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When Frank and Blanch had made a short stop at Saratoga, "just to be able to say so," as Blanch said, they returned to the mountains, and the little domestic drama began. As it progressed Frank grew interested in watching the effect it had on his proud mother. To have her only son show her so much devotion before crowds of people gladdened her heart, and it was soon noticed and commented upon. She had known that Frank was from the first a little smitten with this sister of his college chum, but as he had had several mild cases before she thought nothing of it. With motherly caution she took care to ask no questions, even when Blanch told her they had visited Alice on their way to Saratoga. When the denouement came she was, as Blanch had predicted, completely taken aback. She made but little reply to his lover's tale except to laugh at him and assure him he would soon overcome it, but that night she questioned Blanch.

"I noticed Frank was very attentive to Miss Page," Blanch said, "while she seemed to avoid being left alone with him a moment. She is one of the sweetest and prettiest girls I've met in a long time, and also one of the proudest. I fell in love with her at sight and am sure Frank has, but so far as I saw she gave him no encouragement. She is poor, pretty and proud, and that tells the whole story. I imagined she believed she would not be welcomed by you."

When the last of August came and the Nasons returned to Boston, Frank and his mother were on excellent terms.

"What has come over Frank?" Edith said to Blanch one day. "He has never been so well behaved in his life. First he quit idling and began to study law as if he meant to be somebody, then he deserted his crowd of cronies for us and has acted as if we were his sole care in life ever since. What is the meaning of it, Blanch?"

"It seems so good to have him devoted to us that I am not going to ask any questions," answered Blanch.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE last day of August dawned fair in busy Boston. Summer sojourners were returning. John Nason's store was filled with new fall styles, the shoppers were crowding the streets, and the bustling, bustling life of a great city was at flood tide. Albert Page, full of business, was in his office, and Frank Nason was studying hard again. Small fortunes were being won and lost on State street, and in one smoke polluted broker's office Nicholas Frye sat watching the price of wheat. The September option opened that day at 78½, rose to 79, fell to 76½, rose to 78 and then dropped back to 76. He had margined his holdings to 71, and if it fell to that price his \$50,000 would be gone and he—ruined. For many nights he had had but little sleep, and that made hideous by dreams filled with the unceasing whirr and click, click, click of the ticker. He was worn and weary with the long nervous strain and misery of seeing his fortune slowly clipped away by the clicker's tick that had come to sound like the teeth of so many little devils snapping at him. To let his holdings go, he could not, and, lured on and on by the broker's daily uttered assertion that "wheat could not go much lower, but must have a rally soon," he had kept putting up margins. Now all he could possibly raise was in the broker's hands, and when that was gone all was lost.

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Frye sat and watched the blackboard where the uneven columns of quotations looked like so many little legs ever growing longer. Around him were a score of other men watching the figures. No one cared whether another won or lost in the great gambling game that ruins thousands.

It was the caldron filled with lies, false reports, fictitious sales and the hope and lust of gain that boiled and bubbled, heated by the fires of hell. And ever around that caldron the souls of men were circling, cursing their losses and gloating over their gains.

And Frye was muttering curses. So fast came the quotations that the boy could no longer record them. Instead he called them out in a drawing singsong:

"September wheat now seventy-three—the half-five-eighths—a half-five-eighths split—now a half-three-eighths—a quarter—seventy-three!" Frye set his feet hard together and clinched his hands. Only 2 cents in price stood between him and the loss of all his twenty years' saving. All the lies he had told for miserable gain, all the miserly self denial he had practiced, all the clients he had cheated and robbed, all the hatred he had won from others, availed him not. His contemptible soul and his life almost now hung by a miserly 2 cents.

"Seventy-three—a quarter—an eighth—seventy-three—now seventy-two seven-eighths—three-quarters—five-eighths—three-quarters split—now five-eighths—a half—a half!"

Pandemonium was raging in the Chicago wheat pit, and the ticker's teeth clicked like mad.

"Seventy-two—a half—a half—three-eighths—a half—three-eighths—a quarter—seventy-two!"

Cold beads of sweat gathered on Frye's forehead. One cent more and he was ruined.

"September wheat now seventy-one seven-eighths—seven-eighths—three-quarters—seven-eighths split—now the three-quarter-five-eighths—a half—a half-five-eighths—a half—a half again—three-eighths—a quarter—an eighth—a quarter—an eighth—a quarter split—an eighth—"

"Seventy-one!"

Frye was ruined. He gave one low moan, the first and only one during those three long weeks of agony.

