

Big Money

By P.G. Wodehouse

Illustrated by
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J. B. Hoke left his hearers in no doubt at all as to what had happened at Oxhey. They might have been there in person

VII

The Story Thus Far:

THE impecunious Godfrey, Lord Biskerton (known to his irreverent intimates as "the Biscuit"), is engaged to the comely (and wealthy) Ann Moon, an American. To escape a small army of rude creditors until he is married—and solvent—he flees to the country, where he takes a house near the bellicose Major Flood-Smith, a retired army officer.

Visiting the major is a beautiful girl: his niece, Kitchie Valentine. His lordship sees her, meets her, likes her. She is an American—also rich. Great! She is engaged. What of it? Blissfully unaware that Miss Kitchie Valentine is a close friend of Miss Moon, the future Lady Biskerton, his lordship gets busy. . . .

Here let us pause for a moment to meet a few other personages: T. Paterson Frisby, crab-like American financier and uncle of Miss Moon; "Berry" Conway, a pal of the Biscuit and (due to lack of funds) secretary to Mr. Frisby; Lord Hoddesdon, father of the Biscuit and likewise bankrupt; and the lion-hearted Lady Vera Mace, aunt of the Biscuit, engaged in the lucrative business of chaperoning Miss Moon in London.

Now back to the story—and "Berry" Conway. Mr. Conway owns a copper mine—"The Dream Come True." He thinks it is worthless. T. Paterson Frisby knows otherwise. He strongly urges the young man to accept an offer of a trifling sum, made by one J. B. Hoke (secretly on the Frisby pay roll), and happily awaits developments. . . .

Meantime, while the Biscuit and the fair Kitchie are disporting themselves in the country, Berry has a series of delightful encounters with a girl. She is beautiful, perfect; but Berry does not even know her name. Nor does she know Berry's. A small matter. Soon they're in love. . . . But the girl's engaged—to another man! What should Berry do? He consults the Biscuit. "Grab her!" says his lordship. . . . And the girl is none other than Godfrey, the charming Lord Biskerton's affianced love, Ann Moon!

MR. FRISBY buzzed the buzzer, and his private secretary came gamboling into the room like a lamb in springtime. The remarkable happenings of the previous night had had the effect of raising Berry Conway's spirits to the loftiest heights. He felt as if he were walking on pink clouds above a smiling world.

"You rang, sir?" he said affectionately.

"Of course I rang. You heard me, didn't you? Don't ask damn-fool questions. Get Mr. Robbins on the phone."

"Mr. Who, sir?" asked Berry. There was nothing he desired more than to assist and oblige his employer, to smooth his employer's path and gratify his lightest whim, but the name was strange to him. Mr. Frisby had a habit, which Berry deplored, of being obscure. His construction was bad. He would suddenly introduce into his remarks something like this Robbins motive—vital, apparently, to the narrative—without any preliminary planting or preparation. "Mr. Who, sir?" asked Berry.

"Mr. gosh-darn-it-are-you-deaf-I-should-have-thought-I-spoke-plainly-enough-why-don't-you-buy-an-ear-trumpet Robbins. My lawyer. Chancery 9632. Get him at once."

"Certainly, sir," said Berry soothingly. He was concerned about his employer. It was plain that nothing jolly had been happening to him overnight. He was sitting hunched up in his swivel chair as if he had received a shock of some

kind. His equine face was drawn, and the lines about his mouth had deepened. Berry would have liked to ask what was the matter, how bad the pain was and where it caught him. A long, sympathetic discussion of Mr. Frisby's symptoms would just have suited his mood of loving kindness.

Prudence, however, whispered that it would be wiser to refrain. He contented himself with getting the number and presently found himself in communication with Mr. Frisby's legal adviser.

"Mr. Robbins is on the wire, sir," he said in his best bedside manner, handing the instrument to the sufferer.

"Right," said Mr. Frisby. "Get out."

BERRY did so, casting, as he went, a languishing glance at his overlord. It was meant to convey to Mr. Frisby the message that, no matter how black the skies might be, John Beresford Conway was near him, to help and encourage, and it was extremely fortunate that Mr. Frisby did not see it.

"Robbins!" he was barking into the telephone, as the door shut.

A low, grave voice replied—a voice suggestive of foreclosed mortgages and lovers parting in the twilight.

