ROBERT HERRICK

HIS GREAT ADVENTURE

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PART I: FORTUNE

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It was dusk of an April day, and Fifth Avenue was crowded. A young man, who had emerged from a large hotel, stood in the stream of traffic and gazed irresolutely up and down the thoroughfare. He wore a long, cheap rain-coat, and his head was covered by a steamer-cap of an old design, with two flaps tied in a knot across the top, behind which an overabundant crop of dull black hair pushed forth.

His thin, sallow face was unshaven, and his eyes were rimmed by round steel spectacles that gave him an almost owlish expression. An air of dejection hung about him, as he loitered by the curb—not the imaginative depression of youth, soon to float off like a cloud before the sun of life, but rather the settled gloom of repeated failure, as if the conviction of final doom had already begun to penetrate deeply into his manhood.

He looked first up the avenue, then down, vacant of purpose, seeing nothing in the moving pageant. Finally, as if aroused by certain curious glances that the less hurried passers-by cast on him, he bestirred himself and moved on down the avenue, his shoulders stooped, his legs trailing wearily.

Thus he proceeded for several blocks, never raising his head, stopping mechanically at the street crossings, resuming his discouraged pace as the crowd moved on.

Once he plunged his hand into his coat pocket, to assure himself of some possession, and then withdrew it with a bitter smile for his unconscious anxiety.

When in this vacant promenade he had reached the lower part of the avenue, where the crowd was less dense, and less gay and rich in appearance, he lifted his head and looked musingly into the misty space before him.

“Well,” he muttered, with tightening lips, “it’s only one more throw-down. I ought to be used to ’em by now!”

Nevertheless, his face relapsed into its melancholy expression as he turned into one of the side streets with the unconscious precision of the animal following a beaten path to its hole.

He crossed several of the shabbier commercial avenues, which were crowded with traffic and blocked by men and women returning from the day’s work. Compared with these tired laborers, he seemed to have a large leisure—the freedom of absolute poverty. His thoughts had turned to supper. Should he buy a roll and a piece of pie at the bakery on the next corner, or—mad venture!—dissipate his last resources at the saloon opposite, where the Italian wife of the Irish proprietor offered appetizing nourishment for a quarter?

Meditating upon this important decision, the young man entered his own block. At one end the elevated trains rattled; at the other, heavy drays lumbered past in an unbroken file on their way to the ferries; but between the two there was a strip of quiet, where the dingy old houses were withdrawn from the street, and in front of them a few dusty shrubs struggled for life in the bare plots of earth.

In the middle of this block there was an unusually animated scene. A group of children had huddled together about some object of interest. A horse must have fallen on the pavement, the young man thought dully, or there was a fight, or a policeman had made a capture.

He hurried his lagging steps, moved by a boyish curiosity. As he drew nearer, he perceived that the circle was too small to contain a horse or a good scrap. The center of interest must be some unfortunate human being. He shouldered his way through the crowd.

“What’s up?” he asked of a small boy.

“A drunk,” was the laconic reply.

Looking over the heads of the boys, the young man could see the figure of a stoutish, well-dressed man lying prone on the pavement. His black coat was spattered with mud, his gray hair rumpled. His eyes were closed, and through the open lips his tongue protruded.

“Say, he’s bad!” the boy observed knowingly. “Just look at him!”

A convulsion shook the prostrate figure. The face began to twitch, and one arm waved violently, beating the air. One or two more mature passers-by who had been attracted by the disturbance drew off, with the selfish city excuse that the proper authorities would come in time and attend to the nuisance. Not so the idle young man.

“He isn’t drunk!” he exclaimed, pushing his way into the circle and stooping over the figure. He had seen too many plain “drunks” in his newspaper days to be deceived in the symptoms.

“There he goes again!” the boys shouted.

“He has some sort of fit. Here, one of you give me a hand, and we’ll get him off the street!”

The boys readily helped the young man to drag the prostrate figure to the nearest steps, and one of them ran to the corner after a policeman. When the officer arrived, the young man, who had steadied the stranger through another convulsion, said:

“You’ll have to call an ambulance. We’d better carry him somewhere—can’t let him lie here in the street like a dog. We can take him to my room.”

