the way location, the shop had not always been unprofitable.

While Margaret lived my heart still ached with the memory of her name. Sam's business had prospered. She had been one of those women who can rise to any emergency in the interest of her loved ones. The first to realize Sam's improvidence and lack of executive ability, she had taken hold of the business with a firm hand and made it pay—while she lived.

During Margaret's regime, as I say, the shop had thrived. Sam had few ill winners in Radville. The trade came his way. Then Betty was born, and Margaret died.

Most of this I have on hearsay. I left Radville shortly after their marriage and did not return until some months after Margaret's burial. By that time the shop had begun to show signs of neglect. Its stock was depleted, its trade likewise. Sam was struggling with his inventions more feverishly than ever—seeking forgetfulness, I always thought. The business was allowed to take care of itself. He had always a serene faith in his ton-narrows.

Now, the little shop had been far distanced by the competition of Sothen & Lee. It was twenty years behind the times, as the saying is. Small, darksome, dreary and dingy, it served chiefly as a living room for Sam, his daughter and his cronies as well as for his workshop. He had a bench and a ramshackle lathe in one corner, where you might be sure to find him furiously pottering at almost any hour. He owned the little building—or that portion of it which it were a farce to term the equity above the mortgage—and Betty kept house for him in three rooms above the store.

I pushed the door open and entered. He looked up with his never failing smile of welcome and a wave of his hand.

"Howdy, Homer! Come in. Well, well, I'm glad to see you. Sit down. I think that chair there by the stove will hold together under you."

"What are you doing, Sam?" I asked.

"Fixin' up the sody fountain. Meant to get it workin' last month, Homer, but somehow I kind of forgot."

He rubbed away briskly at the single faucet which protruded above the counter, lathering it busily with a metal polish that smelled to heaven.

"Do much sody trade, Sam?"

He paused, passing his worn old fingers reflectively across a chin

heard. "No," he showed thoughtfully, "not so much as we used to now that Sothen & Lee 've got this newfangled notion of puttin' ice cream in a nickel glass of sody. Most of the young folks go there now, but still I get a call now and then, and every little bit helps." He rubbed on feverishly for a moment. "Course I'd do more, likely, if I carried a bigger line of flavors."

"How many do you carry?"

"One," he admitted—with a sigh, "vanilly."

While I filled my pipe he continued to rub very industriously.

"Why don't you get more?"

He dashed me one of his pale, genial smiles. "I'm thinkin' of it, Homer, soon's I get some money in—next week, mebbe. There's a man in N' York that mebbe can be intrusted in one of my inventions, Roland Barnette says. Mebbe he'd be willin' to put a little money in it, Roland says, and of course if he does I'll be able to stock up considerable."

I sighed covertly for him. He rubbed, humming a tuneless rhythm to himself.

"Roland's goin' to write to him about it."

"What invention?" I asked, incredulous.

Sam put down his bottle of polish and came round the counter, beaming. Nothing pleases him better than an opportunity to exhibit some one of his innumerable models. "I'll show you, Homer," he volunteered cheerfully, stuffling over to his workbench. He

one direction of my eye to the work bench, where Sam stood with his back to it, his worn hands folded quietly before him. He seemed a little whiter than usual, I thought, and perhaps it was only my fancy that made him appear to tremble ever so slightly, for he was quite calm and self-possessed—so much so that I realized for the first time there was another man in Radville besides myself who did not fear old Colonel Bohun.

"I'm here, colonel," he said quietly. "What is it you wish?"

The colonel swung on him, shaking with passion. But he held his tongue until he had mastered himself somewhat, a feat of self-restraint on his part over which I marvel to this day.

"You know well, Graham," he said presently. "You got my letter—the letter I wrote you a week ago?"

"Yes," said Sam, with a start of comprehension. "Yes, I did it."

"Then why the devil man, don't you answer it?"

Sam's apologetic smile sweetened his face. "Whis," he said haltingly. "I'm sure I meant no offense, but you see, I'm a very busy man. I forgot it."

"The devil you forge it! D'ye expect me to believe that, man?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to."

Bohun was speechless for a moment, taken dumb by a second seizure of fury. But again he calmed himself.

"Very well, I'll swallow that insouciance for the present."

"It wasn't meant as such, I assure you—don't interrupt me, D'you hear? I've come for my answer. Yes, I've come down to that, Graham. If you can't accord me the common courtesy of a written reply I've come to hear it from your mouth."

Sam nodded thoughtfully. "Mebbe," he said, "you forget you have failed to accord me the common courtesy of my sort of communication whatever for twenty years, Colonel Bohun. Even when my wife, your daughter, died you ignored my message asking you to her funeral."

"Be silent!" screamed the colonel. "Do you think I'm here to bandy words with you, fool? I demand my answer."

"And as for that," continued Sam as evenly as if he had not been interrupted. "Your proposition was so preposterous that it could have come only from you and deserted no answer. But since you want it formally, sir, it's no."

For a moment I feared Bohun would have a stroke. The back of the chair I had just vacated and his stick alone supported him through that dumb, terrible transport. He shook so violently that I looked momentarily to see the chair break beneath him. There was insanity in his eyes. When finally he was able to articulate it was in broken gasps.

