

# THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

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JOHN FLEMING WILSON



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**THE MAN WHO CAME BACK**









“FOOL ! I THOUGHT I'D MADE A MAN OUT OF YOU !”

# THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

BY

JOHN FLEMING WILSON

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LATITUDES," ETC.

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## TO ROBERT OGILVIE KIRKWOOD

Since we met sixteen years ago we have sailed on many seas; yet I think we both have steered by the same stars. Permit me to dedicate this story to you, because no one more than yourself will understand that it is written in good faith.

I think most of us can say that an Unknown Woman has stood at the turning point of our lives, shown the right road, and vanished. This tale of an Unknown Woman is my grateful tribute to two people—to yourself and to Her.

New York City,  
15th September, 1912.



I  
THE GOING





**F**ROM West Fifty-sixth Street in New York City, United States of America, to Metter Alley, Shanghai, China, is ten thousand, one hundred and twenty-nine miles *and* a quarter. Henry Potter made the distance in six years, two months and four days. He left New York in a private car at an average speed of fifty miles an hour and two hundred dollars a day. He entered Metter Alley on foot and spent during the last quarter of a mile of his long journey the precise sum of \$0.00, his total wealth.

There were other differences, besides that of money, between the well-dressed, well-fed, jovial young man who left the American metropolis and the ragged, ill-nourished, shaking creature who sought the smoky shelter of Sam-shew-sing's corrugated-iron roofed shanty in a Shanghai

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purlieu. These differences were the result of ten thousand, one hundred and twenty-nine *and* one quarter steps downward. Let us descend with Henry Potter.

Thomas Potter, Henry's father, had made his money in Pittsburg. Having it firmly in his possession he retired, as Pittsburgers say, to New York. There he awaited the graduation of his son and heir from Princeton, amusing himself meanwhile with making a little more money, eating a little more than was good for him, enjoying the society of fellow-millionaires and building an immense house. When Henry had got his diploma, sung his last on the steps of Old North and entered the world by way of Twenty-third Street, Thomas looked at him over the breakfast table and said, "Ahumph! Humph! A-hem!" very loudly.

As this was the invariable preface to

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Thomas's most trifling remarks as well as to his most resonant decrees, Henry kept judiciously silent and went on with his meal. Having thus heralded speech, Thomas said very mildly,

“ I suppose you're ready to go to work.”

“ I suppose so,” his son answered carelessly. “ What shall it be? ”

“ Pittsburg,” Thomas proceeded. “ Pittsburg and the business. I made my start in Pittsburg. My son shall do the same.”

“ All right! ” was the dutiful response. “ Jolly lot of fellows in old Pitts.”

“ You will assume charge of my office there as second vice-president. It is really the central portion of my business that will come to your desk, sir. You will quickly pick up the details it is needful for you to know and you will also get a view of the larger—almost world-wide sweep of—ah—the business.”

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Henry looked at his watch, nodding. "All right, dad. Must drop down town and see Fitzy. Fitzy sails to-morrow for France. We'll have luncheon and all that."

"Ahumph! Humph! A-hem!" rumbled Thomas.

"Yes, sir?"

"Could you make arrangements to leave for Pittsburg next Monday?"

"Sure. By the way, I'm a bit short of coin. Lemme have a few hundreds, will you?"

Thomas drew out an infinitesimal check book and a gigantic fountain pen which he joined in due service to his son. While the ink on the check dried he rolled his portly form proudly in his big chair. "The first Potter — your great-grandfather — entered Pittsburg in a two-wheeled cart, with his tools wrapped up in his leathern apron and tied under the axle. You will have my private car."

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Henry sighed. "Well, everybody's got to work, I guess, so I might as well buckle down. I *did* think of a run across to London and a shy at Scotland with some of the fellows — but duty's duty!"

"That spirit is very gratifying," said his father warmly. "You will start on a salary of fifty thousand a year. You will receive that from the beginning, my boy. Your expenses will naturally be heavy. You will live like a gentleman. It's expected of a Potter."

It is four hundred and eighty-six miles from New York to Pittsburg.

One year later Henry was awakened at eleven A. M. on Sunday morning by his man. "A telegram for you, sir."

Henry cast a glazed eye on the yellow envelope. "Another?" he muttered huskily. "Burn it. I'll take the ten o'clock to New York."

"It's eleven now, sir."

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“ Then fix me for the two o'clock. Coffee! Martin.”

At midnight Thomas looked at his son's white face and dull eyes. “ Ahumph! Humph! A-hem! ” he rumbled.

“ What on earth were all those telegrams about? ” Henry asked peevishly, pouring himself a drink.

“ Didn't you read 'em? ”

“ No. Too busy. Knew you wanted to see me. Here I am! ”

Thomas kicked his way back and forth across the heavy rug. “ I want to know what you mean by your crazy infatuation for that woman? ”

“ So *that's* it! I thought old Maxwell was hatching something.”

“ If it weren't for Maxwell my business would have been to the dogs before this,” was the grim answer. “ I'm much obliged to him. Now what about this woman? ”

“ I presume that you respectfully refer

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to Miss Vandola Vert? She's the classiest, prettiest girl in ten cities —"

"I care nothing about that. Maxwell thinks you want to marry her. She's on the stage and while I don't grudge you young fellows your pleasures, marriage is out of the question and —"

From Pittsburg to Fairfield, Iowa, is six hundred and twelve miles. Among his many interests Thomas Potter possessed a wagon manufactory in Fairfield and thither went his son Henry, general manager on a salary of eight thousand a year.

"You can live well there on half your income and save one half," Thomas remarked. "At least you will see no Vandolas and other butterflies that never saw a meadow. There's an old fellow named Peet — Pett — Peck — Peterby who's run that factory twenty-five years. He knows the wagon business from hickory to axle-

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grease. A year with him will do you good."

Nine months later Thomas Potter sat at his desk in New York and roared, "Ahumph! Humph! A-hem!" and his secretary leaped in his polished chair. "Take this letter and put the copy in my private files," said his employer.

*"Dear Harry:*

"Your letter of the 14th noted. Mr. Peterby's letters have gratified me by their reports of your attention to business. I am glad of your extension of the sales department and see with satisfaction that you wish to become settled down.

"In view of your record I have notified the San Francisco branch that you will take charge there as manager. You will receive a salary of \$12,000 a year for the first year and I have excellent hopes that you will show the same diligence there as in Fairfield.



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“ Referring to your letter again, I may say that I do not see my way clear to approving of an engagement between you and Miss Price. From what you say of her I feel sure that she is a very deserving and excellent young woman, but you and I must consider whether she is the lady to carry the burden of your social position.

“ It is unlikely that Miss Price, living in Fairfield, has the trained character and broad outlook so needful to the wife of a man who must sooner or later be the head of the Potter interests.

“ I enclose a check for \$10,000 as a reminder to you of my affection.

“ Your aff. father

“ THOMAS POTTER.”

“ I guess that will take his mind off Miss Sadie Price,” he remarked to the secretary, giving him Henry’s letter to file.

“ If I were Henry,” said the secretary

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to himself, "I'd cash the check and beat it with Sadie. They could live in fine style on ten thou —"

From Fairfield, Iowa, to Oakland Pier is twenty-four hundred and seventy-six miles. Henry Potter made the distance in four days with the aid of the liquids supplied by the buffet. He landed in San Francisco under the escort of six red-caps whom he fee'd royally.

Two years afterwards he was sitting in a delicately furnished music room in a costly house on Jackson street and trying to catch the exact color of the eyes of a tall, handsome woman opposite him. She refused to look up.

"I've always sworn your eyes were blue," he laughed. "When I last saw them they were gray — steel gray."

She looked up suddenly. He started. "Why, you're crying, Edith!"

She nodded mutely.

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“What on earth is the matter? Darling! Let me —”

Edith shook her head determinedly. “No! Don’t! Can’t you see?” she said in a low tone. “I can’t marry you, Harry.”

“But you said you cared for me — you promised —”

“I know! But I can’t!”

He took her two hands in his. “Now tell me what’s the matter.” He straightened himself handsomely. “Speak out, darling!”

Her steady glance rested on him till his own eyes fell. She withdrew her hands gently. “You have so many awful — wicked habits, Harry! I — I am a clean girl! You would make me utterly miserable!”

“You would save me!” he muttered.

She shook her head again, mutely. His coarse laugh rang out. “So that’s it! I suppose some of the poverty-stricken

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goody-goodies that hang around you have been chattering! You don't know what love is! And I had faith in you! Just like —"

It is two thousand and ninety-one miles from San Francisco to Honolulu. Henry Potter telegraphed Thomas, cashed a draft for five thousand dollars and ten days later lounged on the *lanai* of the Moana Hotel with a long glass ready to his hand and a very dirty, uncouth man opposite him.

"You say you know Honolulu like a book," remarked Henry. "Well, I'm quite a scholar when it comes to books. I like the looks of you. We'll see what these Hawaiian Isles have to interest the curious and well-heeled foreigner."

It is four and one-third miles from the Moana Hotel to Bishop's Bank. Two months after his arrival in Honolulu Henry Potter made the trip in response to

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an urgent telephone summons and was informed that his balance was exhausted. The accountant referred him to a cablegram, which, being interpreted by the aid of an A B C Code-Book, stated that Thomas Potter would honor drafts drawn on him by Henry Potter to the total amount of five thousand dollars and no more.

“ I’ll have the five thousand now,” said Henry, carelessly picking up a pen. “ Gimme a thousand in cash and the rest in exchange on any old bank in the Orient.”

“ Hongkong? Yokohama? ” suggested the accountant.

“ Either,” said Henry. “ I’ve seen your Honolulu inside, outside and wayside. What I don’t know about this town wouldn’t amount to the daily cable report in an afternoon paper.”

The banker used a blotter on the shaky signature and assumed a meditative air. He seemed about to say something but evi-

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dently thought better of it. He failed to see Henry's hand outstretched in farewell.

From Honolulu to Yokohama is three thousand three hundred and ninety-four miles.

Exactly four years after he left Princeton Henry sat in a Yokohama hotel, with a glass of gin beside him, and wrote to his father as follows:

*“ Dear Dad:*

“ I had a very fair time in Honolulu but saw no chance to do any business in our line. Here in Yokohama I feel sure I can find an opening though of course the Japs try to make out that they can do without our products.

“ I'll try my luck here a while. You know we have no agent here so I would suggest that I open an agency and get together a small sales force. I already have an eye on some good men.