He motioned toward the next house, and with the officer’s assistance carried the sick man into the rear room on the first floor, which he unlocked. Then the policeman drove the curious boys out of the house and went off to summon the ambulance. Left alone, the young man dipped a towel in his water-pitcher, wet the sick man’s brow, then wiped his face and cleaned the foam and dirt from his beard and lips.

The stranger, lying with half-closed eyes, looked to be rather more than sixty years of age. Judging from the quality of his clothes, and from his smooth hands, he was a well-to-do business man. Presently his eyelids began to twitch, then the whole face; the right leg shot out and beat the air; then the right arm began to wave, and foam oozed from his lips.

“I wish they’d hurry that ambulance!” the young man thought, as he wiped the sick man’s face again with the damp towel. “He won’t last long, at this rate!”

This convulsion gradually passed off as the others had, and the stranger lay once more as if dead, his eyes almost wholly closed. The young man went to the door and listened

nervously, then returned to the prostrate form, unbuttoned the coat, and felt for the heart. Immediately the sick man opened his eyes, and, looking directly into the eyes of the man bending over him, tried to raise his hand, as if he would protect himself from a blow.

“It’s all right!” the young man said reassuringly. “I was just feeling for your heart, friend.”

The sick man’s lips twitched desperately; and finally, in the faintest whisper, he managed to stammer:

“Wh-who are you?”

“One Edgar Brainard,” the young man replied promptly. “Let me unfasten this vest and make you more comfortable.”

“N-n-no!” the sick man gasped suspiciously.

He managed to clutch Brainard’s wrist with his wavering right hand; his left lay quite powerless by his side. His eyes closed again, but the lips moved silently, as if he were trying to frame sounds.

“He’s going this time, sure!”

The young man slipped his wrist from the feeble grasp, inserted a pillow under the sick man’s head, and sat back to wait.

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It was very still in that back room. No step sounded in the hall, and the noise from the street came muffled. In the stillness, the sick man’s desperate efforts to breathe filled the little room with painful sounds. Brainard felt the stifling

approach of death, and opened the window wide to get what air would come in from the small court outside.

He studied the figure on the lounge more closely. The thick, red under lip curled over the roots of the gray beard. A short, thick nose gave the face a look of strong will, even of obstinacy. There was a foreign expression to the features that might indicate German descent.

On the third finger of his right hand, the sick man wore an old, plain gold ring, which had sunk deep into the flesh. From the inside pocket of his short coat bulged a thick wallet, over which his right hand rested, as if to guard precious possessions.

“He thought I was going to rob him!” Brainard observed. “Expect he’s been up against it already—and that’s what’s the trouble.”

It was quite dark. The young man lighted a gas-jet, then went again to the door. As he stood there, listening, he felt the old man’s eyes on him, and turned to look at him. The eyes, now wide open, held him, asking what the lips refused to utter.

Brainard went back to his patient and leaned over to catch the flutter from the moving lips. At last, as if with great exertion, the murmur came:

“Wh-wh-what are you go-going to do—to do—with me?”

In spite of the faintness of the whisper, it was the voice of one accustomed to being answered.

“I’ve sent an officer for an ambulance,” Brainard replied. “It ought to be here before now, I should think. They’ll take you to some hospital and fix you up,” he added encouragingly.

The lips twitched into a semblance of a smile, then mumbled:

“No—not—th-this time.”

“What’s the matter—accident?” Brainard asked.

The sick man did not attempt to reply, as if he considered the question of trifling importance. Instead, his eyes studied the young man’s face intently. Evidently his brain was clearing from the shock, whatever had caused it, and he was revolving some purpose. Soon the lips began to move once more, and Brainard bent close to catch the faint sounds.

“Wh-wh-what’s your bus-bus-i-ness?”

“Oh, I’ve had lots of businesses,” the young man replied carelessly. “Been on a newspaper, in the ad business, real estate, and so on.” He added after a moment, with a little ironical laugh, “Just now I’m in the literary business—a dramatist.”

