

Success

By

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PART I. ENCHANTMENT

CHAPTER I

The lonely station of Manzanita stood out, sharp and unsightly, in the keen February sunlight. A mile away in a dip of the desert, lay the town, a sorry sprawl of frame buildings, patternless save for the one main street, which promptly lost itself at either end in a maze of cholla, prickly pear, and the lovely, golden-glowing roseo. Far as the eye could see, the waste was spangled with vivid hues, for the rare rains had come, and all the cacti were in joyous bloom, from the scarlet stain of the ocatilla to the pale, dream-flower of the yucca. Overhead the sky shone with a hard serenity, a blue, enameled dome through which the imperishable fires seemed magnified as they limned sharp shadows on the earth; but in the southwest clouds massed and lurked darkly for a sign that the storm had but called a truce.

East to west, along a ridge bounding the lower desert, ran the railroad, a line as harshly uncompromising as the cold mathematics of the engineers who had mapped it. To the north spread unfathomably a forest of scrub pine and piñon, rising, here and there, into loftier growth. It was as if man, with his imperious interventions, had set those thin steel parallels as an irrefragable boundary to the mutual encroachments of forest and desert, tree and cactus. A single, straggling trail squirmed its way into the woodland. One might have surmised that it was winding hopefully if blindly toward the noble mountain peak shimmering in white splendor, mystic and wonderful, sixty miles away, but seeming in that lucent air to be brooding closely over all the varied loveliness below.

Though nine o'clock had struck on the brisk little station-clock, there was still a tang of night chill left. The station-agent came out, carrying a chair which he set down in the sunniest corner of the platform. He looked to be hardly more than a boy, but firm-knit and self-confident. His features were regular, his fairish hair slightly wavy, and in his expression there was a curious and incongruous suggestion of settledness, of acceptance, of satisfaction with life as he met it, which an observer of men would have found difficult to reconcile with his youth and the obvious intelligence of the face. His eyes were masked by deeply browned glasses, for he was bent upon literary pursuits, witness the corpulent, paper-covered volume under his arm. Adjusting his chair to the angle of ease, he tipped back against the wall and made tentative entry into his book.

What a monumental work was that in the treasure-filled recesses of which the young explorer was straightway lost to the outer world! No human need but might find its contentment therein. Spread forth in its alluringly illustrated pages was the whole universe reduced to the purchasable. It was a perfect and detailed microcosm of the world of trade, the cosmogony of commerce *_in petto_*. The style was brief, pithy, pregnant; the illustrations--oh, wonder of wonders!--

unfailingly apt to the text. He who sat by the Damascus Road of old marveling as the caravans rolled dustily past bearing "emeralds and wheat, honey and oil and balm, fine linen and embroidered goods, iron, cassia and calamus, white wool, ivory and ebony," beheld or conjectured no such wondrous offerings as were here gathered, collected, and presented for the patronage of this heir of all the ages, between the gay-hued covers of the great Sears-Roebuck Semiannual Mail-Order Catalogue. Its happy possessor need but cross the talisman with the ready magic of a postal money order and the swift genii of transportation would attend, servile to his call, to deliver the commanded treasures at his very door.

But the young reader was not purposefully shopping in this vast market-place of print. Rather he was adventuring idly, indulging the amateur spirit, playing a game of hit-or-miss, seeking oracles in those teeming pages. Therefore he did not turn to the pink insert, embodying the alphabetical catalogue (Abdominal Bands to Zither Strings), but opened at random.

"Supertoned Banjos," he read, beginning at the heading; and, running his eye down the different varieties, paused at "Pride of the Plantation, a full-sized, well-made, snappy-toned instrument at a very moderate price. 12 T 4031/4."

The explorer shook his head. Abovestairs rested a guitar (the Pearletta, 12 S 206, price \$7.95) which he had purchased at the instance of Messrs. Sears-Roebuck's insinuating representation as set forth in catalogue item 12 S 01942, "Self-mastery of the Guitar in One Book, with All Chords, Also Popular Solos That Can Be Played Almost at Sight." The nineteen-cent instruction-book had gone into the fire after three days of unequal combat between it and its owner, and the latter had subsequently learned something of the guitar (and more of life) from a Mexican-American girl with lazy eyes and the soul of a capricious and self-indulged kitten, who had come uninvited to Manzanita to visit an aunt, deceased six months previously. With a mild pang of memory for those dreamy, music-filled nights on the desert, the youth decided against further experiments in stringed orchestration.

