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ESTABLISHED 1855.

THE FORTUNE HUNTER.

Novelized by Louis Joseph Vance
From the Play of the Same Name
by Winchell Smith

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CHAPTER XXI.

"You never guessed that, did you?" "No," she breathed brokenly. "No, Nat, I—"

"Well, it's the truth, and— He rose and moved away. "But I can't tell you just now—not now."

"No, not now, Nat? Betty, too, got up. "I think I'd better go home and see father. I mustn't forget!"

She faltered, half blinded by the mist of the happiness before her eyes.

"No—wait!" She stopped to find his gaze full upon her. For the first time

she comprehended that she had not understood—that, worst of all, she had misunderstood. "What tell you?"

he blurted desperately. "I must—"

Instinctively she moved a step toward him. He hung his head.

"Tonight, Betty—this evening, just a little while ago, I became engaged to Josie Lockwood."

She stood as if petrified throughout a wait that seemed to both interminable.

"Oh, Nat, dear," she said, "I'm so glad for you. I wish you all the happiness in the world. I— Good night!"

The hand slipped out of Nat's. He did not move, but waited there with his empty palm outstretched, despair in his eyes, and hope in his heart, while she walked quietly from the store.

After some time he awoke to the knowledge that she was gone.

"Blithering fool!" he growled. "Why didn't I know I loved her, like this?"

He took a turn to and fro, distracted. "And now I've made a mess of everything. Good Lord, what can I do? I must do something or go mad!"

He swung round behind the soda fountain counter and seized a bottle. "I know what! The rules are off! I can have a drink! I can have two drinks! I can have a million drinks if I want 'em!"

Pouring a generous dose of raw whisky into the glass, he lifted it to his lips and threw back his head. But the heavy bouquet of the liquor was stifling in his nostrils, and the first mouthful of it almost choked him.

In a fury he flung the glass from him so that it crashed and splintered upon the floor. "Great heavens," he cried, "I don't like the stuff any more! But—"

his gaze fell upon the cigar case—"I can have a smoke. That'll help some!"

With feverish haste he snatched a cigar from the nearest box, gnawed off one end and, thrusting the other into the alcohol lighter, puffed vigorously. But to his renovated palate the potent fumes of the tobacco were no less repugnant than the whisky had been. Half strangled, he plucked the cigar from his mouth and stamped on it.

"Oh," he cried wildly, "I'll be—I'll be damned!"

He paused, staring vacantly at nothing. "And even that I've forgotten to do!"

"God help me, I've forgotten to do!"

To him in this overwrought state came Tracey, lumbering cheerfully in, materials and essences used for the manufacture of perfumes and pomades.

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"Go to blazes with your supper! Keep away from me! Don't talk to me! I don't want anything to do with you, do you understand? You and your confounded systems have got me into all this!"

He caught sight of his hat abruptly, ceased talking, grabbed the hat and jammed it on his head, muttering, then started on a run for the door.

"But what's the matter?" demanded Kellogg, thunderstruck. "Here! Hold on! Where are you going?"

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