"Yes, Mr. Frisby?"

"Robbins, come round here at once. Immediately."

"Is something the matter, Mr. Frisby?"

"Oh, no!" the financier yapped bitterly. "Nothing's the matter. Everything's fine. I've only been swindled

and double-crossed by a hellhound."

"Tut!" said the twilight voice.

"I can't tell you over the wire. Come round. Hurry."

"I will start immediately, Mr. Frisby."

Mr. Frisby replaced the receiver and, rising, began to pace the room. He returned to the desk, picked up a letter, read it once more (making the tenth time), uttered a stifled howl (his fifteenth), threw it down, and resumed his pacing. He was plainly overwrought, and Berry Conway, if he had been present, would have laid a brotherly hand on his shoulder and patted him on the back and said, "Come, old man, what is it?" It was lucky, therefore, that instead of being present he was in his own little room, dreaming happy dreams.

These were interrupted almost immediately by the sound of the buzzer.

Mr. Frisby, when Berry answered the summons, was waltzing about his office. He looked like one of those millionaires who are found stabbed with paper knives in libraries.

"Sir?" said Berry tenderly.

"Hasn't Mr. Robbins come yet?"

"Not yet, sir," sighed Berry.

"Hell's bells!"

"Very good, sir."

Mr. Frisby resumed his waltzing. He had just paused to give the letter on the desk an eleventh perusal when the door opened again.

This time it was the office boy.

"Mr. Robbins, sir," said the office boy. Mr. Robbins, of Robbins, Robbins,



Robbins and Robbins, Solicitors and Commissioners for Oaths, was just the sort of man you would have expected him to be after hearing his voice on the telephone. He looked and behaved as if he were a mute at some particularly distinguished funeral. He laid his top hat on the desk as if it had been a wreath.

"Good morning, Mr. Frisby," he said, and you could see the mortgages foreclosing and the lovers parting all over the place.

"Robbins," cried the financier, "I've been hornswoggled."

The lawyer tightened his lips another fraction of an inch, as if to say that something of this kind was only to be expected in a world in which all flesh was as grass and where at any moment the most harmless and innocent person might suddenly find himself legally debarred from being a foffeee of any fee, fiduciary or in fee simple.

"What are the facts, Mr. Frisby?"

Mr. Frisby made a noise extraordinarily like a sea lion at the zoo asking for fish.

"I'll tell you what the facts are. Listen. You know I'm interested in copper. I practically own the Horned Toad mine."

"Quite."

"Well, the other day they struck a new vein on the Horned Toad. One of the richest on record, it looked like."

"Excellent."

"Not so darned excellent," corrected Mr. Frisby. "It was on the edge of the

Horned Toad, and it suddenly disappeared into the claim next door—a damned, derelict dusthole called the Dream Come True, which nobody had bothered to pay any attention to for years. It had just been lying there. That's where that vein went."

"Most disappointing."

"Yes," said Mr. Frisby, eyeing this word-painter strangely, "I was a little cross about it."

"This would, of course," said Mr. Robbins, who had a good head and could figure things out, "considerably enhance the value of this neighboring property."

"You've guessed it," said Mr. Frisby. "And naturally I wanted to buy it quietly. I made inquiries, and found that the original owner had sold it to a woman named Mrs. Jervis."

"And you approached her?"

"SHE was dead. But one morning, out of a blue sky, I'm darned if my secretary didn't come in and inform me that he was her nephew and had been left this mine."

"Your secretary? Young Parkinson?"

"No. Parkinson's gone. This is a new one. A fellow named Conway. You've never seen him. He came in and asked my advice about selling the mine. He said it had never produced any copper, and did I think there was any chance of getting rid of it for a few hundred pounds. I tell you, when I heard him say those words, Robbins, I believed in miracles—a thing I haven't

done since I quit attending Sunday school at Carcassone, Illinois, thirty-nine years ago. Can you tie it? A fellow right in my office, and without a notion that the thing was of any value. I nearly broke my fountain pen."

"Remarkable."

Mr. Frisby took a turn about the room.