Telescopes turned up next. He lingered a moment over 20 T 3513, a nickel-plated cap pocket-glass, reflecting that with it he could discern any signal on the distant wooded butte occupied by Miss Camilla Van Arsdale, back on the forest trail, in the event that she might wish a wire sent or any other service performed. Miss Camilla had been very kind and understanding at the time of the parting with Carlotta, albeit with a grimly humorous disapproval of the whole inflammatory affair; as well as at other times; and there was nothing that he would not do for her. He made a neat entry in a pocket ledger (3 T 9901) against the time when he should have spare cash, and essayed another plunge.

Arctics and Lumberman's Overs he passed by with a grin as inappropriate to the climate. Cod Liver Oil failed to interest him, as did the Provident Cast Iron Range and the Clean-Press Cider Mill. But he paused speculatively before Punching

Bags, for he had the clean pride of body, typical of lusty Western youth, and loved all forms of exercise. Could he find space, he wondered, to install 6 T 1441 with its Scientific Noiseless Platform & Wall Attachment (6 T 1476) in the portable house (55 S 17) which, purchased a year before, now stood in the clearing behind the station crammed with purchases from the Sears-Roebuck wonderbook. Anyway, he would make another note of it. What would it be like, he wondered, to have a million dollars to spend, and unlimited access to the Sears-Roebuck treasures. Picturing himself as such a Croesus, he innocently thought that his first act would be to take train for Chicago and inspect the warehoused accumulations of those princes of trade with his own eager eyes!

He mused humorously for a moment over a book on "Ease in Conversation." ("No trouble about conversation," he reflected; "the difficulty is to find anybody to converse with," and he thought first of Carlotta, and then of Miss Camilla Van Arsdale, but chiefly of the latter, for conversation had not been the strong point of the passionate, light-hearted Spanish girl.) Upon a volume kindly offering to teach astronomy to the lay mind without effort or trouble (43 T 790) and manifestly cheap at \$1.10, he bestowed a more respectful attention, for the desert nights were long and lonely.

Eventually he arrived at the department appropriate to his age and the almost universal ambition of the civilized male, to wit, clothing. Deeply, judiciously, did he meditate and weigh the advantages as between 745 J 460 ("Something new--different--economical--efficient. An all-wool suit embodying all the features that make for clothes satisfaction. This announcement is of tremendous importance"--as one might well have inferred from the student's rapt expression) and 776 J 017 ("A double-breasted, snappy, yet semi-conservative effect in dark-green worsted, a special social value"), leaning to the latter because of a purely literary response to that subtle and deft appeal of the attributive "social." The devotee of Messrs. Sears-Roebuck was an innately social person, though as yet his gregarious proclivities lay undeveloped and unsuspected by himself. Also he was of a literary tendency; but of this he was already self-conscious. He passed on to ulsters and raincoats, divagated into the colorful realm of neckwear, debated scarf-pins and cuff-links, visualized patterned shirtings, and emerged to dream of composite sartorial grandeurs which, duly synthesized into a long list of hopeful entries, were duly filed away within the pages of 3 T 9901, the pocket ledger.

Footsteps shuffling along the right of way dispelled his visions. He looked up to see two pedestrians who halted at his movement. They were paired typically of that strange fraternity, the hobo, one being a grizzled, hard-bitten man of waning middle age, the other a vicious and scrawny boy of eighteen or so. The boy spoke first.

"You the main guy here?"

The agent nodded.

"Got a sore throat?" demanded the boy surlily. He started toward the door. The agent made no move, but his eyes were attentive.

"That'll be near enough," he said quietly.

"Oh, we ain't on that lay," put in the grizzled man. He was quite hoarse. "You needn't to be scared of us."

"I'm not," agreed the agent. And, indeed, the fact was self-evident.

"What about the pueblo yonder?" asked the man with a jerk of his head toward the town.

"The hoosegow is old and the sheriff is new."

"I got ya," said the man, nodding. "We better be on our way."

"I would think so."

"You're a hell of a guy, you are," whined the boy. "'On yer way' from you an' not so much as 'Are you hungry?' What about a little hand-out?"

