

## A NEW SERIAL STORY

## TOILERS AND IDLERS

By John R. McMahon

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John R. McMahon

A rich young man, tired of a monotonous life, goes to work in a New York iron foundry, which he discovers to be his own property. He lives in the East Side, meets many surprising characters, and has a variety of adventures. His social studies are interwoven with his relations to three young women of diverse charm, a working-girl agitator, a girl who paints, and one who belongs to high society. Scenes of uptown life contrast vividly with the world of labor. A powerful romance of real people and things.

## CHAPTER II.

But he was surprised and a trifle hurt by a judgment that tallied with the attitude of the gatekeeper and the men about the cupola. He had long held the doctrine that blood tells; he owned to a definite if modest sense of his superiority. He had been sure that gentle birth was distinguishable, especially by one's inferiors. Did not one's features alone proclaim heritage and culture? The broad brow under sandy hair, the incurious gray eyes, full ruddy cheeks, artistically loose lips—tightened at the thought—ought to have told something. He was clever witty, able to talk on music, women's dress, painting, cooking; had an excellent knowledge of dogs, and horses and auto boats; danced well and played every fashionable game. No one, it had seemed, could fail to appreciate the erect forward carriage of well padded shoulders, the manicured white hands that never rested, the smile on smooth, ample lips, the low-pitched voice, the bored droop of the eyelashes, and even the manner of smoking a cigarette.

Of course, one could not display such traits to advantage in the present occupation.

These ideas were quickly displaced by a sense of reminiscence that had been struggling in his mind. Until now the calamity of self and the stress of toil had kept down all lesser matters. The familiar note, as he gazed about the yard and at the low brick buildings, connected itself for a moment with dreams and pictures. Then his thoughts leaped to the simplest explanation. It was incredibly absurd.

He had not noticed the name of the firm on the application blank. There was a placard on the nearby wall and he walked toward it in order to verify fantastic suspicion.

"You greeny, quit mooning! Come here and shovel coke." The cupola boss had a peremptory voice.

Renson had to bear suspense for awhile. He took a tined fork, not unlike that which farmers use in pitching hay, and joined the other laborer. The coke lay in a pile of silvery gray fragments the size of coal, and a fork seemed a strange tool with which to toss it on the elevator; but it was very light and easily handled, and it tinkled musically as it fell. By the time he had pitched enough coke and helped load another ear of pig, he had almost forgotten to look at the placard.

There was a new interest, too, in the advancing operations; the greater activity and bustle of the men, outside and in. Being sent up to the charging platform of the cupola, he had a look at the interior of the monster that devoured so much coal, iron, oyster shells, coke and limestone. The cavernous stomach pipe, lined with bricks and clay, was filled with airy sheets of flame, blue and rose and violet mingling kaleidoscopically. The eager clouds of radiance were torn and scattered upward in a shapes of fantasy.

Soon, a humming roar proceeded from the cupola, as if the monster had become vocal in a new-found zest of appetite; sparks and flame sheets began to fly from the stack to the evening sky. A furnace spout, waist high, vented a black, viscous stream that spread into a glistening cake and hardened. The windows of the buildings on the right gave ruddy gleams. There was a creaking of machinery and shouts of men. The flame s at the stack darted higher; spreading like the petals of an angry flower, they threatened the roofs and caused an uneasy pulse of glare and gloom in the yard. A man

came out holding a red object with a pair of tongs; leaning back, he dropped the thing in a water tank, when there was a volcanic explosion and the water flew a dozen feet.

Renson found time to read the placard only when the whistle blew the end of the day's work.

He was hugely delighted. He laughed. What a story for the Belvedere Club tonight! Perhaps there would be skeptics rash enough to wager it an invention; that would add to the sport. A bath, a change of linen, some canvasback, a salad, a bottle of Lafitte, cigars and coffee—the encounter with the skeptics and then a luxurious sleep.

"Say, you done well for a green hand," remarked the cupola boss, approaching. "You're ignorant, but willing."

"Thanks. That's very kind—" "You'll do, son. The foreman wants you inside to-morrow. You'll report to John Day."

Renson was struck by the idea of being depended upon. There was something friendly and heart-warming about these men. Moreover, he felt a little curious about the work inside, of which the afternoon's toil was evidently a detail. And now that one came to think of it, five hours ago he was considering ways and means. What then? Where as he had been restored to sane vigor. He wondered whether he ought to be grateful to anyone or anything.

At any rate, it would be worth while to carry on the adventure for another day. His brows knitted. He joined the hurrying, noisy procession of men and boys who swung empty dinner pails and put on their coats as they passed the arched gate.

