BREWSTER'S MILLIONS

BY

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CHAPTER I

A BIRTHDAY DINNER

"The Little Sons of the Rich" were gathered about the long table in Pettingill's studio. There were nine of them present, besides Brewster. They were all young, more or less enterprising, hopeful, and reasonably sure of better things to come. Most of them bore names that meant something in the story of New York. Indeed, one of them had remarked, "A man is known by the street that's named after him," and as he was a new member, they called him "Subway."

The most popular man in the company was young "Monty" Brewster. He was tall and straight and smooth-shaven. People called him "clean-looking." Older women were interested in him because his father and mother had made a romantic runaway match, which was the talk of the town in the seventies, and had never been forgiven. Worldly women were interested in him because he was the only grandson of Edwin Peter Brewster, who was many times a millionaire, and Monty was fairly certain to be his heir—barring an absent-minded gift to charity. Younger women were interested for a much more obvious and simple reason: they liked him. Men also took to Monty because he was a good sportsman, a man among men, because he had a decent respect for himself and no great aversion to work.

His father and mother had both died while he was still a child, and, as if to make up for his long relentlessness, the grandfather had taken the boy to his own house and had cared for him with what he called affection. After college and some months on the continent, however, Monty had preferred to be independent. Old Mr. Brewster had found him a place in the bank, but beyond this and occasional dinners, Monty asked for and received no favors. It was a question of work, and hard work, and small pay. He lived on his salary because he had to, but he did not resent his grandfather's attitude. He was better satisfied to spend his "weakly salary," as he called it, in his own way than to earn more by dining seven nights a week with an old man who had forgotten he was ever young. It was less wearing, he said.

Among the "Little Sons of the Rich," birthdays were always occasions for feasting. The table was covered with dishes sent up from the French

restaurant in the basement. The chairs were pushed back, cigarettes were lighted, men had their knees crossed. Then Pettingill got up.

"Gentlemen," he began, "we are here to celebrate the twenty-fifth birthday of Mr. Montgomery Brewster. I ask you all to join me in drinking to his long life and happiness."

"No heel taps!" some one shouted. "Brewster! Brewster!" all called at once.

"For he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow!"

The sudden ringing of an electric bell cut off this flow of sentiment, and so unusual was the interruption that the ten members straightened up as if jerked into position by a string.

"The police!" some one suggested. All faces were turned toward the door. A waiter stood there, uncertain whether to turn the knob or push the bolt.

"Damned nuisance!" said Richard Van Winkle. "I want to hear Brewster's speech."

"Speech! Speech!" echoed everywhere. Men settled into their places.

"Mr. Montgomery Brewster," Pettingill introduced.

Again the bell rang—long and loud.

"Reinforcements. I'll bet there's a patrol in the street," remarked Oliver Harrison.

"If it's only the police, let them in," said Pettingill. "I thought it was a creditor."

The waiter opened the door.

"Some one to see Mr. Brewster, sir," he announced.

"Is she pretty, waiter?" called McCloud.

"He says he is Ellis, from your grandfather's, sir!"

"My compliments to Ellis, and ask him to inform my grandfather that it's after banking hours. I'll see him in the morning," said Mr. Brewster, who had reddened under the jests of his companions.

"Grandpa doesn't want his Monty to stay out after dark," chuckled Subway Smith.

"It was most thoughtful of the old gentleman to have the man call for you with the perambulator," shouted Pettingill above the laughter. "Tell him you've already had your bottle," added McCloud.

"Waiter, tell Ellis I'm too busy to be seen," commanded Brewster, and as Ellis went down in the elevator a roar followed him.

"Now, for Brewster's speech!—Brewster!"

Monty rose.

"Gentlemen, you seem to have forgotten for the moment that I am twenty-five years old this day, and that your remarks have been childish and wholly unbecoming the dignity of my age. That I have arrived at a period of discretion is evident from my choice of friends; that I am entitled to your respect is evident from my grandfather's notorious wealth. You have done me the honor to drink my health and to reassure me as to the inoffensiveness of approaching senility. Now I ask you all to rise and drink to 'The Little Sons of the Rich.' May the Lord love us!"

An hour later "Rip" Van Winkle and Subway Smith were singing "Tell Me, Pretty Maiden," to the uncertain accompaniment of Pettingill's violin, when the electric bell again disturbed the company.

"For Heaven's sake!" shouted Harrison, who had been singing "With All Thy Faults I Love Thee Still," to Pettingill's lay figure.