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“ I know you think I left San Francisco hurriedly and without sufficient explanation. The real explanation was a woman. Fascinating and — well, I remembered the advice you gave me about that Fairfield affair and I simply ran away — couldn't do anything I knew you'd disapprove.

“ It was really a serious affair. I'm sorry, but I saved the Potter bacon socially and I'm going to get a fresh start here just to show you what I can do before I come back to New York.

“ I have some money but not enough to start the business here right. Suppose you give me a credit here and I'll hustle and show you what I can do.

“ Why don't you drop business a while and come across and have a look at the situation yourself? We could plan the whole thing together. Affectionately,

“ HARRY.”

“ That last paragraph ought to land the

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old boy," Henry mused with pride in his epistolary skill. "Ask him to come out himself! Great idea! You couldn't get him here with a traction engine, but it'll put him off the scent. And that story about the girl! Hits him right where he *lives!* Hard on Edie, but the old man must have something to chew on. Society! what lies are told in thy name by poor beggars who have to shake the paternal purse once in a while!"

One year later Henry Potter, obese, puffy-eyed and husky voiced, swaggered into the hotel followed by a boisterous company who talked loudly of their preparations for the evening.

"Nothin' like havin' a rippin' time, old sport," said one, "and Yokohama's the place to enjoy yourself! Say, loan me —"

But Henry was staring at a card which the clerk handed him. It bore the name of Thomas Potter. He turned on his companions swiftly. "Say, you fellows! I'll



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meet you at Ushida's at six. Busy now!"

They trooped out. Henry spoke in the ear of the desk clerk. That functionary nodded. "Yes, he came in with the passengers from the *Mongolia*. He said he would be back for dinner."

Henry hurried to his room and stared at himself in the mirror. "Nothin' doin'," he said thickly to his image. "Beat it, Henry!" He fumbled amid the raffle of papers, bills and magazines on the table and finally found a daily paper. "Steamer *Bremen* for Shanghai, 8 P. M.," he read aloud. He counted the money in his pockets and sighed. "Not much to go on. But Shanghai is *my* place."

It is ten hundred and seventy miles from Yokohama to Shanghai. Henry Potter arrived there with one hastily packed trunk, a couple of bags and eight hundred dollars in cash.

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Two weeks after his son, Thomas Potter also landed in Shanghai, portly and very grim. He went from hotel to hotel till he found the one he sought, a small place in the suburbs. Here he put up under the name of P. Thomas and spent a week watching the guests go to and fro. At four o'clock on the eighth day a young man, in a soiled suit of white duck, battered straw hat and dusty shoes entered and called for his key. Thomas Potter rose and walked to the desk. The newcomer did not see him but took his key in a shaking hand and started for his room under the guidance of a boy. Thomas stopped him at the door.

“ Ahumph! Humph! A-hem!” he rumbled.

Henry whirled around, grinning in sickly fashion.

“ I missed you in Yokohama,” Thomas said puffily. “ I've waited a week here to find you.”

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“ Away on business — little trip,” Henry said with a poor attempt to be airy.

“ I know the kind of business, my son,” Thomas responded sternly.

“ Well, come in, anyhow! ”

They entered the shaded room and Henry proceeded to plunge his bursting head into cold water. Slightly refreshed he opened his bags and extracted clean clothes. He dressed without shaving, while his father sat in silence.

“ Now don't lie to me,” Thomas said presently, after a preliminary volley.

“ What's the use? ” demanded his son.

“ None. For five years you have traveled your own road. You have cost me two hundred thousand dollars and my pride.”

“ You miss the pride more than the money, don't you? ” was the remark in a hard voice.

Thomas digested this and rose. “ I find that words are useless. — I shall act.

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You can have no more of my money, my son."

"Then I'll go to jail for my hotel bill."

Thomas panted. "I — I'll settle that," he said heavily. "I'll do that much. But you are on your own resources from this day."

"I wish you would tell me what they are," Henry said reflectively.

"Work! Honest work!"

"What work can I do? Who would give me work?"

Thomas almost smiled his triumph. "Do you mean to say you are willing to go to work?"

"It looks as if I would have to, doesn't it?"

His father was melted. "I *knew* there was a decent strain in you," he said, with assumed roughness. "You have your good points, my boy. I'm deuced glad you haven't put the fat in the fire by making a rotten marriage. That's one credit. But

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—no more of this wildness. Man, I've followed your trail from San Francisco to this place by the gossip—scandalous tales! Incredible!”

Henry laughed. “Look here, while we're talking this over, why didn't you keep me in New York?”

“Ahumph! Humph! A-hem!” said Thomas. “I thought it would be better for you to make your own way—with plenty of money and my backing, of course. A young man amounts to nothing in New York unless he has a reputation for making good somewhere else.”

Henry got on his feet, swaggering on the dying effects of what he had drunk the preceding hundred hours. “Well, I made my own way, didn't I? All by myself! Now—suppose I turn around and make my way back to New York and the paternal millions?”

“Not on my money!” was the disgusted reply. “You're a pretty picture!

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You'd make any father proud! Ahumph! Humph! A-hem! That road is not traveled twice the same fashion, my son. I'll get you a position — a good one — right here in Shanghai. I guess Thomas Potter isn't unknown to a few people here. When you make good, then we'll talk about your coming back."

"All right. Gimme something to start on, anyway," quoth Henry. "I owe a few little bills."

"Of course," his father assented. "I understand that you can't be pinched. I'll fix it so you can have an extra sum above your salary. I'll inquire what is supposed to be a good allowance here for a young man with a position."

The next morning Thomas was very busy. In the afternoon he found Henry in bed and announced his achievements. "A good job in an exporting house, the equivalent of twelve hundred dollars a year with the prospect of more at the end

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of twelve months. Simpson's Exporting Company. I have arranged that an extra fifty dollars be paid you each month by the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank. I will catch the steamer to-night for San Francisco. I'll expect you back in two years, son."

Henry laughed and invited his father to supper. "Pleasure after business," he remarked.

"Well, well, you've sown your wild oats. Now for a steady and respectable career, Harry."

Having seen his father off Henry returned to the hotel, drank three cocktails, called a rig and —

It is one-quarter of a mile from the office of Simpson's Exporting Company to Sam-shew-sing's dive in Metter Alley. Henry Potter made the distance in one year, one month and four days.

He entered the hot, foul shanty, tossed

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his ragged hat into the face of a sleeping Chinese and held up before his filmed eyes a gold ring with a small stone in it. Sam-shew-sing rose, slipped his bare feet into straw sandals and plucked the bauble from Henry's hand.

"I b'long your flend," Henry said, licking dry lips. "I likee gin and smoke. You ketchum *chop-chop*. Sabe!"

The ring vanished into some recess in Sam-shew-sing's filthy garments and a black bottle of "square-face" appeared. Henry uncorked it with his teeth and stared round among the shadows of the den. "Anybody here join me?"

There was a stir in one of the smoke blackened shelves and a woman swung her feet out and dropped to the earthen floor. Henry gasped. "A white woman!"

"With a thirst," she answered in a low voice.

They drank.



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It was a hot autumn afternoon. The breeze from the great river eddied in Metter Alley and revolved slowly the mingled odors of decaying garbage, frying pork and blistering tar-paint. Sam-shew-sing's open door gave a vista of rutted road, a dry gutter and a green latticed gate across the way. An exceedingly soiled white goose pulled awkwardly at the string which tied it by one foot to a short stake.

Henry took it all in for five minutes. He turned back into the hovel with a yawn. The girl was on the shelf that served as a couch, mixing a pellet for her pipe. She glanced up to say, "Been smoking long?"

"Never yet," Henry told her. "Heretofore I've enjoyed the social vices — wine and song. I have no money to buy wine and song has palled.

"You're a toff!" was the unexpected assertion from the couch.

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“A toff,” Henry repeated gravely. “Madam, you have hit the nail on the head!”

The girl gave the opium pellet a final roll and dropped it on a little sheet of tin. Her eyes glanced over the tatterdemalion who spoke thus nonchalantly. She examined him from his neatly clipped hair to his patent leather shoes. She nodded. “A toff! You must have come a long ways to get down to this.”

She included the shanty, the dozing Chinese, the earthen floor, the sooty fireplace, the doorway open upon the squalid alley in one short sweep of a thin hand.

“It *was* a long way,” Potter confessed, helping himself to more liquor. “A long way, my dear, with many sights by the roadside. But this is the end of it!”

She lit the wick of an infinitesimal candle-end, held the pellet sizzling in the flame and thrust it into the brass bowl of

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the pipe, inhaling deeply. It was some minutes before she spoke again.

“ So you’ve come to Sam-shew-sing’s at last! Where *chits* are no good and check books unknown! Well, there’s one consolation: you can’t get any lower! ”

“ Not so long as that ring of mine pays my way,” he remarked. “ It ought to gild a few days here. It cost me a couple of hundred.”

“ Sam-shew is a robber,” she murmured. “ But even he wouldn’t dare put you out under a three-month, unless you insist on first-chop hop.”

“ Explain. Elucidate. Put me wise,” Henry pleaded. “ I am bent on economy. Rash expenditure is forbidden. Why should I possibly insist on first-chop hop? ”

“ Good opium,” she said quietly. “ This stuff is the cheapest. But it doesn’t kill you so quickly.”

“ Ah, I see the advantage in first-chop.

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I may yet indulge therein, fair damsel."

She heated the pipe bowl again and blew out the candle. Henry took a seat on a stool near her. "Going to sleep?"

She shook her head. "No. I don't sleep so much now. I just dream."

"Impertinent, I know," he proceeded, "but what do you dream about?"

"Digging worms in a soft garden to go fishing with my brother," she answered simply.

He stared. "You're joking!"

"No. When I was a little girl that's what I used to do."

"I never fished with worms," Henry Potter mused aloud. "I always had a fly-hook."

Under the influence of the drug the girl suddenly turned querulous. "Of course, you toffs! I suppose you never went bare-foot nor stole apples nor walked on home-made stilts nor swung in a barrel-stave hammock!"

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“ All that is outside my — er — extensive experience, I regret to say.”

“ Money in every pocket, fine clothes, college, champagne and gold-tipped cigarettes instead,” she said crossly. “ Well, you’re down to Sam-shew-sing’s planks and rotten dope *now*. That’s one satisfaction.”

“ I fail to appreciate it,” he remarked calmly.

Her mood had changed again. He caught her drowsy whisper: “ Poor fellow! ” It seemed to express a profound, womanly pity. It stirred him to the ugly depths. He kicked the stool away and reached for the half-empty bottle.