"Well, I hadn't much time to think, and I see now that I did the wrong thing. The way it seemed to me was that if I made a bid for the mine myself he might suspect something. So I told him I knew of a man named J. B. Hoke, who sometimes speculated in derelict mines, and I would mention the matter to him. This Hoke is a hydrophobia skunk who has been useful to me once or twice in affairs where I didn't care to appear myself. A red-faced crook who makes a living by hanging around on the edge of the financial world and yessing everybody. He's yessed me for years. I never liked him, but he was a man I thought you could rely on. So I told him to go to Conway and offer him five hundred pounds."

"For a property worth millions?" said Mr. Robbins, dryly.

"Business is business," said Mr. Frisby.

"Quite," said Mr. Robbins. "And did the young man accept the offer?"

"He jumped at it."

"Then surely . . . ?"

"Wait!" said Mr. Frisby. "Do you know what happened? I'll tell you. That double-crossing scoundrel Hoke

bought the mine for himself. I might have guessed, if I'd had any sense, that he would suspect something when I told him to go around buying up no-good mines. Maybe he has had private information from somewhere. He's a man with friends in Arizona. Probably there was a leak. Anyway, he went to Conway, gave him his check, got his receipt, and now he claims to own the Dream Come True."

"Tut," said Mr. Robbins.

Mr. Frisby performed a few more waltz steps, rather pretty to watch. Finding himself pirouetting in the neighborhood of the desk, he picked up the letter and handed it to the lawyer.

"Read that," he said.

MR. ROBBINS did so, and emitted two "H'm's" and a "Tehk." Mr. Frisby watched him anxiously.

"Can he get away with it?" he asked, pleadingly. "He can't get away with it, can he? Don't tell me he can get away with it. Raw work like that. Why, it's highway robbery."

Mr. Robbins shook his head. His manner was not encouraging.

"Have you anything in writing—any letter—or document—to prove that this man was acting as your agent?"

"Of course I haven't. It never occurred to me . . ."

"Then I fear, Mr. Frisby, I greatly fear . . ."

"He can get away with it?"

"I fear so."

"Hell!" said Mr. Frisby.

A thoughtful expression came into the lawyer's face. He seemed to be testing this oath, assaying it, to see if it was one of the variety for which he was supposed to be a commissioner.

"But it's murder in the first degree!" cried Mr. Frisby.

"I note that in his letter," said Mr. Robbins, "this Mr. Hoke says that he is calling here this morning with his lawyer, Mr. Bellamy. I know Bellamy well. I am afraid that if Bellamy has endorsed the legality of his action we have little to hope. A very shrewd man. I have the greatest respect for Bellamy."

"But look what he says on the second page. Look how he proposes to hold me up."

"I see. He suggests that the Dream Come True be merged or amalgamated with your property, the Horned Toad, the whole hereinafter to be called Horned Toad Copper, Incorporated. . . ."

"And he wants a half interest in the combination!"

"IF BELLAMY is behind him, Mr. Frisby, a half interest is, I fear, precisely what he will get."

"But it's a gold mine!"

"A copper mine, I understood."

"I mean, I'm parting with a fortune."

"Most annoying," said Mr. Robbins.

"What did you say?" asked Mr. Frisby in a low voice.

"I said it was most annoying."

"So it is," said Mr. Frisby. "So it is. You're a great describer."

Mr. Robbins regarded his hat sadly but affectionately.

"If it is necessary for your purposes to acquire this Dream Come True property," he said, "I can see no other course but to accept Mr. Hoke's proposals. He undoubtedly owns and controls the property in question. If you would care for me to be present at the conference, I shall be delighted to attend, but I fear there is nothing that I can do."

"Yes, there is," said Mr. Frisby. "You can stop me beaming the fellow with a chair and getting hung for murder."

The door opened. The office boy appeared. He was a lad whose voice was passing through the breaking stage.

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"This all you find to do?"
None of them had seen the
Bosun. They started guiltily
now and snatched hastily
at the oilskins

LIFE on the Walgren was as nearly perfect as the crew of a destroyer had any right to expect—until the Bosun discovered the power of will—and lost his voice.

For the Bosun—he was not a boatswain and he appeared on the Walgren's muster roll as Michael Ignatius O'Halloran, Chief Boatswain's Mate—came very close to being the mainspring of the ship. Custom and certain direct and very forceful methods of his own, where results were demanded, had eclipsed his name and rating behind the title. He accepted it with silent if not entirely unconscious dignity and when occasion arose justified all of its implications.

"She would never be the same without him," the captain had insisted firmly when for the third time in two years the staff detail officer had reminded him that no man should be allowed to stay on one ship for seven years.