The sick man looked puzzled, and frowned, as if disappointed. Perhaps his cloudy brain could not assort this information with his purpose. Presently his brow contracted, his face twitched violently, the right leg shot out.

“I say! It’s too bad,” the young man exclaimed sympathetically. “I wish I knew what to do for you. Where can that ambulance be?” He laid one hand on the sick man’s hot brow, and held his arm with the other. “Easy now!” he exclaimed, as the right arm began whirling. “There! Steady! It’s going off.”

Instead of closing his eyes, as he had done after the previous attacks, and relapsing into coma, the sick man made an immediate effort to speak.

“Co-come here,” he articulated faintly. “Important, very important.”

He groped feebly for his inner pocket.

“You want me to take out this bundle?” Brainard asked, laying his hand on the bulky wallet.

The man made an affirmative sign, and kept his eyes steadily on Brainard while the latter gently extracted the pocketbook.

“You—you will do something for me?” the stranger said more distinctly than he had hitherto spoken, as if urgency were clearing his mind. “You can—you can start to-night?”

“I’m not very busy,” the young man said, with a laugh. “I guess I could start for Hong-Kong on a few minutes’ notice.”

“Not Hong-Kong,” the old man labored forth literally. “You’re honest?”

It was said in a tone of self-conviction rather than of question.

“Oh, I guess so,” the young man answered lightly. “At least, what’s called honest—never had a chance to steal anything worth taking!” He added more seriously, to quiet the sick man, who seemed to be laboring under excitement, “Tell me what you want done, and I’ll do my best to put it through for you.”

The sick man’s eyes expressed relief, and then his brow contracted, as if he were summoning all his powers in a final effort to make a clogged brain do his urgent will.

“Lis-lis-listen,” he murmured. “No—no, write—write it down,” he went on, as Brainard leaned forward.

Brainard looked about his bare room for paper, but in vain. He felt in his pockets for a stray envelope, then drew

from his overcoat a roll of manuscript. He glanced at it dubiously for a moment, then tore off the last sheet, which had on one side a few lines of typewriting. With a gesture of indifference, he turned to the sick man and prepared to take his message.

"All ready," he remarked. "I can take it in shorthand, if you want."

"Sev-en, thir-ty-one, and four. Sev-en, thir-tyone, and four. Sev-en, thir-ty-one, and four," he repeated almost briskly.

Brainard looked at him inquiringly, and the stranger whispered the explanation: "Combi-na-tion pri-vate safe—understand?" Brainard nodded.

"Where?"

"Office—San Francisco."

The young man whistled.

"That's a good ways off! What do you want me to do there?"

"Take *everything*."

"What shall I do with the stuff? Bring it here to New York?" the young man inquired, with growing curiosity.

The sick man's blue eyes stared at him steadily, with a look of full intelligence.

"I shall be dead then," he mumbled.

"Oh, I hope not!" Brainard remarked.

But with unflinching eyes, the sick man continued:

"You must have—pow-er—pow-er of attorney."

He brought the words out with difficulty, not wasting his strength by discussing his chances of recovery. He was

evidently growing weaker, and Brainard had to bend close to his lips in order to catch the faint whisper, “Take it down!”

And with his face beginning to twitch, and the convulsive tremors running over his body, the sick man summoned all his will and managed to dictate a power of attorney in legal terms, as if he were familiar with the formula. When he had finished, his eyes closed, and his lips remained open. Brainard dropped his paper and felt for the sick man’s heart. It was still beating faintly.

After a few moments, the eyes opened mistily, and again the man made an effort to collect himself for another effort.

“What shall I do with the stuff?” Brainard inquired.

“Ge-get it out of the country. Take it to—to Ber-Ber-Ber—”

“Bermuda?” Brainard suggested.

“Ber*lin*!” the sick man corrected with a frown. As if to impress his messenger with the seriousness of his work, he added, “If you don’t get away, they’ll—kill you.”

“Oh!” Brainard exclaimed, impressed.

