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F. R. KRAMER. OFFICE IN FIRST STATE BANK BUILD'G.

## Wallingford In His Prime

By GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER

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come artists and the city council grown rich from their well paid labor on this beautiful glazed inlay.

"Glazed inlay," repeated the mayor. "Is that what he calls it?" And he once more inspected curiously the box and the checkerboard. "That man has held back the progress of his town," he concluded, with woeful grief that such things could be. "I reckon the city council 'll fix him. They're in session now. I'll take these things right over to them. By the way, you're not going to charge anything for the loan of them, are you?"

"Certainly not," Wallingford assured him. "I have brotherhood principles myself. I regard everybody's money as common property," and he smiled blandly.

Wallingford wrote an elaborate receipt for the mayor to sign. "Mr. Crosby has a patent on the process," he stated, "and he has money to prosecute any infringement. Selfish of him to patent it, when the only infringement possible must come from Spangerville, no other town having water like yours."

"That's the very point!" said the mayor excitedly. "The city water I figured it all out while we were sitting here. The council will pass an ordinance this very morning placing a tax of a dollar a quart on all city water used for art manufacture."

The door opened, and a tall, thin man with gray sideburns and jet black hair and mustache entered on tiptoe. That man was Blackie Daw!

"Hist!" he said. "Henry Crosby! This morning he expressed a bottle of Spangerville's city water to New York. Hist! He prepaid it!"

Wallingford glanced at him wonderingly. "You see, Mr. Mayor," he resignedly explained. "If you attempt to tax Mr. Crosby he can move away from Spangerville. The only thing the city can do is to force Mr. Crosby to sell you his patent secret process and good will at a fair figure," and he looked at his watch.

"I must hurry right over to the council meeting," the mayor observed.

### CHAPTER XXVI.

**A** NERVOUS little dark skinned man was in the store with Henry Crosby and concentrated with penny pinching intensity upon books, invoices, bills and receipts when a committee of four members of the city council, including the mayor, entered, with much pomp and ceremony.

In deference to his official capacity Mr. Boyler and Mr. Kerr and Mr. Scorpine allowed Mayor Sawberry to take up a position about two feet in front of them, and in solemn array, hats held formally across their left wrists, they awaited the attention of the proprietor.

Mr. Crosby came forward, with scant graciousness. "Well?" he demanded peremptorily.

The mayor cleared his throat. "We represent Spangerville, the people and the city council," he began sonorously and looked back at his followers to see if they were properly supporting him. His eye was attracted immediately to one of the show windows, however, against the pane of which was dully pressed the nose of a face otherwise entirely concealed by a radiating pink beard of the most inflammatory anachronistic type. Needless to say, that face was Blackie Daw's!

"Very well," responded Mr. Crosby, his gaze also roving to the face in the window, each eye of which at that moment successively winked shut.

"It has come to the ears of the city council that you have found the city water of use, necessity and profit in an art manufacture known as glazed inlay. Is this allegation true?" And the mayor, annoyed with himself, but unable to resist the fascination, turned again to find the face at the window pane. It was not there, he was relieved to note, but suddenly it appeared at the other window so low down that only the nose and eyes were visible above a pile of gingham. Much disconcerted, the mayor repeated his question.

"Since it is nobody's business I decline to answer," responded Mr. Crosby, watching Blackie with mild pleasure, as that earnest detective slowly straightened to his full height, his nose sliding against the glass all the way up.

"You hold a patent for such a process, though," the mayor charged, sturdily resisting the impulse to look behind him. "You might as well answer that much, because Congressman Darlings sends me the Patent Office Record free and I have looked it up."

"Then you know that I obtained a patent," said Crosby dryly.

"It has come to the ears of this body," went on the mayor, looking rigidly out of the back door to prevent his head from turning, "that you have made over \$40,000 from this patent in less than three years and that you're taking in from it over \$25,000 a year. Is this allegation true?"

"I refuse to answer."

"You don't need to!" retorted the mayor warmly. "The city council has absolute proof." It was almost impos-

sible not to look again at that show window, but Mayor Sawberry accomplished it and gazed stouly through the back door at the high board fence. "Now, the city council, which only wants its rights. Mr. Crosby, has decided on this: It will take over the manufacture of your glazed inlay, make it a municipal enterprise, charge you nothing for the use of our valuable natural resource and pay you a fair and reasonable royalty on the output. The question before us for dispassionate and friendly argument is, What is the least royalty that will satisfy you?"

