

THE SPENDERS

A TALE OF THE THIRD GENERATION

By HARRY LEON WILSON

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A SENSATIONAL TURN IN THE MILBREY FORTUNES.

It was a morning early in November. In the sedate Milbrey dining-room a brisk wood fire dulled the edge of the first autumn chill. At the breakfast table, comfortably near the hearth, sat Horace Milbrey. With pointed spoon he had daintily scooped the golden pulp from a Florida orange, touched the tips of his slender white fingers to the surface of the water in the bowl, and was now glancing leisurely at the headlines of his paper, while his breakfast appetite gained agreeable zest from the acid fruit.

On the second page of the paper the names in a brief item arrested his errant glance. It disclosed that Mr. Percival Bines had left New York the day before with a party of guests on his special car, to shoot quail in North Carolina. Mr. Milbrey glanced at the two shells of the orange which the butler was then removing.

"What a hopeless brute that fellow was!" he reflected. He was recalling a dictum once pronounced by Mr. Bines. "Oranges should never be eaten in public," he had said with that lordly air of dogmatic character which him. "The only right way to eat a juicy orange is to disrobe, grasp the fruit firmly in both hands and climb into a bathtub half full of water."

The finished epicure shuddered at the recollection, poignantly, quite as if a saw were being filed in the next room. Mrs. Milbrey entered, news of importance visibly animating her. Her husband arose mechanically, placed the chair for her, and resumed his fork in an ecstasy of concentration.

"You really must talk to Avice," his wife said.

Mr. Milbrey sighed, deprecatingly. He could remember no time within five years when that necessity had not weighed upon his father's sense of duty like a vast bowlder of granite. He turned to welcome the diversion provided by the regions sautees which Jarvis at that moment uncovered before him with a discreet flourish.

"Now you really must," continued his wife, "and you'll agree with me when I tell you why."

"But, my dear, I've already talked to the girl exhaustively. I've pointed out that her treatment of Mrs. Wybert—her perverse refusal to meet the lady at all, is quite as absurd as it is rude, and that if Fred chooses to marry Mrs. Wybert it is her duty to act the part of a sister even if she cannot bring herself to feel it. I've assured her that Mrs. Wybert's antecedents are all they are; not illustrious, perhaps, but eminently respectable. I quite approve of the southern aristocracy. But she constantly recalls what that snobbish Bines was unfair enough to tell her. I've done my utmost to convince her that Bines spoke in the way he did about Mrs. Wybert because he knew she was aware of those ridiculous tales of his mother's illiteracy. But Avice is—er—my dear, she is like her mother in more ways than one. Assuredly she doesn't take it from me."

"He became interested in the kidneys," remarked, feelingly. "I often suspect that her fame as a chef would have been second to none. Really, the suavity of her sauces is a never-ending delight to me."

"I haven't told you yet the reason—a new reason—why you must talk to Avice."

"The money—yes, yes, my dear, I know, we all know. Indeed, I've put it to her plainly. She knows how surely Fred needs it. She knows how that head of a tailor is threatening to be nasty—and I've explained how invaluable Mrs. Wybert would be, reminding her of that lady's generous hint about the rise in Federal Steel, which enabled me to net the neat little profit of \$10,000 a month ago, and how, but for that, we might have been acutely distressed. Yet she stubbornly clings to the notion that this marriage would be a messallance for the Milbreys."

"I agree with her," replied his wife, tersely.

Mr. Milbrey looked perplexed, but polite.

"I quite agree with Avice," continued the lady. "That woman hasn't been right, Horace, and she isn't right. Young Bines knew what he was talking about. I haven't lived my years without being able to tell that after five minutes with her, clever as she is, I can read her. Like so many of those women, she has an intense passion to be thought respectable, and she's come into money enough—God only knows how—to gratify it. I could tell it, if nothing else showed it, by the way in which she overdoes respectability. She has the thousand and one artificial little rules for propriety that one never does have when one has been bred to it. That kind of woman is certain to lapse sooner or later. She would marry Fred because of his standing, because he's a favorite with the smart people she thinks she'd like to be pally with. Then, after a little she'd run off with a German dialect comedian or something, like that appalling person Normie Whitmund married."