It was midnight when he awoke, as a battered American alarm clock and a darkened doorway told him. He sat up on the hard, polished board, bumped his head against the shelf above him and swore viciously. The Chinese was broad awake and sitting at a little table with a couple

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of his countrymen. Their beady eyes were intent on a game of dominoes. He saw that several sleepers occupied the bunks about the room, which was filled with the dull, acrid smoke of opium. He got up and tapped Sam-shew-sing on the shoulder. "Ketchem bottle?"

The Chinese made an impatient gesture. Henry followed its direction, spied the gin and helped himself generously. Then he rolled a cigarette and sat down on the bunk.

His thoughts were dismal indeed. Accustomed as he was to clean linen and the best of food he was revolted by his own filthy garments while his stomach cried loudly for delicate victuals. He knew the hopelessness of asking for an omelet dressed with fresh herbs and he was also sure that his soiled clothes must last him as they were. "I'll have a whiff of that pipe they praise so highly," he thought

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despondently. "I might as well take the final step first as last."

He had taken a second half tumblerful of gin when someone entered through the doorway with a brisk, assured step. He peered across the room and saw the white woman, gaudily dressed and swinging a big garden hat by the ribbons. Changed as she was by dress and manner he recognized her and was glad she had returned, for no reason except that she seemed to make the horrible den less loathsome — a good indication of the depths to which the once meticulous Potter was descended.

She paid no attention to the Chinese nor the other occupants of the room, but came over and stood in front of Henry.

"*Now* I know who you are," she said in her customary low voice. "I knew you were a toff, but I never suspected that you were *you!*"

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

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She tossed her hat into her bunk and smoothed her hair down. "I sing at Sit Que's café," she retorted. "You came there several times with your pals. Threw money around like sand. Oh, yes!"

He wrinkled his eyelids and cocked his head on one side. "I believe I do see that you are the lady who sang," he said slowly. "I never met you."

She shook her head. "I'm not the sort," she said briefly. "I smoke hop, but I'm straight, my friend."

"And — in — Sam-shew-sing's!" he said lazily, feeling the warmth of the liquor through his aching limbs.

She flushed angrily. "Yes! Why? Because I don't go after the money! I make enough to keep body and soul together and have a smoke and dream of old times. That's me! I'll last another three months and then —" She snapped her fingers.

"Death? Hell? Eh?"



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“They’re both here,” she said somberly. “No. Heaven!”

“What a fortunate outlook! I regret that I can’t expect any change for the better in *my* future. Well, the world wags!”

“I’ll make a cup of tea and we’ll have a dip into the Chink’s rice pot,” she said abruptly.

“I am with you. Why this kindness to me? I am filthy and unshorn and forlorn and penniless — except what credit I have with our honest friend here.”

She smiled wanly. “I’ll tell you why presently. I’ve been thinking. There’s something I want you to do for me.”

He drank the tea and picked at the rice till even a feverish determination to fortify his rebellious stomach could not make his throat swallow another morsel. Then he drank more gin, lit a cigarette and watched the girl — he decided that she could not be over twenty-one — take down her hair and put a vast mother-hubbard gown over her

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street dress. She sat down and faced him.

“ I want you to tell me how you happened to be here,” she said earnestly.

“ First, how old are you? ”

“ Twenty-eight.”

“ And how long since you’ve been on the toboggan? ”

He shook his head. “ I don’t really know.”

“ I mean, how long since you’ve seen the end — *this!* ” she indicated the hovel scornfully.

“ I parted with my last cent twenty-four hours ago, if that’s what you mean,” he said. “ I was kicked out of my hotel yesterday morning when I tried to sneak in and get some clean clothes.”

“ All right! Forget it,” she said angrily. “ A girl at the café said you were a good sort. Seems you gave her money to get her sister into a hospital. Well, I told her you were here.”

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She cast a quick glance at the Chinese, assured herself that they were intent on their game and flicked a knotted handkerchief into Henry's hand. "She sent it to you. Now beat it while your shoes are good. Get out of here. Get clean clothes and a job. You at the end of your rope? Nonsense! You don't smoke. Be a man."

Potter untied the knot and ten sovereigns rolled into his palm. He silently knotted them up again and tossed the handkerchief into her lap.

"Nothing doing with *me*," he said gently. "I'm low. But not that low."

The girl leaned forward, earnest eyes on his. "Say, she meant it! You're a toff! You're not down and out! Get a job! Go to work! Be a man! Take the coin and get a start. You can pay it back."

Potter shook his head and drank another half tumblerful of the raw gin. "Kid, you

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don't know me. That fifty bucks would last me fifty minutes and then — back to Sam-shew-sing's! I'm a dead bird."

She frowned. "It's a chance for you," she persisted, slowly. "You look like a good sort, dirty as you are. But a month here and you *are* done for! Say, ain't there a fatted calf waiting for you somewheres?"

"Not that I know of?"

"Or a girl?"

"Cut it out," he said roughly.

"Don't be so saucy! I'm quite entitled to ask after your lady friends. It doesn't become you to play the toff *here*. You're a tramp, a beachcomber, Mister Man. You're in a hop joint in Metter Alley and I guess you'd better act according." She rose and commenced to dicker with the Chinese for the drug.

Six days later Sam-shew-sing refused Henry Potter another bottle of liquor and in the ensuing altercation the white man

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was kicked out into Metter Alley. After half an hour's crawling about in the darkness the girl's intercession got him back within the shelter of the den; sick and despairing and crushed. He sat on the earthen floor and sobbed. He had reached the abyss.

The girl considered him at length, sitting on the edge of her bunk, elbows on knees. In her eyes was an expression of almost maternal compassion.

When he was slightly composed she gave him a stiff drink, rolled him a cigarette and made him sit on a stool.

“ Now, friend,” she said calmly, “ have you had enough? ”

He tried to resume a jaunty air. “ Quite a helping, thank you! ”

“ Where's your home? ”

“ New York,” was the sulky answer.

“ That's a long way,” she sighed. “ If it were nearer you might make it.”

“ It's ten thousand, one hundred and

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

twenty-nine miles," he remarked. "I have it all totted up in my pocket-book. I mean to say, I *had* it. The pocket-book is gone where the woodbine twineth."

"Ten thousand one hundred and twenty-nine miles!" she repeated slowly. "If you were only a man you could make it!"

"It took me six years to come," he said airily.

"You couldn't get back in ten," she replied, looking at him curiously.

Under the stimulation of the fiery gin he laughed. "I made it in several stages: Pittsburg, Fairfield, Iowa, San Francisco, Honolulu, Yokohama, Shanghai. Last stop: Sam-shew-sing's hop joint in Metter Alley."

"Has your father any money?"

"A Cræsus! A Pittsburg millionaire!"

"And *he* threw you over? Then you haven't got any *mother!*"

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Henry laughed. "Lemme tell you about the old man," he chuckled.

He related the story of Thomas's visit to Shanghai. She refused even a smile. "I see. You'd be ashamed to go back now."

"He's proud as the devil. He wouldn't look at me if I turned up broke and without a shave. If I blew in with good clothes, rings on my fingers and patent leather boots on my toes and money in my pocket, he might have — the veal. When prodigal sons come home from foreign parts nowadays, my dear, they get no welcome unless they bring a little foreign capital with 'em."

"And you've been kicked out by a Chink!" she said reflectively.

"Not again!" His brow darkened ominously.

"Then it's the police and the jail for you," she interposed. "And *that's* no recommendation!"

He fell instantly despondent again.

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“ Oh, I’m a hopeless case. What’s the good of talking about it? Why don’t we discuss *your* soul a little? ”

She looked at him steadily. “ I’d worry less about my soul if I could get you out of this. You’re so disgusting I can barely talk to you, but I’d really like to make a man out of you.”

“ In love with me? ”

She shook her head. “ Not even a little. I’m fussy, of course. Still, there may be the makings of a man somewhere about you, though you don’t look it.”

“ Flattered, indeed! ”

“ I know — you think that’s the lowest degradation, to have a café girl put up her nose. Well, you needn’t put on airs. But I would like to get you started again.”

Something in her tone broke through the hard shell of his recklessness. He got up and sought a basin and cold water. He spent ten minutes over his toilet and came back and sat down.



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“I believe you really care,” he muttered. “I’ve been a pretty poor kind of scoundrel several times and an awful ass all the time. But I—I really would like to repay a kindness which takes no account of dirty clothes, a week’s beard and the reek of gin. So you have hopes of me?”

“It’s a long way back,” she said mournfully. “I know what it would cost you. It isn’t simply a matter of going back to New York a prodigal son. You’d fall for the same thing again. It’s the going back the way you came! If you were really a man, you’d do that. You’d go back over the old road and reach your father’s house with a clean record behind you. Oh, but it would be hard!”

The silence was broken only by the click of the ivory dominoes on the table. Potter sat, chin on his palm, and thought as he had never thought before, while the girl twisted her fingers together and swallowed constantly something in her throat.

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Presently Henry said musingly, "Ten thousand, one hundred and twenty-nine miles *and* a quarter."

"And a quarter?" she repeated.

"My last respectable appearance — and my final appearance — was one quarter of a mile from Metter Alley, in the office of the excellent Simpson. My dear, that quarter of a mile will stump me!"

She looked at him searchingly, with quivering lips. Henry went to the basin and once more scrubbed his face with cold water. When he came back she reached into the dark bunk and pulled from its hiding place a knotted handkerchief. It flicked into his palm again. He kept it.

"Clothes and your board," she said hastily. "You can pay it back. My God, be a man, and don't throw me down! I don't want ever to see you again till you can walk into Sit Que's sober, well-dressed, with money in your pocket and say, 'Kid, I've got back the quarter of a mile!' Just

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that, and I'll be happy, perfectly happy! Then you leave Shanghai and go the rest of the way!"

Henry sought the den over till he found a scrap of rice paper. He appropriated Sam-shew-sing's ink-saucer and brush and made the following schedule:

Sam-shew-sing's to Simpson's.....	¼ mile
Shanghai to Yokohama.....	1070
Yokohama to Honolulu.....	3394
Honolulu to San Francisco.....	2091
San Francisco to Fairfield, Ia.....	2476
Fairfield, Ia., to Pittsburg.....	612
Pittsburg to New York City.....	486

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10,129¼

He handed her the paper. "I remember all those distances because I used to have to know 'em in the shipping end of the business. I'm glad the first number is a fraction. It looks easy, at least."

She held the figures in tense hands. "And you'll go back—every mile of the way?"