A few blocks away in Scammel street, which was narrow, rather quiet and fronted with a better sort of tenements, Renson found an eating place. It bore the name Eureka restaurant, had clean windows, and occupied the first floor of a three-story house. The proprietor said that he had a good custom, merchants and clerks who did not live in the neighborhood. The choicest thing on the bill of fare this evening was bean soup, made by the proprietor's wife. Renson ate two large plates of soup and a half loaf of bread; nor did he regret the canvasback and Lafitte.

"Where you working?" asked the German as he paid at the desk.

"At the foundry."

"So. Maybe you new mans. I rent you room upstairs."

"I want a room for the night at least. Is there a bath?"

"Bath? My gracious. I tell you, we make a bath, mit pails of water hein!"

"All right. Let me see it."

The room was at the rear of the top floor. It was square, papered in pink flowers and carpeted with worn Brussels; it had a small coal stove, a bed with two feather ticks, a wash stand, a little table and two chairs.

The guest being left alone with a candle—since too many people nowadays selbstmordern, so the gas was

## FOOD FOR A YEAR

|                  |          |
|------------------|----------|
| Meat .....       | 300 lbs. |
| Milk .....       | 240 lbs. |
| Butter .....     | 100 lbs. |
| Eggs .....       | 27 doz.  |
| Vegetables ..... | 500 lbs. |

This represents a fair ration for a man for a year.

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turned off—tilted his chair, feet on window sill, and lit a cigarette. Some distance away there was a truck yard; men with whips and lanterns stamping about; shaggy big limbed horses gingerly descending an incline to their cellar stable. On the left the rows of tenement windows gave a clear idea of domestic operations in a dozen households.

At one window that had lace curtains and green shades sat a young girl working at a sewing machine. The light shone on her glossy black curls smoothly parted, and brought out a profile comely yet strong. The bent head never changed position, except once when she rose to get some white material; and the observer noticed the shapeliness of her short figure. On the opposite wall were pictures, and shelves of books.

Renson, starting to turn in between the two feather beds, surprised himself with a hearty laugh. The climax of the eventual day, the scene at the placard, was worthy a historical painting. It could be entitled, "The New Cortez, or, a Laborer Discovering that He is His Own Employer."

For he had considered the Atlantic Foundry, Renson & Sons, proprietors, merely as one of several properties that yielded a steady income and whose management did not interest him. Years since his father had taken him through the works. Since then all he knew about them was comprised in the annual statement of the long-trusted superintendent, a paternal protegee, so business-like that he insisted on being bonded and having a public accountant certify to his books. Therefore Renson only knew that the net profits fluctuated between twelve and eighteen per cent. It was as convenient as coupon bonds.

## CHAPTER III.

"Williams, is my bath ready? Yesterday it was too hot. You're getting careless—unreliable. Who mentioned pails of water. I say, have that noise stopped."

Renson woke with a start. The foundry whistle was blowing; fifteen minutes after seven, and he must be at work. He threw on his clothes, took a swallow of Eureka coffee, put a roll in his pocket, and ran down the street. This running developed the stiff soreness in arms, legs and back, but the joints soon limbered and he had an exhilarating sense of vigor. A real handicap to speed was the tightness of the borrowed overalls over elegantly cut trousers, not to mention the toe-pinching of his patent leathers.

The morning air smelled good, bearing a whiff of the sea. Over the roofs between synagogue towers on this side the river and factory chimneys on the other, dawn was painting the leaden sky. A horse-car, picturesque relic, jangled the Grand street. Farmers returning from early market drove hooded wagons toward the ferry.

He passed the arched gate in the tail of the procession of workers as a bell was tolling notes of grace. A moment later and he would have been docked half an hour's pay. He entered the foundry, asked for John Day, and was sent to a short man with chubby red cheeks and grey hair who stood in the middle of the floor studying some varnished pieces of wood.

"New handy man, eh? What's your name son?" inquired the veteran moulder cheerfully.

"Otis,"—recollecting the application blank. It was in fact his first name.

"What do you know, Otis?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid."

"That's all right, you're young—"

"I am thirty years old."

"Just the right age to learn. I'm sixty. This is your first duty, son, he went on, placing a shovel in Renson's hand. "Keep an eye on this all day. Don't give it up. Afterward I'll show you where I hide it at night."

John Day left him to consult the foreman about a pattern.

The first view of the foundry was rather confusing. A long gloomy hall, lighted by wire-net windows, dusty enough and several broken. Shadowy black rafters criss-crossing the high places above. At equal distances across the hall two cranes triangles of massive timber, stood pivoted on one leg. The floor, mere

earth deeply layered with black sand was cluttered with sections of iron cylinders, boxes like those in the yard, queer shaped patterns, tools and what not. An odor of burnt sand, machine oil and damp earth. Many men were doing things all over the place—one delving in a pit, another perched on a sand pile, without seeming to mind the disorder.