A fond light kindled in Henry Crosby's eyes. "I have been waiting for this happy moment," he gayly informed them, and thereupon he emptied himself of all the bitterness that had been clogging his system since he was a boy.

"In conclusion," he went on, smiling sweetly in his black beard. "I have not forgotten that you cringing whelps came to obtain possession of my patent on glazed inlay. You may have it. It will cost you exactly \$60,000; no more, no less. Thanking you, one and all, for your kind attention, I bid you a pleasant good morning."

The mayor and the committee were speechless with rage, surprise and many other emotions too complicated to assort. Some vigorous denunciation might nevertheless have come from some of them if there had not appeared at that moment above the board fence a solemn face wearing yellow Dundrearys a foot long and a pair of huge blue goggles. Needless to say that face belonged to Blackie Daw, and the mayor was so disconcerted by the sight that, with a purring puff of his cheeks, he turned and stalked rapidly out of the store, followed by the entire committee.

They were not to escape so easily, however, for just at the corner of the alley the tireless detective, now wearing a flawless Vandyke, met them with three separate hist's.

"We are on his trail!" he declared. "He has sold his store and collected the money! He leaves town tonight

on the 7:30 train, never to return! He will take the glazed inlay patent with him! Look!" And before their very eyes he plucked off his Vandyke, put it under his arm, banded them a telegram and replaced the beard, though upside down.

The mayor opened the telegram and read it with keen interest, then passed it silently to the other members of the committee. It was from Mr. Tuttle, in New York, addressed to Henry Crosby and said:

Entertaining proposition apply glazed inlay table and dresser tops how much.

Saluting them, Blackie wheeled and entered the alley mouth. They watched him while he stopped at a dry goods store and emptied whiskers from all his pockets. When he began pointing at them successively with his forefinger and saying, "Eeny, meeny, miney, moe," to determine which set he should wear next the committee hastily left.

As the result of their deliberations the city clerk was sent to Mr. Crosby with an offer of \$10,000 and a royalty for his patent.

The city clerk came back with a counter offer of \$60,000 cash!

The city council offered \$20,000 and royalty.

The answer was the same.

They offered \$30,000 and no royalty.

Same answer.

Blackie Daw, wearing a Francis Josef makeup, dashed in upon the worried city council with another stolen telegram. It was from Chicago and said:

Shall you please come to 125 South Clark street.

ANTONIO SCERLATTI.

That telegram settled the business. The mystery of it was what did the work. Just thirty minutes before the bank closed the city council accepted Henry Crosby's offer of \$60,000 cash for his patent on the process of making glazed inlay and for his written agreement never to engage in that or a similar enterprise as long as he lived nor to sanction such an enterprise; also, at their dictation, he wrote a letter to Mr. Tuttle advising that art agent of the sale and that the glazed inlay, henceforth and forever, was the property of the Spangerville city council.

Before the 7:30 pulled out that night Wallingford, Blackie and Henry Crosby, each with \$20,000 of official money in his pocket, sat at a cozy table in the dining car when an agitated knocking came at the window. Looking out, they saw the panting committee.

Wallingford hurried out to the rear platform.

"We want Henry Crosby to sign this telegram," puffed the mayor breathlessly. "The city council 'll pay for it!"

Since the telegram proved to be nothing more than an order forbidding Mr. Tuttle to have the city water of Spangerville analyzed, Wallingford promised that they should have it and, hurrying in, obtained Crosby's signature. He returned to the committee with a sadly grieved countenance.

"Gentlemen, you have made a hideous mistake," he told them as he handed the mayor the telegram. "Mr. Crosby has never made a penny from the glazed inlay, and he just refused to sell the patent to a furniture factory because the best offer he could get was \$500."

"It's a lie!" gulped the mayor. "You can't fool us. We seen his bank statement."

"Those receipts consisted entirely of royalties from the sale of plaster dogs," Wallingford suavely explained.

"From what?" gasped the mayor.

"Plaster dogs!" repeated Wallingford calmly, and from his pocket he produced a copy of the canine whose formlessness had started Henry Crosby on the road to a comfortable fortune.

The consternation on the faces of

the four members of the committee was as the balm of Gilead to the soul of Henry Crosby; and Blackie, sitting opposite him, and studying in friendly admiration the whiskered face of the artist, made a sudden discovery.

"You're about a week late in your trip to Chicago, aren't you?" he inquired.

"How do you know?" sharply asked Crosby, turning upon him a scared countenance.

