

## ABE CRONKITE SOLVED THE SWINDLE.

It was one day in midsummer, when the courts were closed and many law offices and law books with them; but calendar changes made no difference to Mr. Beavers, junior member of the firm of Marcellus & Beavers. The judge might be off to Europe, as he was; the clerks might be drawing cuts for the most desirable two weeks of vacation, as they were; even Abe Cronkite might have left his desk and be strolling around town, observing the passing throng in parks, hotels and streets, and storing away bits of indiscriminate knowledge which time and again had come pat to an emergency, as he was; it was all one to Mr. Beavers. He pursued an undeviating course to the office in the morning and back to his modest lodgings at night; even as he had ever since the night he came out of the country town, where the judge himself was born, to apply well grounded principles of law and practice to the larger affairs of metropolitan life. An invaluable man was Beavers; as industrious as his name implied. He had the code at his finger ends, and was an animated cross-reference to the reports and statutes. Knowing, too, was he in the arts of the procedure; never without a precedent for his action. Before his trained gaze the wiles of unscrupulous attorneys stood out as manifest as the defects and makeshifts of unskillful architecture.

But yet, this spare, dark young man, with respectable string tie and his watch guard of his mother's hair, had remained a stranger in the great town. He knew his way to the courts, the county offices, the lecture rooms and the church; but that was all. His work had engrossed his time; it had also engrossed his shrewdness; so personally, he remained, as he came, simple and unsophisticated.

On this day in midsummer, then, Mr. Beavers sat at his desk, drawing up a complaint in partition, and deriving many benevolent sensations from his masterly disposition of the property. He was alone, and so preoccupied that he did not notice the swinging of the door, or light, advancing steps. It was, therefore, with a start that he saw, as he glanced from his work, as the industrious often do to rest the eyes, a beautiful young woman, dressed in black, standing by him.

"I am seeking Judge Marcellus," she began, "I have a letter to him from the Hon. J. K. Minister, of Mountain Dale, his old-time friend. Are you he?"

There was a subtle flattery in the tone, implying as it did that the young man might well have reached such legal eminence, which was very grateful. He hastened, therefore, after explaining that his partner was away, to express the desire to be of any possible service to one so highly recommended.

"Oh, then you are Mr. Beavers," she cried, "I am so glad! I have heard so much about you, and you are so clever and competent, I know you will arrange all my troubles for me. Let me tell you my story, sir, and it will be as clear to you as it is dubious and dreadful to me. My name is Eleanor Naughton, and my dear husband was Carrol Naughton of Mountain Dale. He died three months ago, leaving me all his property, but when his will was presented for probate at the Surrogate's Court his brothers and sisters filed objections—oh such awful lies. See, here are papers, they tell better than I can the conspiracy against me," and she drew a formidable package from her reticule.

Mr. Beavers ran over the documents with the rapidity of experience. Ah yes he murmured. Petition, objections, answer, issue joined, appointment of temporary administrator, and hearing set for Oct. 1 to which time the court stands adjourned. And what's this; blank power of substitution from the petitioner's attorneys, Knowles & Vholes? Your lawyers have abandoned the case, Madame?

"Yes, brought off by the other side," sobbed Mrs. Naughton. "Oh, you can't imagine the despicable means they have used to overwhelm me."

"I don't have to imagine, I know, madame," replied Mr. Beavers, "from the grim realities of many, many cases. There is no tribunal in the world where the evil traits of humanity are so conspicuous as the Surrogate's court. It is a perpetual exhibit of depravity in its lowest, meanest forms. But to resume: You, of course, wish us to appear for you: there is nothing further to do before the return day, when the judge will be here."

"Ah, yes," interrupted Mrs. Naughton, "I know just what you are going to say and it agrees fully with Mr. Minister's advice:

'Keep them in the dark as long as you can regarding your plans,' he reiterated. 'Let them think, if possible, that there will be no contest. Judge Marcellus' appearance will be all the more disheartening to them if it is unexpected.' So he said, and so I repeat, except I add, Mr. Beavers' appearance.'

'That is sound,' mused the lawyer. 'When such unscrupulous tactics are employed as these papers evidence fire must be fought with fire. But I see the estate is entirely tied up; pardon me, madame, we have to be inquisitive, you know. Have you sufficient means for your subsistence?'