"Nothing doing."

"Tightwad! How'd you like--"

"If you're hungry, feel in your coat-pocket."

"I guess you're a wise one," put in the man, grinning appreciatively. "We got grub enough. Panhandlin's a habit with the kid; don't come natural to him to pass a likely prospect without makin' a touch."

He leaned against the platform, raising one foot slightly from the ground in the manner of a limping animal. The agent disappeared into the station, locking the door after him. The boy gave expression to a violent obscenity directed upon the vanished man. When that individual emerged again, he handed the grizzled man a box of ointment and tossed a packet of tobacco to the evil-faced boy. Both were quick with their thanks. That which they had most needed and desired had been, as it were, spontaneously provided. But the elder of the wayfarers was puzzled, and looked from the salve-box to its giver.

"How'd you know my feet was blistered?"

"Been padding in the rain, haven't you?"

"Have you been on the hoof, too?" asked the hobo quickly.

The other smiled.

"Say!" exclaimed the boy. "I bet he's Banneker. Are you?" he demanded.

"That's my name."

"I heard of you three years ago when you was down on the Long Line Sandy," said the man. He paused and considered. "What's your lay, Mr. Banneker?" he asked, curiously but respectfully.

"As you see it. Railroading."

"A gay-cat," put in the boy with a touch of scorn.

"You hold your fresh lip," his elder rebuked him. "This gent has treated us _like_ a gent. But why? What's the idea? That's what I don't get."

"Oh, some day I might want to run for Governor on the hobo ticket," returned the unsmiling agent.

"You get our votes. Well, so long and much obliged."

The two resumed their journey. Banneker returned to his book. A freight, "running extra," interrupted him, but not for long. The wire had been practicing a seemly restraint for uneventful weeks, so the agent felt that he could settle down to a sure hour's bookishness yet, even though the west-bound Transcontinental Special should be on time, which was improbable, as "bad track" had been reported from eastward, owing to the rains. Rather to his surprise, he had hardly got well reimmersed in the enchantments of the mercantile fairyland when the "Open Office" wire warned him to be attentive, and presently from the east came tidings of Number Three running almost true to schedule, as befitted the pride of the line, the finest train that crossed the continent.

Past the gaunt station she roared, only seven minutes late, giving the imaginative young official a glimpse and flash of the uttermost luxury of travel: rich woods, gleaming metal, elegance of finish, and on the rear of the observation-car a group so lily-clad that Sears-Roebuck at its most glorious was not like unto them. Would such a train, the implanted youth wondered, ever bear him away to unknown, undreamed enchantments?

Would he even wish to go if he might? Life was full of many things to do and learn at Manzanita. Mahomet need not go to the mountain when, with but a mustard seed of faith in the proven potency of mail-order miracles he could move mountains to come to him. Leaning to his telegraph instrument, he wired to the agent at Stanwood, twenty-six miles down-line, his formal announcement.

"O. S.--G. I. No. 3 by at 10.46."

"O. K.--D. S.," came the response.

Banneker returned to the sunlight. In seven minutes or perhaps less, as the Transcontinental would be straining to make up lost time, the train would enter Rock Cut three miles and more west, and he would recapture the powerful throbbing of the locomotive as she emerged on the farther side, having conquered the worst of the grade.

Banneker waited. He drew out his watch. Seven. Seven and a half. Eight. No sound from westward. He frowned. Like most of the road's employees, he took a special and almost personal interest in having the regal train on time, as if, in dispatching it through, he had given it a friendly push on its swift and mighty mission. Was she steaming badly? There had been no sign of it as she passed. Perhaps something had gone wrong with the brakes. Or could the track have--

The agent tilted sharply forward, his lithe frame tense. A long drawn, quivering shriek came down-wind to him. It was repeated. Then short and sharp, piercing note on piercing note, sounded the shrill, clamant voice.

The great engine of Number Three was yelling for help.

CHAPTER II

Banneker came out of his chair with a spring.

"Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!" screamed the strident voice.

It was like an animal in pain and panic.