"By the streaks of rust in your chin-chillas," laughed Blackie, tickled immeasurably with his discovery. "Am I some detective? I am! And he jumped up from the table.

"Where are you going?" demanded Crosby, jumping up also, his usually ruddy face now turning a deep scarlet.

"To explain the fatal mystery!" replied Blackie. "It'll sting them worse than anything."

"No, you don't!" cried Crosby, starting after him, but Blackie had already passed Wallingford at the door, and was leaning out over the platform, while the conductor was swinging his lantern.

"Antonio Scerlati!" he called in clarion tones.

"Robber!" yelled the committee as Henry Crosby laid hold of Blackie's coat-tails.

"Hist!" shouted Blackie. "I know Henry Crosby's secret!"

Crosby reached farther and grabbed him by the shoulders.

"Antonio Scerlati!" shrieked Blackie as the train moved away.

"Tea?" encouraged the mayor, quivering with eagerness.

"He is an Italian!" yelled Blackie, and, laughing himself limp, allowed Henry Crosby to pull him inside.

"What's the fuss?" asked Wallingford as he followed them back to the table.

Crosby grinned sheepishly. "S. Holmes had me scared stiff," he confessed, blushing, as he revealed the dark secret of his life. "He made me think that he was going to tell the official gossips of Spangerville that I've been going to Chicago every two weeks for the last three years to have Antonio Scerlati dye my whiskers."

### CHAPTER XXVII.

That Little Deal.

**T**HE woman in the next room screamed again. Blackie Daw winced in sympathy; Wallingford grimaced; the gray mustached man in the corner sat in patient misery, as he had from the first, and held his swollen jaw.

"I don't think it hurts so much as it did, Jim," decided Blackie, looking up with a hopeful smile. "Stop me. I think I want to go home."

"Stay right where you are and have it out," chuckled Wallingford. "You brought me along to keep you here, and I'll do it if I have to sit on you."

The dentist, who had tried to conceal his necessarily cruel countenance with a pink mustache, hurried out to the water cooler with a glass upon which was a bright red spot, and everybody grew solemn.

"Hello, Bessmer! How's the Oak Center?" the dentist greeted the stranger.

"Which of you is next?" And brutal speculation kindled his eye as he looked them over.

Both the patients, anxious to put off the moment of agony, indicated each other with surprisingly ready courtesy, but Mr. Bessmer had truth and the right on his side.

"These gentlemen were waiting when I came," he insisted.

"I am only my friend's guardian," explained Wallingford with a happy smile.

"I'm it, I guess," acknowledged Blackie, cornered. "Give me another drink, Jim; quick!"

"You may come with me now," the dentist remarked softly.

Blackie arose and followed, with much careless bravery.

"Is Oak Center a pretty fair business town?" asked Wallingford of the stranger.

"For some lines," stated Bessmer, with distinct and quite visible inward reservations. "It's really a farming town and very rich, but it gives slight support to manufacturing."

"You must be a manufacturer," guessed Wallingford.

"I am in a small way," acknowledged the other, still frowning. "I have a malleable iron foundry and have obtained capacity business on a process of my own."

"Capacity is good enough."

"The trouble is with the size of the capacity," explained Bessmer, with a dry laugh. "Why, with \$50,000 more capital I could increase, not alone my net earnings, but my percentage of profit on the total investment not less than four times. As it is, I barely hold my credit."

"When a shaky business can't borrow money it sells stock," observed Wallingford with a wisdom born of much experience. "Are you incorporated?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand. I've \$125,000 worth of stock in the treasury. The \$25,000 I sold of the other half went at 50 per cent."

"I suppose you'd be willing to clean out the treasury shares for your \$50,000," suggested Wallingford.

The man jumped at that. "Show me how!" he begged.

"You're shamefully honest," mused Wallingford, studying him in minute detail.

"I hope so," returned Bessmer sincerely.

"I think I'll go to Oak Center and look at your plant," decided Wallingford, who had found his present location unproductive. "I have \$50,000 that haven't done a useful thing, except come to me, since they were printed."

"I suppose I shall see you again, Mr. Wallingford," ventured Bessmer.

"I think so," replied Wallingford, shaking his head at him and giving a sidelong glance toward Blackie. Mr. Bessmer nodded in comprehension of

the warning to be secretive. Wallingford took him by the arm and walked into the operating room with him, coolly closing the dentist out with Blackie. "I'd rather not have Mr. Daw know anything of our affairs," he explained.