'At present, yes,' answered the young widow, a little doubtfully. 'Of course I have far more than that, but I am so nervous about it. You see, a year ago, my husband made me a present of twenty Vidalia bonds, \$1,000 each, you know, and nothing better in the world; but the interest day isn't until Oct 1. I might hypothecate them, to be sure, but Mr. Minister thought it wouldn't be wise. He is so fearful lest they should learn of my possessing them and build up another infamous charge against me. I have them here and I want to leave them with you. There is no place at the family hotel where I am staying, and as I said, I am so nervous.'

Mr. Beavers carefully counted over the securities, as crisp as if right from the press. Have you the numbers? he asked: 'no? Then please jot them down yourself.' The young woman took from her reticule a bit of a pencil, and made the memorandum. 'Here also is my receipt,' continued the lawyer, 'perhaps under the circumstances, it is prudent for us to be entrusted with them.'

'No perhaps, at all,' retorted the young widow, each moment becoming more and more vivacious, as the worries of her solitude were so attentively met. 'Oh, I am so grateful to you; and you won't mind my coming often for counsel, may I say comfort? Here is my card, Mrs. Eleanor Naughton, the Quenton. But you won't have occasion to send for me; I fear I shall be such a nuisance.'

'Nuisance, madam?' exclaimed Mr. Beavers, 'it is my duty, my pleasure, my—' Here words failed him, leaving his thoughts to express themselves in a low bow of devotion, under which his client drew about her the habiliments of woe, and tripped out.

For a few moments Mr. Beavers sat in a reverie, deliciously novel. Was there ever such a charming creature, so persecuted, so helpless. How sincere she was; how simple, her faith of finding relief and comfort! Well, he would manfully do his devoirs, meeting craft with craft, planning legal surprises which would be all the more effective for the great surprise of the firm's appearance in the case. He endorsed the name of his new client on the bonds and put them away in the safe. Then as he resumed his seat but not his occupation he noticed that Mrs. Naughton had left her pencil on the desk. It was a comical little butt for a woman to carry, and he smiled at her naturalness in using it; rather unusual in appearance it was, too, being yellow in color and with an indefinite something about it which bespoke foreign make. Despite the propriety which Mr. Beavers had brought with him from the country and enlarged through habit into primness, he kissed the fragment and stored it with a sigh in his vest pocket; nor did it in any way occur to him that Mrs. Naughton had neglected to deliver the letter of introduction from the Judge's old-time friend, the Hon. J. K. Minister.

The summer waxed and the summer waned, and a strange surpassing emotion developed and flowered in Mr. Beavers' breast. The clerks took their vacations, and Abe Cronkite indulged his peripatetic studios; but the young lawyer's devotion to duty was all the greater. Why should it not be, indeed, since at any odd moment, not when he would least expect it, for he was always expecting it, but when hard and logical chances were against any such blessing, the office might be illumined and his soul enraptured by the vital model and form of all feminine charms. Gone was Mrs. Naughton's melancholy, dissipated by the confidence which the very name of Marcellus & Beavers inspired. She no longer appeared in those habiliments of woe, only less utter than her sense of bereavement. She now seemed the embodiment of all that is light and ethereal and gay, and as she floated to the Windsor chair by his desk, under the convoy of a

Gainsborough hat. Who could be so churlish as to refuse her request, even if judged unwise? Not Mr. Beavers surely! Why it would be this morning a beautiful picture of the imagination if such sordid details as prudence and economy and foresight were obtruded! And yet, one day, in the early fall, as the lawyer looked over the advances he had been overlooked to allow her to draw against the bonds in his possession, he was dismayed by the total. 'Dear, impetuous, uncalculating Eleanor,' he murmured, 'I really must caution her for her own good. Doubtless she is only living up to her accustomed style, and the contest will fall to pieces on our appearance; but still, but still, why, there is scarcely any margin left. Yes, the time she comes I will expostulate with her.'

A laudable resolution, but only effective on the coming of this vision of light! Days passed and the Windsor chair remained unoccupied. Evenings drooped, and Mr. Beavers lingered to the very last trip of the elevator car. Then he grew alarmed. Eleanor must be ill, so ill as to be unable to send him word. Inquiry at the Quenton only increased his agitation. Mrs. Naughton was not there; she had not been there for weeks; indeed, she had never been there but for a few days at any time. What did it mean? What should he do? What, then, was the Judge wont to do, when any mystery arose in the office? With fingers singularly tremulous Mr. Beavers touched the bell on his desk, and called into consultation Abe Cronkite, who had desisted from his philosophical wanderings.

