

THE FORTUNE HUNTER

Novelized by LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE From the Play of the Same Name by WINCHELL SMITH

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"Anything I can do for you?" chirped Duncan cheerfully, dropping off the counter as Sperry entered.

"No-o," amazedly. "I just wanted to see old Sam. Is he upstairs?"

"No, Mr. Graham's not in at present," Duncan told him civilly.

Sperry wrinkled his brows over this problem. "You working here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Duncan pleasantly. He waited a moment, a little irritated. "Sure there's nothing I can do for you?"

"No-o," said Sperry slowly, struggling to comprehend. "Thank you just the same."

"Not at all," Duncan turned away.

"You see," Sperry pursued, "I don't buy from drug stores; I sell to 'em."

Duncan faced about with new interest in the man. "Yes?" he said encouragingly.

"My card," volunteered Sperry, fishing the slip of pasteboard from his



"LET US HOPE NOT," SAID DUNCAN.

saltpeter pocket. He dropped his sample case beside the stove and slumped down in the chair, to the peril of his existence. "I don't make this sort of thing often," he pursued while Duncan studied his card. "Sothern & Lee are the only people I sell to here. I never miss a chance to chin while with old Sam. So, having half an hour before train time, I thought I'd drop in."

"Mr. Graham doesn't order from your house, then?"

"Doesn't order from anybody, does he?"

"I don't know. I've just come here. He'll be sorry to have missed you, though. He's just stepped out to wire your house—I gather from the fact that it's in Elmira; he mentioned that town, not the firm name—for some sirups."

"You don't mean it?" Sperry gasped.

"What's struck him all of a sudden? He ain't put in any new stock for ten years, I reckon."

"Well, you see," Duncan explained artfully, "I've persuaded him in a way to try to make something out of the business here. We're going to do what we can, of course, in a small way at first."

Sperry wagged a dubious head. "I dunno," he considered. "Sam's a nice old duffer, but he ain't got no business sense and never had. You can see for yourself how he's let everything run to seed here. Sothern & Lee took all his trade years ago."

"Yes, I know. That's why he needs me," said Duncan brazenly. In his soul he remarked, "Oh, Lord!" in a tone of awe. His colossal impudence faded even himself. "But don't you think he could get back some of the trade if the store was stocked up?"

"No doubt about that at all," Sperry retorted; "he'd get the biggest part of it."

"You think so?"

"Sure of it. You see, everybody round here likes Sam, and Sothern & Lee have always been outsiders. They would swing to this shop in a minute just on account of that. Fact is, I wanted a lot of talk on our firm a couple of years ago trying to make our people give him some credit, but they couldn't see it. He owed them a bill then that was so old it had grown whiskers."

"And still owes it, I presume?"

"You bet he still owes it. Always will. It's so small that it ain't worth while suing for."

"Look here, Mr. Sperry, how much is this bill with the whiskers?"

"About \$50, I think," said the traveling man, fumbling for his wallet. "I'm supposed to ask for payment every time I strike town, you know, so I always have it with me, but I haven't had the heart to say a word to Sam for a good long time. Here it is."

Duncan studied carefully the memorandum. "To Mds, as per bill ren-

dered, \$47.85. "I wonder"—he murmured.

"Eh?" said Sperry.

"I was wondering. Suppose you were to tell your people that there's a young fellow here who'd like to give this store a boom. Say he wants a little credit because—because Mr. Graham won't let him put in any cash?"

"Not a bit of use," Sperry negated.

"I would myself, but the house—no."

"But suppose I pay this bill?"

"Pay it? You really mean that?"

"Certainly I mean it." Duncan produced the wad of bills which Kellogg had furnished him the night before his departure from New York. Thus far he had broken only one of the \$500 gold certificates, and of that one he had the greater part left. Living is anything but expensive in Radville.

"I'm beginning to understand that I was cut out for an actor," he told himself as he thumbed the roll with a serious air and an assumed indifference, which permitted Sperry to estimate its size pretty accurately.

"That's quite a stack of chips you're carrying," Sperry observed.

Duncan's hand airtily waited the remark into the limbo of the negligee. "A trifle—a mere trifle," he said casually. "I don't generally carry much cash about me. Haven't for five years," he added irrepressibly. He extracted a fifty dollar certificate from the sheaf and handed it over. "I'll take a receipt, but you needn't mention this to Mr. Graham just now."

"No, certainly not," Sperry scrawled his signature to the bill.