"But the desire to be respectable, my dear—and you say this woman has it—is a mighty lever. I'm no cynic about your sex, but I shudder to think of their—ah—eccentricities if it should

cease to be a factor in the feminine equation."

"It's nothing more than a passing fad with this person—besides, that's not what I've to tell you."

"But you, yourself, were not averse to Fred's marrying her, in spite of these opinions you must secretly have held."

"Not while it seemed absolutely necessary—not while the case was so brutally desperate, when we were actually pressed—"

"Remember, my dear, there's nothing magic in those \$10,000. They're winged dollars like all their mates, and most of them, I'm sorry to say, have already flown to places where they'd long been expected."

Mrs. Milbrey's sensation was no longer to be repressed. She had toyed with the situation sufficiently. Her husband was now skillfully dissecting the deviled thighs of an immature chicken.

"Horace," said his wife, impressively. "Avice has had an offer of marriage—from—"

He looked up with new interest.

"From Rulon Shepler."

He dropped knife and fork. Shepler, the man of mighty millions! The undisputed monarch of finance! The cold-blooded, calculating sybarite in his lighter moments, but a man whose values as a son-in-law were so ideally superb that the Milbrey ambition had never vaulted high enough even to overlook them for one daring moment! Shepler, whom he had known so long and so intimately, with never the audacious thought of a union so stupendously glorious!

"Margaret, you're jesting!"

Mrs. Milbrey scorned to be dazzled by her triumph.

"Nonsense! Shepler asked her last night to marry him."

"It's bewildering! I never dreamed—"

"I've expected it for months. I could tell you the very moment when the idea first seized the man—on the yacht last summer. I was sure she interested him, even before his wife died two years ago."

"Margaret, it's too good to be true!"

"If you think it is, I'll tell you something that isn't: Avice practically refused him."

Her husband pushed away his plate; the omission of even one regretful glance at its treasures betrayed the strong emotion under which he labored.

"This is serious," he said, quietly. "Let us get at it. Tell me, if you please!"

"She came to me and cried half the night. She refused him definitely at first, but he begged her to consider, to take a month to think it over—"

Milbrey gasped. Shepler, who commanded markets to rise and they rose, or to fall and they fell—Shepler begging, entreating a child of his! Despite the soul-sickening tragedy of it, the situation was not without its element of sublimity.

"She will consider; she will reflect?"

"You're guessing now, and you're as keen at that as I. Avice is not only amazingly self-willed, as you intimated a moment since, but she is intensely secretive. When she left me I could get nothing from her whatever. She was wretchedly sullen and taciturn."

"But why should she hesitate? Shepler—Rulon Shepler! My God! is the girl crazy? The very idea of hesitation is preposterous!"

"I can't divine her. You know she has acted perversely in the past. I used to think she might have some affair of which we knew nothing—something silly and romantic. But if she had any such thing I'm sure it was ended, and she'd have jumped at this chance a year ago. You know yourself she was ready to marry young Bines, and was really disappointed when he didn't propose."

"But this is too serious." He tinkled the little silver bell.

"Find out if Miss Avice will be down to breakfast."

"Yes, sir."

"If she's not coming down I shall go up," declared Mr. Milbrey when the man had gone.

"She's stubborn," cautioned his wife. "Gad! don't I know it?"

Jarvis returned.

"Miss Avice won't be down, sir, and I'm to fetch her up a pot of coffee, sir."

"Take it at once, and tell her I shall be up to see her presently." Jarvis vanished.

"I think I see a way to put pressure on her, that is if the morning hasn't already brought her back to her senses."

At four o'clock that afternoon, Avice Milbrey's ring brought Mrs. van Geist's butler to the door.

"Sandon, is Aunt Cornelia at home?"

"Yes, Miss Milbrey, she's confined to her room 'account 'o' a cold, miss."

"Thank heaven!"

"Yes, miss—certainly! will you go 'p to her?"

"And Mutterchen, dear, it was a regular bombshell," she concluded after she had fluttered some of the November freshness into Mrs. Van Geist's room, and breathlessly related the facts.

"You demented creature! I should say it must have been."

"Now, don't lecture!"

"But Shepler is one of the richest men in New York."

"Dad already suspects as much."

