

# ABNER DANIEL

By ...  
**WILL N. HARBEN**  
Author of  
"Wasteful"

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## CHAPTER I.

**T**HE young man stood in the field road giving directions to a robust negro who was plowing the corn, which in parallel rows stretched on to the main road a quarter of a mile distant.

It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining brightly, but the atmosphere had dropped a dim veil over the nearby mountain. Even the two storied farmhouse, with its veranda and white columns, to which the field road led up a gradual slope, showed only its outlines. However, Alan Bishop, as he steeled his gaze upon the house, saw the figure of an elderly woman come out of the gate and with a quick step hurry down to him. It was his mother. She was tall and angular and had high cheek bones and small blue eyes. She had rather thin gray hair, which was wound into a knot behind her head, and over it she wore only a small red breakfast shawl, which she held in place by one of her long hands.

"Alan," she said, panting from her brisk walk, "I want you to come to the house right off. Mr. Trabue has come to see you, and I can't do a thing with him."

"Well, what does he want with him?" asked the young man. His glance was on the plowman and his horse. They had turned the far end of the corn row and were coming back, only the nodding head of the animal being visible beyond a little rise.

"He's come to draw up the papers for another land trade you pa's making. He's the lawyer for the Tompkins



estate. You pa tried to buy the land a year ago, but it wasn't in shape to dispose of. Oh, Alan, don't you see he's going to ruin us with his fool notions? Folks all about are a-laughin' at him for buyin' so much useless mountain land. I'm powerful afeard his mind is wrong."

"Well, mother, what could I do?" Alan Bishop asked impatiently. "You know he won't listen to me."

"I reckon you can't stop 'im," sighed the woman, "but I wish you'd come on to the house. I knowed he was up to some'n. Ever' day for the last week he's been ridin' up the valley an' rollin' an' tumblin' at night an' chawin' him times as much tobacco as he eat. Oh, he's goin' to ruin us! Brother Abner says he is buyin' because he thinks it's goin' to advance in value, but such property hasn't advanced a speck since I kin remember an' is bein' sold ever' year for tax money."

"No, it's very foolish of him," said the young man as the two turned toward the house. "Father keeps talking about the fine timber on such property, but it is entirely too far from a railroad ever to be worth anything. I asked Rayburn Miller about it, and he told me to do all I could to stop father from investing, and you know he's as sharp a speculator as ever lived; but it's his money."

There was a palling fence around the house, and the inclosure was alive with chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks and peewees. In the sunshine on the veranda two pointers lay sleeping, but at the sound of the opening gate they rose, stretched themselves lazily and gaped.

"They are in the parlor," said Mrs. Bishop, as she whisked off her breakfast shawl. "Go right in; I'll come in a minute. I want to see how Linda is makin' out with the churning. La! I feel like it's a waste o' time to do a lick o' work with him in that actin' like a child. Ef we both go in together, I'll look like we've concocted some-thing, but we must stop 'im ef we kin."

Alan went into the parlor on the left of the wide, uncarpeted hall. The room had white plastered walls, but the ceiling was of boards planed by hand and painted sky blue. In one corner stood a very old piano with pointed, octagonal legs and a stool with haircloth covering. The fireplace was wide and

high and had a screen made of a decorated window shade tightly pasted on a wooden frame. Old man Bishop sat near a window and the carefully reading a long document written on legal cap paper. He paid no attention to the entrance of his son, but the lawyer, a short, fat man of sixty-five with thick black hair that fell below his coat collar, rose and extended his hand.

"How's Alan?" he asked pleasantly. "I saw you down in the field as I come along, but I couldn't catch your eye. You see, I'm out after some o' your dad's cash. He's buying hisse' rich. My Lord, it ever does turn his way he'll scound in enough money to set you and your sister up for life! Folks tell me he owns mighty near every stick of timber land in the Cohutta valley, an' what he has got at the bottom figure."

"If it ever turns his way," said Alan, "But do you see any prospect of its ever doing so, Mr. Trabue?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "I never bet on another man's trick, my boy, and I never throw cold water on the plans of a speculator. I used to when I was about your age, but I saw so many o' 'em get rich by paying no attention to me that I quit right off. A man ought to be allowed to use his own judgment."

Old Bishop was evidently not hearing a word of this conversation, being wholly absorbed in studying the details of the deed before him. "Reckon it's all right," he finally said. "You say the Tompkins children are all of age?"