'I remember years ago, sir,' remarked Abe Cronkite, after the case had been stated as only an enmeshed lawyer could state it 'that Bill Dalton, the burglar, made a haul of about all of one issue of Vidalia bonds. But he never was able to realize. They were cancelled by law, and there was a reissue.'

'What has that got to do with the matter?' asked Mr. Beavers, savagely.

'Nothing, sir, only it might be prudent to inquire.'

'Nonsense!' returned the other with unabated ire. 'It would be an insult to a lady of highest, noblest character, recommended to us by one of the judge's old-time friends, the Hon. J. K. Minister.'

'Would you mind showing me his letter?'

'I haven't it at hand just at present,' said Mr. Beavers, evasively.

'And you have never communicated with her former attorneys, Knowles & Vholes?' continued Cronkite, remorselessly.

'No; why should I?' asked Mr. Beavers, as he took a bit of yellow pencil from his pocket and twirled it nervously.

'Well, I noticed in the papers a month ago an advertisement for some legal papers left on an elevated train, and it was signed Knowles & Vholes.'

'That is the worst thing about you, Cronkite,' cried the lawyer, all flushed and excited; 'your long association with crime makes you so suspicious. You utterly misapprehend my wishes in this matter, the trend of your questions are ridiculous, simply ridiculous. What I want to do is to conduct an inquiry, in the most delicate way, for a woman in distress, who has powerful enemies, who is our client, remember, not mine alone, but the judge's and mine, and who seems to be missing. Listen now, while I give you as accurate a description as I can of her personal appearance, and don't waste valuable time by conjectures so unfounded and unjust as to seem both trivial and malicious.'

Cronkite, notwithstanding, did not seem to pay the strictest attention to Mr. Beavers' words. His eyes were fixed the rather on his hands; and when the lawyer concluded he abruptly asked: 'Where did you get that pencil, sir?'

'That question is too irrelevant for answer,' retorted Mr. Beavers.

'But if by any chance, sir,' the detective persisted, 'the lady should have happened to leave it here, why it might prove a clue; I don't see just how, but little things have a powerful way of pointing out; think of the magnetic needle, sir; so if you don't mind—'

And Mr. Beavers' anxiety was so great that he not only admitted that Mrs. Naughton had owned the pencil, but delivered the precious relic into the detective's charge.

'Remember,' repeated the young lawyer as a last solemn injunction, 'a simple inquiry delicately conducted! I not only have the utmost confidence in our client, but the highest esteem, respect, regard for her! Brave words, but notwithstanding, after Cronkite had departed, Mr. Beavers himself made certain simple inquiries, delicately conducted, too, of a broker, whose specialty was municipal bonds, of the Hon. J. K. Minister, and of the law firm of Knowles & Vholes, and when the fatal answers came, as fatal answers always do, he was unable either to work or to dream; he was duly, dumbly unhappy, very unhappy!

As straight as if the magnetic needle pointed the way Abe Cronkite proceeded to where the horses were running by the seaside, only pausing to make certain changes in his appearance not on the side of austere respectability. These changes, however, were so effective as to give him ready acquaintance with the loungers about the bar of the adjacent hotel; and his glib and adaptable tongue did the rest. By the time the tramp, tramp along the piazza indicated that the races were over for the day, he was generally accepted as Mr. Nerval, the starter for a Western track, and a man worthy of cultivation by all the knowing ones. As the crowd surged through the windows Mr. Nerval grew retiring. He stepped out to a corner of the piazza and watched closely, while after the first arid rush, the men and women noisily and flauntingly took places at the various tables. One couple especially seemed to attract the starter's attention—a pretty young woman, vivid with ribbons and ablaze with diamonds, and a tall, well-made man, whose dress and manner revealed all the outer signs and inner graces of a dead game, all-around sport. They were laughing boisterously, they were ordering lavishly, evidently things had come their way, and they wanted the whole world, or at least their half, to know it.

Soon the man, after his kind, sauntered into the barroom, and Mr. Nerval followed. 'Jim Mixon,' said a banger on, 'shake hands with Pop Nerval, the Western starter.'

'You're a good man to get next to,' said Mixon affably; 'what'll you have?' And fertilized by interest and watered by conviviality an intimacy between the two sprang up like Jonah's gourd.

'You must meet her,' insisted Mixon after a little, indicating his fair companion with his thumb, and for the next hour the three over a superabundance of half-cold food and half-warm wine talked technically about the steppers, and whether so and so's stable was out for the dust, and which was the wiser course, to follow the jocks or the colors, and in so doing and so saying, swore an eternal friendship. So great, indeed, was the attraction of the Mixons for the Western man that they insisted when the city was reached on his accompanying them to their Harlem flat, where a bird and a bot promised a fitting ending for what yet was only the shank of the evening.