"And he's kind, he's a big-hearted chap, a man of the world, generous—"

"A woman fancier," Fidelia Oldaker calls him."

"My dear, if he fancies you—"

"There, you old conservative, I've heard all his good points, and my duty has been written before me in letters of fire. Dad devoted three hours to writing it this morning, so don't, please, say over any of the moral maxims I'm likely to have heard."

"But why are you unwilling?"

"Because—because I'm wild, I fancy—just because I don't like the idea of marrying that man. He's such a big, funny, round head, and positively no neck—his head just rolls around on his big, pillowy shoulders—and then he gets little right at once, tapers right off to a point with those tiny feet."

"It isn't easy to have everything."

"It wouldn't be easy to have him, either."

Mrs. Van Geist fixed her niece with a sudden look of suspicion.

"Has—has that man anything to do with your refusal?"

"No—not a thing—I give you my word, auntie. If he had been what I once dreamed he was, no one would be asking me to marry him now, but—do you know what I've decided? Why, that he is a joke—that's all—just a joke. You needn't think of him, Mutterchen—I don't, except to think it was funny that he should have impressed me so—he's simply a joke."

"I could have told you as much long ago."

"Tell me something now. Suppose Fred marries that Wybert woman."

"It will be a sorry day for Fred."

"Of course! Now see how I'm pinned. Dad and the mater both say the same now—they're more severe than I was. Only we were never in such straits for money. It must be bad. So this is the gist of it: I ought to marry Rulon Shepler in order to save Fred from a marriage that might get us into all sorts of scandal."

"Well?"

"Well, I would do a lot for Fred. He has faults, but he's always been good to me."

"And so?"

"And so it's a question whether he marries a very certain kind of woman or whether I marry a very different kind of man."

"How do you feel?"

"For one thing, Fred shan't get into that kind of muddle if I can save him from it."

"Then you'll marry Shepler?"

"I'm still uncertain about Mr. Shepler."

"But you say—"

"Yes, I know, but I've reasons for being uncertain. If I told you you'd say they're like the most of a woman's reasons, mere fond, foolish hopes, so I won't tell you."

"Well, dear, work it out by your lonely if you must. I believe you'll do what's best for everybody in the end. And I am glad that your father and Margaret take your view of that woman."

"I was sure she wasn't right—and I knew Mr. Bines was too much of a man to speak of her as he did without positive knowledge. Now please give me some tea and funny little cakes; I'm famished."

"Speaking of Mr. Bines," said Mrs. van Geist, when the tea had been brought by Sandon. "I read in the paper this morning that he'd taken a party to North Carolina for the quail shooting, Eddie Arledge and his wife and that Mr. and Mrs. Garmer, and of course Florence Akemil. Should you have thought she'd marry so soon after her divorce? They say Bishop Doolittle is frightfully vexed with her."

"Really I hadn't heard. Whom is Florence to marry?"

"Mr. Bines, to be sure! Where have you been? You know she was on his yacht a whole month last summer—the bishop's sister was with her—highly scandalized all the time by the drinking and gayety, and now every one's looking for the engagement to be announced. Here, what did I do with that Town Topics Cousin Clint left? There it is on the tabouret. Read the paragraph at the top of the page."

Avice read:

"An engagement that is rumored with uncommon persistence will put society on the qui vive when it is definitely announced. The man in the case is the young son of a mining Croesus from Montana, who has inherited the major portion of his father's millions and who began to dazzle upper Broadway about a year since by the reckless prodigality of his ways. His blonde innamorate is a recent divorcee of high social standing, noted for her sparkling wit and an unflinching exuberance of spirits. The interest of the gossips, however, centers chiefly in the uncle of the lady, a right reverend presiding over a bishopric not a thousand miles from New York, and in the attitude he will assume toward her contemplated remarriage. At the last Episcopal convention this godly and well-learned gentleman was a vehement supporter of the proposed canon to prohibit absolutely the marriage of divorced persons; and though he stoutly championed his bewitching niece through the infelicities that eventuated in South Dakota, on dit that he is highly wrought up over her present intentions, and has signified unmistakably his severest disapproval. However, nous verrons ce que nous verrons."