The crew, hearing a slightly garbled account of that interview via the ship's mail orderly and a yeoman in the destroyer force detail office, had heartily endorsed the opinion. When another draft of petty officers left for the battleships and the Bosun remained aboard they had even agreed that the Old Man had handled the situation fairly well. Which was a real admission in the critical intimacy of the Walgren.

To say that the Bosun was popular would be misleading. He was too unbending and too self-assertive to inspire any such feeling among his shipmates. But they approved of him, heartily and without reservations. In the presence of outsiders, whether men of the other ships in the Walgren's division tied up there with her at the same buoy or strangers from outside the relatively compact community made up by the six destroyers, they insisted that he was unique among chief petty officers and, when necessary, supported their contention with more direct argument.

Like many another revolution, the change in the Bosun passed unnoticed in its early stages, was never critically examined by its principal actors—and

victims. He, for instance, realized that a new influence had entered his life the morning that the force commander inspected the Walgren. The rest of the ship's company only knew that luck and the admiral's bad humor had slightly clouded her previously unblemished reputation.

Because of the inspection the Bosun had the deck force working as soon as they had gulped down their morning coffee. And in the early morning quiet his purely official indignation resounded from one end of the ship to the other. For the moment, he leaned over the port rail glaring down with outraged eyes at two shivering side cleaners.

"An' you calls that scrubbin' the waterline?" As he pointed one of the men on the cleaning stage reached back and rubbed away a faint smudge of oil that he had overlooked. Too wise to attempt a reply, the culprit winked at his companion and attacked the iron plate in front of him with redoubled energy. But the little man above was unimpressed.

"CORKIN' off. That's what you're doin'. An' the side lookin' like a lousy beef boat—" While his tongue flailed them the Bosun's small eyes ran along the neat line where the war color of the side met the black boot topping, probing for other deficiencies that they failed to find.

He was aware that the real preparation for inspection was behind them, and secretly he was pleased with the result. Although his face betrayed none of the inner satisfaction that possessed him, the diminutive czar of the deck force was at peace with his world as he turned away from the rail and bent down to examine the spotless paintwork on the wardroom hatch coaming.

It happened that the wardroom door on the deck below was open. Through it came the voice of the captain, gossiping comfortably with the chief engineer over an early morning cup of coffee. The Bosun always took a personal interest in the responsibilities of the ship's officers. So it was purely

"Walk Back the Cat"

By Murney Mintzer

All our navy needs to make it invincible is a bosun like Michael Ignatius O'Halloran on every fighting ship—a bosun who doesn't need books to tell him how to handle men

official concern that sharpened his hearing as he bent over the hatch.

"A good man, the Bosun."

The listener's black eyes snapped as he glanced around to make sure that he was not being watched. Only the most acute observers among his shipmates suspected his weakness for flattery. Now, although he respected Captain West's judgment, he would have been only slightly less pleased if he had known that the latter was simply quoting the division commander, who had once written a professional article on the theory of discipline and ever after had pursued psychology as an avocation. But the next words touched the little chief petty officer's most sensitive spot:

"But he lacks education. No intellectual drive—no ambition—" The Bosun was doubtful about "intellectual." But the first and the last charges touched him on the raw. "It's a new navy now."

At the wardroom table the captain was grinning skeptically at the quoted opinion but the Bosun heard only the

spoken words. "And he'll never learn—"

With a snort of indignation the little man on deck backed away from the hatch, reached up and jammed his cap firmly over one eye. But the eyes were dulled now and his swagger as he moved down the deck cost him a real effort.

IN THE midships deckhouse three seamen were perfunctorily restowing the oilskin locker. They worked more through a fear that the Bosun would find them a real occupation than because of any disorder in the locker. When Ham Sourby, the biggest—and the laziest—man in the deck force, dragged out a tattered, coverless magazine the other two came close to examine the calculated revelations of its illustrations.

"Love and Life," Sourby read the title from the top of a rumpled page. "So this is where the cooks stow their heart interest!" The galley door was just behind him and he turned to fling the magazine at its probable owners.

"This all you find to do?" None of them had seen the Bosun. They started guiltily now and snatched hastily at the



Her new luck held, and in what
they knew was their last hour
the minesweeper's people saw a
battered destroyer crawl to them