

Jedrick the Unstung

By Robert Leslie Bellem

A tight-fisted banker with a heart of flint is softened up by two boys from the Big Town

I REMEMBER being a bit plaintive about it at the time. As I recall, I said: "George, you didn't stop for that boulevard sign. And there is a minion of the law following us on a motorcycle."

The trouble with George, he is sometimes afflicted with ideas. When this blight is upon him, you can't do anything about it. You sit back and allow nature to take its course; and you pray that you won't wind up in the nearest bastille. On this particular Northern California afternoon, I could tell that George was having one of his seizures. He had all the symptoms. There was a glitter in his eye as he zipped the roadster past that stop sign. Instead of slowing down, he built the speedometer up to fifty-five.

I grabbed for my hat and took a look behind. "George," I said again, "the arm of the law draws closer."

George smiled that peculiar smile of his. It always gives me the creeps, because I know trouble is in the offing. George said: "I wish that copper would hurry up and pinch us."

"You don't mean you want to be arrested?" I asked him.

George nodded. By now, we were zephyring straight down the main street of Yerkesville. Abruptly, George swung his wheel and bopped his foot down on the brake pedal. We screeched in toward the curb and came to a dead stop.

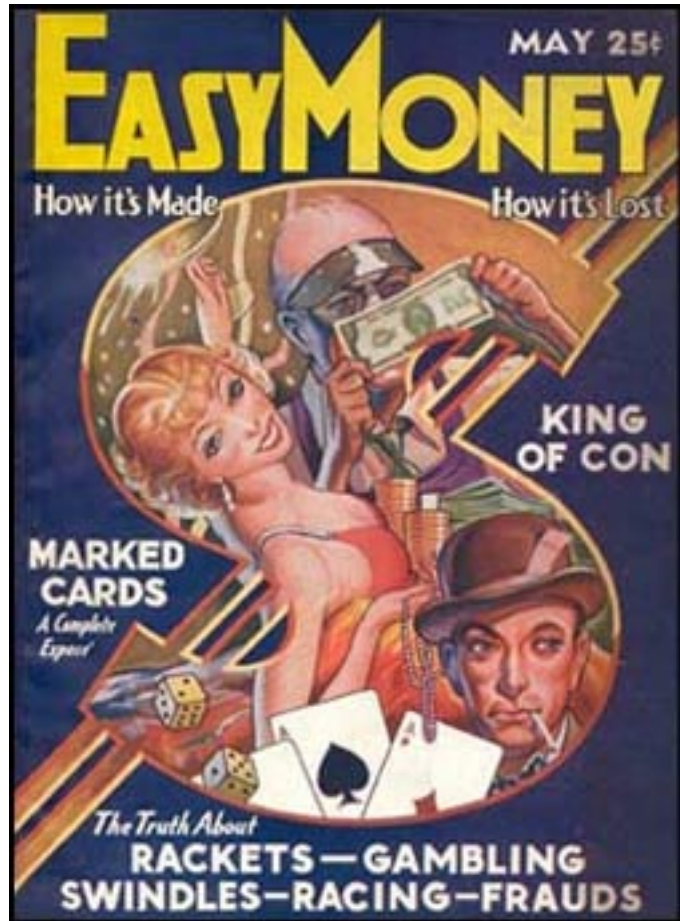
George said: "Come, Harry. We are going for cigarettes."

"But, George," I said in a moaning voice, "you have parked our car exactly in front of a fire plug."

"So I have, Harry. So I have." And George pulled me out of the roadster and took me into a cigar store.

He took a long time to buy cigarettes, George did. By the time we went outside again, the motorcycle minion was standing with one Number Twelve parked firmly upon our running board, and he had a book of summonses in his fist. He had an annoyed expression.

George walked up to him and said: "Is anything wrong, Officer?"



"Oh, no," the minion answered artlessly. "There is nothing wrong. Nothing at all. Except, perhaps, for a few minor infractions of our Yerkesville traffic regulations, which I am sure you will be able to explain satisfactorily to Judge Jedrick." He licked the tip of his pencil, as if he liked the taste.

"Infractions?" George inquired earnestly.

"Just little ones," the minion said. "Such as disregarding a boulevard stop, driving at an excessive rate of speed, and illegal parking in front of a fire hydrant. Mere trifles, of course. Let me see your driver's license."

