



# THE HUNTER FOR THE FORTUNE

NOVELIZED BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE FROM THE PLAY OF THE SAME TITLE BY WINCHELL SMITH



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(Continued from Saturday.)

"You're the best man that ever said that. I wonder if it's so."

"I'm sure of it."

"Well," said Nat, chuckling, "I'll write that to my chum. He'll—"

"Oh, I can tell," Graham interrupted. "New, I— Well, you see, I've been a failure in business. So far as that goes, I've been a failure in everything all my life."

Duncan stared for a moment, then offered his hand. "For luck," he explained, meeting Graham's puzzled gaze as his hand was taken.

Wondering, Graham shook his head, and gratitude made his old voice tremulous. He put a hand over Duncan's, patting it gently.

"I want you to know, my boy, that I appreciate it." His voice broke. "It's mighty kind of you to buy the strap—very kind."

"Nothing of the sort. It's just because I've got great business ability," Duncan laughed quietly and moved away. "We'll want to clean up a bit," said he. "Got a broom? I'll raise the

"Underneath," Graham told him simply, taking down a battered hat from a hook behind the counter.

"I know. But how do I get there?"

"By the steps. You go through that door there into the hall. The steps are under the stairs to our rooms. I live above the store, you see."

"Yes, Goodby, Mr. Graham."

"Goodby, my boy."

Duncan watched the old man move slowly out of sight, then, with a groan, sat down on the counter to think it over. "It wouldn't be me if I didn't make a mess of things somehow," he told himself bitterly. "Now you have gone and went and done it, Mr. Fortune Hunter. You stand a swell chance of getting away with the goods when you take a wageless job in a spavined country drug store with no trade worth mentioning and nothing to draw it with just because that old doctor's the only human being you've spotted in this burg."

"Wonder what Harry would say if he heard about that wonderful business ability thing. But what in thunder can we do to bring business to this bum joint?"

He raised his surroundings with a discouraged glance.

"Doesn't order from anybody, does he?" he said thoughtfully. "It's the fault."

Five minutes later Ben Sperry found him in the same position, his head bent in perplexed reverie. Sperry had been traveling for Graham & Jones, a wholesale drug house in Elmira, twenty years than I can remember. His friendship for Sam Graham, contracted during the days when Graham was the drug store of Ravville, had survived the decay of the business. He's a square, decent man, Sperry, and has wasted many an hour trying to persuade Sam to pay a little more attention to the business.

"Anything I can do for you?" chirped Duncan cheerfully, dropping off the counter as Sperry entered.

"No-o," amazedly. "I just wanted to see old Sam. Is he upstairs?"

"No; Mr. Graham's not in at present," Duncan told him civilly.

Sperry wrinkled his brows over this problem. "You working here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"Let us hope not," said Duncan pleasantly. He waited a moment, a little irritated. "Sure there's nothing I can do for you?"

"No-o," said Sperry slowly, struggling to comprehend. "Thank you just the same."

"Not at all," Duncan turned away. "You see?" Sperry persisted. "I don't buy from drug stores; I sell to 'em."

Duncan faced about with new interest in the man. "Yes," he said encouragingly.

"My card," volunteered Sperry, fishing the slip of pasteboard from his waistcoat pocket. He dropped his sample case beside the stove and plumped down in the chair, to the peril of its existence. "I don't make this town very often," he pursued while Duncan studied his card. "Sothern & Lee are the only people I sell to here, but I never miss a chance to chin awble with old Sam. So, having half an hour before train time, I thought I'd drop in."

"Mr. Graham doesn't order from your house, does he?"



"LET US HOPE NOT," SAID DUNCAN.

had the heart to say a word to Sam for a good long time. Here it is."

Duncan studied carefully the memorandum: "To Miss, as per bill rendered, \$47.85." "I wonder"—he murmured.

"Eh?" said Sperry.

"I was wondering. Suppose you were to tell your people that there's a young fellow here who'd like to give this store a boom. Say he wants a little credit because—because Mr. Graham won't let him put in any cash—"

"Not a bit of use," Sperry negated.

"I would myself, but the house—no."

"But suppose I pay this bill?"

"Pay it? You really mean that?"

"Certainly I mean it." Duncan produced the wad of bills which Kellogg had furnished him the night before his departure from New York. Thus far he had broken only one of the \$500 gold certificates, and of that one he had the greater part left. Living is anything but expensive in Ravville.

"I'm beginning to understand that I was cut out for an actor," he told himself as he thumbed the roll with a serious air and an assumed indifference, which permitted Sperry to estimate its size pretty accurately.

"That's quite a stack of chips you're carrying," Sperry observed.

Duncan's hand airily waved the remark into the limbo of the negligible. "A trifle—a mere trifle," he said casually. "I don't generally carry much cash about me. Haven't for five years," he added irrepressibly. He extracted a fifty dollar certificate from the sheaf and handed it over. "I'll take a receipt, but you needn't mention this to Mr. Graham just now."