"Come home with me, grandson, come home with me now," suggested Subway Smith.

"Tell Ellis to go to Halifax," commanded Montgomery, and again Ellis took the elevator downward. His usually impassive face now wore a look of anxiety, and twice he started to return to the top floor, shaking his head dubiously. At last he climbed into a hansom and reluctantly left the revelers behind. He knew it was a birthday celebration, and it was only half-past twelve in the morning.

At three o'clock the elevator made another trip to the top floor and Ellis rushed over to the unfriendly doorbell. This time there was stubborn determination in his face. The singing ceased and a roar of laughter followed the hush of a moment or two.

"Come in!" called a hearty voice, and Ellis strode firmly into the studio.

"You are just in time for a 'night-cap,' Ellis," cried Harrison, rushing to the footman's side. Ellis, stolidly facing the young man, lifted his hand.

"No, thank you, sir," he said, respectfully. "Mr. Montgomery, if you'll excuse me for breaking in, I'd like to give you three messages I've brought here to-night."

"You're a faithful old chap," said Subway Smith, thickly. "Hanged if I'd do A.D.T. work till three A.M. for anybody."

"I came at ten, Mr. Montgomery, with a message from Mr. Brewster, wishing you many happy returns of the day, and with a check from him for one thousand dollars. Here's the check, sir. I'll give my messages in the order I received them, sir, if you please. At twelve-thirty o'clock, I came with a message from Dr. Gower, sir, who had been called in—"

"Called in?" gasped Montgomery, turning white.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Brewster had a sudden heart attack at half-past eleven, sir. The doctor sent word by me, sir, that he was at the point of death. My last message—"

"Good Lord!"

"This time I bring a message from Rawles, the butler, asking you to come to Mr. Brewster's house at once—if you can, sir—I mean, if you will, sir," Ellis interjected apologetically. Then, with his gaze directed steadily over the heads of the subdued "Sons," he added, impressively:

"Mr. Brewster is dead, sir."

CHAPTER II

SHADES OF ALADDIN

Montgomery Brewster no longer had "prospects." People could not now point him out with the remark that some day he would come into a million or two. He had "realized," as Oliver Harrison would have put it. Two days after his grandfather's funeral a final will and testament was read, and, as was expected, the old banker atoned for the hardships Robert Brewster and his wife had endured by bequeathing one million dollars to their son Montgomery. It was his without a restriction, without an admonition, without an incumbrance. There was not a suggestion as to how it should be handled by the heir. The business training the old man had given him was synonymous with conditions not expressed in the will. The dead man believed that he had drilled into the youth an unmistakable conception of what was expected of him in life; if he failed in these expectations the misfortune would be his alone to bear; a road had been carved out for him and behind him stretched a long line of guide-posts whose laconic instructions might be ignored but never forgotten. Edwin Peter Brewster evidently made his will with the sensible conviction that it was necessary for him to die before anybody else could possess his money, and that, once dead, it would be folly for him to worry over the way in which beneficiaries might choose to manage their own affairs.

The house in Fifth Avenue went to a sister, together with a million or two, and the residue of the estate found kindly disposed relatives who were willing to keep it from going to the Home for Friendless Fortunes. Old Mr. Brewster left his affairs in order. The will nominated Jerome Buskirk as executor, and he was instructed, in conclusion, to turn over to Montgomery Brewster, the day after the will was probated, securities to the amount of one million dollars, provided for in clause four of the instrument. And so it was that on the 26th of September young Mr. Brewster had an unconditional fortune thrust upon him, weighted only with the suggestion of crepe that clung to it.

Since his grandfather's death he had been staying at the gloomy old Brewster house in Fifth Avenue, paying but two or three hurried visits to the rooms at Mrs. Gray's, where he had made his home. The gloom of death still darkened the Fifth Avenue place, and there was a stillness, a gentle stealthiness about the house that made him long for more cheerful companionship. He wondered dimly if a fortune always carried the

suggestion of tube-roses. The richness and strangeness of it all hung about him unpleasantly. He had had no extravagant affection for the grim old dictator who was dead, yet his grandfather was a man and had commanded his respect. It seemed brutal to leave him out of the reckoning—to dance on the grave of the mentor who had treated him well. The attitude of the friends who clapped him on the back, of the newspapers which congratulated him, of the crowd that expected him to rejoice, repelled him. It seemed a tragic comedy, haunted by a severe dead face. He was haunted, too, by memories, and by a sharp regret for his own foolish thoughtlessness. Even the fortune itself weighed upon him at moments with a half-defined melancholy.

