

THE BEST MAN

by HAROLD MACGRATH

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. WEIL

AUTHOR OF "THE MAN ON THE BOX," "HEARTS & MACHINES"

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SYNOPSIS.

Carrington loved Kate Cavanaugh, daughter of Multi-Millionaire Henry Cavanaugh. The latter liked Carrington, but refused him as a son-in-law. Young Carrington, a lawyer, held evidence of criminal financial operations, of which Cavanaugh was guilty. It was Carrington's duty to prosecute the rich man, but he decided to lay the whole matter before Kate. He did so the next day. The young woman decided that to drop the case would be cowardly even though the accused was her father. Cavanaugh offered Carrington a position at \$15,000 a year. He refused it. He hid his evidence in the Cavanaugh safe, after being introduced to the millionaire's father. The evidence was stolen that night. Kate's sister Norah confided that she had told her grandfather the combination to the safe. Carrington and Kate went riding. Grandfather Cavanaugh reappeared. He called upon his son for \$50,000 in return for the delivery of the evidence stolen from Carrington. The younger Cavanaugh refused his request. Then Carrington was called in to the conference and the grandfather began his life story.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

He stopped, eyeing Carrington's stupefaction. The son gnawed his lips impatiently.

"I was a master, after a fashion," resumed the old man, satisfied with his denouement. "I committed a dozen splendid burglaries. I never left a trail behind. The police sought for me, but did not know me either by name or by sight. This was the sword my son kept over my neck. The slightest rebellion, and he threatened to expose me. Oh, I know the boy well enough; he would have done it in these days. Once extradited to England, 30 years ago, no one would have connected our names. Yet he was afraid of me; he wasn't sure that at any time the old desire would spring up renewed. I robbed to gratify my craving for excitement rather than to fill my purse. I made an unhappy marriage; something Kate nor Norah shall do while I live. Henry was clever. He made me an allowance of two hundred a month. And how do you suppose he arranged the payment? On the first day of the month he placed the cash in a safe in the house and changed the combination. If I got the money without being caught it was mine; otherwise I went hungry. Ingenious idea, wasn't it? For I had all the excitement and none of the peril of a real burglary. Henry forgot yesterday that it was the first of the month."

The millionaire found it impossible to remain seated. He rose and paced the floor, his brows knit, his hands clenched. He was at bay. Carrington felt as if he were in the midst of some mad dream.

"Sometimes I succeeded in opening the safe; and sometimes, when luck went against me for two or three months, Norah tipped me the combination. She dared not do it too often. So the mouths went on. Once a month I was permitted to visit my grandchildren. My son grew richer and richer; for myself, I remained in the valley of humiliation. I had no chance. I had never met any of my son's friends; he took good care that I did not; so they were in total darkness as to my existence. But the ball and chain were knocked off last night. Your papers are, after all, only an incident. Calliban revivits. Mr. Carrington, my son! Oh, I am proud of him. I believed the genius for robbery was mine. I am a veritable tyro beside Henry. Half a dozen millions from the pockets of the poor at one fell swoop! Where's your Robin Hood and his ilk? But it isn't called robbery; it is called high finance."

He applied a match to his dead cigar and thoughtfully eyed his desk.

"And there is a good joke on me, weaving in and out of all this. I regularly invested half my allowance in buying shares in my son's company, to insure my old age. It jarred me when I read the truth last night. I hate to be outwitted. Henry, sit down; you make me nervous."

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked the son. As he faced his father there was something lion-like in his expression.

"Sit down, my son, and I will tell you," answered the old man, quietly. He knew that his son was a fighter, and that to win he would have to strike quick and hard.

Cavanaugh flung himself into his chair. At that moment he did not know which he hated the most, his father or Carrington.

"First, you will write out that check for fifty thousand."

"Blackmail!"

"Nothing of the sort. For 20 years you have kept your heel on my neck. I could do nothing; opportunities came and I dared not grasp them; my genuine ability was allowed to rust.

It is simply compensation. Blackmail? I think not. I could easily force a million from you. But I am and have been for years an honest man. And heaven knows how well I have paid for my early transgression," bitterly. "This hour is mine, and I propose to use it."

"What guaranty have I of your good faith?" fiercely.

"My word," calmly. "I have never yet broken it."

Carrington gazed longingly toward the door. It was horribly embarrassing. He began to realize that Kate's father would hate him bitterly, indeed, and that his own happiness looked very remote.

Cavanaugh turned to his desk, filled out the blank, and passed it to his father, who, with scarcely a glance at it, passed it back with a negative shake of the head.

"The official certifying stamp lies on your desk; use it."

There was no getting around this keen-eyed old man. He knew every point in the game.

"You will live to regret this," said



"And You Still Wish to Marry Me?" Asked the Girl.

Cavanaugh, his eyes sparkling with venom.

"I have many things to regret; principally that fate made me a father." The old man passed the check over to Carrington. "You're a lawyer; does that look legal to you?"