The blue eyes examined the young man steadily, as if they would test his metal. Then, satisfied, the man murmured:

“Quick—must—sign—quick! Now!” he concluded, as his face began to twitch.

Brainard handed him a pen, and held his right arm to steady him while he scrawled his name—“H. Krutzmacht.” The sick man traced the letters slowly, patiently, persisting until he had dashed a heavy line across the t’s and another beneath the name; then he dropped the pen and closed his eyes.

When another moment of control came to him, he whispered uneasily:

“Witness? Must have witness.”

“We’ll find some one—don’t worry,” the young man replied lightly. “The ambulance man, when he comes, if he ever does come!”

Brainard did not yet take very seriously the idea of starting that night for San Francisco to rifle a safe.

“Mo-mo-money,” the voice began, and the eyes wandered to the fat wallet which Brainard had deposited on the table.

Brainard lifted the wallet.

“Plen-plen-plenty of mon-money!”

“I understand,” the young man replied. “There’s enough cash for the journey in here.”

As he laid the wallet down, there was the welcome sound of feet in the passage outside, and with an exclamation of relief the young man flung open the door. The ambulance surgeon was there with an assistant and a stretcher. With a muttered explanation for his delay, the doctor went at once to the sick man and examined him, while Brainard told what he knew of his strange guest.

“Tries to talk all the time—must be something on his mind!” he said, as another convulsion seized the sick man. “Been doped, I should say.”

“Looks like brain trouble, sure,” the ambulance surgeon remarked, watching the stranger closely. “He can’t last long that way. Well, we’d better hustle him to the hospital as soon as we can.”

They had the sick man on the stretcher before he had opened his eyes from his last attack. As they lifted him, he mumbled excitedly, and Brainard, listening close to his lips, thought he understood what was troubling him.

“He wants that paper witnessed,” he explained. “I forgot—it’s something he dictated to me.”

“Well, hurry up about it,” the surgeon replied carelessly, willing to humor the sick man. “Here!”

Brainard dipped his pen in the ink-bottle and handed it to the surgeon, who lightly dashed down his signature at the bottom of the sheet, without reading it.

“Now are we ready?” the doctor demanded impatiently.

But the blue eyes arrested Brainard, and the young man, stooping over the stretcher, caught a faint whisper:

“You’ll g-g-go?”

“Sure!”

“Gi-gi-give it all to—”

Krutzmacht struggled hard to pronounce a name, but he could not utter the word.

“It’s no use!” the doctor exclaimed. “Tell him to wait until he’s better.”

But Brainard, moved by the sick man’s intense look of mental distress, raised his hand to the doctor and listened. At last the whispered syllable reached his ear:

“M-M-Mel—”

“I tell you it’s no use!” the ambulance doctor repeated irritably. “They’ll find out at the hospital what he wants done. Come on!”

As they bore the stretcher through the narrow door, the agonized expression gave way, and the sick man articulated

more distinctly:

“Mel-Melo—”

“Melo-melodrama!” Brainard said. “It’s all right, my friend. Don’t worry—I’ll fix it up for you!”

With astonishing distinctness came back the one word:

“Melody!”

“All right—Melody!”

The sick man would have said more, but the ambulance men bore him swiftly to the waiting vehicle and shoved him in.

“Will you come along?” the doctor asked.

“No. I’ll look in some time to-morrow, probably—St. Joseph’s, isn’t it?”

The sick man’s eyes still rested on Brainard, when the latter poked his head into the dark ambulance. They seemed to glow with a full intelligence, and also with a command, as if they said:

“Do just what I’ve told you to do!”

“He knows what he wants, even if he can’t say it,” Brainard muttered to himself as the ambulance moved off. “Poor old boy!”

III

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When Brainard opened the door of his room, he heard the rustle of papers on the floor, blown about by the draft from the window. He lighted his lamp and picked up the loose sheets, which were the typewritten leaves of his last play—the one that he had finally got back that very afternoon from a famous actor-manager, without even the

usual note of polite regret from the secretary. The absence of that familiar note had dejected him especially.