For a brief instant the station-agent halted at the door to assure himself that the call was stationary. It was. Also it was slightly muffled. That meant that the train was still in the cut. As he ran to the key and sent in the signal for Stanwood, Banneker reflected what this might mean. Crippled? Likely enough. Ditched? He guessed not. A ditched locomotive is usually voiceless if not driverless as well. Blocked by a slide? Rock Cut had a bad repute for that kind of accident. But the quality of the call predicated more of a catastrophe than a mere blockade. Besides, in that case why could not the train back down--

The answering signal from the dispatcher at Stanwood interrupted his conjectures.

"Number Three in trouble in the Cut," ticked Banneker fluently. "Think help probably needed from you. Shall I go out?"

"O. K.," came the answer. "Take charge. Bad track reported three miles east may delay arrival."

Banneker dropped and locked the windows, set his signal for "track blocked" and ran to the portable house. Inside he stood, considering. With swift precision he took from one of the home-carpentered shelves a compact emergency kit, 17 S 4230, "hefted" it, and adjusted it, knapsack fashion, to his back; then from a small cabinet drew a flask, which he disposed in his hip-pocket. Another part of the same cabinet provided a first-aid outfit, 3 R 0114. Thus equipped he was just closing the door after him when another thought struck him and he returned to slip a coil of light, strong sash-cord, 36 J 9078, over his shoulders to his waist where he deftly tautened it. He had seen railroad wrecks before. For a moment he considered leaving his coat, for he had upwards of three miles to go in the increasing heat; but, reflecting that the outward and visible signs of authority might save time and questions, he thought better of it. Patting his pocket to make sure that his necessary notebook and pencil were there, he set out at a moderate, even, springless lope. He had no mind to reach a scene which might require his best qualities of mind and body, in a semi-exhausted state. Nevertheless, laden as he was, he made the three miles in less than half an hour. Let no man who has not tried to cover at speed the ribbed treacheries of a railroad track minimize the achievement!

A sharp curve leads to the entrance of Rock Cut. Running easily, Banneker had reached the beginning of the turn, when he became aware of a lumbering figure approaching him at a high and wild sort of half-gallop. The man's face was a welter of blood. One hand was pressed to it. The other swung crazily as he ran. He would have swept past Banneker unregarding had not the agent caught him by the shoulder.

"Where are you hurt?"

The runner stared wildly at the young man. "I'll soom," he mumbled breathlessly, his hand still crumpled against the dreadfully smeared face. "Dammum, I'll soom."

He removed his hand from his mouth, and the red drops splattered and were lost upon the glittering, thirsty sand. Banneker wiped the man's face, and found no injury. But the fingers which he had crammed into his mouth were bleeding profusely.

"They oughta be prosecuted," moaned the sufferer. "I'll soom. For ten thousan' dollars. M'hand is smashed. Looka that! Smashed like a bug."

Banneker caught the hand and expertly bound it, taking the man's name and address as he worked.

"Is it a bad wreck?" he asked.

"It's hell. Look at m'hand! But I'll soom, all right. _I_'ll show'm ... Oh! ... Cars are afire, too ... Oh-h-h! Where's a hospital?"

He cursed weakly as Banneker, without answering, re-stowed his packet and ran on.

A thin wisp of smoke rising above the nearer wall of rocks made the agent set his teeth. Throughout his course the voice of the engine had, as it were, yapped at his hurrying heels, but now it was silent, and he could hear a murmur of voices and an occasional shouted order. He came into sight of the accident, to face a bewildering scene.

Two hundred yards up the track stood the major portion of the train, intact. Behind it, by itself, lay a Pullman sleeper, on its side and apparently little harmed. Nearest to Banneker, partly on the rails but mainly beside them, was jumbled a ridiculous mess of woodwork, with here and there a gleam of metal, centering on a large and jagged boulder. Smaller rocks were scattered through the _mélange_. It was exactly like a heap of giant jack-straws into which some mischievous spirit had tossed a large pebble. At one end a flame sputtered and spread cheerfully.

A panting and grimy conductor staggered toward it with a pail of water from the engine. Banneker accosted him.

"Any one in--"

"Get outa my way!" gasped the official.

"I'm agent at Manzanita."

The conductor set down his pail. "O God!" he said. "Did you bring any help?"

"No, I'm alone. Any one in there?" He pointed to the flaming debris.

"One that we know of. He's dead."

"Sure?" cried Banneker sharply.

"Look for yourself. Go the other side."

Banneker looked and returned, white and set of face. "How many others?"

"Seven, so far."

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