"Yes, Effie was the youngest," answered Trabue, "and she stepped over the line last Tuesday. There's her signature in black and white. The deeds all right. I don't draw up any other sort."

Alan went to his father and leaned over him. "Father," he said softly and yet with firmness, "I wish you'd not act hastily in this deal. You ought to consider mother's wishes, and she is nearly distracted over it."

Bishop was angry. His massive, clean shaven face was red. "I'd like to know what I'd consult her fer," he said. "In a matter o' this kind a woman's about as responsible as a suckin' baby."

Trabue laughed heartily. "Well, I reckon it's a good thing your wife didn't hear that or she'd show you whether she was responsible or not. I couldn't have got the first word of that off my tongue before my wife would 'a' knocked me clean through that wall."

Alfred Bishop seemed not to care for levity during business hours, for he greeted this remark only with a frown. He scanned the paper again and said, "Well, ef that's any law in this I reckon you'll make it right."

"Oh, yes, I'll make any mistake of mine good," returned Trabue. "The paper's all right."

"You see," said Alan to the lawyer, "mother and I think father has already made up his sort of property that he can carry, and—"

"I wish you and your mother 'd let my business alone," broke in Bishop, frowning again. "Trabue heer knows I've been worryin' 'im fer the last two months to get the property in salable shape. Do you reckon after he gets it that way I want to listen to your two tongues a-waggin' in open opposition to it?"

Trabue rubbed his hands together. "It really don't make a bit of difference to me, Alan, one way or the other," he said pacifically. "I'm only acting as attorney for the Tompkins estate and get my fee whether there's a transfer or not. That's where I stand in the matter."

"But it's not what I stand in, Mr. Trabue," said a firm voice in the doorway. It was Mrs. Bishop, her blue eyes flashing, her face pale and rigid. "I think I've got a right—and a big one—to have a say so in this kind of a trade. A woman 'at's stayed by a man's side for thirty odd year an' raked an' scraped to he's save a little handful o' property fer her two children has got a right to raise a rumpus when her husband goes crooked like Alfred has an' starts in to bankrupt 'em all jest fer a blind notion o' his'n."

"Oh, that you are!" said Bishop, lifting his eyes from the paper and glaring at her over his glasses. "I knowed I'd have to have a knockdown an' drag out fight with you 'fore I signed my name, so sail in an' git it over. Trabue's got to ride back to town."

"But what in the name o' common sense is the money to come from?" the woman hurled at her husband as she rested the top of her head on the edge of the table and glared at him. "As I understand it, the 'a' about 5,000 acres in this place alone, an' yere a-payin' a dollar a acre. What's it a-comin' from, I'd like to know? What's it to come from?"

Bishop sniffed and ran a steady hand over his short, gray hair. "You see how little she knows o' my business," he said to the lawyer. "Heer she's raisin' the devil an' Tom Walker about the trade, an' she don't so much as know what the money's to come from."

"Now was I to know?" retorted the woman, "when you've been tellin' me for the last six months that this

wasn't enough in the bank to give the house a coat o' fresh paint an' patch the barn roof?"

"You knowed I had \$5,000 worth o' stock in the Shoal River cotton mills, didn't you?" asked Bishop defiantly and yet with the manner of a man throwing a missile which he hoped would fall lightly.

"Yes, I knowed that, but— The woman's eyes were two small fires burning hungrily for information before their reach."

"Well, it happens that Shoal stock is jest the same on the market as ready money, up a little today an' down tomorrow, but never varyin' more'n a fraction of a cent on the dollar, an' so the Tompkins heirs say they'd jest as leve have it, an' as I'm tickled to relieve them of their land it didn't take us long to come together."

If he had struck the woman squarely in the face, she could not have shown more surprise. She became white to the lips and with a low cry turned to her son. "Oh, Alan, don't—don't let 'im do it. It's all we have left that we can depend on! It will ruin us!"

"Why, father, surely," protested Alan as he put his arm around his mother, "surely you can't mean to let go your mill investment which is paying 15 per cent to put the money into lands that may never advance in value and always be a dead weight on your hands! Think of the loss of interest and the taxes to be kept up. Father, you must listen to—"

"Listen to nothin'," thundered Bishop, half rising from his chair. "No body axed you two to put in. It's my business, an' I'm a-goin' to attend to it. I believe I'm doin' the right thing, an' that settles it."