"But, Mutterchen, that's only one of those absurd, vulgar things that wretched paper is always printing. I could write dozens of them myself. Tom Banning says they keep one man writing them all the time, out of his own imagination, and then they put them in like raisins in a cake."

"But, my dear, I'm quite



AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE.

is authentic. I know from Isabella Oldaker that the bishop began to cut up about it to Florence, and Florence defied him. That ancient theory that most gossip is without truth was exploded long ago. As a matter of fact most gossip, at least about the people we know, doesn't do half justice to the facts. But, really, I can't see why he fancied Florence Akemil. I should have thought he'd want some one a bit less flutery."

"I dare say you're right, about the gossip, I mean—"

Miss Milbrey remarked when she had finished her tea, and refused the cakes. "I remember, now, one day when we met at her place, and he seemed so much at home there. Of course, it must be so. How stupid of me to doubt it! Now I must run. Good-by, you old dear, and be good to the cold."

"Let me know what you do."

"Indeed I shall; you shall be the first one to know. My mind is really, you know, almost made up."

A week later Mr. and Mrs. Horace Milbrey announced in the public prints the engagement of their daughter Avice to Mr. Rulon Shepler.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNCLE PETER BINES COMES TO TOWN WITH HIS MAN.

One day in December Peter Bines, of Montana City, dropped in on the family—came with his gaunt length of limb, his kind, brown old face with eyes sparkling broadly far back under his grizzled brows, with his rough, resonant, musical voice, the spring of youth in his step, and the fresh, confident strength of the big hills in his bearing.

He brought Billy Brue with him, a person whose exact social status some of Percival's friends were never able to fix with any desirable certainty. Thus, Percival had presented the old man, the morning after his arrival, to no less a person than Herbert Delaney Livingston, with whom he had smoked a cigar of unusual excellence in the cafe of the Hightower hotel.

"If you fancy that weed, Mr. Bines," said Livingston, graciously, to the old man, "I've a spare couple of hundred I'd like to let you have. The things were sent to me, but I find them rather stiffish. If your man's about the hotel I'll give him a card to my man, and let him fetch them."

"My man?" queried Uncle Peter, and, sighting Billy Brue at that moment, "why, yes, here's my man, now. Mr. Brue, shake hands with Mr. Livingston. Billy, go up to the address he gives you, and get some of these cigars. You'll relish 'em as much as I do. Now don't talk to any strangers, don't get run over, and don't lose yourself."

Livingston had surrendered a warring and uncertain nano to the warm, reassuring clasp of Mr. Brue.

"He ain't much fur style, Billy ain't," Uncle Peter explained when that person had gone upon his errand, "he ain't a mite gaudy, but he's got friendly feelings."

The dazed scion of the Livingstons had thereupon made a conscientious tour of his clubs in a public hansom, solely for the purpose of relating this curious adventure to those best qualified to marvel at it.

The old man's arrival had been quite unexpected. Not only had he sent no word of his coming, but he seemed, indeed, not to know what his reasons had been for doing a thing so unusual.

"Thought I'd just drop in on you all and say 'howdy,'" had been his first avowal, which was lucid as far as it went. Later he involved himself in explanations that were both obscure and conflicting. Once it was that he had felt a sudden great longing for the life of a gay city. Then it was that he would have been content in Montana City, but that he had undertaken the winter in New York out of consideration for Billy Brue.

"Just think of it," he said to Percival, "that poor fellow ain't ever been east of Denver before now. It wasn't good for him to be holed up out there in them hills all his life. He hadn't got any chance to improve his mind."

"He'd better improve his whiskers first thing he does," suggested Percival. "He'll be gold-bricked if he wears 'em scrambled that way around this place."

But in neither of these explanations did the curious old man impress Percival as being wholly ingenuous.

Then he remarked casually one day that he had lately met Higbee, who was on his way to San Francisco.

"I only had a few minutes with him while they changed engines at Green River, but he told me all about you folks—what a fine time you was havin', yachts and card parties, and all

like that. Higbee said a man ought to come to New York every now and then, jest to keep from getting rusty."

