

THE FORTUNE HUNTER

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

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(Continued from Saturday, Dec. 9. "No, not long; just a minute or two." Sam was already dragging the affair out from under the window box. "You see?"

He went on to expound its virtues with all the fond enthusiasm of a father showing off his firstborn and wound up with a demonstration of the illuminating appliance. "I'm afraid, though, he got little encouragement from Mr. Burnham. He considered the machine with a dispassionate air, 'S' true, and admitted its practical advantages, but wasn't at all disposed to take a roscoe view of its future." "Yes," he grumbled when Sam put a match to the jet, "that's certainly a very good light."

"All right, ain't it?" chimed Roland, enthusiastic. "Oh, it may amount to something. It's hard to tell. Of course you know, sir," he continued, addressing Graham directly, "you've got competition to overcome." Sam's old fingers trembled to his chin. "No-o," he said, "I didn't know that. I've got the patent."

"Of course that's something. But the Consolidated Petroleum crowd has another machine, slightly different, which does the same work and, I should say, does it better."

"Is—is that so?" quavered Sam. "My patent!" "Now, see here, Mr. Graham," Burnham argued, "we're practical men, both of us."

"No, I shouldn't say that about myself," Sam interrupted. "Now, you, sir, I can see you're a man who understands such things. But I—" "Nevertheless you must know that a patent isn't everything. You said a moment ago a man had to have money to make anything out of his inventions."

"Did I?" Sam interjected, surprised. "Certainly you did. And dead right you are. A patent's all very well, but supposing you're up against a powerful competitor like the Consolidated Petroleum company. They've got a patent too. Granted, it may be an infringement of yours even. What can you do against them?"

"Why, if it's an infringement—" "See, of course. But do you suppose they're going to lie down just because



"I'D BE GLAD TO SHOW YOU ANYTHING I'VE GOT HERE."

an unknown and penniless inventor sues them? Bless you, no! They'll fight to the last ditch. They'll engage the best legal talent in the country. You'll have to carry the case to the supreme court of the United States if you want a winning decision. And that's going to cost you thousands—hundreds of thousands—a million."

"Never mind. A thousand's enough," said Sam gently. "I see what you mean, sir. It's just another case where I've got no chance."

"Oh, I wouldn't put it as strong as that."

"But I have no money."

"Still, you never can tell. I'll think it over if I get time."

additional business of looking at his watch, "I'd like to send that wire I spoke of."

"Yes, Roland," Sam agreed meekly, "you mustn't keep your friend from his business. I'm glad you looked in, sir. You'll call again, I hope."

"Thank you," said Burnham, moving toward the door. It was too much for Roland's sense of opportunity. He rolled in Burnham's wake sullenly reluctant. "Say, Mr. Burnham," he exploded as they got to the door, "if you'll just offer Sam five—" "That will do!" Roland collapsed as if punctured. Burnham turned to Graham with a wave of his hand. "I'm leaving on the afternoon train, but if I get time I may drop in again and talk things over with you. There might be something in that thrasher machine you mentioned."

"I'll be glad to show you anything I've got here."

"All right. Good day. I'll see you again perhaps." This cavalier snub was lost on Sam as an essential of whose serene soul is the quality of humility. He followed them to the door as grateful as a lost dog for a stray pat instead of a kick. "Good day, sir. Good day, Roland," he sped their parting cheerfully.

But it was a broken man who shut the door behind them and turned back, frowning at his gray chin.

"Perhaps Mr. Burnham was right. Only I was kind of hopin'— Now, Mr. Lockwood over there?"

He shook himself to throw off the spell of depression. "Well, well! He's kind, very kind. With this young man in here and everything gettin' fixed up and new stock comin' in— I'm sure Mr. Lockwood



"ONLY HER SENSE OF DUTY SUSTAINED HER."

"I'll see it the right way for us. He's kind, very kind."

Thus it was that he presently called up the stairs in a very cheerful voice, "Betty, are you pretty near through up there?"

The girl's weary voice came down to him without accent. "Yes, father, almost."

"Well, then, you keep an eye on the store, please. I'm goin' to step out for a minute."

"And if— if anybody asks for me I'll most likely be down to the depot with Mr. Duncan."