Yet the situation was not without its compensations. For several days when Ellis called him at seven, he would answer him and thank fortune that he was not required at the bank that morning. The luxury of another hour of sleep seemed the greatest perquisite of wealth. His morning mail amused him at first, for since the newspapers had published his prosperity to the world he was deluged with letters. Requests for public or private charity were abundant, but most of his correspondents were generous and thought only of his own good. For three days he was in a hopeless state of bewilderment. He was visited by reporters, photographers, and ingenious strangers who benevolently offered to invest his money in enterprises with certified futures. When he was not engaged in declining a gold mine in Colorado, worth five million dollars, marked down to four hundred and fifty, he was avoiding a guileless inventor who offered to sacrifice the secrets of a marvelous device for three hundred dollars, or denying the report that he had been tendered the presidency of the First National Bank.

Oliver Harrison stirred him out early one morning and, while the sleepy millionaire was rubbing his eyes and still dodging the bombshell that a dream anarchist had hurled from the pinnacle of a bedpost, urged him in excited, confidential tones to take time by the forelock and prepare for possible breach of promise suits. Brewster sat on the edge of the bed and listened to diabolical stories of how conscienceless females had fleeced innocent and even godly men of wealth. From the bathroom, between splashes, he retained Harrison by the year, month, day and hour, to stand between him and blackmail.

The directors of the bank met and adopted resolutions lamenting the death of their late president, passed the leadership on to the first vice-president and speedily adjourned. The question of admitting Monty to the directory was brought up and discussed, but it was left for Time to settle.

One of the directors was Col. Prentiss Drew, "the railroad magnate" of the newspapers. He had shown a fondness for young Mr. Brewster, and Monty had been a frequent visitor at his house. Colonel Drew called him "my dear boy," and Monty called him "a bully old chap," though not in his presence. But the existence of Miss Barbara Drew may have had something to do with the feeling between the two men.

As he left the directors' room, on the afternoon of the meeting, Colonel Drew came up to Monty, who had notified the officers of the bank that he was leaving.

"Ah, my dear boy," said the Colonel, shaking the young man's hand warmly, "now you have a chance to show what you can do. You have a fortune and, with judgment, you ought to be able to triple it. If I can help you in any way, come and see me."

Monty thanked him.

"You'll be bored to death by the raft of people who have ways to spend your money," continued the Colonel. "Don't listen to any of them. Take your time. You'll have a new chance to make money every day of your life, so go slowly. I'd have been rich years and years ago if I'd had sense enough to run away from promoters. They'll all try to get a whack at your money. Keep your eye open, Monty. The rich young man is always a tempting morsel." After a moment's reflection, he added, "Won't you come out and dine with us to-morrow night?"

CHAPTER III

MRS. AND MISS GRAY

Mrs. Gray lived in Fortieth Street. For years Montgomery Brewster had regarded her quiet, old-fashioned home as his own. The house had once been her grandfather's, and it was one of the pioneers in that part of the town. It was there she was born; in its quaint old parlor she was married; and all her girlhood, her brief wedded life, and her widowhood were connected with it. Mrs. Gray and Montgomery's mother had been schoolmates and playmates, and their friendship endured. When old Edwin Peter Brewster looked about for a place to house his orphaned grandson, Mrs. Gray begged him to let her care for the little fellow. He was three years older than her Margaret, and the children grew up as brother and sister. Mr. Brewster was generous in providing for the boy. While he was away at college, spending money in a manner that caused the old gentleman to marvel at his own liberality, Mrs. Gray was well paid for the unused but well-kept apartments, and there never was a murmur of complaint from Edwin Peter Brewster. He was hard, but he was not niggardly.

It had been something of a struggle for Mrs. Gray to make both ends meet. The property in Fortieth Street was her only possession. But little money had come to her at her husband's death, and an unfortunate speculation of his had swept away all that had fallen to her from her father, the late Judge Merriweather. For years she kept the old home unencumbered, teaching French and English until Margaret was well in her teens. The girl was sent to one of the good old boarding-schools on the Hudson and came out well prepared to help her mother in the battle to keep the wolf down and appearances up. Margaret was rich in friendships; and pride alone stood between her and the advantages they offered. Good-looking, bright, and cheerful, she knew no natural privations. With a heart as light and joyous as a May morning, she faced adversity as though it was a pleasure, and no one would have suspected that even for a moment her courage wavered.