Back of this Percival imagined for a time that he had discovered Uncle Peter's true reason for descending upon them. Higbee would have regaled him with wild tales of the New York dissipations, and Uncle Peter had come promptly on to pull him up. Percival could hear the story as Higbee would word it, with the improving moral incident of his own son snatched as a brand from the "Tenderloin" to live a life of impecunious usefulness in far Chicago. But, when he tried to hold this belief, and to prove it from his observations, he was bound to admit its falsity. For Uncle Peter had shown no inclination to act the part of an evangel from the virtuous west. He had delivered no homilies, no warnings as to the fate of people who incontinently "cut loose." He had evinced not the least sign of any disposition even to criticize.

On the contrary, indeed, he appeared to joy immensely in Percival's way of life. He manifested a willingness and a capacity for unbending in boon companionship that were both of them quite amazing to his accomplished grandson. By degrees, and by virtue of being never at all censorious, he familiarized himself with the young man's habits and diversions. He listened delightedly to the tales of his large gambling losses, or the bouts at poker, the fruitless venture in Texas oil land, the disastrous corner in wheat, engineered by Burman, and the uniformly unsuccessful efforts to "break the bank" in Forty-fourth street. He never tired of hearing whatever adventures Percival chose to relate; and, finding that he really enjoyed them, the young man came to confide freely in him, and to associate with him without restraint.

Uncle Peter begged to be introduced at the temple of chance, and spent a number of late evenings there with his popular grandson. He also frequently made himself one of the poker coterie, and relished keenly the stock jokes as to his grandson's proneness to lose.

"Your pa," he would say, "never could learn to stay out of a Jack-pot unless he had Jacks or better; he'd come in and draw four cards to an ace any time, and then call it 'hard luck' when he didn't draw out. And he just loved straights open in the middle; said anybody could fill them that's open at both ends; but, after all I guess that's the only way to have fun at the game. If a man ain't got the sperrit to overlay aces-up when he gets 'em, he might as well be clerkin' in a bank for all the fun he'll have out of the game."

The old man's endurance of late suppers and later hours, and his unsuspected disposition to "cut loose" became twin marvels to Percival. He could not avoid contrasting this behavior with his past preaching. After a few weeks he was forced to the charitable conclusion that Uncle Peter's faculties were failing. The exposure and hardships of the winter before had undoubtedly impaired his mental powers.

"I can't make him out," he confided to his mother. "He never wants to go home nights; he can drink more than I can without batting an eye, and show up fresher in the morning, and he behaves like a young fellow just out of college. I don't know where he would bring up if he didn't have me to watch over him."

"I think it's just awful—at his time of life, too," said Mrs. Bines.

"I think that's it. He's getting old, and he's come along into his second childhood. A couple of more months at this rate, and I'm afraid I'll have to ring up one of those nice shiny black wagons to take him off to the 'colish house.'"

"Can't you talk to him, and tell him better?"

"I could. I know it all by heart—all the things to say to a man on the downward path. Heaven knows I've heard them often enough, but I'd feel ashamed to talk that way to Uncle Peter. If he were my son, now, I'd cut off his allowance and send him back to make something of himself; like Sile Higbee with little Henery; but I'm afraid all I can do is to watch him and see that he doesn't marry one of those little pink-silk chorus girls, or lack a policeman, or anything."

"You're carryin' on the same way yourself," ventured his mother.

"That's different," replied her perspicacious son.

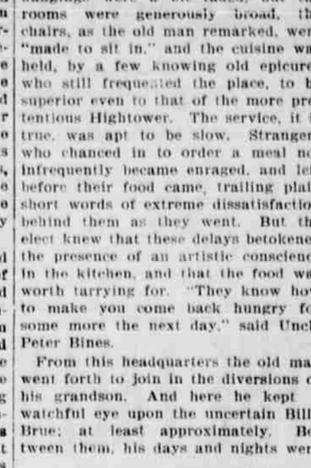
Uncle Peter had refused to live at the Hightower after three days in that splendid and populous caravansary.