"The right thing," moaned the old woman as she sunk into a chair and covered her face with her hands. "Mr. Trabue," she went on fiercely, "when that factory stock leaves our hands we won't have a single thing to our names that will bring in a cent of income. You kin see how bad it is on a woman who has worked as hard to do fer her children as I have. Mr. Bishop always said Adele, who is visitin' her uncle's family in Atlanta, should have that stock for a weddin' gift ef she ever married, an' Alan was to have the low half of this farm. Now, what would we have to give the girl—nothin' but thousands o' acres o' hills, mountains an' gulches full o' bear, wildcats an' catamounts—land that it'd break any young couple to hold on to, much less put to any use. Oh, I feel perfectly sick over it!"

There was a heavy, dragging step in the hall, and a long, lank man of sixty or sixty-five years of age paused in the doorway. He had no beard except a tuft of gray hair on his chin, and his teeth, being few and far between, gave to his cheeks a hollow appearance. He was Abner Daniel, Mrs. Bishop's bachelor brother, who lived in the family.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, shifting a big quid of tobacco from one cheek to the other. "Plottin' agin the whites? Ef you are, I'll decamp, as the feller said when the bull yerlin' butted 'im in the small o' the back. How are you, Mr. Trabue? Have they run you out o' town fer some o' yore legal rascality?"

"I reckon your sister thinks it's rascality that's brought me out today," laughed the lawyer. "We are on a little land deal."

"Oh, well, I'll move on," said Abner Daniel. "I jest wanted to tell Alan that Riggs' hose got into his young corn in the bottom jest now an' rooted up about as many acres as Pole Baker's plowed all day. Ef they'd a-rooted in straight rows an' not gone too nigh the stalks, they might 'a' done the crop more good than harm, but the aim or intention, one o' t'other, was bad. Folks is that way. Mighty few of 'em root—when they root at all—fer anybody but thes'elves. Well, I'll git along to my room."

"Don't go, Brother Abner," pleaded his sister. "I want you to he's me stand up fer my rights. Alfred is about to swap our cotton mill stock fer some more wild mountain land."

In spite of his natural tendency to turn everything into a jest—even the serious things of life—the sorrow face of the tall man lengthened. He stared into the faces around him for a moment; then a slow twinkle dawned in his eye.

"I've never been known to take sides in any connubial tussle yet," he said to Trabue in a dry tone. "Alf may not know what he's about right now, but he's Solomon hisse' compared to a feller that will undertake to settle a dispute betwixt a man an' his wife—more especially the wife. Gee-whillikins! I never shall forget the time old Jane Hardaway come heer to spend a week an' Alf thar an' Betsy split over buyin' a hatrack fer the hall. Betsy had seed one over at Mason's at the campground an' determined she'd have one. Maybe you noticed that fancy contraption in the hall as you come in. Well, Alf seed a bigger unloadin' from a wagon at the door one mornin', an' when Betsy, in feer an' tremblin', told 'im what it was fer he might nigh had a fit. He said his folks never had been above hangin' their coats an' hats on good, stout nails an' pegs, an' as fer them umbrellas pass to ketch the drip, he said they was fancy apthoxes, an' he wanted to know ef he expected a body to do the chavin' an' smokin' in that windy hall. He said it jest should not stand thar with all them prongs an' arms to attack unwary folks in the dark, an' he toted it out to the buggy shed. That got Betsy's dander up, an' she put it back agin the wall an' said it 'ud stay thar ef she had to stand behind it an' hold it in place. Alf wasn't done yet. He 'lowed ef they was to have such a party trick as that on the hill it had to stay in the best room in the house, so he put it heer in the parlor by the piano. But Betsy took it back two or three times, an' he larn't that he was a-doin' a bad job work fer nothin' an' finally quit totin' it about."

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"But that ain't what I started in to tell. As I was a-sayin', old Jane Hardaway thought she'd sorter put a word in the dispute to pay fer her board an' keep, an' she told Betsy that it was all ov'er to the way the Bishop was raised that Alf couldn't stand to have things nice about 'im. She said all the Bishops she'd ever knowed had a natural stoop that they got by livin' in cabins with low roofs. She wasn't spreadin' 'er butter as thick as she thought she was—ur maybe it was the sort she was spreadin'—fer Betsy blazed up like the woods afore in a high wind. It didn't take old Jane long to diskliver that there was several breeds o' Bishops out o' jail, an' she spent most o' her visit braggin' on some she'd read about. She said the name sounded like the start o' 'em had been religious and substantial."

"Brother Abner," whined Mrs. Bishop, "I wish you'd hush all that foolishness an' help me 'n the children out o' this awful fix. Alfred always would listen to you."