"And about that line of credit?"

"Well, with this paid I guess you could have what you needed in moderation. Of course—"

"My name is Duncan—Nathaniel Duncan."

Sperry made a memorandum of it on the back of an envelope. "Any former business connections?"

"None that I care to speak about," Duncan confessed grimly.

Sperry's face lengthened. "No references?"

It took thought and after thought courage, but Duncan hit upon the solution at length. "Do you know L. J. Bartlett & Co., the brokers?"

"Do I know J. Pierpont Morgan?"

"Then that's all right. Tell your people to inquire of Harry Kellogg, the junior partner. He knows all about me."

Noting the name, Sperry put away the envelope. "That's enough. If he says you're all right you can have anything you want." He consulted his watch. "3:30! Train to catch. But let's see. What do you need here?"

Duncan reviewed the empty shelves, his face glowing. "Pills," he said with a laugh—"bill books of pills and everything for a regular, sure enough, drug store. Mr. Sperry, everything Sothern & Lee carry and a lot of attractive things they don't—small lots, you know, until I see what we can sell."

"I see. You leave it to me. I probably know what you need better than you do. I'll make out a list this afternoon and mail it tonight with instructions to ship it at the earliest possible moment."

"Splendid!" Duncan told him. "You do that and don't worry about our making good. I'm going to put all my time and energy into this proposition and—"

"Then you'll make good all right," Sperry assured him. "All anybody's got to do is look at you to see you're a good business man." He returned Duncan's pressure and picked up his sample case. "S'long," said he and left briskly, leaving Duncan speechless.

As if to assure himself of his sanity he put a hand to his brow and stroked it cautiously. "Heavens," he said and sought the support of the counter. "That's twice today I've been told that in the same place!"

"It's funny," he said, half dazed. "I never could have pulled that off for myself."

CHAPTER IX.

PRESENTLY Duncan moved and came out of his abstraction. "I'd better get that broom," he said slowly. "The place certainly needs some expert manuevering before we get that new stock in."

He swept the floor, thrilled with the sensation of accomplishment.

Two shadows moved slowly athwart the windows. Straightening up, he looked, gasped and fled for the back of the store. "Heavens!" he whispered,

aghast to recognize Josie Lockwood and Angie Tuthill, of whose ubiquitous shadows in his way he had been conscious so frequently within the past several days. "I thought I must have made an impression. Don't tell me they're coming in!"

Behind the counter he struggled furiously into his coat. "They are," he said, with a sinking heart, "and I'll bet a dollar my face is dirty!"

His bow was a very passable imitation of the real thing, he flattered himself, and there's no manner of doubt but that it flattered the two prettiest and most forward young women in Radville of that day.

"May I have the honor of waiting on you, ladies?" he inquired with all the suavity of an accomplished salesman.

Josie and Angie sidled together, giggling and simpering, quite overcome

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N. & W. Railway

Schedule in Effect June 11, 1911.

10:20 am, Lv Charlotte So. Ry, 5:50 am, 2:05 pm, Lv Winston N&W 2:05 pm, 4:09 Lv. Martville N&W Ar. 11:40 am, 6:35 pm Ar Roanoke N&W Lv. 9:15 am.

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"YES," ANGIE CHIMED IN, "IT'S SO WARM."

by his manner. A muffled "How do do?" from the angina and a half-strangled echo of the salutation from the other were barely articulate. But, hearing them, he bowed again, separately to each.

"Good afternoon," he said and waited in an inquiring pose.

"This—is this Mr. Duncan, isn't it?" inquired Josie, controlling herself.

"Yes, and you are Miss Lockwood, if I'm not mistaken."

Renewed giggles prefaced her "Oh, how did you know?"

"Could any one remain two weeks in Radville and not hear of Miss Lockwood?"

The shot told famously. "How nice of you! Mr. Duncan, I want you to meet my friend Miss Tuthill."

"I've had the honor of admiring Miss Tuthill from a distance," Duncan assured the younger woman. And "She'll burn up!" he feared secretly, watching the conflagration of blushes that she displayed. "Just think of getting away with a line of mush like that! Harry was right after all. This is a country town, all right."

"And—and are you working here, Mr. Duncan?" Josie pursued.

"I'm supposed to be. I'm afraid I don't know the business very well as yet."

"Oh, that's awfully nice," Angie thought.

He thanked her humbly.