"It suits me well enough," he explained to Percival, "but I have to look after Billy Brue, and this ain't any place for Billy. You see Billy ain't city broke yet. Look at him now over there, the way he goes around butting into strangers. He does that way because he's all the time looking down at his new patent leather shoes—first pair he ever had. He'll be plumb stoop-shouldered if he don't hurry up and get the new kicked off of 'em. I'll have to get him a nice warm box-still in some place that ain't so much on the band-wagon as this one. The ceilings here are too high fur Billy. And I found him shootin' craps with the bell boy this mornin'. The boy thinks Billy, bein' from the west, is a stage robber, or somethin' like he reads about in the Cap Collier lib'ries, and follows him around every chance he gets. And Billy laps up too many of them little striped drinks; and them French-cooked dishes ain't so good fur him, either. He caught on to the bill of fare right away. Now he won't order anything but them allas—them dishes that has 'a la' something or other after 'em." He explained, when Percival looked puzzled. "He knows they'll always be something all fussed up with red, white and blue gravy, and

a little paper — stuck into 'em. I never knew Billy was such a fancy eater before."

So Uncle Peter and his charge had established themselves in an old-fashioned but very comfortable hotel down on one of the squares, a dingy monument to the time when life had been less hurried. Uncle Peter had stayed there 20 years before, and he found the place unchanged. The carpets and hangings were a bit faded, but the rooms were generously broad, the chairs, as the old man remarked, were "made to sit in," and the cuisine was held, by a few knowing old epicures who still frequented the place, to be superior even to that of the more pretentious Hightower. The service, it is true, was apt to be slow. Strangers who chanced in to order a meal not infrequently became enraged, and left before their food came, trailing plain short words of extreme dissatisfaction behind them as they went. But the elect knew that these delays betokened the presence of an artistic conscience in the kitchen, and that the food was worth tarrying for. "They know how to make you come back hungry for some more the next day," said Uncle Peter Bines.

From this headquarters the old man went forth to join in the diversions of his grandson. And here he kept a watchful eye upon the uncertain Billy Brue; at least approximately. Between them, his days and nights were



AN AFFABLE STRANGER.

occupied by crowding. But Uncle Peter had already put in some hard winters, and was not wanting in fortitude.

Billy Brue was a sore trouble to the old man. "I jest can't keep him off the streets nights," was his chief complaint. By day Billy Brue walked the streets in a decent, orderly trance of bewilderment. He was properly puzzled and amazed by many strange matters. He never could find out what was "going on" to bring so many folks into town. They all hurried somewhere constantly, but he was never able to reach the center of excitement. Nor did he ever learn how anyone could reach those high clothes lines, strung 40 feet above ground between the backs of houses; nor how there could be "so many shows in town, all on one night," nor why you should get so many good things to eat by merely buying a "slug of whisky;" nor why a thousand people weren't run over in Broadway each 24 hours.

At night, Billy Brue ceased to be the astounded alien, and, as Percival said Dr. Von Herzlich would say, "began to mingle and cooperate with his environment." In the course of this process he fell into adventures, some of them, perhaps, unedifying. But it may be told that his silver watch with the braided leather fob was stolen from him the second night out; also that the following week, in a Twenty-ninth street saloon, he accepted the hospitality of an affable stranger, who had often been in Montana City. His explanation of subsequent events was entirely satisfactory, at least from the time that he returned to consciousness of them.

"I only had about \$30 in my clothes," he told Percival, "but what made me so darned hot, he took my breastpin, too, made out of the first nugget ever found in the Early Bird mine over Silver Bow way. Gee! when I woke up I couldn't tell where I was. This cop that found me in a hallway, he says I must have been give a dose of Peter, I says. 'All right—I'm here to go against all the games,' I says, 'but pass me when the Peter comes around again,' I says. And he says Peter was knockout drops. Say, honest, I didn't know my own name till I had a chanst to look me over. The clothes and my hands looked like I'd seen 'em before, somehow—and then I come to myself."

(Continued Next Week)

A Habit to Be Encouraged.

The mother who has acquired the habit of keeping on hand a bottle of Chamberlain's Cough Remedy, saves herself a great amount of uneasiness and anxiety. Coughs, colds and croup to which children are susceptible are quickly cured by its use. It counteracts any tendency of a cold to result in pneumonia, and if given as soon as the first symptoms of croup appear, it will prevent the attack. This remedy contains nothing injurious and mothers give it to little ones with a feeling of perfect security. Sold at Kerr's Drug Store.

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stops the cough and heals the lung.