He nodded, his eyes shining with re-

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newed hope. "Every foot, every mile, all the way to my father's house on West Fifty-sixth street!"

She was strangely excited. She put the paper away and drew him to the door, past the absorbed Chinese. The dawn was whitening the Eastern sky and a fresh wind blew from the great river. "Hurry!" she whispered. "To-day! and never come back here! All I ask—all I want—"

"What is it?"

"Let me know—just drop a card to Marcelle at the café each time you make another stage on your way back. That's all."

He glanced at her pallid face and weary eyes. She was shivering. He patted her on the shoulder. "Go back and get warm. I'm all right. I'll send you the ten pounds as soon as I can."

Then, under a sudden impulse, he stooped and kissed her.

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He went up the alley, his bare head high  
with new resolve.

Let us ascend with Henry Potter.



II  
THE COMING  
FIRST STAGE





**F**OR a week he devoted himself to physical recuperation. He sought out a cheap lodging in a part of the city removed from his old haunts, purchased some decent, inexpensive clothes and then tried to remedy the sins of years by a strenuous course of walking, bathing and water-sipping. At the end of seven days he stared at himself in the cracked mirror and shook his head. Some of the unhealthy flesh added by years of luxurious living was gone, but muscle and robust color had not yet arrived. Still, he observed that he looked different than he remembered to have looked since he left college. "Maybe I'm sober," he mused. "At least I'm miserable enough."

That he could jest at all was sign of his vitality, for the week had been one of absolute agony, varying from the acute

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wretchedness of the morning hours to the burning misery of the evening; from physical weakness to mental self-abhorrence. Remorse and shame were his companions and his cheek was constantly flushed with mortification. The long road he had traveled in six years with care-free joviality, selfish absorption and heedless lavishing of time and money and strength seemed in retrospect a long career of inexplicable silliness, rascality and disgrace. A thousand times he was driven out-of-doors by the stinging lash of memory reawakening and a thousand times he managed to refrain from the liquor he craved, control himself and suffer.

Now he was come to the hardest part of his task. Simpson, the exporter, stood like a horrible menace at the entrance of the homeward road — Simpson the calm, the respectable, the formal, the business-like. Henry remembered his final inter-

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view with him. At the time he had flung out of the office with a sense of having put Simpson in his place. He recalled the scene with a heavy blush.

“It’s got to be done,” he muttered to himself. “Can’t leave Simpson behind. — Here goes!”

The polyglot Chinese porter at the warehouse received Henry doubtfully. He did not think Mr. Simpson could be seen.

“I must see him,” Henry said resolutely. “Ask him for just three minutes of his time.”

The porter glanced at Henry’s clothes, his face and his eyes, seemed favorably impressed and departed. He was gone some time and Henry felt the cold sweat of physical weakness oozing in his palms. The eyes of the clerks within the glass cage, apparently bent on their books, he knew to be scanning him and exchanging glances. His face grew crimson. He was on the

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point of retiring to come another time when he was informed that Mr. Simpson would see him. He marched into the familiar private office, closed the door behind him and nodded to the gray-haired man at the big, orderly desk.

“What is it, Mr. Potter?”

“Two things,” said Henry, trying to control his voice. “When I left here you remarked that I had cost your firm several hundred dollars. I wish to pay that back. Secondly, I would like a place — any place — in your establishment, on trial.”

“In the first place,” was the prompt reply, “I charged the loss against my desire to do your father a favor. In the second place I don’t feel that I care to increase the account by giving you any kind of a position in my house.”

Henry’s wits were working more smoothly. “I could get another position, sir, with another firm, in spite of my record with you. There’s always a job for the

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repentant prodigal whose father is worth millions. I'm trying to forget that fact. I realize my criminal foolishness. I'm determined to make good, and my only way to make good lies through your office. I'll take any wages and any work you think best, so long as it will pay my board and lodging — which isn't much."

"And come down on your father as usual?"

"I intend to surprise him agreeably," Henry said firmly. "It is a very hard thing for me to do, but I beg to call your attention to the fact that I am exceedingly sober —"

"No money!"

Henry held out his hand with two gold coins therein. "Sober, sir, in my right mind and not trying to borrow or steal. If you will consider these amazing facts, sir, you may think of my application more favorably."

"You were in an opium dive ten days

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ago," was the chilly reply. "At your father's cabled request I took just pains enough to ascertain where you were."

Henry's flushed face took on a deeper hue. He kept his voice steady. "Quite true. Can I have a job for a month?"

Mr. Simpson looked absurdly abused.

"I'll allow you fifty dollars gold a month and you can keep books — *on trial*— under my Chinese clerk."

Henry realized that this was a job usually given some stray pensioner but promptly accepted it. Fifteen minutes later he was trying to steady his fingers around a pen and decipher the yellow bills he was to enter on a page that was by no means plain before him. "This is going to be the longest quarter of a mile in the entire circuit of the terrestrial globe," he murmured to himself.

One month afterwards Mr. Simpson paid him fifty dollars in gold and looked at him inquiringly. Henry answered the mute

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question. "I'd like to keep the job, sir."

"For another month, then." Mr. Simpson dismissed him curtly.

That night Henry Potter entered Sit Que's café at eight o'clock, the dullest hour of the evening. Marcelle was singing a dismal ditty to empty tables to the accompaniment of an old piano pounded industriously by a long-fingered Portuguese. Henry stood in the shadow of a mechanical organ till her song was concluded and then walked forward to where she rested, fanning herself. A quick twist of his wrist and a knotted handkerchief fell in her lap. She looked up. Henry raised five fingers.

"Half of what I owe you," he said.

Her glance at him was peculiarly earnest. He saw that the pupils of her eyes were dilated, giving her a strange gravity.

"Yes," he went on, "I'm all right. Been working a month. It's a long quarter of a mile!"

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“ You aren’t eating enough,” she said quickly.

“ Plenty! No luxuries, of course, as I’m trying to pay up some debts.”

She made a pleading gesture with her hands. “ Don’t stay here,” she whispered. “ Some of your old crowd might come in — it’s dangerous. Good-by! ”

“ Till next month! ”

Mr. Simpson held the shining coins that were the reward of Henry’s second trial some time before letting them go. “ You seem to be in earnest, young man.”

“ Have I another month? ”

“ You have. Try your hand at selling again,” Simpson continued. “ Salary *and* commissions.”

“ Much obliged,” said Henry.

“ See Murphy. He has a big consignment of goods just in from up the river.”

In due time he saw Murphy and found that personage apparently distracted.



## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

He snarled at Henry. "You back again? Why on earth didn't the boss send me a real man? Look here, Potter, this is too stiff a game for you. I know *you*. Go back and tell Simpson I told you I wanted somebody that would *work*."

"Forget it," said Henry, slangily. "What's the trouble?"

Murphy stared at his new assistant. "Hunh? Say, have you cut out the flowery dalliance with the winecup? Hunh? Well, all right, then. There are three buyers for the biggest houses in New York right here in Shanghai. And the goods we've got in from the upper country haven't been assorted, checked or re-packed. They aren't in shape for me to handle. Simpson must think —"

"He sent me to help you," said Henry. "What do you want done?"

Within five minutes Henry understood that unless some three hundred tons of Chinese goods were put in shape for in-

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spection by the buyers within three days, Simpson's Exporting Company would lose not only a large sum immediately, but valued connections. Together Murphy and he looked at the piles of bales, straw sacks, boxes and bundles. "And those fellows won't wait a day after Saturday and it's Wednesday now," mourned the sales manager.

"You tend to 'em afternoons and evenings," Henry remarked. "Lemme have a couple of porters and I'll wrestle this stuff into shape."

"But you know nothing about it!" said Murphy, tearing at his curly hair. "And if I stay here my men will think I'm not hospitable and if I stay with them you'll make a mess of it."

"Go forth and dally with the full meal and the tall glass," quoth Henry. He stripped off jacket, collar and tie, rolled up his sleeves and fell upon a bale.

"Do your worst!" said his superior

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resignedly. "Glad you aren't ashamed to be seen working, anyhow. It's the boss's fault, not mine!"

Sixty hours later Henry Potter picked up his collar, tie and jacket and fled for a bath house. Then he went to bed and slept twenty hours. When he reported to Simpson Saturday noon he was offered a cigar.

"Your salary is raised to one hundred gold a month," said his employer. "Your commissions already amount to \$500 gold. — You'll stay?"

"I'll stay," said Henry.

That night in Sit Que's he tossed a third knotted handkerchief into Marcelle's lap. She shook her head.

"Interest on the loan your friend made me," Henry explained.

"I'm sure she wouldn't take it," was the demur.

"Take it yourself, then," was the obstinate remark.

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Marcelle glanced down with a faint color on her thin cheeks.

Henry observed it and reached for the handkerchief. "No insult intended. Feel better about me?"

"You look fine — splendid."

"Think you might fall in love with me now?"

She tossed her head.

"It would be good for you," he said calmly. "Steady you and all that. The very thought of it makes you pretty!"

Her lips quivered childishly. He smiled. "Cheer up! I'll see you next month."

Six months and one week after he had quit Sam-shew-sing's Henry stood once more in his employer's office.

"You've a thousand dollars due you," said Mr. Simpson. "You have proved a very valuable man, Mr. Potter. I am — er — exceedingly gratified. I'm sorry to lose you."

"I must get to Yokohama, sir. I'm

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obliged to you for what you have done for me.”

“ Any letters — any little assistance — ” Simpson muttered nervously.

“ Thank you. Just one letter, please. A general statement of my conduct during the past six months.”

“ With pleasure. And in Yokohama — I have connections there, as you know — it would gratify me — ”

“ I am going to open an agency there,” said Henry. “ I think there is an excellent field for the introduction of American vehicles and smaller iron manufactures.”

Mr. Simpson became grave. “ I have an excellent acquaintance there who may be of help,” he said, “ but — ”

“ No financial recommendations,” Henry interposed. “ I’m going on my own *that* way.”

“ Eh — yes, certainly,” was the response given in much relief.

With a draft for fourteen hundred dol-

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lars in his wallet, together with a florid letter from the Simpson Exporting Company, Henry stepped out into the street and made his way one-quarter of a mile to Metter Alley. It was a warm spring afternoon and the odors of the close lane were in full flower. He kicked Sam-shew-sing's door open and nodded to that drug-sodden individual. Marcelle sat up disheveled in her bunk and stared.

“It's you!”