"Well," and the old man smiled and winked at the lawyer, "I'll give you both all the advice I kin. Now, the River stock is a good thing right now, but ef the mill was to be set on fire an' burn down thar'd be a loss. Then as fer timber land, it ain't easy to sell, but it might take a start before another flood. I say it might, an' then agin it mightn't. The mill might burn, an' then agin it mightn't. Now, ef you uns kin be helped by this advice you are welcome to it free o' charge. Not change the subject, did you uns know Mrs. Richardson's heffer's got a calf? I reckon she won't borrow so much milk after her gets good."

Trabue smiled broadly as the quaint man withdrew, but his argument was short lived, for Mrs. Bishop began to cry, and she soon rose in despair and left the room. Alan stood for a moment looking at the unmoved face of his father, who had found something in the last clause of the document which needed explanation; then he, too, went out.

## CHAPTER II.

**A**LAN found his uncle on the back porch washing his face and hands in a basin on the water shelf. The young man leaned against one of the wooden posts

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FOR HEADACHE.  
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FOR TORPID LIVER.  
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FOR SALLOW SKIN.  
FOR THE COMPLEXION.  
CURE SICK HEADACHE.  
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which supported the low roof of the porch and waited for him to conclude the puffing, sputtering operation, which he finally did by enveloping his head in a long towel hanging from a wooden roller on the weatherboarding.

"Well," he laughed, "yore uncle Ab didn't better matters in thar overy much, but what could a feller do? Yore pa's as bullheaded as a young steer, an' he's already played smash anyway. Yore ma's wastin' breath; but a woman seems to have plenty of it to spare. A woman's tongue's like a windmill—it takes breath to keep it a-goin', an' a dead clam 'ud kill her business."

"It's no laughing matter, Uncle Ab," said Alan despondently. "Something must have gone wrong with father's judgment. He never has acted this way before."

The old man dropped the towel and thrust his long, almost jointless fingers into his vest pocket for a horn comb which folded up like a jackknife. "I was jest a-wonderin'," as he began to rake his shaggy hair straight down to his eyes—"I was jest a-wonderin' ef he could 'a' bent his skull in a little that time his mule throwed 'im agin the sweet gum. They say that agin changes a body powerful. Folks do



"It's no laughing matter, Uncle Ab," think he's off his kazip on the land question, an' now that he's traded his best nest egg fer another swipe o' the earth's surface I reckon they'll talk harder. But yore pa ain't no fool. No plumb idiot could 'a' managed yore ma as well as he has. You see, I know what he's accomplished, fer I've been with 'im ever since they was yoked together. When they was married, she was as wild as a buck an' certainly made our daddy walk a chalk line, but Alfred has tapered 'er down beautiful. She didn't want this thing done one bit, an' yet it is settled by this time"—the old man looked through the hall to the front gate—"yes, Trabue's unblitchin' in his pocket, an' yore pa has the deeds in his note case. When this gets out, mossbacks from heer clean to Glimmer 'il be trappin' in to dispose o' land at so much a front foot."

"But what under high heaven will he do with it all?"

"Hold on to it," grinned Abner; "that is, ef he kin rake an' scrape enough to gether to pay the taxes. Why, last year his taxes mighty nigh floored 'im, an' his expenses on this county he's jest annexed will push 'im like ripe, fer now, you know, he'll have to do with-out the income on his factory stock. But he thinks he's got the right now by the year. Before long he may yell out to us to come he's 'im turn 'er loose, but he's waitin' 'er now."

At this juncture Mrs. Bishop came out of the dining room wiping her eyes on her apron.

"Mother," said Alan tenderly, "try not to worry over this any more than you can help."

"Your pa's gettin' old an' childish," whimpered Mrs. Bishop. "He's heard somebody say timber land up in the mountains will some day advance, an' he forgets that he's too old to get the benefit of it. He's goin' to bankrupt us."

"Ef I do," the man accused thundered from the hall as he strode out, "it'll be my money that's lost—money that I made by hard work."

He stood before them, glaring over his eyeglasses at his wife. "I've had enough of yore tongue, my lady. Ef I'd had so much to think about in thar jest now, I'd 'a' shut you up sooner. Dry up now—no more another word. I'm doin' the best I kin accordin' to my lights to provide fer my children, an' I won't be interfered with."

No one spoke for a moment. However, Mrs. Bishop finally retorted, as her brother knew she would in her own time.

"I don't call buyin' thousands o' acres o' unsalable land providin' fer anything except the porehouse," she fumed.