He shoved the rejected play into his table drawer indifferently, thinking of the sick man's last urgent look, and of the terrible effort he had made to articulate his final words. What did he mean by "Melody"? Perhaps the old fellow was really out of his head, and all the rest about his valuable papers in some private safe at the other end of the continent was mythical—the fancy of an unhinged mind.

But the memory of the old man's face—of those keen blue eyes—made Brainard reject such a commonplace solution of the puzzle. The sick man had been in this room with him for a full half-hour, and the place still seemed filled with his positive, commanding personality.

No! The man who signed "H. Krutzmacht" to the sheet lying on the table before him was no vague lunatic. Though he might be at the extremity of life, almost unable to articulate, nevertheless his purpose was clear to himself, and his will was as strong as ever.

Brainard was hungry. Snatching up his old cap, he went out to the neighboring avenue, and, without hesitation, entered the most expensive restaurant in sight—a resort he frequented only on rare days of opulence. Instead of the oyster-stew and doughnuts which had latterly been his luxurious limit, he ordered a good dinner, as if he had earned it, and devoured the food without the usual qualms of prudence.

His spirits had undergone a marvelous change from the timid, fearful state in which he had been that afternoon. He wondered at his own confidence. Complacently selecting a

good cigar at the cashier's desk, he strolled back to his room, his body peacefully engaged in the unaccustomed task of digesting a full meal.

When he entered his dreary little room, his eye fell upon the wallet, which lay under the table where he had dropped it. What was he going to do with that—with this whole Krutzmacht business? Why, simply nothing at all. In the morning, he would go around to St. Joseph's and see how the sick man was. If Krutzmacht recovered, there was nothing to do but to return his pocketbook. But if he got worse, or was dead already? Well, Brainard could turn the wallet over to the hospital people or the coroner, and that would end the affair for him.

With this prudent resolution he took his play from the drawer, and looked it over. His interest in the thing had quite gone, and the sting of its rejection no longer smarted. Very likely it was as bad as the managers to whom he had submitted it seemed to think. He tied the manuscript together with a piece of twine, and shoved it back into the drawer.

One sheet—that last one on which he had taken down Krutzmacht's dictation—was missing from this roll. That sheet contained his final curtain. He looked at the lines, and smiled as he read. The Lady Violet was parting from her lover, with the following dialogue:

> VIOLET.—Oh, Alexander!
> ALEXANDER.—Violet!
> VIOLET.—What will you do, dearest?
> ALEXANDER.—I go on my great adventure!
> VIOLET.—Your great adventure?

ALEXANDER.—Life!

He turned the sheet over. On the other side were the few shorthand notes he had hastily jotted down—the figures of the safe combination and the power of attorney with its legal phrases, the latter written out again below in long hand. At the bottom of the sheet, just beneath Alexander's heroic announcement to Violet, were the three signatures. The old man's blunt name dominated the others—a firm, black scrawl with a couple of vicious dashes.

The powerful will of the sick man, working in what might be the agony of death, spoke in that signature. Brainard felt that there was something mysterious in it. The name spoke to him as the eyes had spoken to him, personally. Criminal? Possibly. Dramatic? Oh, surely! He felt instinctively that there was more drama on this side of the sheet than on the other.

He folded the paper carefully and put it in his inner pocket. It would be an interesting souvenir.

As the young man sat and smoked in his little room, the comfort of his abundant meal penetrating his person, he felt more and more the drama of actual life touching him, calling to him to take a hand in it. He reached unconsciously for the fat wallet, and opened it. There were some legal papers—contracts and leases and agreements, at which Brainard merely glanced.

He felt into the inner recesses of the old-fashioned wallet, and from one pocket extracted a thick sheaf of bank-notes. They were in large denominations—hundreds, fifties, and twenties. Brainard smoothed out the bills on his knee

and carefully counted them; in all there was rather more than four thousand dollars.

“The old boy traveled with quite a wad!” he muttered, fingering the crisp bills.

The touch of the money gave a curious electric thrill to his thoughts. Here was an evidence of reality that made the old man’s mumbled words and intense effort assume a reasonable shape. When Krutzmacht let Brainard take possession of this wallet, he knew what it contained. He trusted to a stranger in his desperate need.

