

# Joseph Greer and His Daughter

By HENRY KITCHELL WEBSTER

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## "DOESN'T IT BORE YOU FRANTIC?"

"Really, though, except as a show, to look at now and then, doesn't it bore you frantic? The whole thing, I mean—our sort of thing—the sort of people we are?"

"I don't know any of you very well," he said, lamely. "I'm not bored now."

"You keep going," she said, "from the time you're quite small, thinking that life's going to open out, somehow, like a door. And then some day you wake up and realize you're thirty-five or so, and that it doesn't mean to open out at all; there isn't any door—not to the thing you're in. And then you hear about somebody who's never been shut up, in anything; somebody the whole world's always been open to. And you try to get people to tell you about him, John and Jimmy Wallace and Henry and Margaret Craven—Margaret's funny about you. You wonder what that kind of freedom feels like. I should think you'd feel," she looked around at him suddenly, "with us, you know, like a big moose, or something, that finds itself shut up in our pasture with the Holsteins."

These two talking are Joe Greer and Mrs. John Williamson, about whom Henry Kitchell Webster's fine story, "Joseph Greer and His Daughter" revolves. It's their first meeting. Greer is a latter-day pirate of the Chicago business world who has fought his way up from the bottom. Violet Williamson is the wife of a society millionaire who is backing Joe in the promotion of an invention. Joe has in California a wife who is planning to divorce him, and a nineteen-year-old daughter, Beatrice, whom he has never seen. He is taking his daughter away from her mother and planning to force her into Chicago society. Beatrice turns out to be as individual and dynamic as her father—an interesting feature of the story is their clash of wills and the resulting adventures that fall to Beatrice. Joe and Violet are irresistibly attracted to each other with results that lead them to the very brink of destruction more than once. There are other strong characters—Jennie MacArthur, for instance, Joe's 100 per cent efficient secretary. And these strikingly individual men and women go ahead and work out their own story, apparently without guidance from the master craftsman who has created them.

For beyond question Webster is a master craftsman in the construction of the modern novel of American life. And his life story reads like one of his own romances. He began his writing at twenty-four in Evanston, Ill., in 1899 in collaboration with Samuel Merwin, who has also achieved popularity as a novelist. Their "Calumet K" (1901) was a big success, as were other joint stories. Then Webster had a sort of intellectual shell shock and in the hope of recovering from it traveled all over the world. In desperation he made a complete change in his literary methods. He dictated fifteen "howler" stories that he sold readily under a pseudonym that he will not reveal. And his hand and brain regained their cunning—witness his latest novel, "Joseph Greer and His Daughter."

## CHAPTER I

### The Pawn.

On the face of it, John Williamson's invitation to lunch was nothing that Henry Craven need especially wonder, let alone worry, about. It was unusual—Henry couldn't remember, indeed, that it had ever happened before in just these circumstances—but surely one needn't feel on that account that there was anything ominous about it. The manner of giving it had been a little overbearing, perhaps; high-handed, anyhow. But that was John Williamson's way, and no doubt his place in Chicago's financial world entitled him to it.

Henry had been dictating a letter—around eleven o'clock this was—when one of the bank's more important customers spoke to him from across the marble rail. Evidently the man didn't care to come inside, so Henry went to the rail to see what was wanted. His telephone rang while he stood talking with the customer and, of course, his stenographer answered it. He heard her say, "Yes, Mr. Williamson." And then, "He's right here. Sha'n't I call him?" But John, evidently, hadn't thought it necessary to wait, even a minute. There was another pause while she made a notation on a pad, and finally, "Very well, Mr. Williamson, I'll tell him."

What Henry's stenographer had written on her pad was: "Be at J. W.'s office at twelve-thirty. Lunch." No "ifs" at all. Not even an "if possible."

Well, of course there were no "ifs." John was one of two or three Olympians who, among their other cloudy war affairs, directed the policies of this great bank, in which his cousin by marriage, Henry Craven, after sixteen years of faithful service, had recently been promoted to be one of the assistant cashiers. Naturally, then, if John wanted him for any reason, big or little, Henry would come.

It was unlikely, wasn't it, that the thing was of any serious importance? It mightn't be a business matter at all. Some little domestic problem or other. Violet (she was John's wife and Henry's cousin) had a birthday coming next week. It was possible that Henry's cultivated taste was going to be requisitioned to pick out a present for her. Only would John have wasted a priceless lunch hour—the most important hour of his hard-driven day—upon a trifle like that? It was inconceivable. The lunch-table was just where men like John talked over and arrived at their major decisions.