The devil's teeth kept snapping; the endless coils of tape kept unwinding. The boy continued his drawl, but Frye paid no heed. Only those spider legs on the wall seemed kicking at him, and that fatal seventy-one—one—kept ringing in his ears. He arose and staggered out and with bowed head made his way to the office.

Whirr-r-r-r! Click, click, click!

Seventy-one—one—one! It was the last he heard, and then he sank forward on his desk in a stupor.

At this moment Uncle Terry, with Frye's letter in his pocket and righteous wrath in his heart, was speeding toward Boston as fast as steam could carry him.

The clear, incisive strokes of an adjacent clock proclaiming midnight awoke Frye. He raised his head, arose, lit the two gas jets and sat down.

Seventy-one—one—one!

They brought it all back to him, and now, alone in his misery, he groaned aloud, and with his despair came the dread of the morrow, when he must go forth crushed, broken, despairing, penniless.

All would know it, and all would rejoice. Out of the many that hated or feared him not one would feel a grain of pity, and he knew it.

Then his past life came back to him. He had never married, and since he had looked down upon his dead mother's face no woman's hand had sought his with tenderness. All his long life of grasping greed had been spent in money getting and money saving. No sense of right or justice had ever restrained him. Year after year he had added to his hoard, carefully invested it, and now it had all been swept away!

He took a pen and wrote a brief letter. Then he went to his tall safe, opened both doors and, taking a small, flat packet from an inner till, returned to his desk, placed that and the letter in one long envelope and sealed and directed it.

Once more his head sank forward on the desk, and he groaned aloud. For a long time he remained thus, living over the past three weeks of agony, and then there smote upon his tortured nerves the sound of many clocks striking 1. It sounded as if they were mocking him, and from far and near, some harsh and sharp, some faint in the distance, came that fatal, one, one, one! He arose and, going to a small locker in his room, grasped a half filled bottle of liquor and drank deeply.

He arose again and, taking a letter opener, crowded bits of paper into the keyhole of the door and up and down the crack. Then he closed the one window, turned out the two gas jets and opened the stopcocks again. An odor of gas soon pervaded the room, into which came only a faint light from the statehouse dome.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ALBERT PAGE had just finished reading his morning mail the first day of September when his office door opened and Uncle Terry entered.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Albert, springing to his feet. "How are you, Uncle Terry? How are your good wife and Telly, and when did you arrive, and why didn't you let me know so I could meet you?"

"Waal," answered Uncle Terry, seating himself, "I got in purty late last night an' put up at a tavern near the depot."

"But why didn't you write or wire me, so I could have met you at the train?"

"The fact on't is," replied Uncle Terry, removing his hat and laying it on the floor beside him. "I've allus pulled my own boat in this world, an' it sorter goes agin the grain now to h'ist the oars over to 'nother fellow." Then, reaching into his pocket, drawing out a letter and handing it to Albert, he added: "Bout two weeks ago I got this 'ere from that thief Frye. I was 'spectin' the gov'ment boat 'long most every day an' so couldn't cum any sooner."

Albert read the letter and gave a low whistle. "Frye must have been either very hard up when he wrote," he said, "or else the other parties are crowding him, and this is his last effort to fleece you. I have heard that he has been speculating in wheat lately, and it may be he has got caught. I hope so, so it will be easier for us to bring him to terms. I have my plans all mapped out, and I think we had best go for him at once while he is likely to be in his office." Then, calling to Frank and rapidly writing a check for \$500 while that surprised young man was shaking hands with Uncle Terry, he continued: "Please go up to the station, Frank, and get an officer at once and step into the Mayvick bank on your way back and get this check cashed. We will go prepared for the worst."

When Frank had gone Uncle Terry said: "There wa'n't no need of yer gettin' money, Mr. Page. I've brung three hundred, which is all he asked fer."

"We may need more nevertheless," answered Albert, "and as I wish to make but one visit to Frye's office, it's best to go prepared." Then after filling out a writ of replevin he added: "Excuse me a moment, Mr. Terry. I will be back soon."

He was absent perhaps five minutes, and then Uncle Terry was astonished to see a strange man enter from an inner room. He wore a full black beard, smoked glasses, broad slouch hat and a clerical coat which was buttoned close to his chin. Uncle Terry looked at him in surprise, waiting for the stranger to speak.

"Don't you know me, Uncle Terry?" said the new arrival.

"By gosh, it's you, Mr. Page," exclaimed the old man, "or else I'm tuck with a change of heart!" Then he added, with a laugh, "I'd never known ye 'cept fer yer voice."

(To Be Continued.)

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