

8 CAPTIVATING MARY CARSTAIRS

"To sum it all up in a word," said Varney, "there's a job of kidnaping on and I happened to get the contract. That's all there is to the little trifle."

Peter swung his feet around to the floor, and sat up. His conviction that Varney was trying to be funny died hard.

Varney laughed. "I need a pal," he added. "Five minutes ago I telephoned and got permission to offer the place to you."

"Stop being so confounded mysterious," Peter broke out, "and go ahead!"

Varney blew smoke thoughtfully and said, "I will. In fact, that's what I came for. It's a devil of a delicate little matter to talk about to anybody, as it happens. Of course, what I tell you must never go an inch further, whether you come along or not."

"Naturally."

"You know my Uncle Elbert?"

"Old Carstairs?"

Varney nodded. "He would n't thank you for the adjective, though. I got the contract from him. By the way, he's not my uncle, of course; he was simply a great friend of my mother's. I inherited the friendship, and in these last five years he and I have somehow managed to get mighty close together. Eight years or so ago," he continued, "as you may or may not know, Uncle Elbert and his wife parted. There was n't a thing the matter, I believe, except that they were n't hitting it off particularly well. They simply agreed to disagree. *Nouveau riche*, and all that,

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