"That's beca' you don't happen to know as much about the business as I do," said Bishop, with a satisfied chuckle, which to the observing Daniel sounded very much like exultation. "When you all know what I know, you'll be laughin' on t'other side o' yore mouths. I reckon I'll jest have to let you all know about this or I won't have a speck o' peace from now on. I didn't tell you at first beca' nobody kin keep a secret as well as the man it belongs to, an' I was afeared it 'ud leak out an' damage my interests, but this last 5,000 acres jest about sweeps all the best timber in the whole Cohutta section, an' I might as

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went set up. I reckon you all know that ef—I say ef—my land was nigh a railroad it 'ud be low at five times what I paid fer it, don't you? Well, then, the long an' short of it is that I happen to be on the inside an' know that a railroad is goin' to be run from Blue Lick Junction to Darley. It'll be started inside of the next year an' I'll run smack dab through my property. Thar now! You know more'n you thought you did, don't you?"

The little group stared into his glowing face incredulously.

"A railroad is to be built, father?" exclaimed Alan.

"That's what I said." Mrs. Bishop's eyes flashed with sudden hope, and then, as if remembering her husband's limitations, her face fell.

"Alfred," she asked skeptically, "how does it happen that you know about the railroad before other folks does?"

"How do I? That's it now—how do I?" and the old man laughed freely. "I've had my fun out o' this thing, listenin' to what every crank said about me bein' cracked an' so on, but I was jest a-lyin' low waitin' fer my time."

"Well, I'll be switched!" ejaculated Abner Daniel, half seriously, half sarcastically. "Gee-whillikins! A railroad! I've always said one would pay like ripe an' open up a dern good, God-forsaken country. I'm glad you are a-goin' to start one, Alfred."

Alan's face was filled with an expression of blended doubt and pity for his father's credulity. "Father," he said gently, "are you sure you got your information straight?"

"I got it from headquarters." The old man raised himself on his toes and knocked his heels together, a habit he had not indulged in for many a year. "It was told to me confidentially by a man who knows all about the whole thing, a man who is in the employ of the company that's goin' to build it."

"Huh!" The exclamation was Abner Daniel's. "Do you mean that Atlanta lawyer, Perkins?"

Bishop started, his mouth lost some of its pleased firmness, and he ceased the motion of his feet.

"What made you mention his name?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, I dunno. Somehow I jest thought o' him. He looks to me like he might be buildin' a railroad ur two."

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"Well, that's the man I mean," said Bishop, more uneasily.

Somehow the others were all looking at Abner Daniel, who grunted suddenly and almost angrily.

"I wouldn't trust that skunk no further 'n I could fling a ball with the tail," der 'n I could fling a ball with the tail."

"You say you wouldn't?" Bishop tried to smile, but the effort was a fatal failure.

"I wouldn't trust 'im nuther, Brother Ab," chimed in Mrs. Bishop. "As soon as I laid eyes on 'im I knowed he wouldn't do. He's too mealy mouthed an' fawnin'. Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. He bragged on ever' thing he had while he was heer. Now, Alfred, what we must git at is, what was his object in tellin' you that tale."

"Object!" thundered her husband, losing his temper in the face of the awful possibility that her words hinted at. "Are you all a pack an' passle o' fools? If you must dive an' probe, then I'll tell you he owns a slice o' timber land above Holley creek, j'innis some o' mine, an' so he'll come to the secret out o' pure good will. Oh, you ain't skeer me. I ain't one o' the skeerin' kind."

But, notwithstanding this outburst, it was plain that doubt had actually taken root in the ordinarily cautious mind of the crude speculator.

Abner Daniel laughed out harshly all at once and then was silent. "What's the matter?" asked his sister in despair.

"I was jest a-wonderin'," replied her brother.

"You are?" said Bishop angrily. "It seems to me you don't do much else."

"Folks 'at wonders a lot ain't so apt to believe ever' thing they heer," retorted Abner. "I was jest a-wonderin' why that little, spindlin' shanked Peter Mosely has been holdin' his head so high the last week or so. I'll bet I could make a dern good guess now."

"What under the sun's Peter Mosely got to do with my business?" burst from Bishop's impatient lips.

"He's got a sorter roundabout connection with it, I reckon," smiled Abner grimly. "I happen to know that Abe Tompkins sold 'im 2,000 acres o' timber land on Huckleberry ridge jest after yore Atlanta man spent the day lookin' round in these parts."

To Be Continued.

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