"I don't believe it," he stammered. "It's a lie! I don't believe it. It's madness. The girl wouldn't be so mad."

"What is it, father?"

I don't know which of us three was the most startled by that simple question in Betty Graham's voice. Sam, at all events, showed the least surprise. The old colonel wheeled toward the back of the store, his jaw dropping and his eyes protruding, as though he were confronted with a ghost—as, in a way, he was. Even I had been struck by that strange, heartrending similarity to her mother's tone, and even I trembled a little to hear that voice, as it seemed, from beyond the grave.

Betty stood at the foot of the staircase. Alarmed by the noise of the colonel's railing, she had stolen down, unheeded by any of us. And in that moment I realized as never before that the girl had more of her mother

rasped a match over its surface and applied the flame to a small gas bracket fixed to the wall. A strong rush of gas extinguished the match, and he turned the flow half off before trying again. This time the vapor caught and settled to a steady brilliant flame as white as and much softer than acetylene.

"There!" he said in triumph. "What d'ye think of that, Homer?"

"Why," I said, "I didn't know you had an acetylene plant."

"No more have I, Homer."

"But what is that, then?" I demanded.

"It's my invention," he returned proudly. "I've been workin' on it two years, Homer, and only got it goin' yesterday. It's goin' to be a great thing, I tell you."

"But what is it, Sam?"

"It's gas from crude petroleum, Homer. See!" he continued, indicating a tank beneath the bench which seemed to be connected with the bracket by a very simple system of piping, broken by a smaller, cylindrical tank. "Ye put the oil in there—just crude as it comes out of the wells, Homer. It don't need refinin', and it runs through this and down here to this, where it's vaporized—much the same they vaporize gasoline for automobile engines, ye know—and then it just naturally flows up to the bracket, and there ye are."

"It's wonderful, Sam," said I, wondering if it really were.

"And the best part of it is the economy, Homer. A gallon will run one lot six weeks, day in and out. And simple to install. I tell ye."

"Have you got it patented yet?"

"Yes, sive! Took out patents just as soon as it struck me how simple it 'ud be—more than two years ago. Only, of course, it took time to work it out just right, specially when I had to stop now and then 'cause I needed money for materials. But it's all right now, Homer; it's all right now."

"And you say Roland Barnette's writing to some one in New York about it?"

"Yes; he promised he would. I explained it to Roland, and he seemed real interestin'. He's kind, very kind."

I was inclined to doubt this and would probably have said something to that effect had not a shadow crossing the window brought me to my feet in consternation. But before I could do more than rise Colonel Bohun had flung open the door and stamped in. He stopped short at sight of me, mis-guided by his nearsighted eyes, and singled me out with a threatening wave of his heavy stick.

"Well, sir," he snarled, "I've come for my answer. Have you sense enough in your added pate to understand that, man? I've come for my answer!"

"And may have it, whatever it may be, for all of me," I told him. His face flushed a deeper red. "Oh, it's only you, is it, Littlejohn? I took you for that fool Graham in this dirty dark hole. Where is he?"

I looked to Graham, and he followed

my eyes were blinded by the signs of overwork and insufficient nourishment that marred her young features, by the hopeless dowdiness of her garments.

Alas! she moved swiftly to her father's side and slipped her hand into his. "What is it, father?" she repeated, crying Colonel Bohun coldly.

"Why, Betty," he said, trembling—why, Betty, your grand'father here has been kind enough to offer to take you and educate you and make a toffy of you, and—and we were just talking it over dear—just talking it over—"

(To Be Continued.)

Twenty-two Down.

LONDON, Nov. 6.—Twenty-two of the crew of a twenty-five aboard the Greek steamer *Lordos Byron*, from Theodosia for Antwerp, perished when she foundered in a gale in the English channel last night.

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IRRIGATION will reclaim "the desert," 6500 acres will be developed into a vast orchard district. "The desert" when irrigated will prove to be the best orchard land in the Rogue River Valley.

IRRIGATION will make the Rogue River Valley famous for its berries. The largest yields in the next few years will come from "the desert."

IRRIGATION will add thousands of acres to the producing area of the Rogue River Valley, and in these new districts there will be no crop failure, for irrigation is a guarantee of bountiful yields, and is real crop insurance for the grower.

IRRIGATION in the Willamette Valley has increased production from sixty to three hundred per cent. It will do the same in the Rogue River Valley.

IRRIGATION will double the population of Medford and the Rogue River Valley in the next few years. New homes will be established. Orchards will be planted on lands that have never been productive. "The desert" will be redeemed and a thousand families will be added through this development.

Rogue River Valley Canal Company

FRED N. CUMMINGS, Manager

Medford National Bank Bldg., Medford, Ore.



I'LL SHOW YOU, HOMER.



SHE HAD STOLEN DOWN UNHEARD

in her than lay in that marvelous reproduction of Margaret Graham's voice. As she walked there one detected in her pose something of her mother's quiet dignity, in her eyes more than a little of Margaret's tragedy. Of Margaret's beauty I saw scant trace, I own, but in those days



SAM GRAHAM.

snowy, with a stubble of neglected

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