Now that Brewster had come into his splendid fortune he could conceive no greater delight than to share it with them. To walk into the little drawing-room and serenely lay large sums before them as their own seemed such a natural proceeding that he refused to see an obstacle. But he knew it was there; the proffer of such a gift to Mrs. Gray would mean a wound to

the pride inherited from haughty generations of men sufficient unto themselves. There was a small but troublesome mortgage on the house, a matter of two or three thousand dollars, and Brewster tried to evolve a plan by which he could assume the burden without giving deep and lasting offense. A hundred wild designs had come to him, but they were quickly relegated to the growing heap of subterfuges and pretexts condemned by his tenderness for the pride of these two women who meant so much to him.

Leaving the bank, he hastened, by electric car, to Fortieth Street and Broadway, and then walked eagerly off into the street of the numeral. He had not yet come to the point where he felt like scorning the cars, even though a roll of banknotes was tucked snugly away in a pocket that seemed to swell with sudden affluence. Old Hendrick, faithful servitor through two generations, was sweeping the autumn leaves from the sidewalk when Montgomery came up to the house.

"Hello, Hendrick," was the young man's cheery greeting. "Nice lot of leaves you have there."

"So?" ebbed from Hendrick, who did not even so much as look up from his work. Hendrick was a human clam.

"Mrs. Gray in?"

A grunt that signified yes.

"You're as loquacious as ever, Hendrick."

A mere nod.

Brewster let himself in with his own latch key, threw his hat on a chair and unceremoniously bolted into the library. Margaret was seated near a window, a book in her lap. The first evidence of unbiased friendship he had seen in days shone in her smile. She took his hand and said simply, "We are glad to welcome the prodigal to his home again."

"I remind myself more of the fatted calf."

His first self-consciousness had gone.

"I thought of that, but I didn't dare say it," she laughed. "One must be respectful to rich relatives."

"Hang your rich relatives, Peggy; if I thought that this money would make any difference I would give it up this minute."

"Nonsense, Monty," she said. "How could it make a difference? But you must admit it is rather startling. The friend of our youth leaves his humble dwelling Saturday night with his salary drawn for two weeks ahead. He returns the following Thursday a dazzling millionaire."

"I'm glad I've begun to dazzle, anyway. I thought it might be hard to look the part."

"Well, I can't see that you are much changed." There was a suggestion of a quaver in her voice, and the shadows did not prevent him from seeing the quick mist that flitted across her deep eyes.

"After all, it's easy work being a millionaire," he explained, "when you've always had million-dollar inclinations."

"And fifty-cent possibilities," she added.

"Really, though, I'll never get as much joy out of my abundant riches as I did out of financial embarrassments."

"But think how fine it is, Monty, not ever to wonder where your winter's overcoat is to come from and how long the coal will last, and all that."

"Oh, I never wondered about my overcoats; the tailor did the wondering. But I wish I could go on living here just as before. I'd a heap rather live here than at that gloomy place on the avenue." "That sounded like the things you used to say when we played in the garret. You'd a heap sooner do this than that—don't you remember?"

"That's just why I'd rather live here, Peggy. Last night I fell to thinking of that old garret, and hanged if something didn't come up and stick in my throat so tight that I wanted to cry. How long has it been since we played up there? Yes, and how long has it been since I read 'Oliver Optic' to you, lying there in the garret window while you sat with your back against the wall, your blue eyes as big as dollars?"

"Oh, dear me, Monty, it was ages ago—twelve or thirteen years at least," she cried, a soft light in her eyes.

"I'm going up there this afternoon to see what the place is like," he said eagerly. "And, Peggy, you must come too. Maybe I can find one of those Optic books, and we'll be young again."

"Just for old time's sake," she said impulsively. "You'll stay for luncheon, too."

"I'll have to be at the—no, I won't, either. Do you know, I was thinking I had to be at the bank at twelve-thirty to let Mr. Perkins go out for something to eat? The millionaire habit isn't so firmly fixed as I supposed." After a moment's pause, in which his growing seriousness changed the atmosphere, he went on, haltingly, uncertain of his position: "The nicest thing about having all this money is that—that—we won't have to deny ourselves anything after this." It did not sound very tactful, now that it was out, and he was compelled to scrutinize rather intently a familiar portrait in order to maintain an air of careless assurance. She did not respond to this venture, but he felt that she was looking directly into his sorely-tried brain. "We'll do any amount of decorating about the house and—and you know that furnace has been giving us a lot of trouble for two or three years—" he was pouring out ruthlessly, when her hand fell gently on his own and she stood straight and tall before him, an odd look in her eyes.