"We didn't expect to see you here," Josie assured him. "We just thought we'd like some soda."

"Soda!" he parroted, horrified. He cast a glance askance at the tawdry fountain. "Let's see, how'd you work the infernal thing?" he asked himself, utterly bewildered.

"Yes," Angie chimed in, "it's so warm this afternoon we—"

"I've got to put it through somehow," he thought savagely, and aloud, "Yes, certainly," he said and smiled winningly. "Will you be pleased to stop this way?"

Out of the corners of his eyes he detected the amused look that passed between the girls. "Oh, very well!" he said beneath his breath. "You may laugh, but you asked for soda, and

soda you shall have, my dears, if you die of it." He put himself behind the counter with an air of great determination and leaned upon it with both hands outspread until he realized that this was the pose of a grocery man. "What'll you have?" he demanded gently. "Er—that is—I mean, would you prefer vanilla or—ah—soda?"

A chant antiphonal answered him: "I hate vanilla."

"And so do I."

"Oh, don't say that!" he pleaded. "Of course you know there's—ah—vanilla and vanilla. Ah, some vanilla I know is detestable, but when you get a real

by fine vintage—ah—imported vanilla, it's quite another matter—ah—particularly at this season of the year!"

His confusion was becoming painful. "Oh, is it?" asked Josie helpfully. Her eyes dwelt upon his with a confiding expression which he later characterized as a baby stare, and he was promptly reduced to babbling idiocy.

"Indeed it is; no doubt whatever, Miss Lockwood. Especially just now, you know—ah—after the back season—"

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As unexpectedly as it had begun the flow ceased. He put down the glass, found his handkerchief and mopped his dripping face. When able to see again he discovered the young women leaning against one of the showcases, weak with laughter, but at a safe remove.

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Warned by experience, he worked at the machine gingerly, finally producing a thin, spluttering trickle. Beaming with triumph, he looked up. "I think it's safe now," he suggested. "I seem to have it under control."

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"IT'S ONE OF THE RULES, BUT I DIDN'T MAKE IT."

ah—I mean, when the weather is—in a way—you might put it, vanilla weather."

"But I like chocolate best," Angie pouted. And he hated her consumedly for the moment.

"Very well," Josie told him sweetly. "I'll have the vanilla."

He thanked her with unnecessary effusion and turned to inspect the glassware. There could be no mistake about the right jar, however; there was nothing but vanilla, and, seizing it, he removed the metal cap and placed it beside the girls. With less ease he discovered a whisky glass and put it beside the bottle, with a cordial wave of the hand.

A pause ensued. Duncan was smiling faintly, serene in the belief that he had solved the problem—the way to serve soda was to make them help themselves. It was very simple, only they didn't. With a start he became sensible that they were eying him strangely.

"You—ah—wanted vanilla, did you not?"

"Yes, thanks, vanilla," Josie agreed.

"Well, that's it," he said firmly, indicating the jar and the glass.

Josie giggled. "But I don't want to drink it clear. You put the sirup in the glass, you know, and then the soda."

"Oh, I see! You want to make a highball—ah—a long drink of it. Ah, yes!" He procured a glass of the regulation size. "Now I understand." A pause. "If you'll be good enough to help yourself to the sirup."

"No, you do it," Josie pleaded.

"Certainly!" He lifted the whisky glass and the jar and began to pour. "If you'll just say when."

"What? Oh, that's enough, thank you!"

"If I ever get out of this fix I'll blow the whole shooting match," he promised himself, holding the glass beneath the faucet and dodging nervously with the valves. For a moment he fancied the tank must be empty, for nothing

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Rock Hill

Special to The News.

Rock Hill, S. C., Feb. 19.—Monday night at Winthrop College a number of the students gave a play, "The Romancers." A large audience was present and the young ladies of the cast acquitted themselves in a creditable manner.

A number of delightful Valentine parties were given the first of the week, among the hostesses being Miss Lenora Moore and Miss Margaret Steele.

Tuesday afternoon the "Over the Teacups Club" was entertained by Mrs. D. B. Johnson, Misses Wickliffe and Russell. The roll call was answered by naming a famous Dickens character, this being followed by a paper on Thackeray by Mrs. D. L. McDonald and read by Mrs. T. E. Bell. A paper on Charles Dickens was read by Mrs. W. J. Cherry, being a splendid resume of the author's life and works. Mrs. Paul Workman read a selection from one of his sketches, "The Loving Couple."

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