"No, certainly not," Sperry scrawled his signature to the bill.

"And about that line of credit?"

"Well, with this paid I guess you could have what you needed in moderation. Of course—"

"My name is Duncan—Nathaniel Duncan."

Sperry made a memorandum of it on the back of an envelope. "Any former business connections?"

"None that I care to speak about," Duncan confessed glumly.

Sperry's face lengthened. "No references?"

It took thought and after thought courage, but Duncan hit upon the solution at length. "Do you know L. J. Bartlett & Co., the brokers?"

"Do I know J. Pierpont Morgan?"

"Then that's all right. Tell your people to inquire of Harry Kellogg, the junior partner. He knows all about me."

Noting the name, Sperry put away the envelope. "That's enough. If he says you're all right you can have anything you want." He consulted his watch. "H-h-h! Train to catch. But let's see. What do you need here?"

Duncan reviewed the empty shelves, his face glowing. "Pills," he said, with a laugh—"all kinds of pills and everything for a regular, sure enough drug store. Mr. Sperry, everything Sothern & Lee carry and a lot of attractive things they don't—small lots, you know, until I see what we can sell."

"I see. You leave it to me. I probably know what you need better than you do. I'll make out a list this afternoon and mail it tonight with instructions to ship it at the earliest possible moment."

"Sperry!" Duncan said. "You do that and don't worry about our making good. I'm going to put all my time and energy into this proposition and—"

"Then you'll make good all right," Sperry assured him. "All anybody's got to do is look at you to see you're a good business man." He returned Duncan's pressure and picked up his sample case. "Strong," said he and left briskly, leaving Duncan speechless.

As if to assure himself of his sanity he put a hand to his brow and stroked it cautiously. "Heavens," he said and sought the support of the counter, "that's twice today I've been told that in the same place!"

"It's funny," he said, half dazed. "I never could have pulled that off for myself!"

## CHAPTER IX.

PRESENTLY Duncan moved and came out of his abstraction.

"I'd better get that broom," he said slowly. "The place certainly needs some expert manuring before we get that new stock in."

He swept the floor, thrilled with the sensation of accomplishment.

Two shadows moved slowly athwart the windows. Straightening up, he looked, gasped and fled for the back of the store. "Heavens!" he whispered.



"YES," ANGIE CHIMED IN, "IT'S SO WARM."

said, with a sinking heart, "and I'll bet a dollar my face is dirty!"

His brow was a very passable imitation of the real thing, he flattered himself, and there's no manner of doubt but that it flattered the two prettiest and most forward young women in Ravville of that day.

"May I have the honor of waiting on you, ladies?" he inquired with all the suavity of an accomplished salesman. Josie and Angie sidled together, giggling and simpering, quite overcome



by his manner. A muffled "How do do?" from Angie and a half strangled echo of the salutation from the other were barely articulate. But, hearing them, he bowed again, separately to each.

"Good afternoon," he said and waited in an inquiring pose.

"This—is this Mr. Duncan, isn't it?" inquired Josie, controlling herself.

"Yes, and you are Miss Lockwood, if I'm not mistaken."

Renewed giggles prefaced her "Oh, how did you know?"

"Could any one remain two weeks in Ravville and not hear of Miss Lockwood?"

The shot told famously. "How nice of you! Mr. Duncan, I want you to meet my friend Miss Tutbill."

"I've had the honor of admiring Miss Tutbill from a distance," Duncan assured the younger woman. And "She'll burn up!" he feared secretly, watching the conflagration of blushes that she displayed. "Just think of getting away with a line of mush like that! Harry was right after all. This is a country town, all right."

"And—are you working here, Mr. Duncan?" Josie pursued.

"I'm supposed to be. I'm afraid I

don't know the business very well as yet."

"Oh, that's awfully nice," Angie thought.

He thanked her humbly.

"We didn't expect to see you here," Josie assured him. "We just thought we'd like some soda."

"Soda!" he parroted, horrified. He cast a glance askance at the tawdry fountain. "Let's see, how d'you work the infernal thing?" he asked himself, utterly bewildered.

"Yes," Angie chimed in, "it's so warm this afternoon we—"

"I've got to put it through somehow," he thought savagely, and aloud, "Yes, certainly," he said and smiled winningly. "Will you be pleased to step this way?"

Out of the corners of his eyes he detected the amused look that passed between the girls. "Oh, very well!" he said beneath his breath. "You may laugh, but you asked for soda, and soda you shall have, my dears... you die of it." He put himself behind the counter with an air of great determination and leaned upon it with both hands outspread until he realized that this was the pose of a grocerman. "What'll you have?" he demanded genially. "Er—that is—I mean, would you prefer vanilla or—soda?"

A chant antiphonal answered him: "I hate vanilla."

"And so do I."

(To be Continued.)

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A SQUARE, DECENT MAN, SPERRY.

dust a bit while you're out sending that wire."

"You'll find one in the cellar, I guess, but—your clothes?"

"Oh, that's all right. Where's the

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