“It's me,” said Henry. “Listen to the words of wisdom and cheer. First, I've made the first quarter of a mile of the ten thousand, one hundred and twenty-nine *and* a quarter. I am the possessor of coin in large amounts and a letter which testifies that I am a reputable, sober and highly industrious business man. I am now prepared to cover the ten hundred and seventy miles between the metropolis on the Great River and Yokohama.”

Marcelle brushed the hair from her eyes

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and smiled wanly. "I knew you would make it," she said in a low voice.

"You knew nothing of the sort, my dear," quoth Henry. "You took a chance on a poor devil because—well, because you're a good sort. So here's the poor devil, no longer poor and desirous of returning a favor by asking another. Here"—he drew out a hundred dollars in gold—"is the needful wherewith you, fair damsel, will proceed to buy, purchase and equip yourself with a wedding garment. *Chop-chop! Wiki-wiki! Pronto!*"

She stared at him with lips parted.

"'Tis in earnest the fond swain speaks," he assured her. "Out of your slothful couch and to the bazaars for pretties!"

Her piercing tones reached even the drowsy ear of Sam-shew-sing. "Oh, you fool! You *fool!*"

Henry's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

She flung herself out of the bunk and

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faced him with flashing eyes. "Fool! I thought I'd made a man out of you! And you'd *marry* me!" She laughed hysterically. "Marry me! an opium smoker! a café singer! You *fool!*"

"Of course I'd marry you — shall marry you," Henry Potter said firmly. "I've expected to, all along. You saved me. I think you like me. Therefore, I marry you and take you out of this smoky hell and share my respectability with you — the respectability you've handed me."

She put a hand on each of his shoulders and peered into his face. She sighed. "You'd do it! Yes, you'd do it!"

She crept into the vile bunk again, sobbing. Henry tried to rouse her, to extract a single word of assent. All in vain. At last he thrust the spurned money under the pillow and bent over her.

"I'll be back at seven o'clock this evening. You will be dressed and we'll go and



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get married. A steamer sails for Yokohama to-morrow morning at eight."

She made no response. When he was once more in the stifling alley he could still hear her sobs.

It was dark when he returned to Samshew-sing's. The door was open and he saw the proprietor eating rice by the light of a dim candle. He entered and called, "Marcelle!"

She did not answer. The Chinese nodded his head wisely. "She ketchem new dless. B'long too muchee hop."

With a swift step Henry crossed the earthen floor to the bunk. It was deep in the shadow and he snatched up the candle and held it so that the slender beam fell on Marcelle.

She lay immobile and silent. By her head, on the pillow, was a modest hat. His quick eyes saw that she was freshly clad from head to foot. She was abso-

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lutely motionless, pallid cheeked, grey lipped, with her slim fingers across her breast. He slowly bent nearer, nearer, nearer. . . . The hot grease from the candle dripped down on the flowered bodice. . . . Marcelle did not move. . . . She was dead.

Henry stared long at the serene face. It held a beauty he had never noticed, a delicacy that made him choke.

In her right hand was a piece of paper. He gently disengaged it. By the light of the candle he saw that it was the schedule of distances he had set down—so long ago!

Sam-shew-sing's to Simpson's,  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile.

Marcelle had crossed out that first line and set a date opposite it. "To-day!" he said to himself.

At the bottom she had written in firm letters, *You made the quarter of a mile for my sake. That's all you can do for*

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*me. I'll remember it in my long dream.  
Good-by.*

Henry Potter slipped the paper into his wallet and stooped and kissed the pallid lips. "Good-by, friend!" he whispered. "I'll remember, too!"

Later he slipped a hundred dollars into the hand of the portly Sit Que.

"Missy Marcelle b'long my velly good fen'," he explained slowly. "She dead Sam-shew-sing's place. Bimeby you ketchem bury, all same white lady."

Sit Que nodded impassively and picked up his ink brush. A few strokes and he handed the result as a receipt to Potter.

"I sabe," he remarked. "She b'long your fen'. Allight! I ketchem. *Maskee* money—all same white lady. I bury! Allight! Goo'-by!"

"It is ten hundred and seventy miles to Yokohama," Henry muttered to himself.



III

SECOND STAGE



**T**HE first man Henry met when he landed in the Japanese city was an American in the Consular service. He nodded curtly to Potter and was passing on when a thought seemed to strike him.

“By the way, Potter,” he said briefly, “your name was dropped at the Club.— Just mentioned it — might save embarrassment.”

Henry met his glance calmly. “Much obliged, Howard.”

The other seemed slightly abashed. He looked at the clean, healthy face and the clear eyes a second time. “I didn’t mean to be nasty about it,” he proceeded, a trifle more cordially.

“No offense. I made an owl of myself here. Nobody knows that better than I do. I’m back here on business.”

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Howard hastily said farewell and departed. "He thought I'd want to borrow from him," Henry said to himself, flushing. "I seem to remember loaning *him* some money. I must have made an awful ass of myself if he thinks it's up to him to turn me down. Well, it's part of the long road."

He hesitated some time before ordering a 'rickshaw to take him to the same hotel where he had stopped before. His impulse was to go some place where he was not known. But he put this aside as cowardly. He set his teeth and said the name.

While he was registering the clerk looked at him coldly. He seemed to be struggling with astonishment.

"I should like a room at your monthly rate," said Henry.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Potter, but you possibly remember a small account you left unsettled here? We have tried to collect



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several times and failed. Also a notification to your New York address stated that you were no longer entitled to draw on your people. They repudiated the account, sir."

"I remember very little about it," said Henry quietly. "I do remember getting some sort of a letter from you in Shanghai, but what it was all about I don't know.—How much do I owe you?"

Appeared a proprietor whose initial rudeness was softened by Henry's prompt settlement and excuses. But he was sufficiently callous to insist on payment in advance thenceforth.

With great difficulty Henry kept his temper. It was new to his experience to suffer indignities such as these. During the last months with Simpson he had partially forgotten the lessons of Metter Alley. However, it was part of his scheme to rehabilitate himself everywhere he had

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been known formerly as a reckless and dissolute youth. So he swallowed the hotel clerk's ill-concealed contempt.

Within a week he had established himself under the title of Commercial Agent and set about trying to sell vehicles and materials manufactured by his father's various companies. In this he was aided by what he recalled of the details of the offices he had worked in and a mass of lists, catalogues and so on which he found among some luggage he had left in storage. By shrewd inquiries he acquainted himself with the general run of his line of business in Yokohama and corrected his lists accordingly. Meanwhile he cabled to San Francisco, trusting that the manager there would send on his quotations and office supplies first and make inquiries afterwards.

He soon found his equipment for competition with shrewd Germans and earnest Englishmen was pitiably threadbare. He devoted himself all the more sedulously

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to study and finally, when his little hoard was almost exhausted, made a large sale on what he considered advantageous terms. He closed the deal, cabled the order and started out after new prospects.

Gradually it dawned on him that his ill-success was due largely to an invisible, intangible something which caused his very quotations to be taken carelessly. His eyes were opened when a Japanese with whom he had been talking prices and grades for a week suddenly ignored all his quotations and gave the order to another firm at a large advance in price. He thought the affair over twenty-four hours and then went to the importer.

“I wish you would speak frankly to me,” he said. “You could have saved four thousand dollars by placing your order with my house. You evidently consider me unreliable. Why?”

The Japanese was suave. “Not at all, sir. In my dealings I merely consult rec-

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

ognized commercial rules. You have no rating in Yokohama. You have no references at all.”

Henry considered this a moment and then — smiled.

With his next customer (in prospect) he was very blunt. “I’m in wrong on account of some serious foolishness,” he told that keen-eyed man. “I’m trying to get back into business. I can save you money and you’ll find the goods all right. I’ve learned that they say in this city that I can’t deliver on the contracts I make. Here is a letter from a gentleman for whom I have been working. It is in no sense a financial guarantee. Read it.” He offered Simpson’s letter.

“I’m glad you spoke this way,” was the reply. “You *have* a bad reputation, Mr. Potter. In the business world such affairs are not easily forgotten, such as your repudiation by your father’s companies. But that was several years ago. I hear the

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best reports of you now. I know Mr. Simpson for a careful man. I'll consider the matter. Maybe we can risk a little, though I wish you to understand that in placing an order through you we consider the *risk*."

Henry got his order and cabled it. He was left with less than a hundred dollars between him and starvation. The San Francisco office had duly sent him supplies, but from New York and his orders he had heard not a word. He reckoned that the next mail steamer must bring either notice of the shipping of his first order or a repudiation of his authority which would mean beginning all over again in some other way.

When the letter finally arrived he opened it with misgivings. It was a formal acknowledgment of his cable and the confirmatory letter, and a statement that the consignment had been duly shipped as per terms he had arranged. There were a few

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words at the bottom, signed by his father's general manager.

“ *Dear Sir:*

“ I have risked this shipment on my own responsibility.”

Henry drew a long breath. He was safe. With two big sales, satisfactory to both parties, he knew that the rest was merely a matter of endurance and energy.

The incident, however, taught him a lesson: he realized the almost universal willingness of humanity to give a man another chance. Simpson had shown it, the unknown manager of the San Francisco branch had shown it, his father's utterly businesslike, brusque and busy lieutenant had shown it. It made him understand how sorely he had tried the patience of everybody when he was finally left to starve, or die in the gutter.

One year later Henry welcomed an elderly, experienced branch manager who

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stated that the company had decided, in view of the young Commercial Agent's success, to establish a Japanese office. The newcomer seemed greatly surprised at the business which hummed through the one room Henry occupied.

"I shan't accept a position with the company," Henry informed him, when it was suggested that he might do well to take a place with the new agency. "I'm on my own, now. I'll take a few days to show you about and introduce you. Then I go to Honolulu."

The new manager looked at him quizzically. "This country has agreed with you, Mr. Potter."

"Excellently, but I must move on."

"To Honolulu?"

"To Honolulu."

The manager rubbed his neatly shaven chin. "I believe it would do no harm for you to go on to New York," he suggested.

Henry smiled. "It's exactly nine thou-

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sand and fifty-nine miles to New York City from here.”

“Quite a distance!” murmured the manager, doubtful of the meaning of this apparently irrelevant statement.

“Quite! and first I must make the three thousand three hundred and ninety-four to Honolulu.”

“Dear, dear, these figures!” ejaculated his auditor, more puzzled than ever.

“We have an agency in Honolulu, haven’t we?”

“A kind of one — a kind of one; very small.”

“I feel impelled to see whether it can’t be worked up into a better one,” said Henry.