Yet what major decision of John's could imaginably concern Henry? Unless—unless it was a question of Henry's own job in the bank. They weren't going to promote him again; they'd just done that. But suppose—suppose they felt he hadn't made good, and had decided to do the other thing. Wouldn't it be broken to him just like

this, generally, over the lunch-table? He pulled himself up with a jerk and shot a glance at his stenographer. Had his moment of panic been legible to her in his face? But she was gazing out nowhere in the sort of trance that is one of the accomplishments of her profession.

"What's the last thing I said?" he demanded. Then as the girl started to read, "No, give me the whole thing from the beginning."

He didn't need it, but he did need another minute or two in which to take possession of himself. That fear—that damnable black dog of a fear, had slunk at his heels since his first day at the bank.

It had been natural enough at first, when he was bruised and bewildered by a sudden tragic change in the whole prospect of his life. John had given him this job out of charity, or, if you preferred putting it so, by way of meeting an obligation he had assumed on marrying into the Craven family. He'd come into the bank as a lame duck.

There was, though, no reasonable doubt that he stayed and advanced on his merits. All the evidence leaned that way. But the fear persisted. Not, of course, as a constant companion. There were days, weeks of them together sometimes, when he never thought of it. But at some trifling enigma, fancied very likely, in the conduct of one of his superiors, some conversation unavoidably half overheard, some smile that he felt glanced his way, the thing would seize him like a spasm of pain from an injured nerve.

He knew it was a weakness. He made valiant attempts to conquer it. He grew ashamed of it. He developed the corollary fear that it would be discovered.

His latest promotion had, he'd supposed, worked a cure. An assistant cashier was one of the officers of the bank. "If ever they make me an officer," he'd said to himself a thousand times, "then I'll know I'm safe." And indeed, during the three months since it had occurred, he'd been breathing deeper, exulting in a new security.

But now, for no better reason than that his Cousin John had invited him to lunch, he was quaking at the pit of his stomach like a schoolboy who's been told to report to the principal. It was absurd. A desire came flooding over him as he sat upon that straight chair in John Williamson's outer office—a passionate desire to do something unexpected, wicked quite possibly, but successful, immense; to the effect that telephone girls should stand in awe of him and private secretaries treat him with respect.

Through an open transom Henry could hear loud laughter as a heavy voice rumbled through a story and his angel, that he should be kept waiting under such circumstances, rose. He was about to have the girl telephone to John that he was waiting when the

door into Mills' office was brusquely opened. Henry heard young Mills, evidently at the other door, say, "You can get out this way, Mr. Greer."

The man addressed stood there in an attitude of arrested motion, grinning back into the room. And Henry, while he stared at the sight of him, held his breath. All his fidgety annoyances were forgotten, swallowed up in the sensation which the man's appearance produced.

His beard was the first thing you saw. It was cut round and short—not fashioned at all—and it was black, as black as if it had been drawn upon his face with India ink. His hair was just as black and thick, and it was cut quite short enough to hide a tendency to curl. Against this blackness of jowl and brow the gleam of his teeth and the whites of his eyes made a dazzling contrast. But indeed, as you took him in, you saw that he was a bundle of contrasts; the lightness of his pulse, as he stood there holding the door, against the burly breadth of those shoulders and the bull-neck; the look of geniality that you got from his smile, contradicted by his nose, which jutted out in so bluntly aggressive a manner as to be—practical almost. Henry felt.

He had answered Rollie Mills by saying in his peculiarly resonant voice that he always thought he was lucky, coming to a place like this, if he could get out the same door he'd come in by; and he continued for a minute rubbing this in. All these robber barons of finance had, he supposed, a chute down which the unwary visitor, having been shorn, was permitted to plunge.

John looked absent-minded when he appeared a moment later. He did not come out of his abstraction until just as they were turning into the club; then he took Henry by the arm.

"Did you know that fellow?" he asked. "The man who was up in my office?"

"No," Henry said. "I don't believe I've ever seen him before. I'm sure he's not one of the customers over at the bank."

"His name's Greer," said John. "Joseph Greer. Ever heard of him?"