Still feeling around in the folds of the wallet, Brainard extracted a railroad-ticket of voluminous length for San Francisco.

“He was on his way to the train!” Brainard exclaimed, and added unconsciously, “when they got him and did him up!”

Already his busy mind had accepted the hypothesis of enemies and foul play rather than that of disease.

With the railroad-ticket and the money in his hand, he stood staring before him, still debating the matter. Something seemed to rise within him, some determination—a spirit of daring which he had not felt for years.

Mechanically he put the papers and bank-notes back into the wallet, and shoved it into his pocket. Then he looked at his watch. It was nearly ten o’clock. If he was to leave to-night, as the old man had ordered, there was no more time to lose.

Without further hesitation, he threw a few articles into an old bag and started for the ferry. On the way he stopped to telephone the hospital. After a delay which made him

impatient, he learned that the sick man was resting quietly —“still unconscious,” the nurse said. So he had not spoken again.

When Brainard reached the station in Jersey City, having a few moments to spare, he wrote a brief note to the hospital authorities, saying that he was leaving the city on business, and would call on his return in a week or ten days. He inclosed several bank-notes, requesting that the sick man should have every comfort. Having dropped his letter into the box he stepped into the Chicago sleeper. The exhilarating beat of his heart told him that he had done well.

The disdainful look that the porter had given him when he took charge of his shabby bag, as well as the curious glances of his fellow passengers, the next morning, made Brainard conscious of his eccentric appearance. But all that he could do, for the present, to improve his neglected person, was to have himself shaved and his hair cut. He was obliged to keep his rain-coat on, although the car was hot, in order to cover up a large hole in his trousers—the only pair he possessed.

He resolved to employ the few hours in Chicago, between trains, in making himself as decent as possible. Meanwhile he ate three good meals and furtively watched his more prosperous fellow travelers.

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It was a very different person, in appearance, who seated himself on the observation platform of the Overland Limited that evening. Only the round steel spectacles were left as a

memento of Brainard’s former condition. He had had no scruples in helping himself freely from the store of bills in the wallet. What lay before him to do for the sick man would probably be difficult, in any event, and it would be foolish to handicap himself by presenting a suspicious appearance at Krutzmacht’s office. He would play his part properly dressed.

So, when he glanced into the little mirror beside his berth, he smiled in satisfaction at the clean-shaven, neatly dressed, alert young man who looked back at him. With his ragged habiliments he seemed also to have discarded that settled look of failure, and not a few of his years. Without unduly flattering himself, he felt that he might easily be taken for one of the energetic young brokers or lawyers whom he observed on the train.

Removing his new hat, and stretching his well-shod feet on the cushioned seat opposite, he took up the evening newspapers and glanced through them for some telegraphic item about the fate of his mysterious employer. If Krutzmacht were a well-known figure, as he supposed likely, reporters must doubtless have discovered him before this and proclaimed his predicament to the world. But Brainard could find no reference to any such person in the newspapers, and with a sigh of relief he let them slip from his lap.

His task would be easier, if it could be accomplished while the sick man lay undiscovered in the hospital. If he should already be dead, when he arrived, there would be an end to Brainard’s job altogether; and that would have been a keen disappointment to the young man.

His job? A hundred times his mind reverted to this perplexing consideration—what, exactly, was he to do when he had reached the end of his long journey?

First, he would find where Krutzmacht's offices were, and then? He had been told to make off with whatever he might find in the private safe. For this purpose he had provided himself, in Chicago, with a bulky leather valise, in which his discarded raiment was now reposing. It all sounded like an expedition in high piracy, but he quieted any scruples with the resolve that he would make off merely to New York, if Krutzmacht still lived, instead of Berlin, and remain there to await further developments.

So, as the Overland Limited rushed across the prairie states, Brainard took counsel with himself, mentally sketching out his every move from the moment when he should step from the train. The readiness with which his mind reached out to this new situation surprised himself; he was already becoming in some way a new person.