He didn't mention that he contemplated calling on Lockwood, because he feared it might worry Betty.

Betty knew, or, rather, divined. And she had no hope, no faith such as made Sam what he was. She came down the steps listlessly. Only her sense of duty sustained her. She owed something to old Sam for the gift of life, dismal though she found it. He needed her. What she could do for him she would.

Sighing, she went to work. In work only could she forget. The soda glasses needed cleaning and the sirup jars replenishing, for the new order of sirups had come in the previous evening.

After a time, to a tune of pounding feet, Tracey Tanner pranced into the shop with all the graceful abandon of a young elephant feeling its oats. His face was fairly scarlet from exertion and his eyes bulging with a sense of importance. The girl looked up without interest, nodding slightly in response to his breathless "Lo, Betty."

"Father's gone out," she said, holding a glass to the light, suspicious of the tint from her dish towel.

"I know—seen him down the street." The boy halted at the counter, producing a handful of square envelopes. "Note for you from the Lockwoods, Betty," he panted. "Josie ask me to bring it round."

Betty put down her glass in consternation. "From the Lockwoods?"

"Uh-huh!" Tracey offered it, but she withheld her hand, dubious.

"For me, Tracey?"

"Uh-huh! It's an invitation. I got four more to take." He thrust it into her reluctant fingers. "Got five, really, but one of 'em's for me."

"An invitation, Tracey?"

"Yeh. Hope you have a good time when it comes off." Already he was bounding toward the door. "Goodby."

"But what is it, Tracey?"

"Aw, it tells in the invitation 'S'long."

"From the Lockwoods?" she whispered. Suddenly she tore it open, her hands nudgey with nervousness.

The envelope contained a square of heavy cardboard of a creamy tint with scalloped edges touched with gold. On the face of the card a round and formless hand had traced with evident pains the information:



"R. S. V. P."

The envelope fluttered to the floor, while the card was crushed between the girl's hands. For a moment her face was transfigured with delight, her eyes blank with rapturous visions of the joys of that promised night.

"Oh—it 'ud be grand!"

Then suddenly the light faded. Her eyes closed; her face settled into its discontented lines. She stuffed the card heedlessly into the pocket of her dingy apron and took up another glass.

"But I can't go; I've got nothin' to wear."

CHAPTER XI.
 SHE was scrubbing blindly at the same glass when, a quarter of an hour later, Blinky Lockwood strode into the store, his right eye twitching more violently than usual, as it always does in his phases of mental disturbance—as when, for instance, he fears he's going to lose a dollar.

Lockwood is that type of man who was born to grow rich.

In person he is as beautiful as a snake fence, as alluring as a stone wall. Something over six feet in height, he walks with a stoop, one hand always in a trousers pocket jangling silver, that materially detracts from his stature. His face, like his figure, is gaunt and lanky, his nose an emaciated beak. His mouth illustrates his attitude toward property—is a trap from which nothing of value ever escapes. His eyes are small and hard and set close together under lowering brows. He's grizzled, with hair not actually white, but gray as the iron from which his heart was fashioned.

Aside from these characteristics, his principal peculiarity is a nervous twitching of the right eye which has earned him his sobriquet of Blinky. Legrand Gunn said he contracted the

affliction through squinting at the silver dollar to make sure none of its mintage had been worn off. I have never known the man to wear anything but a rusty old frock coat, black, of course, and black and shiny broadcloth trousers, with a hat that has always a coating of dust so thick that it seems a mottled gray.

He grunts his words, a grunt to each. He grunted at Betty when he saw her. "Where's your father?"

She put down her glass and dish rag. "I don't know, sir."

"Don't know, eh?" he asked in an indescribably offensive tone. "I think he went to the bank to see you."

"Oh, he did, eh? Did he have anything for me?"

The girl took up another glass. "I don't know, sir," she said wearily. "I'm afraid not."

"Well, if he didn't there's no use seein' me. It won't do him any good."

"I guess he knows that," she returned, with a little flash of spirit.

"Does, eh? Well, that's a good thing—saves talk. You don't do no business here, not to speak of, do ye?"

"No, not to speak of."

"Then what's the good of all this foolishness, fixin' up?"