“Excellent! I see, now, what you meant. You intend to master all the details from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Excellent, Mr. Potter! That will greatly gratify your fa — the firm. Allow me to summarize a few things about Hawaii and



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its market." He drew Henry aside for an hour.

"By the way," Henry said before he took final leave, "I suppose you have gone over all the books and reports?"

"I have. Everything is in perfect shape, Mr. Potter."

"A letter to that effect? Would it be asking too much?"

"Of course I shall report to the home office," was the smiling reply.

"I'd like a letter of my own," Henry said firmly.

"Certainly, certainly — anything to oblige, but I fail to see the necessity —"

"It is three thousand three hundred and ninety-four miles to Honolulu," was the extraordinary reply.

Two days later, with the manager's letter tucked in beside Simpson's and five thousand dollars in his pocket, Henry Potter boarded the s.s. *Siberia*.



IV

THIRD STAGE



ONCE more Henry Potter leaned across the desk of the accountant in Bishop's Bank in Honolulu with a pen in his hand.

“I'm not very flush of money,” he remarked, “but what little I have I wish to deposit with you as a business account.”

The accountant looked at the amount written on the slip. “What business, may I ask, Mr. Potter?”

“General agency,” said Henry. “I shall sell, among other things, the products of the Potter Corporation, of which I am a representative.”

“I am afraid—”

“I know exactly what you are going to say,” interposed Henry. “I wish no accommodation at all—simply to be able to

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

draw my check on whatever balance I may have and direct that the drafts be handled through you for collection."

"We shall be glad to do that," was the reply.

Again Henry sought out a dirty and uncouth man in the precincts of Kapiolani Park. Dirt grasped the hand of cleanliness.

"My long-lost brother!" ejaculated the tramp. "The fertile isle of Oahu has been a desert since you left."

"You are now bound on an expedition across the desert that is traversed solely by the water-wagon," said Henry. "On my last trip with your aid I examined Honolulu on the inside, outside and by the wayside."

His auditor licked his lips fondly.

"We saw several things," Henry continued. "We missed some of the most important."

"I can —"

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“Precisely. It happens that in the accumulation of much worthless though costly knowledge you have gained an acquaintance with the flora, fauna and mineral wealth of this archipelago. We will examine these matters together.”

“Let’s have a drink on it.”

“Instead I propose that you bathe, shave, purchase clean clothes and then discuss with me the easiest way of ascertaining what wealth lies hid beneath the garden soil of Hawaii. Do you get me?”

“I once boasted myself a mining engineer,” replied the other. “Where, if I may be impertinent, is the dauntless sport of yester-year with whom I trod the mazy dance which knows not professions nor the tree of useful knowledge?”

“His address is Metter Alley, Shanghai.”

“And his gold — his glittering gold?”

“I’ll pay all expenses, a reasonable salary and something to remember me by.”

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

The bargain was struck and Henry Potter, after a week in the office of the agent, during which he delved deeply into territorial reports, set forth with his companion and was lost to view for two months. At the end of that period he returned to Honolulu laden with notebooks, blue-prints and health. He brought with him a brawny and enthusiastic man who had been known for several years as a loafer and a drunkard but now astonished his acquaintances by sober devotion to some business about which he gave no information.

To him Henry gave many gold coins. "You are a first-class engineer," he added.

"I was an engineer once," said the other. "Then I thought I was an acrostic and commenced dropping syllables till my last was plain gin. I'm much obliged."

"A job?"

"That's what I'm after, *wiki-wiki*."

"A hundred a month with me, then," quoth Henry.



## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“ *Much* obliged,” the engineer grinned.

“ Thank a lady called Marcelle.”

Another month was spent by Henry digging out statistics in the Palace, going over points of law and accumulating general information. When he was done he interviewed three men of means. To the last one he said, “ You agree with me that the development of this property will be extremely profitable? ”

“ Certainly — but at an enormous initial expense. Your figures — ”

“ You think they are within reason? ”

“ I do. But it will take millions, Mr. Potter, and millions — ”

“ You and your associates, if you will take this up, can easily induce capital to invest with you.”

“ But — ”

Henry picked up his papers and rose, smiling. “ I filed on the central property and I have a first-class man, an engineer, planning the development work. I’m not

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

a wealthy man. But I will make the proposition to you: Give me ten thousand dollars for the work I've done and my interest. You can go ahead and organize your company and have a free field. I'll ask for one thousand dollars down, for the assignment of my rights, and nine thousand one year from now if you make the thing go. Otherwise I keep the thousand and you return me my rights."

Three days later Henry cashed a check for one thousand, drew out his own balance, bade the accountant good-by and walked out into Queen street, patting his breast pocket which now held, besides drafts and cash, sundry letters certifying to his reliability, experience and integrity, signed by Honoluluans of respectable position.

A thought struck him. He opened his wallet and extracted a ragged piece of rice paper which was brushed with a list of

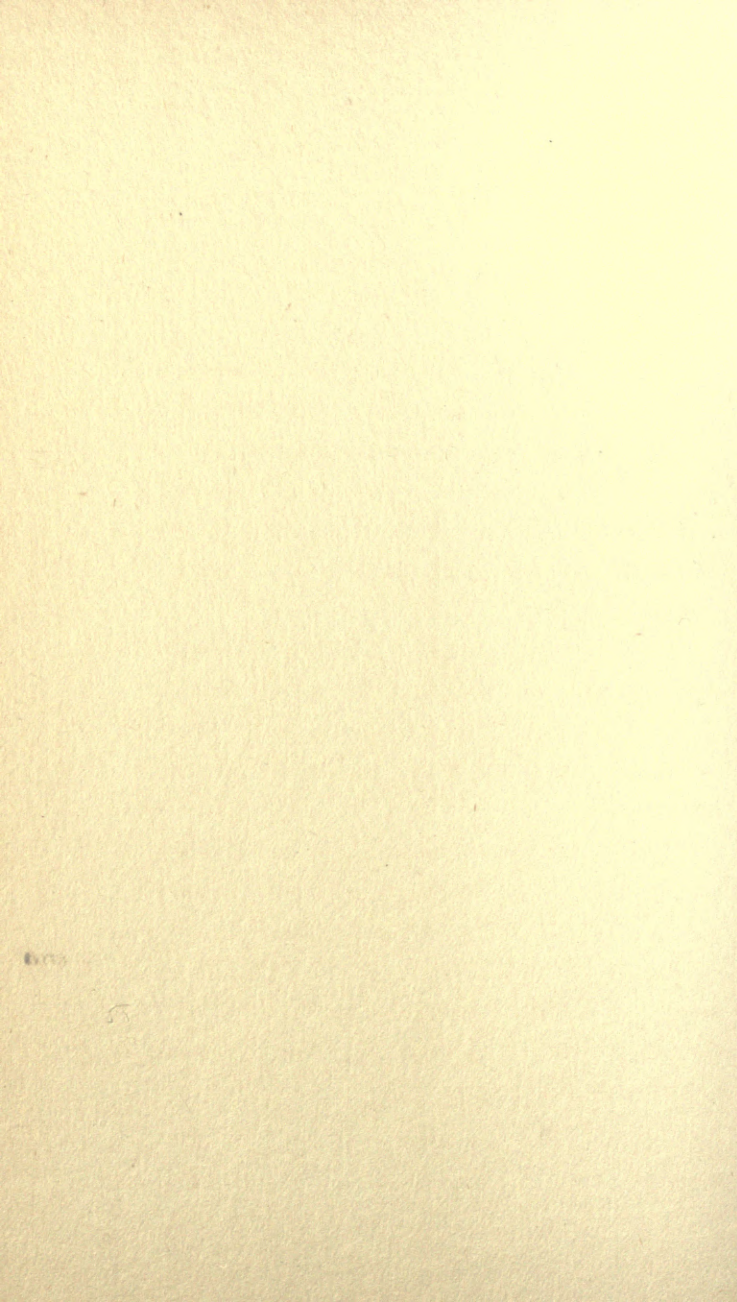
## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

distances. He ran his pen through the fourth line. "It is just two thousand and ninety-one miles to San Francisco," he said aloud.



V

**FOURTH STAGE**



SAN FRANCISCO'S chill winds reminded him that life was becoming very earnest. He dreaded meeting all the people he had known in the California city and thought with constant qualms of the difficulty he would have in retrieving his former errors.

It was early morning when the steamer docked and he sent his baggage directly from the customs sheds to a hotel while he took a car to the Potter offices on Market street.

"This is the first pill," he thought sheepishly. "I return silent as the foot of time about my previous career and try to make them think I had no thought except for business when I departed between two days and left the managership to hang on a nail until somebody came along and

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

picked it off. Well, they can do no more than look suspiciously at me.”

But he found that several warm letters from his successor in Yokohama had paved the way. The present manager received him politely, unobtrusively took stock of his firm, brown face and clear eyes and ended by remarking, “ I presume you’re on your way to New York? ”

“ I am not,” said Henry. “ I am here to ask whether you have an outside job for me.”

“ Without instructions from the home office — really — ”

“ I understand,” Henry put in promptly. “ Your salary list is full up. Give me a chance on commission. I’ve a few prospects up my sleeve.”

“ But the other men — ”

Henry’s eyes grew a trifle sharper. “ If they can’t hold their own, hadn’t you better stir ’em up? ”



## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

The manager recognized the voice of a Potter.

“Go ahead and see your prospects,” he said.

For two months Potter devoted himself to business so exclusively that no one saw him except the men he dealt with. He got orders and proved his knowledge of the selling end of the business, but he kept steadily in mind his chief aim, which was to establish a connection of his own and wipe out forever the reputation which still clung to him.

On every hand he found himself remembered. Some laughed and slapped him on the back when he mentioned business. Others listened coldly and referred him to their subordinates, but gradually he gained a couple of firm allies who perceived that the “sport” of old was become an earnest, sober and exceedingly clever worker.

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

He avoided meeting his former boon companions and refused all invitations to dinners, suppers and club affairs except when he knew that he was received on his present merits. He lived simply in an up-town hotel and spent his spare time over law-books and government reports. Occasionally he mailed a result of his investigations to his father's general manager, but with Thomas himself he neither sought nor had any communication.

Yet in the very midst of his industry he knew that he was evading his heaviest duty. His conscience grew more and more troublesome. His inward misery gained keenness as the months went on and he did not meet the girl whom he had left in tears in a delicately furnished music room in a costly house on Jackson street. She was still unmarried and gossip spoke of her as devoted to charity and the church.

Time and again he dressed himself care-

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

fully for the evening. Time and again he could not force himself to leave his room and face Edith Cellenery. "It's the whole blamed two thousand and ninety-one miles," he remarked to himself. "All in a heap!"

