

THE IMPOSTOR



BY
**HAROLD
BINDLOSS**

AT last, however, a clerk signed to them from a doorway, and they found Graham sitting before a littered table. A man sat opposite him with the telephone receiver in his hand.

"Sorry to keep you, but I've both hands full just now. Every man in this city is thinking wheat," he said. "Has he word from Chicago, Thomson?"

"Yes," said the clerk. "Bears lost hold this morning. General buying!"

Just then the door swung open, and a breathless man came in. "Guess I scared that clerk of yours who wanted to turn me off," he said. "Heard what Chicago's doing? Well, you've got to buy for me now. They're going to send her right up into the sky, and it's 'bout time I got out before the bulls trample the life out of me."

"Quite sure you can't wait until to-morrow?" asked Graham.

The man shook his head. "No, sir. When I've been selling all along the line! Send off right away, and tell your man on the market to cover every blame sale for me."

Graham signed to the clerk, and as the telephone bell tinkled, a lad brought in a message. The broker opened it. "New York lost advance and recovered it twice in the first hour," he read. "At present a point or two better. Steady buying in Liverpool."

"That," said the other man, "is quite enough for me. Let me have the contracts as soon as they're ready."

He went out, and Graham turned to Witham. "There's half-a-dozen more of them outside," he said. "Do you buy or sell?"

Witham laughed. "I want to know which a wise man would do."

"Well," said Graham, "I can't tell you. The bulls rushed wheat up as I wired you, but the other folks got their claws in and worried it down again. Wheat's anywhere and nowhere all the time, and I'm advising nobody just now. No doubt you've formed your own opinion."

Witham nodded. "It's the last of the grappled, and the bears aren't quite beaten yet, but any time the next week or two the decisive turn will come. Then, if they haven't got out, there'll be very little left of them."

"You seem tolerably sure of the thing. Got plenty of confidence in the bulls?"

Witham smiled. "I fancy I know how Western wheat was sown this year better than any satisfaction of the ring, and it's not the bulls I'm counting on but those millions of hungry folks in the old country. It's not New York or Chicago, but Liverpool the spark is coming from."

"Well," said Graham, "that's my notion, too, but I've no time for any-body who hasn't grist for me just now. Still, I'd be glad to come round and take you home to supper if you haven't the prejudice, which is not unknown at Silverdale, against eating with a man who makes his dollars on the market and didn't get them given him."

WITHAM laughed, and held up a brown hand. "All I had until less than a year ago I earned with that. I'll be ready for you."

He went out with Alfreton, and noticed that the lad ate little at lunch. When the meal was over he glanced at him with a smile through the cigar smoke.

"I think it would do you good to take me into your confidence," he said.

"Well," said Alfreton, "it would be a relief to talk, and I feel I could trust you. Still, it's only fair to tell you

I didn't at the beginning. I was an opinionated ass, you see."

Witham laughed. "I don't mind in the least, and we have most of us felt that way."

"Well," said the lad, "I was a little short of funds, and proud of myself, and when everybody seemed certain that wheat was going down for ever, I thought I saw my chance of making a little. Now I've more wheat than I care to think of to deliver, the market's against me. If it stiffens any further it will break me; and that's not all, you see. Things have gone tolerably badly with the folks at home, and I fancy it took a good deal of what should have been the girl's portion to start me at Silverdale."

"Then," said Witham, "it's no use trying to show you how foolish you've been. That is the usual thing, and it's easy; but what the man in the hole wants to know is the means of getting out again."

Alfreton smiled ruefully. "I'm tolerably far in. I could just cover at today's prices if I pledged my crop, but it would leave me nothing to go on with and the next advance would swamp the farm."

"Well," said Witham quietly, "don't buy to-day. There's going to be an advance that will take folks' breath away, but the time's not quite ripe yet. You'll see prices knocked back a little the next day or two, and then you will cover your sales to the last bushel."

But are you sure?" asked the lad a trifle hoarsely. "You see, if you're mistaken, it will mean ruin to me."

Witham laid his hand on his shoulder. "If I am wrong, I'll make your losses good."

NOTHING more was said, but Alfreton's face grew anxious once more as they went up and down the city. Everybody was talking wheat, which was not astonishing, for that city and the two great provinces to the west of it lived by the trade in grain; and before the afternoon had passed they learned that there had been a persistent advance. The lad's uneasiness showed itself, but when they went back to the hotel about the supper hour Witham smiled at him.

"You're feeling sick?" he said. "Still, I don't fancy you need worry."

Then Graham appeared and claimed him, and it was next morning when he saw Alfreton again. He was breakfasting with Colonel Barrington and Dane, and Witham noticed that the older man did not appear to have much appetite. When the meal was finished he drew him aside.