The journey itself was a revelation to him and an education. With his Broadway prejudice that the United States stopped somewhere just above the Bronx and behind the Jersey hills, he was astonished to find so much habitable country beyond these horizons and so many people in it who did not seem to depend upon New York City for their livelihood or happiness. At first he was so much preoccupied with his errand and himself in his surprising new rôle that he paid little attention to the scenes spread before his eyes. Chicago impressed him only as a dirtier and more provincial New York. But the next morning when he awoke at Omaha he began to realize that America was more than a strip of

land along the Atlantic seaboard, and by the time the train had left Ogden his respect for his fatherland had immensely increased.

He noticed also that the character of the people on the train was gradually changing. Large, rough-looking men, with tanned faces not too carefully shaved, and sometimes with a queer assortment of jewelry and patent leather shoes took the places of the pallid, smooth shaven business men that had been his companions from Jersey City to Chicago. There were also a number of women traveling alone, large, competent, and not overrefined. Brainard, whose ideas of Americans other than the types to be seen on the streets of New York had been drawn from the travestied figures of the stage,—the miner and the cowboy with flapping sombrero and chaps,—watched these new specimens of his fellow countrymen with keen interest. In spite of their rather uncouth speech and their familiarity with the negro porters, they were attractive. They had a vigorous air about them, indicating that they came from a big country, with big ways of doing things in it, and a broad outlook over wide horizons. The would-be dramatist began to perceive that the world was not peopled wholly by the types that the American stage had made familiar to him.

A little way beyond Ogden the train rolled out into the bright blue inland sea of the Great Salt Lake and trundled on for mile after mile in the midst of the water on a narrow strip of rocky roadbed. Brainard had read in the newspapers of this famous “Lucin cut-off” where in an effort to save a detour of a few miles around the shore of the lake millions of tons of “fill” had been dumped into an apparently

bottomless hole. The pluck and the energy of that road builder who had conceived this work and kept at it month after month, dumping trainloads of rock into a great lake had not specially thrilled him when he read of it. But now the imagination and the courage of the little man who did this sort of thing thrilled him. Harriman, the bold doer of this and greater things, was of course a popular Wall Street hero to the New Yorker,—one of those legendary creatures who were supposed to have their seat of power in the lofty cliffs of that narrow Via Dolorosa and somehow like the alchemists of old conjure great fortunes out of air, with the aid of the “tape.” That was the way in which this young man had always thought of Harriman,—“the wizard of railroad finance.”

But now as he glided smoothly over the solid roadbed that ran straight westward into the remote distance with the salt waves almost lapping the tracks and leaving a white crust from their spume, with lofty mountains looming to south and to north,—as he stood on the rear platform of the heavy steel train observing this marvelous panorama,—a totally new conception of the renowned financier came to him. This was not done by watching the tape! It demanded will and force and imagination and faith—spiritual qualities in a man—to do this. The young traveler mentally did homage to the character that had created the wonderful highway over which for a day and a half he had been comfortably borne in luxurious ease.

As he watched the blue mountains about Ogden fade into the haze, it seemed that New York, his life there, and all his conventional conceptions of the little world in which he had

vainly struggled for existence also receded and grew smaller, less real. The train in its westward flight was bearing him forward into a new world, within as well as without! As the track began to wind up again to higher levels before taking its next great leap over the Sierras, Brainard went forward to the smoking room, his usual post of observation, where he sat through long, meditative hours, listening to the talk about him and gazing at the fleeting landscape. Whatever else it might mean,—this jaunt across the continent on a stranger's errand,—it was bringing him a rich cargo of new ideas.