Renson recalled the hasty visit to this place years ago with his father. He had found nothing to interest him. These toilers seemed scarcely human. As a dilettante in landscapes, one had been repelled by the shut-in ugliness. Machinery and all the processes of industry one had detested, taking credit to himself for a poetic, cultured taste. It came to him now that machinery might have some interest as the embodiment of thought, as the yoke-fellow of human labor.

Also he wondered, not without a flush, how many backs had been bent how many drops of sweat had fallen here in the last decade, to realize for a cultured taste an income of twelve to eighteen per cent.

"Let's have that shovel, it's mine, said a handsome well-formed young molder who came strolling up.

"I was told to keep it. But, of course, if it's yours—" Renson, admiring the features and stalwart figure, saw in time the deceptive glint in the dark Celtic eyes.

"Sure it's mine. Why don't you give it to me? Just tell the old man, Tom Locker took it."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Locker—"

"Go to hell," grumbled the shovel-seeker in a tone of child-like disappointment. He walked away.

Renson became interested in the doings of the cupola boss at the end of the shop. He was raking cinders from his furnace, standing in a pit under the open trap door; only his long legs showed. He stooped down, kneaded balls of clay; and again went out of sight, except his legs.

A wizened-faced boy with a shrill voice ran up.

"John Day wants the shovel, young feller."

This time the precious tool was relinquished. A moment later John Day returned.

"That little rascal, Ohio Jimmy, did the trick," was the comment on Renson's report. "Now you've failed in your first duty."

"Shall I steal one?" asked the charged helper.

"Well, I doubt you'd succeed," with a twinkling blue eye.

Equipped with another shovel, the fruit of politeness rather than craft, Renson began to clear a space where the burnt sand from yesterday's cast lay in crisp hummocks. Bending low to the task, with heed to a suggestion on leverage, he scooped the black sand to one side. A layer of coarse cinders was put down. Now the bottom flask, twelve feet long and half as wide, was swung by the crane and laid in the cleared space. This box without top or bottom, on-ly sides and edge-up boards cut to fit the pattern, had to be adjusted carefully by the spirit level. Next Renson took turns with Day at shovelling sand into a round sieve—the riddle—and shaking it. The sifting kept out stray nails, lumps, pebbles and bugs—iron droppings. Mixing was a further important operation, the sand being combined with fresh yellow loam. After this the mixed sand was riddled into the flask until the traverse boards were well hid.

The two men took the pattern, a pine model of an engine bed plate, and laid it in the sand. It was hammered down with a mallet and proved by the spirit level. Renson, tired of shovel and riddle, gladly accepted an invitation to get on his knees and help press the sand around the sides of the pattern. But soon he had to be up and shovelling while Day alternately shook the sieve, walking backward over the box, and wielded a rammer. At length, the model being half buried, the rammed earth was levelled with a stick and smoothed with a trowel. Some fine white sand was sprinkled over all.

"Have we finished it?" asked Renson, not sweatless.

"My son—I was going to say, don't be like Lot's wife. Never mind. Fetch me the windbags."

"But why," persisted the helper, returning with a pair of bellows, do you take such pains with the level and all that?"

"Otis," said the old man, blowing the sand from interstices in the pattern. "I like your spirit, so I'll tell you. Melted iron is like a woman. She's gentle, delicate, obliging, if you treat her decent. Otherwise she may fuss and explode."

Another flask was shifted by the crane and placed on top, pins fitting into holes in the lower box.

"Sun about," said Day, which

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meant that both men, balancing the box on its handles, should push from right to left. This operation, to be repeated afterwards, would insure a fit, despite the chance of loose pins.

A layer of fine sand was sifted through the upper box. Renson fetched a pail of orange-hued clay-water, in which some iron hooks were dipped, and then placed upright at intervals along the cross boards. The hooks, Day said, were to hold the sand together when the upper flask was lifted; in fact, both cross boards and hooks served no other purpose than to solidify the tons weight of sand; 'twas like the bony framework of law stiffening unstable flesh and blood. There was more shovelling by the assistant and ramming by the molder, which seemed the easiest work; but evidently the latter require some peculiar skill.

When the sand reached the top of the box, Renson felt he had never worked so hard in his life. His hands were blistered, the cords behind the knees, the arm muscles, the leg muscles from heel to thigh, ached terribly; his back seemed to be crippled. A suspicion that the joke had gone far enough, that one ought not, to risk health in brutish violence of toil, urged him momentarily to rebellion. Would it not be wiser to take moderate, clean exercise at golf or polo? Gentle exercise in the open air?

"I guess you're tired, son," said John Day, casually.

"No—oh no," declared Renson, startled, with a flush. "Just getting my second wind."

"Don't feel soft anywhere?"

"Why should I?" retorted the indignant helper, clinching his lips.

(To be continued)

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