It was when these pleasures were culminating, and the smoke of the heavy black cigars was curling lazily over the wet table and clinging to the glasses that Mr. Nerval little by little brought the conversation to a consideration of the many monetary advantages within the grasp of thoroughbreds like themselves. Many a tale he told of "doping" and "ringing," of monte playing and the "long con," tales met and capped every time by long Jim Mixon, and extravagantly corroborated by his fair partner, when he would turn to her and say: 'Ain't that straight goods, Nell?'

'Sometimes, though, the biter is bit,' remarked Mr. Nerval with a laugh, as he lolled back in his chair, 'as I happened to find out once to my loss. Did you ever hear tell of old Bill Dalton? No? Well, Bill was one of the old-time lags you read about, and his grait it was safe cracking. One night he did a sick job at Vidalia, lifting a whole new issue of bonds, blow me if he didn't! His plan was to lay low and wait for an offer, but the lawyers they put their heads together and contrived a law that cancelled the lot, and permitted a reissue, and old Bill was left with a fiat full of sleepers. After that any of the boys who wanted to spring a game on some hayseed, the old snide bond racket, you know, would apply to old Bill for the col-lat, and get it too for a thankee kindly. Why, I had a bunch of the stuff a few years ago that I let go for a song. Now here is where the joke was on me and old Bill, and the rest of the fly boys. Only a day or so ago, I heard, and it came right from headquarters, too, that the higher courts had taken up the question of those Vidalia bonds that old Bill prigged, and decided that since they had gotten into the hands of innocent third parties they were good for the face and interest. And that ain't all, by a jugfull. Being a good lien, as

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When the genial Mr. Nerval finally took a long farewell of his hosts, they looked at each other with dismay. 'We've been done up for fair, Nell,' said Jim. 'Pium in the kisser,' agreed the allegoric Nell. 'But I won't stand for it,' went on the man angrily, 'to embroil myself out of ten thousand bones like a gillie at the wheel! We've got the dough and to spare, and we could not invest it better. Now you go down this morning, the first thing, to Beavers', give him any old song and dance to explain where you've been, take up your loan, bring home the bonds, and we can break way ahead of the game, and as square as young squaratoes himself!'

The following afternoon when Abe Cronkite came into the office Mr. Beavers greeted him with an air of conscious triumph.

'Let this be a lesson to you, Cronkite,' he said, 'against hasty judgments. Mrs. Naughton called this morning and paid the amount I had advanced on the bonds. Her absence was caused by the illness of a dear friend; and she was in such a hurry to return to her that she had no time to explain fully the two or three discrepancies in her case which you were so eager to pronounce suspicious. She was shocked when I told her about the bonds, and took them with her for verification by her late husband's brokers. As for the Hon. J. K. Minister, it is easy to say that, like Knowles & Vholes, he has been bought by the other side. Well, she has one staunch and faithful friend who will serve her to the end.'

And then Abe Cronkite, perceiving that nothing but the plain truth would remove an infatuation which the young lawyer's sterling qualities only made the stronger, told the story from beginning to end.

'But how did you know where to seek her?' gasped Mr. Beavers. 'I don't understand!'

'You forget the yellow pencil,' explained Cronkite, 'the moment I saw it I knew she must follow the horses. You never see one in use outside the ring. Why should you? They cost much more than the ordinary kind. But the bookmakers and especially the sheet writers, require in their business, as you will readily see, a lead very black, unfriction and tough; and these yellow pencils, which are made in Austria, fill the bill. It's the little things that point the way, sir, as I said before; and that little nub of a pencil sent him as straight to the track as it steered by the magnetic needle itself.'

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In a dull Scottish village on a dull morning one neighbor called upon another. He was met at the door by his friend's wife, and the conversation went thus:

'Cauld?'

'Aye.'

'Gae'n to be weety, I think.'

'Aye.'

'Is John in?'

'Oh, aye; he's in.'

'Can I see him?'

'No.'

'But I wanted to see him.'

'Aye; but you canna see him. John's deid.'

'Deid?'

'Aye.'

'Sudden?'

'Aye.'

'Very sudden?'

'Very sudden.'

'Did he say anything about a pot of green paint before he deid?—Anecdote by Ian MacLaren.'

'Yes, I hope to start the century free from debt.'

'Of course you mean the 21st century.'

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