Of all his fellow travelers the man who happened to occupy the drawing-room in the car where Brainard had his section aroused his curiosity especially. He was one of those well-dressed, alert young business men who had made Brainard conscious of his shabby and inappropriate appearance when he first started on his journey. The door of his room had been closed all the way to Chicago, and Brainard had seen nothing of the man. But since the train left Omaha the door to the drawing-room had been open, and from his section Brainard observed its occupant diligently reading a book. What aroused his attention and interested him in the stranger more than his pleasant appearance of frank good humor had been the sort of book he had chosen for this long journey. It was bound like a "best seller" in a gaudy red cloth, and a picture of a starry-eyed maiden with floating hair adorned the cover. But it was labeled in unmistakable black letters *Paradise Lost*. Brainard, who had made a painful and superficial acquaintance in his youth with this poetic masterpiece,

decided that the smartly dressed young American could not be devoting the journey to Milton's epic. It must be that some writer of best sellers had cribbed the great poet's title and fitted it to a less strenuous tale of love and starry-eyed maidens. This theory, however, broke down before the fact that from time to time the young man consulted a small black book that was indubitably a dictionary, and Brainard taking advantage of a moment when the traveler had left his room assured himself that the book was really a copy of Milton's poem set within profane modern covers. Just why this young man should spend his hours on the train reading the puritan epic of heaven and hell puzzled Brainard and whetted his curiosity to know what sort of man the stranger was.

Earlier this morning as the train was climbing down from the Rockies into Utah, an opportunity had come to speak to his fellow traveler. The train had pulled up somewhere before a desolate station whose architect had tried to make a Queen Anne cottage that looked singularly out of place in the bare, wild landscape. While the engine took its long drink, the passengers stretched their legs and enjoyed the crisp mountain air. The stranger came to the vestibule, yawned, and read the name of the station:

"Palisade, is it? . . . The last time I was over this way it looked more lively than this."

"What was happening?" Brainard inquired.

"There was a bunch of miners somewheres in Utah making trouble, on a strike. The company had brought in a couple of carloads of greasers, and the miners were down here shooting up the party."

He got down to the ground, yawned again, and opened a gold cigarette case which he offered to Brainard,—“Have one?”

Brainard took one of the monogrammed cigarettes, and they sauntered together in the sunlight.

“Yes, sir,” his new acquaintance continued, “they sure did have a lively time. The greasers were over there on the siding in their cars, and they just let go at ’em with their guns. Now and then they’d hit the station, for fun, you know. I guess maybe you can see the holes yet.”

The young man pointed up at some scars among the shingles and a broken window in the upper story. “Sure enough they left their marks!”

“What did they do to ’em?” Brainard asked naïvely, as they returned to the car when the conductor droned “all aboard.”

“Who?” the stranger asked. “The police?”

He waved a hand at the desolate stretch of sage brush backed by grim mountains and laughed. As the train moved off, he added, “Lord, I don’t know! They were still popping when my train pulled out. There weren’t many greasers fit to work in the mines. What was left after the reception must have walked home—a long ways.”

Brainard was somewhat impressed with the possibilities of a country that could offer such a scrap, *en passant*, so to speak. The stranger invited him into his room and gave him another cigarette.

“From New York?” he inquired. “Not a bad sort of place,” he observed tolerantly. “Ever been on the Coast? You’ve something to see.”

“How is San Francisco since the earthquake?” Brainard inquired, thinking to come cautiously and guardedly to the topic of Krutzmacht.

“It’s all there and more than ever,” the stranger cheerily responded. “You won’t find any large cracks,” he jested.

“It’s queer that you all went straight back to the same ground and built over again.”

“Why? It was home, wasn’t it? Folks always have a feeling for the place they’ve lived in, even if it has disadvantages. It’s only human!”

Brainard reflected that this was a sentimental point of view he should hardly have expected from the practical sort of man opposite him. In the course of their conversation Brainard inquired about the graft prosecution then in full swing, which had attracted the notice even of eastern papers on account of the highly melodramatic flavor that a picturesque prosecuting attorney had given to the proceedings. The man from San Francisco readily gave his point of view, which was unfavorable to the virtuous citizens engaged in the task of civic purification. When Brainard asked about the celebrated prosecuting attorney, the stranger looked at him for the first time suspiciously, and said coldly:

“Well, as that gentleman has just been parading up and down the state saying he was going to put me in state prison for the better part of my remaining years, I can’t say I have a high opinion of him.”

“Indeed!” Brainard emitted feebly. The stranger was more mysterious than ever. He did not seem in the least like a candidate for state prison.