"Don't—please don't go on, Monty," she said very gently but without wavering. "I know what you mean. You are good and very thoughtful, Monty, but you really must not."

"Why, what's mine is yours—" he began.

"I know you are generous, Monty, and I know you have a heart. You want us to—to take some of your money,"—it was not easy to say it, and as for Monty, he could only look at the floor. "We cannot, Monty, dear,—you must never speak of it again. Mamma and I had a feeling that you would do it. But don't you see,—even from you it is an offer of help, and it hurts."

"Don't talk like that, Peggy," he implored.

"It would break her heart if you offered to give her money in that way. She'd hate it, Monty. It is foolish, perhaps, but you know we can't take your money."

"I thought you—that you—oh, this knocks all the joy out of it," he burst out desperately.

"Dear Monty!"

"Let's talk it over, Peggy; you don't understand—" he began, dashing at what he thought would be a break in her resolve.

"Don't!" she commanded, and in her blue eyes was the hot flash he had felt once or twice before.

He rose and walked across the floor, back and forth again, and then stood before her, a smile on his lips—a rather pitiful smile, but still a smile. There were tears in her eyes as she looked at him.

"It's a confounded puritanical prejudice, Peggy," he said in futile protest, "and you know it."

"You have not seen the letters that came for you this morning. They're on the table over there," she replied, ignoring him.

He found the letters and resumed his seat in the window, glancing half-heartedly over the contents of the envelopes. The last was from Grant & Ripley, attorneys, and even from his abstraction it brought a surprised "By Jove!" He read it aloud to Margaret.

> September 30.
>
> MONTGOMERY BREWSTER, ESQ.,
> New York.
>
> Dear Sir:—We are in receipt of a communication from Mr. Swearengen Jones of Montana, conveying the sad intelligence that your uncle, James T. Sedgwick, died on the 24th inst. at M— Hospital in Portland, after a brief illness. Mr. Jones by this time has qualified in Montana as the executor of your uncle's will and has retained us as his eastern representatives. He incloses a copy of the will, in which you are named as sole heir, with conditions attending. Will you call at our office this afternoon, if it is convenient? It is important that you know the contents of the instrument at once.
>
> Respectfully yours,
> GRANT & RIPLEY.

For a moment there was only amazement in the air. Then a faint, bewildered smile appeared in Monty's face, and reflected itself in the girl's.

"Who is your Uncle James?" she asked.

"I've never heard of him."

"You must go to Grant & Ripley's at once, of course."

"Have you forgotten, Peggy," he replied, with a hint of vexation in his voice, "that we are to read 'Oliver Optic' this afternoon?"

CHAPTER IV

A SECOND

"You are both fortunate and unfortunate, Mr. Brewster," said Mr. Grant, after the young man had dropped into a chair in the office of Grant & Ripley the next day. Montgomery wore a slightly bored expression, and it was evident that he took little interest in the will of James T. Sedgwick. From far back in the recesses of memory he now recalled this long-lost brother of his mother. As a very small child he had seen his Uncle James upon the few occasions which brought him to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Brewster. But the young man had dined at the Drews the night before and Barbara had had more charm for him than usual. It was of her that he was thinking when he walked into the office of Swearengen Jones's lawyers.

"The truth is, Mr. Grant, I'd completely forgotten the existence of an uncle," he responded.

"It is not surprising," said Mr. Grant, genially. "Every one who knew him in New York nineteen or twenty years ago believed him to be dead. He left the city when you were a very small lad, going to Australia, I think. He was off to seek his fortune, and he needed it pretty badly when he started out. This letter from Mr. Jones comes like a message from the dead. Were it not that we have known Mr. Jones for a long time, handling affairs of considerable importance for him, I should feel inclined to doubt the whole story. It seems that your uncle turned up in Montana about fifteen years ago and there formed a stanch friendship with old Swearengen Jones, one of the richest men in the far West. Sedgwick's will was signed on the day of his death, September 24th, and it was quite natural that Mr. Jones should be named as his executor. That is how we became interested in the matter, Mr. Brewster."

"I see," said Montgomery, somewhat puzzled. "But why do you say that I am both fortunate and unfortunate?"

"The situation is so remarkable that you'll consider that a mild way of putting it when you've heard everything. I think you were told, in our note of yesterday, that you are the sole heir. Well, it may surprise you to learn that James Sedgwick died possessed of an estate valued at almost seven million dollars."