Once or twice he resolved simply to let the whole affair slip. Maybe she had forgotten it! But he realized that his self-respect demanded this poor reparation for an act of scoundrelism.

So, at eight o'clock one night, he rang the bell of the Jackson street house and gave his card to the maid.

"Miss Cellenery is in the music room," was her direction. "She is at home this evening."

He dropped hat and coat and proceeded the familiar way to the room he knew so well. The door was open and he stepped in. Edith sat by the piano turning over some loose sheets of music. She looked up with a smile which faded when she saw

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

who it was. She rose and faced him gallantly, every curve of her face expressing pride.

“ I have come back,” he said quickly and stopped. He could think of no more to say.

She bowed slightly. She did not offer to sit nor offer him a seat.

Henry flushed. “ I have only one claim on your patience,” he continued. “ I have come to tell you where I went when I left San Francisco — and you.”

She had recovered herself. “ To Honolulu? wasn't it? There were so many tales about I paid little attention to which was the true one.”

“ You were quite right. It was natural you should despise me. I have learned to be very blunt in the last couple of years, Edith. May I speak frankly to you, for the last time? ”

“ For the first time? ” she suggested.

But something in his attitude made her

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

raise her eyes to his. He saw that they were a heavenly blue, and it thrilled him. With some difficulty he kept his mind on his errand.

“ The last time I was here I had — well, I had no business in a respectable house, much less in the home of the lady whom I was engaged to. I played the scoundrel and the cur and gave you to understand that I was glad of an opportunity to break with you. As a matter of fact I should have been glad of even your slightest friendship, for I was completely unworthy of even that. I am unworthy now, but I am at least respectable. I’m sober — which sounds horribly vulgar — and I have been for a long time (which is barely interesting), and I make my own living — which is what something like a hundred thousand better men do in this city every day.”

“ You *have* changed,” she murmured, blushing slightly.

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“ Now, Edith, this is the hardest hour I shall ever have to put in in my life. Please help me. I’ve been trying for two months — ever since I returned to San Francisco — to come here and see you. Please help me — just this once.”

“ I still don’t see why you are here — speaking this way,” she answered quietly. “ Won’t you sit down? ”

“ Thank you.”

He was silent, his brow wrinkled into a frown. “ I really am at a loss to explain things,” he began. “ It is a matter of my ‘ going back,’ as I call it. I think the best way is to tell you the truth, just as it was, though it does sound sentimental.”

“ Please spare me anything like that,” she said coldly. He saw the faint color rise in her cheeks.

“ I brought this along,” he proceeded, pulling out a piece of paper and handing it to her. “ Take it! It’s not inflammable — merely some figures. Read ’em.”

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

She seemed provoked but kept her eyes on the paper. "I see it's a set of distances."

"If you don't read them you'll never understand!" he burst out. "Please!"

"*'From Sam-shew-sing's to Simpson's, one quarter of a mile,'*" she repeated quietly. "*'From Shanghai to Yokohama* —' — what on earth has this to do with anything I must listen to?"

Henry got to his feet, crimson-faced. "All right, Edith. You are entitled to make it as hard as possible. Listen: those distances mark the various steps in my — my degradation. I ended at last in an opium joint in Shanghai. There somebody woke me up. I started back. I've been two years and over getting this far. I made up my mind that I'd come back the road I went, only I'd come back on my own earnings, and sober and a — a man, not a lying, dissipated blackguard. See? I — I did you a great injury. I threw aside

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

and couldn't understand the pure love that a woman as fine and good as you are offered a creature like myself. You loved me and I wouldn't surrender a bit of what I called my freedom, nor be a man even for an instant — even for the great reward of your love. I was unspeakable. But I'm coming back and this is my poor atonement — to come to you and show you that after all I had enough of the man in me to try to make good. It doesn't amount to much. I forfeited your affection and your esteem. But I'm sworn to regain your respect."

She sat holding the paper in her fingers while he talked. She did not raise her eyes till he was finished. When he met her gaze he saw that she was crying silently. Heavy tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Edith!" he whispered, shocked.

She shook her head.



## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

He sat miserably watching her weep. She did not sob nor move her hands in her lap. He felt the poignancy of that restrained grief.

Presently she held out her hand with the paper. "I see a message at the bottom of it."

"It is the writing of a girl who loaned me money to get clean clothes and a fresh start," he replied slowly. "She killed herself."

The blue eyes burned on his. He bowed his head. "She was a singer in a café. I offered to marry her. A good girl! She called me fool, and killed herself."

Miss Cellenery rose, mistress of herself once more. "I'm glad you have come back to San Francisco," she said, holding out her slim hand. "You were always a dear boy, Harry. All's past now! Come and see — an old friend!"

He squared his shoulders under her

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

gaze. She answered his drawn smile lightly. "What an improvement! What are you doing now? Manager again?"

"I make about a hundred a month commissions," he returned. "I'm at the foot of the list."

"But your father?"

"He disowned me long ago. It's a good many miles to *him*."

"I know you'll make it," she responded cordially.

Out on the street Henry drew a long breath. "We'll count that for a thousand miles, my son! Heavens, what a girl! But you're down and out *there*, and — you've got no right anyway."

He walked to his room, lips set in a grim line.

In the morning, six months afterward, Henry informed his superior that he was going East the next day.

"Sorry to lose you," was the hearty

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

response. "You're certainly a good hustler. I suppose it's New York now?"

"Fairfield, Iowa," quoth Henry. "Two thousand, four hundred and seventy-six miles."



VI

FIFTH STAGE



**T**HE maples displayed the gorgeous banners of autumn when Henry arrived at the Iowa town. He spent the first day in a long walk through the oak and hickory woods, which he had learned to know with Sadie Price by his side. He felt that he was near the end of his journey back, his spirit was light and — yet! He had left Fairfield suddenly, without giving any excuses except that he was going on “business.” True, he had lived simply and decently within its narrow confines, but he remorsefully thought of the girl whose affection he had won and whom he had left with a careless remark that he would soon return. That had been seven years ago. What had happened during those years?

He recalled three letters from Sadie, hastily read, put away and lost. Yet he

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

had cherished her image and many a time, in fits of repentance and despondency, he had regretted the simplicity and innocence of his life when he had worked in the wagon factory. Was she married? Had she changed? Had he himself changed? Was he still in love with her? "That doesn't matter," he said to himself sternly. "What you have to do is to set things *right*."

In the morning he sought the office and found the staid Mr. Peterby still at the manager's desk. He looked up and nodded. "I heard you had come to town," was his remark, shaking hands perfunctorily.

Henry leaned across the unpainted oaken counter. "How's business?"

Mr. Peterby removed his spectacles. "Very fair, indeed. Very fair. I believe the company is satisfied."

"Good."



## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“ You have been abroad? ” the manager inquired. “ I believe I heard something about your being in China? ”

“ In China I was.”

“ And you are on your way to New York? ”

“ *Via* Fairfield and Pittsburg,” said Henry. “ A word in your ear: What’s the news? ”

For half an hour Mr. Peterby recalled names and identified them with short histories. At last, when Henry’s patience was almost exhausted the word “ Price ” fell from the manager’s lips. “ Old man Price died three years ago last July. He had a pension, you know, and very little property. But Sadie — an excellent woman, Mr. Potter — studied bookkeeping and is now working in town and supporting her mother. Do you remember Sadie? ”

“ I do,” Henry admitted, wincing at the

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

tone. "Where is she working, did you say?"

"At Thorne's. You must remember Thorne's?"

Henry's mind traveled back a few years, surveyed the Fairfield of that era and fixed on a drygoods store. He nodded. "I'll stay here quite a while, possibly," he remarked. "I have some business to attend to."

He left and walked from the factory into town, made the circuit of the square and entered the long aisle of Thorne's store. A couple of clerks looked at him and set him down as new salesman. He arrived at the little glass-enclosed office, saw a figure that he would have recognized anywhere, he realized, and boyishly pressed his nose against the pane.

Miss Price, pen in the air, gazed in stupefaction at this prank on the part of a stranger, composed her face into dignified rebuke and then opened her eyes very

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

widely. The cream of her cheek was ruddied by an unmistakable blush. Henry rubbed his nose, opened the door and stood beside her stool, smiling.

“Sadie Price! Put down that pen and wipe your mouth. I’m going to kiss you!”

Miss Price slipped from her stool, holding the pen like an offensive weapon, and retired hastily against the iron safe. From that vantage she faced him angrily.

“What do you mean by speaking that way to me?”

Henry shook his head. “I’ll tell you. Listen to me.” He turned his back on her and began slowly, “Chestnut brown hair, perfect eyes, an adorable nose, though a little large, red lips, a dimple, creamy white —”

He stopped, picked up the pen and ostentatiously wiped some splattered ink from his sleeve. “I was just going to prove that I could say it all with my eyes

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

shut," he complained, facing her. "I've said it over to myself a thousand —"

He saw that her anger was almost too much for her self-control. He dropped his air of gayety and said quietly, "Sit down, please."

She resumed her seat on the stool, her eyes flashing. She bent over the big ledger.

"Listen!" commanded Henry. "I've come exactly eight thousand nine hundred and thirty-one miles *and* a quarter to tell you something."

Her lip was quivering and he hastened on.

"I left here for a reason I shan't explain to you just now. No matter. I went to China before I realized that I had made the big mistake of my life. I'm back here to cry for mercy, Sadie. I swear —"

"What's the use of bringing it all up again?" she whispered.

"Use! I can't ever get back to New

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

York if you don't let me talk things over. I'm fixed right in Fairfield for life unless you listen to me." His tone was a new one and she must perforce bite her lip and let him speak.

"In the first place, this is Saturday," he proceeded. "I have discovered that you have a half-holiday on Saturdays and I want to take you for a drive. I have something to tell you, Sadie. Will you come?"

"I always spend the afternoon with my mother," she said coldly.

"You can spend every Saturday afternoon for the next hundred years with her, if you'll come with me to-day," he pleaded impetuously. "Please!"

"If it's the only way of getting rid of you I suppose I must suffer," she replied.

"I'll call for you at two o'clock, then, at your house."

She flushed. "Not at the house. I don't want mother to know I'm going with you.

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

She hates you. I'll meet you one block down Burlington street."

She allowed him not even a nod of farewell and he left the store with his face set in hard lines. "I don't blame her!" he mused. "I have the gall of a corporation lawyer even to ask her to go driving with me. But I simply *must!* Lord, what a girl! And I deliberately quit her!"