"You have covered your sales, sir?" he asked.

"No, sir," said Barrington. "I have not."

"Then I wonder if it would be pre-sumption if I asked a question?"

Barrington looked at him steadily. "To be frank, I fancy it would be better if you did not. I have, of course, only my own folly to blame for believing I could equal your natural aptitude for this risky amusement, which I had, and still have, objections to. I was, however, in need of money, and seeing your success, yielded to the temptation. I am not laying any of the responsibility on you, but am not inclined to listen to more of your suggestions."

Witham met his gaze without embarrassment. "I am sorry you have been unfortunate, sir."

Just then Dane joined them. "I sat up late last night in the hope of seeing you," he said. "Now, I don't know what to make of the market, but there

were one or two fellows who would have bought my estimated crop from me at a figure which would have about covered working expenses. Some of the others who did not know you were coming in, put their affairs in my hands, too."

"Sell nothing," said Witham quietly.

It was an hour later when a messenger from Graham found them in the smoking-room, and Colonel Barrington smiled dryly as he tore up the envelope handed him.

"Market opened with sellers prevailing. Chicago flat!" he read.

Dane glanced at Witham somewhat ruefully, but the latter's eyes were fixed on Colonel Barrington.

"If I had anything to cover I should still wait," he said.

"That," said Dane, "is not exactly good news to me."

"Our turn will come," said Witham gravely.

THAT day, and several which followed it, wheat moved down, Dane said nothing to Witham about what he felt, though his face grew grimmer as the time went on. Barrington was quietly impassive when they met him, while Alfreton, who saw a way out of his difficulties, was hard to restrain. Witham long afterwards remembered that horrible suspense, but he showed no sign of what he was enduring then, and was only a trifle quieter than usual when he and Alfreton entered Graham's office one morning. It was busier than ever, while the men who hastened in and out seemed to reveal by attitude and voice that they felt something was going to happen.

"In sellers' favour!" said the broker. "Everybody with a few dollars is hammering prices one way or the other. Nothing but wheat is heard of in this city. Well, we'll simmer down when the turn comes, and though I'm piling up dollars, I'll be thankful. Hallo, Thomson, anything going on now?"

"Chicago buying," said the clerk. "Now it's Liverpool! Sellers holding off. Wanting a two-eighths more the cental."

The telephone bell tinkled again, and there was a trace of excitement in the face of the man who answered it.

"Walthew has got news ahead of us," he said. "Chicago bears caved in. Buying orders from Liverpool broke them. Got it there strong?"

Witham tapped Alfreton's shoulder. "Now is the time. Tell him to buy," he said. "We'll wait outside until you've put this deal through, Graham."

It was twenty minutes before Graham came out to them. "I'll let you have your contracts, Mr. Alfreton, and my man on the market just fixed them in time," he said. "They're up a penny on the cental in Liverpool now, and nobody will sell, while here in Winnipeg they're falling over each other to buy. Never had such a circus since the trade began."

Alfreton, who seemed to quiver, turned to his companion, and then forgot what he had to tell him. Witham had straightened himself and his eyes were shining, while the lad was puzzled by his face. Still, save for the little tremor in it, his voice was very quiet.

"It has come at last," he said. "Two farms would not have covered your losses, Alfreton, if you had waited until to-morrow. Have supper with us, Graham—if you like it, lakes of champagne."

"I want my head, but I'll come," said Graham, with a curious smile. "I don't know that it wouldn't pay me to hire yours just now."



These Books Mean Money in Your Pocket

If you intend building a house, you naturally want the best house possible for the money you have to spend.

If you could eliminate the architect's fee, the contractor's profit and the usual amount of "Extras," you would save more than a third of your cost.

READY-CUT HOMES

will save you more than a third of the money it would cost you to put up a house in the ordinary way.

Ready-Cut Homes are made to more than 60 different plans—the simplest to the more elaborate.

They are shipped all ready for erection. Every piece of lumber, every stick of timber in the house is cut to fit exactly into place. Every window, window-sash, door and door-frame is complete and exact in size. All hardware is included and every piece of material is marked.

If you can hold a hammer and drive a nail, you can put one of our Ready-Cut houses together, and the result is a beautiful home of the exact plan chosen, with a saving of one-third the cost of labor and one-seventh the money you pay for materials. In addition to all this you get our building experts' free advice.

Send six cents in stamps for book No. 72

**Sovereign Construction
Company, Limited**

1327 C.P.R. Building

TORONTO - - ONTARIO

Western Assurance Company

(Fire and Marine)

Incorporated A.D. 1851

Assets over \$3,000,000.00

Losses paid since organization over

\$56,000,000.00

W. B. MEIKLE, General Manager