"I guessed as much," smiled Bessmer, "but at first I thought he was an intimate friend of yours."

"He's an intimate business rival," denied Wallingford, chucking. "We have some great fights."

"What is your business, if I may ask?" Bessmer naturally inquired.

"The purchase and sale of stock in unprosperous companies," J. Rufus told him, with a perfectly straight countenance.

"I guess you could do it," Bessmer opined, with a sigh. "I wish you would think it worth while to take hold of my factory."

"What time do you go back to Oak Center?"

"On the 2:40 train."

"I'll ride over with you," promised Wallingford, and they shook hands on it.

Mr. Bessmer, much relieved as to jaw and with renewed hope as to business, took a seat in the parlor car of the 2:40 train, correctly guessing that the resplendent Wallingford would ride there or nowhere. The train waited its appointed four minutes; its bell clanked; its whistle tooted; its smoke puffed, and it pulled out, and still no Wallingford!

Bessmer suddenly felt weary and old. He had not realized until now how critical his business situation really was. The proof of it lay in the fact that he had grasped so desperately at the word of a chance stranger.

"Well, Mr. Bessmer, how's the jaw?" inquired a cheerful voice at his elbow, and, looking up, he found Blackie Daw, laden with a suit case, a hat-box, an Oxford and a saxophone case.

"Haven't any, so far as the feeling is concerned," responded Bessmer, his heart jumping with the sudden memory that Blackie Daw was in the same line of business as the man who had failed him. "I didn't notice you getting on the train."

"You were looking for Jim Wallingford; that's the reason," laughed Blackie, stowing grips in every available corner, and sitting down, like a real sport, with no regard whatever for the tails of his Prince Albert. "I side tracked him."

Mr. Bessmer contracted his brows and turned on Blackie a glance of disapproval. "That was not fair to either Mr. Wallingford or myself," he charged.

"It's all in the game," declared Blackie lightly. "I saw he had a business opportunity with you, so I had a pony telegram delivered to him and sent him on a wild goose chase; then I made your dentist tell me all about the Bessmer Malleable Process company, and here I am!"

Mr. Bessmer could not see the joke. "Mr. Wallingford might have purchased my stock," he protested.

"So might I," Blackie consoled him. "On the other hand, Mr. Wallingford might not have purchased it, and I may not. Tell me the news."

J. Rufus Wallingford paused opposite the corner of the Bessmer Malleable Process company and made a comprehensive estimate of it. It was a more or less toy plant, but radiated the impression of extreme business so thoroughly that its walls seemed to bulge and quiver.

With a nod of satisfaction Wallingford walked into the office where Mr. Bessmer, with gray fangs on his bat and in his hair and mustache and even clinging to his eyebrows, was bent over a much soiled building plan.

"I'm in no hurry, Mr. Bessmer," said Wallingford cheerily. "When you're not so busy I'll take up with you the matter of the purchase of that stock."

Mr. Bessmer seemed somewhat embarrassed. "I'm very sorry to say you're too late," he returned, his conscience smiting him that he had helped to trick this friendly big stranger out of a possibly profitable deal.

"You don't mean to say you've sold it?" protested Wallingford.

In spite of his compunctions a gleam of satisfaction lit Mr. Bessmer's eyes.

"Well," he stated apologetically, "the spot cash was offered me, and now I'm building my extensions."

"I bet I know who bought it," declared Wallingford, with a trace of annoyance.

"Your friend, Mr. Daw," admitted Bessmer, frowning slightly. "I'm afraid that he played a rather questionable trick on you and that I made myself a party to it."

"I can't blame you," pardoned Wallingford, hurt, but generous. "Does Mr. Daw now own all your surplus stock?"

"Every share of it."

"Where would I find Mr. Daw?" Bessmer suddenly laughed. "He is probably out oiling the engine, or trimming castings at one of the emery wheels to see the sparks, or riding on the warehouse elevator. Shall I send for him?"

"No, thanks," replied Wallingford, with careful gravity. "If you don't mind my going through your factory unattended I'll hunt him up."

With a fair certainty of what he would find Wallingford walked back through the grinding shop and out the side door. Across the yard on one of the little narrow gauge tracks that ran everywhere came a black cisting car, rattling and bumping at top speed, and standing on the buffers was a tall lank figure in new vivid blue overalls and blouse and wearing a workman's cap tilted rakishly up over one corner of his forehead.

"Can't stop, Jim!" he yelled as he flew past. "They're waiting for this car."