"The name's vaguely familiar, perhaps, but I can't place it. I'll be glad to look him up for you, if you like."

"We've looked him up," said John. "I guess we know pretty much all there is to know about him. He's got a proposition we're going to take up. Going into business with him. I'll tell you the whole thing at lunch."

By this time Henry perceived that danger of his job being taken away from him did not exist and he breathed easy again. When the two men sat down to the table John launched into a description of Greer's business. It seemed that the farmers of the country, who were growing plants for linseed oil, were throwing away the flax-straw from some two million acres of land every year and that Greer had discovered a process by which to make linen from it at a price that would permit America to compete with the cheap hand labor of Europe.

John finally wound up his talk by telling Henry that he had picked him as treasurer of the new company at a salary of ten thousand a year. Frankly, he stated, the directors had



"If Ever They Make Me an Officer."

faith in Greer's ability in a practical way but they feared his handling huge amounts of money without some sort of a check being kept on him, and that was to be Henry's duty. John did not press Henry for an immediate answer and told him to sleep on it before giving him his answer.

The offer was a splendid one for Craven after the fifteen years of terrible struggle on the part of himself and his sister to keep up appearances. His father had died when Henry was a mere boy, leaving his family practically penniless but the brother and sister, aided by powerful friends of their father, had managed to keep up the home.

Henry arrived home ahead of his sister and when the buzzer announced a caller he rushed to the door, expecting to see Margaret, although she usually carried a key.

It wasn't Margaret, though. There

were two people coming up, and they proved to be Violet Williamson and young Dorothy. The latter, when she saw who was waiting for them, left her mother behind, took the remaining flight of stairs two at a time, flung her arms around him, gave him a tight hug, and kissed him soundly, just as she'd used to do when she was unequivocally a little girl. It was a heart-warming experience. The two foraged in the pantry and through the icebox for materials for tea.

"I am practicing on you," Dorothy admitted. "She wants me to."

"Your mother?"

The girl nodded. Henry was still speechless over this when he heard Margaret talking to Violet in the other room. It was only a moment later that his sister, without stopping to remove her wraps, swooped down upon them in the pantry. She kissed Dorothy enthusiastically and held her off in both hands.

"You're a delicious-looking young thing," she said.

"I wish I looked like you," the girl retorted, a little flushed but easily enough. "I always have, you know."

People had just one adjective for Margaret—good-looking. She fell short of beauty and there was nothing pretty about her. She had regular features, rather finely modeled, a good skin, and enough hair. Had her life run on in the channel that it had started in, she might have attained an effect of style, smartness anyhow. As it was what she had achieved was a crispness of movement and inflection, an air of adequacy to any situation that might arise, which men, in the main, found a little formidable. The men who liked her best were older than she and married. But just this quality, it was easy to guess, was what young Dorothy admired. And you could not mistake the sincerity of what she had just said.

Abruptly, Margaret shooed them out into the sitting-room to keep Violet amused while she got the tea. Just as Margaret was coming in with the tray Violet said, "It must seem strange to be leaving the bank, doesn't it?"

He answered quickly, "Margaret doesn't know." Then to his sister he went on, "John offered me a new job at lunch today and I—I'm taking it."

Her eyebrows went up with an expression which betrayed nothing but good-humored surprise. Then she said, "It must be pretty good if you could make up your mind as quickly as that to take it."

"Well, I'm sure it must look good to John," Violet observed. "The whole scheme, I mean. Because unless it had looked—well—marvelous, he'd never have gone in with that man."

"Greer, you mean," Henry said, with explanations. "He's an inventor and he's found a way to make linen out of American flax straw. They've never been able to do it before and the farmers have burned it—thousands, or maybe millions, of tons of it every year. I don't understand Greer's process in the least. I'm not even sure that John does. But he seems to have no doubt it works. John wants me to be treasurer of the new company," he concluded. "The inventor himself is to be president."

"Have you met him yet?" Violet asked.

"I just got a glimpse of him," Henry answered. "I hadn't time to see anything but his beard."

"That's the man, all right," Violet said, with a nod. And went on, since they were both visibly waiting for more: "Why, he sounds amusing to me; really attractive. Jimmie Wallace likes him quite a lot. He likes to play with theatrical people—that's how Jimmie knows him. But, of course, Jimmie himself isn't exactly what you'd call—austrere. He's got an apartment—Greer, I mean—up on Sheridan road, in the same building that Bella and Bill Forrester are in. Bella is quite an authority on him. Never met him, of course. But she meets up with him, accidentally, you know, every now and then, and they get very palmy. She's hoping, she says, that he'll invite her to one of his parties. They must be pretty terrific from all accounts."