"I don't know."

"Costs money, don't it?"

"I guess so."

"And that money belongs to me."

"It's Mr. Duncan's doing. Father ain't paying for it. He can't."

"What's he doin', then? Stirrin' round foolin' with his inventions, ain't he?"

"Yes."

"What's he inventin' now?"

"I don't know much about it." She pointed to the model beneath the window. "That's the last thing, I guess."

"'Cause he likes it," said Betty hopefully. "It's the only thing that makes life worth while to him. So I let him alone."

"What difference does that make? It don't bring him in nothin', does it? No, s'live, it don't. What does he do with them things?"

"Patents them."

"And then what?"

"Nothin' that I know of."

"That's it—nothin', nor ever will. Well, he's been gettin' money from me for those patents. I thought at first there might be somethin' in 'em. But he won't any more."

She interjected a significant "Huh!" He broke off abruptly, pale with anger.

"Well, I want to see him, and I want to see him before noon," he snapped. "I'm goin' over to the bank, and if he knows what's good for him he'll come there pretty damn quick."

He swung on one heel and slouched out as Betty turned to go upstairs.



BLINKY LOCKWOOD.

Presently she reappeared, pinning on her sad little hat, and left the store. It was upward of an hour before she returned, walking quickly and very erect with her head up and shoulders back, her eyes suspiciously bright. Even old Sam, who had returned from the depot after missing Blinky at the bank—even he, blind as he ordinarily was, saw instantly that something was wrong with the child.

"Why, Betty," he cried in solicitude as she fung into the store—"Betty, dear, what's the matter?"

For an instant she seemed speechless. Then she tore the hat from her head and cast it regardlessly upon the counter. "Father," she cried—"father!" and gulped to down her emotion. "Can you get me some money?"

"Money? Why, Betty, what?"

Her foot came down on the floor impatiently. "Can you get me some money?" she repeated in a breath.

"Well—er—how much, Betty?" He tried to touch her, to take her to his arms, but she moved away, her sorry little figure quivering from head to foot.

"Enough," she said, half sobbing—"enough to buy a dress—a nice dress—a dress that will surprise folks."

"But tell me what the matter is, Betty. Wanting a dress would never upset you like this."

She whipped the cracked and crumpled card from her pocket and pushed

it into his hand. "Look at that," she said and turned away, struggling

with all her might to keep back the tears.

He read, his old face softening. "Josie Lockwood's party, eh? And she's sent you an invitation. Well, that was kind of her, very kind."

She swung upon him in a fury. "No, it was not kind. It was mean! It was mean!"

"Oh, Betty," he begged in consternation, "don't say that. I'm sure—"

"Oh, you don't know! I heard the girls talkin' 'in the postoffice—Angie Tuthill and Mame Garrison and Bessie Gabriel. I was round by the boxes where they couldn't see me, but I could hear them, and they were laughin' because I was invited. They said the reason Josie did it was because she knew I didn't have anything to wear, and she wanted to hear what excuse I'd make for not goin'. Ah, I heard them!"

"Oh, but Betty, Betty," he pleaded, "don't you mind what they say. Don't—"

"But I do mind! I can't help mindin'. They're mean!" She paused, her features hardening. "I'm goin' to that party," she declared tensely; "I'm goin' to that party, and— and I'm goin' to have a dress to go in to! I don't care what I do—I'm goin' to have that dress!"

Sam would have soothed her as best he might, but she would neither look at nor come near him.

"Well, see," he said gently. "We'll see, I'll try."

She turned on him, exasperated beyond thought. "That only means you can't help me!"

"Oh, no, it doesn't. I'll do what I can."

that her words stumbled and ran into one another. "I can't understand it!" she raged. "Why—is it that I have to be more shabby than any other girl in town? Why isn't that the others have all the fun and I all the drudgery? Why is it that I can't ever go anywhere with the boys and girls and laugh and—and have a good time like the rest do?"

Sam bent his head to the blast. In his lap his hands worked nervously. But he could not answer her.

(To Be Continued.)

Walter Injured. Frank Ohson, waiter in the Manhattan, suffered from a broken collarbone as the result of a wrestling match with the night cook of the establishment.

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