At two o'clock he urged the slowest horse he could procure from the liveryman down Burlington street. On the first crosswalk he found Sadie Price, veiled. She climbed in beside him without a word and he meekly drove on into the country. While he sedulously imitated her silence he glanced at her frequently.

The road turned down between two wooded slopes and the old horse subsided into a walk. Then Henry spoke. "Do you remember what I told you of the reason of my leaving Pittsburg and coming to Fairfield?"

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

She uttered a low-toned "Yes."

"I was perfectly frank in telling you that I had wasted money, time and strength in trying to be a high-flying young blood?"

She nodded.

"My dear Sadie, I wrote to my father, the millionaire, and told him I hoped to make you my wife and —"

"I never told you —"

"Exactly. But I thought you cared a heap and I knew I did, so I broke it to the old man. He knew me for about what I was, though he wouldn't have acknowledged it. He gave me ten thousand dollars to leave Fairfield. He took me for a blackguard and I proved to be one. In other words he paid me to leave the one girl who was making a man of me and whom I could honestly revere and respect as well as love. I left in a hurry. I lied to you. I said I was going on a business trip and would soon be back. That busi-

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

ness trip ended in an alley in Shanghai, China, where I pawned my sole remaining jewelry with an old Chink for a lodging, something to drink and rice out of a dirty pot. *That's* what my father's money made out of me.

“ Well, I took stock and decided I'd do something for myself. I started back. You wouldn't understand just how hard that was nor how long it took me. But I haven't been drinking for several years, and I make my own living. Not a cent do I get from my father. More than that, I've tried to straighten out mistakes I've made and atone a little for the wrongs I did. But when I left Fairfield as I did I wronged myself most, for I gave up my manhood. I sold it for ten thousand dollars. I want it back. I have sworn not to go back to New York nor to see my father until I can look him in the eye, as a man should.”

The long speech came to an end. Miss



## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

Price lifted her veil above her mouth. "I thought, of course, that you were only — playing, when you paid me so much attention."

"That is a fib of the blackest," quoth Henry. "You knew I was in deadly earnest."

"It didn't look like it."

He groaned. "Sadie, you haven't had three years of what I've had. I'm back here to tell you that I *was* in earnest and, more than that, that I'm a better man now and I want a second chance."

"I can't see the use of discussing it!"

He stopped the horse. "Are you in love with anybody else?"

"I fail to see what business it is of yours," she said quietly.

The horse, astounded by a cut of the whip, bounded forward. When Henry spoke again it was in a very humble voice. "I know! I blunder and blunder! But I tell you, Sadie, I worship the ground

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

you walk on! If I've forfeited my chance forever, be merciful and say so. Only, so long as there's no one else you care for — too much — I'm here, praying just for a chance — just a chance, Sadie, to win you for my wife! ”

The horse covered a long distance before she spoke. “ It is bitterly humiliating to confess it,” she said coldly. “ But I was in love with you — very deeply. You were my heart's idol. When you simply disappeared and I heard you were in San Francisco, and you didn't answer my three letters — shame on me for writing them! — I thought my heart would break. But — I tried to understand — to feel that you were only thoughtless.”

Once more the lash stung the patient animal and Henry's face was scarlet. “ Go on,” he said huskily. “ It's all coming to me — I know it.”

“ Then papa died, and I had to work

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

and that — that kept me occupied. The hardest thing was the way mamma felt.”

“ I had spoken to her,” Henry said simply.

“ Oh, it was cruel! ” she burst out.

Henry pulled the horse in and jumped out of the buggy. “ I see some hazel bushes in there. Let’s get some nuts.”

She shook her head. He insisted, one hand over hers. Finally she allowed him to lift her out and when he had tied the horse to a tree they went under the scattering trees. Suddenly he seemed struck by a thought. She heard his furious mutter to himself, “ Idiot! Fool! ”

He turned on her swiftly. She drew back, shrinkingly.

“ Will you promise to answer just one question, honestly and truly? Just one? ” he said gently.

“ If I can and you will take me right home.”

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“Lift your veil so I can see your eyes. — That’s better. Do you love me?”

The abruptness of the question, the great gentleness of the tone, stopped the quick denial on her lips. She faced him while the color rose slowly and tinged her cheeks. She struggled to maintain her composure under his gaze. But her defenses were weak before the onset. She surrendered, however, with the honors of war.

“I do — but God help me!”

He bent over and kissed her hand. “And you will marry me?”

She stood among the laden bushes, suddenly remote and mysterious to him. Her eyes seemed fixed on the distance, on some invisible and absorbing scene. He listened for her reply, every sense thrice acute.

With the swiftness of light her eyes filled, her lips trembled. He caught her in his arms.

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

It was dusk when the old horse stopped in front of the little creeper-enwrapped porch of the Price house. Henry leaped out and lifted Sadie down. "Now together — no, you stay here, dearest! I'll see your mother myself. I guess it's the only thing I can do!"

She smiled. "No. It's my place, Harry. She will take much convincing. I'll see her first."

"Then I can't stop to supper?"

A startled exclamation met his ear. "Saturday night! and no marketing done! I told mamma I would do it!"

"Hence, housewife! In and explain while I ransack the bazaars of the city."

He drove away cracking his whip boyishly. The horse trotted sedately to its stable.

An hour later Henry reappeared, a mass of bundles and packages. Sadie met him on the porch. "My goodness alive, Harry, what *have* you got?"

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“Got!” he cried, enclosing her in the midst of his parcels, “I’ve got supplies for the future Mrs. P. The grocer thinks I’m crazy and the butcher never let go of his cleaver from the moment I entered his shop.”

“But we never can use —”

“You forget I’m shy something like one thousand and one suppers of your cooking,” he retorted. “I’m going to make ’em all up to-night.”

Later he stood facing the gray-haired Mrs. Price. “Rich! Dear lady, I’m poor. I make my own living. My father disowned me long ago.”

“I hope you are not in debt,” quavered Mrs. Price.

“Pretty nearly paid up,” quoth Henry. “I owe only ten thousand dollars more and I’ll soon pay that off.”

On the porch Sadie inquired about the enormous debt. “If you only make enough for us to live on, how are you go-

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

ing to pay such an awful sum? How did you ever get into debt that much?"

"A secret!" said Henry. "You'll help me pay it."





VII  
SIXTH STAGE



“FROM Fairfield to Pittsburg is six hundred and twelve miles, Mrs. Potter,” Henry said to his bride, glancing round the Pullman.

“You’ll spend all our money in traveling,” she said, smiling. “Are you sure you can get a position there?”

“I must,” Henry answered. “Leave it to me. If the magnates refuse to open their coffers I will loot their old town. I feel equal to it!”

“We must live very economically,” she murmured.

“Exactly. Economically is the word. But you shan’t feel poor, Sadie.”

She returned a true wifely and satisfactory answer, and Henry delved into a suitcase and extracted therefrom a bundle of papers to which he devoted himself till dinner was announced.

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“ I’ve just closed up a deal in Honolulu,” he explained. “ I’ll make a profit out of it that will settle my last debts. Heigh-ho! ”

He spoke no further of money till they had been in their little flat in Pittsburg three months. He entered the kitchen one evening and kissed its aproned occupant. “ Hurry up with the supper, Sadie dear. We’re going to take the night train for New York.”

“ But — ”

“ Fair damsel, your master speaketh. Look here! ” He waved a slip of green paper before her eyes.

“ Ten thousand dollars! ” she exclaimed. “ *Harry!* where *did* you get it? ”

“ You have missed the first question proper on such occasions. A true and loyal wife would have said, ‘ Is it ours? ’ I reply like the true husband, ‘ It is — for a while. ’ ”

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

“ Already? ”

“ Mighty little faith in your husband’s earning capacity,” he pretended to grumble.



VIII  
BACK





**A**T midnight Henry pulled the ear of his sleeping bride. "Say, my dear, do you know that it is only *four hundred and eighty-six miles to New York?*"

"Well?" she murmured sleepily.

"It is *very* well," quoth Henry and gazed at the mahogany surface of the closed upper berth till daylight came through the window screen with the smell of coal smoke.

At ten o'clock that morning Thomas Potter looked at the card deposited by his hot plate.

"Humph! Ahumph! A-hem!" he rumbled. "Is he — how does he look, Henderson?"

Henderson coughed discreetly. "Lady with him, sir."

"Show him in — no, I'll see him in the library."

Thomas dallied with his egg, scowled,

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

picked up the morning paper, frowned at it, pushed his chair back into the ready hands of Henderson and departed for the library.

Henry was swinging his long legs from the big table in the center of the room when his father entered.

“Humph! Ahumph! A-hem!” roared Thomas crustily. “What does this mean?”

“A matter of business,” said Henry, meeting the scowl with a smile. “Here you are, sir!”

Thomas took the slip of green paper and stared at it. “A draft for ten thousand dollars,” he grumbled. “*Well?*”

“Some years ago you paid me that amount to leave Fairfield and not marry Miss Sadie Price,” Henry explained quietly. “I accepted the money and did *not* marry the lady. I discovered that I was the loser by the bargain. There is your money. Here is Mrs. Potter, *née*

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

Sadie Price." He waved his hand towards a figure almost lost in an enormous chair.

The elder Potter glanced at the bank draft and then at the young woman alternately. He put on his eyeglasses finally and rumbled, "Humph! Ahumph! A-hem! this draft seems to be perfectly good."

"So is the lady," said his son. "Mrs. Potter *née* Price. Sadie, advance and see the man who thought your charms were less than his old money."

She came timidly forward, with a shy glance at her husband. Thomas Potter stared, speechless. He referred to the green slip as the more comprehensible of the two visions.

"Where did you get this money, Henry?"

"I made it. Promoted a company in Honolulu. Make my own living. Perfectly honest money, sir!"

## THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

Through his eyeglasses Thomas studied his son's appearance. He missed nothing from the clear eyes and healthy complexion to the steady, capable hands and buoyant figure.

"Humph! Ahumph! A-hem!" he muttered, "I never expected it!"

"You accept the money?"

A remarkable trembling, never before witnessed by any acquaintance of Thomas Potter, attacked his lower lip. The green paper shook between his big fingers. "It's the only money I've got that I'm proud of," he said huskily. "Ahumph! Humph! A-hem! My dear, have you had your breakfast yet? We will have some breakfast, my dear. Yes, breakfast. It is waiting for you."

Thomas Potter offered his arm to Mrs. Henry Potter and led her out. Henry followed.

"It's fine to be back!" he murmured.







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