Carrington signified that it did.

"Now, then, Henry, you will write down on official paper your resignation as president and director of the General Trust Company of America. You will give orders for the restitution of the millions that were fraudulently added to your capital. I am not the least interested in what manner the restitutions are made, so long as they are made. I am now representing the investors. As for your partners, it will be easy for you to impress them with the necessity of the action."

"And if I refuse?"

"Nothing less than the attorney general. I intend to make this business as complete as possible."

Cavanaugh turned again to his desk. He knew his father even as his father knew him. He wrote hurriedly, the pen sputtering angrily.

"What else?" with a cold fury. Again the old man gave Carrington the paper.

"It is perfectly intelligible," he said. He began to feel a bit sorry for Cavanaugh, junior.

"Now, those papers," said Cavanaugh, sharply.

"I believe they belong to me," interposed Carrington.

Grandpa smiled. "It all depends."

"I could easily force you," suggestively.

Grandpa smiled again. "Of that I haven't the least doubt. Of course, what I have is only a copy?"

"It is the only copy in existence," replied Carrington, anxiously. And then a flush of shame mantled his cheeks. Where was his legal cunning?

"Ah!" The ejaculation came from Cavanaugh, junior.

"There is but one thing more," said grandpa, urbanely. "I am determined that Kate shall be happy. She shall marry Mr. Carrington before the snow flies. It is an excellent policy to keep valuable secrets in the family."

"Give your papers to the attorney general. I'll see you all hanged before I'll give my consent!" Cavanaugh roared out these words. His patience had truly reached the limit of endurance.

"Softly, softly!" murmured grandpa. "I mean it!" con agitata.

"Ah, well; what will be, will be. Son, I came down here yesterday with altogether a different piece of business in mind. The documents I discovered last night changed these plans. You own rich oil lands in Texas; or, rather, you did own them before you sold out to the company. The land you sold was not, and never had been, legally yours; you owned not a single tuft of grass. Government land-grab, I believe they call it.

us will be forgotten by Mr. Carrington. For myself, I shall return to England. I have always had a horror of dying in this country. Like father, like son; the parable reads truly. It was in the blood, Mr. Carrington; it was in the blood. But Henry here went about it in a more genteel man-



Cavanaugh Turned to His Desk, Filled Out the Blank.

ner." He struck the bell. "William, send Miss Kate here."

William bowed. He recognized the change; grandpa's voice was full of confident authority.

Kate entered the study shortly after. She had been weeping; her eyes were red. Seeing her father's bowed head, she sprang to his side like a lioness.

"What have they been doing to you, father?"

"Nothing but what is just," softly answered her parent. The little dukes and princes faded away as a dream fades.

"Grandpa—" she began.

"Child, it is all settled. The hatchet is buried in frozen ground. Your father consents to your marriage with Mr. Carrington. It has been a heated argument, but he has come around to my way of thinking. 'All's right with the world,' as Browning says. Bless you, my children, bless you!" with tender irony.

"And now, my papers," said Carrington, smiling up at the girl, reassuringly.

"And you still wish to marry me?" asked the girl, her face burning and her eyes moist.

"I'd marry you if your grandpa was Beelzebub himself!"

"Here's your papers, young man," said grandpa. He passed the envelope across the table.

"What's this?" cried Carrington.

"It means, my boy," said grandpa, "that blood is thicker than water, and that I really intended no harm to Henry. And then, besides, I like to win when all the odds are against me."

Carrington gently turned the envelope upside down. Nothing but burnt paper fluttered upon the table.

THE END.

Holiday Lavishness.

"Spending money is a thing that does not appeal to me much," remarked the man of simple tastes, "except just before a holiday. If there is anything I need in the way of what you might call a luxury, then is the time I get it, although on most other days of the year I think of the things my family needs always before I do my own. I'm always freer with tips on the eve of a holiday than at any other time, and on those days they never seem to me like a kind of blackmail, but I always give them liberally both as to amount and spirit. And the curious part of it is that when I look at the things I've bought under that influence I always have pangs of conscience, as I am now over a set of totally unnecessary mother-of-pearl waistcoat buttons and sleeve links that are the result of an ante-Thanksgiving present to myself."

A Good Inheritance.

No boy or girl can ever come to be utterly bad who remembers only love and tenderness and unselfishness and sweetness as associated with father and mother in the old-time home. Give them manly and womanly examples, give them training, give them the inspiration of devoted lives, give them these higher, deeper things. Do not care so much as to whether you are accumulating money, so that you can leave them a fortune. I really believe that the chances are against that's being a blessing for a boy. But leave them an accumulated fortune of memories and inspirations and examples and hopes, so that they are rich in brain and heart and soul and service. Then, if you happen to leave them the fortune besides, if they have all these, the fortune will be shorn of its possibilities of evil, and will become an instrument of the higher and nobler good.—Minot J. Savage.

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