"I got the impression," Henry observed, "from John's biography of him that he's a bachelor."

"I don't know," said Violet. "It comes to that, anyhow. He lives in that big apartment all by himself. At least—she qualified, and broke off with a glance toward her daughter.

"You needn't mind me," Dorothy said quietly. "I'm reading the Literary News. All the same," the girl went on, looking up at Henry from the magazine her glance had fallen upon, "I think that sort of inventor would be a wonderful person to have about. Mostly they're so awfully noble and innocent, aren't they, and about a hundred years old? Or is that just in the movies? Anyhow, I think you'll like it a lot. I wish father would give me a job in the new company."

She rose then, put down her cup, and, coming round behind her mother's chair, took her lightly by the shoulders. "I was to drag you away by force at a quarter to six," she said,

(Henry noted how she had evaded using any term of address.) "It's nearly that now, and you haven't done your errand yet."

"I'm having a dinner tomorrow night," Violet explained to Margaret, "and as things have turned out, I'm simply gorged with men. Can I steal you away from Henry? It's going to be frightfully dull, I'm afraid."

Margaret thought she could come. Dorothy had come over to Henry and offered him her hand, "for luck." He retained it as he turned to her mother and asked, "How about an even exchange? Or wouldn't it be proper? Or are you going to commandeer Dorothy, too?"

"Yes, it's all right," Margaret said, from her desk in the corner. "Love to! Seven-thirty?"

"Oh, Dorothy's perfectly—unattainable," Violet told Henry. "She's dining and dancing somewhere tomorrow night. I don't in the least remember where. All I know is I accepted eleven invitations for her for Easter week."

"I'm desolated that I can't dine with you," Dorothy cried in the best ac-

cents of Vanity Fair. "It would be much more amusing."

"I call that," Henry grumbled, after he had closed the door behind them, "an infernal outrage. Oh, not your going out to dinner!" he added, for he had caught a look in his sister's face that startled him. "I meant the way she's trying to spoil that lovely child. John said today that seventeen was a devilish age. He's wrong. It's thirty-eight that is."

"I didn't suppose you meant about the dinner," she said, her voice coming rather flat, "and I suppose you did mean Dorothy. But there was just a chance, I thought, that you respected the way John had treated you."

"John! In offering me the new job, you mean? That's because you don't know about it yet. Violet spoiled things, rather, making me tell it backward. It's ten thousand a year, Peg, to begin with—stock in the company—Independence again, if the thing goes right—something like old times."

She asked him abruptly, "When did you first hear about this?"

"Why—just today at lunch. You don't think I'd keep a thing like that from you. I'm sorry I told Violet first, but it came up naturally, somehow, and then I took it for granted that she'd know anyway."

"And you accepted it finally—right there at the lunch-table?"

"No, of course not. As a matter of fact, John didn't ask me to. He knew I'd want to think it over—talk it over with you."

"How long did he give you to decide?" she asked.

"Well, the meeting is tomorrow afternoon," said Henry, and all the wind went out of his sails on the admission. "They'll want to know before then. I told John I'd call him up in the morning."

"That's what I thought you might resent." Her voice flattened down upon the words and, as she'd turned away from him, they were hardly audible.

"I don't feel I'm being unduly hurried," he assured her, "if that's what you mean. I've already decided, unless you've some serious objection to urge, that I'll take it."

"You haven't decided anything," she contradicted. "You haven't had any chance to decide. You don't know whether the process works or not. I don't believe you know whether it's ever been tried or is just a theory. John's decided it for you. He's going to take a flier. He can afford to lose as well as not. He's used you like a pawn in a game of chess—pushing you in. It won't matter to him whether you're taken or not."

"You're the only stenographer in the world," he said.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A mean man usually rejoices because of his meanness.

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**How Was She to Know.**  
The sweet young thing was strug-  
gling earnestly to learn the art of fish-  
ing and was being instructed by one  
of her youthful admirers.

"You place the bait here," he ex-  
plained, indicating the fishhook.

"Yes, yes, I understand," was the  
ready answer, "but do you place the  
pole or the line in the water?"

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