George complied, and the minion wrote various things upon a pink ticket, which he thereupon handed to George along with a pleased grin.

Over George's shoulder, I cast a glimpse at the pink ticket. It required the presence of one George Hammersmith at the justice court presided over by Jason Jedrick, J.P. The meeting was to be consummated at nine o'clock the following morning.

As the law's arm mounted his iron steed and chuffed away, I drew a lingering sigh. "George Hammersmith," I said, "you have committed the unpardonable sin. You have permitted yourself to be pinched. This is outrageous, George."

George just smiled at me. "I wanted to be pinched," he said.

NOW, there are certain things about George which I do not pretend to understand; and this was one of them. Living as we did, our days were largely spent in figuring out ways and means of staying out of the clink. To have George deliberately seek incarceration indicated that George's mental wheels had thrown a tire. I began to worry.

But George, evidently, was completely oblivious to the disastrous possibilities of his predicament. He seemed to fear no catastrophic consequences. Instead, he started to whistle. When George starts to whistle, I commence to tremble. There is something in the wind.

"Come, Harry," George said. "Since we must stay in Yerkessville until tomorrow morning, in order to appear before Judge Jedrick, we may as well make the most of it. I have a cousin who lives in this village. We will seek her but and get free lodging for the night."

"We are likely," I told him, "to have many nights free lodging when Judge Jedrick gets through with us."

"Never burn your bridges until you have crossed them," George said. And he stepped on the starter.

A few moments later he drew up before a modest cottage on the outskirts of the town; and he took me up to the porch of the cottage and rang the doorbell.

The door opened, and I felt a cardiac flip-flop within my chest. I was staring at a girl of excessively smooth contours, and she had the face of an angel. She was clad in gingham, and there were exactly four freckles on her nose. I counted them.

She looked at George, and she gave him a smile of delight that he didn't deserve. No man living ever deserved a smile like that. She said: "Cousin George!" and held out her arms.

George gave her a sort of avuncular kiss, which to me indicated that he certainly was not in his right mind. Any man in full possession of his buttons, given the opportunity to kiss a girl like that, would have made the most of it. I know I would have. But George's kiss was just a pecking sort of dab at her lovely cheek. Cousin or no cousin, George was not up to par on that occasion.

After the amenities had been observed, George introduced me to the auburn-haired angel. He said: "Cousin Sue, allow me to present my partner, Harry Foster. Harry, this is my cousin, Miss Sue Hammersmith."

I tried to produce a string of fluent words which might have some effect upon her, but I succeeded only in emitting a sort of bleating sound, remindful of a lost lamb chop. That's how that girl affected me, and I do not mind admitting it.

"Harry and I," George said, "are going to stay here with you tonight, Sue."

"Oh!" she answered, dimpling. "Then you got my letter regarding those investments?"

George nodded. I frowned at him severely, for he had not told me about receiving any letter from an angel regarding investments. But now I was beginning to realize why he had insisted on driving north for what he claimed was to be a vacation trip. He had planned this visit all the time. The very sound of the word *investments* was always enough to make George gird his loins for action. Even so, I still could not understand why he had permitted himself to be pinched by that motorcycle minion, a few moments before.

I GOT our luggage from the roadster, and we repaired into the cottage. Miss Sue Hammersmith, angel, showed us to a chintz-draped guest room and handed us some clean towels, meanwhile indicating the direction of the bathroom. After George and I had abluted the dust of travel from our persons, we went into the comfortable and cozy living room.

"Now, Sue," George said to his delicious cousin as he set fire to a dollar cigar, "just what is this investment which you wrote to me about? Why did you seek my cousinly advice?"

The angel opened a desk drawer and extracted a thick sheaf of printed slips. "They are oil warrants, George," she answered.

"Oil warrants?" George said. "That is a new one on me. Let's take a look."

He accepted the sheaf of printed slips and examined them with interest. I looked at them over his shoulder.

They were certificates, and this is how they read:

JEDRICK WELLS, Unincorporated.

This is to certify that Miss Sue Hammersmith is the owner of one barrel of crude oil contained in the property controlled by an oil lease held by Jason Jedrick . . . The vendor, Jason Jedrick, holding Title Lease No. 537 issued by the State Corporation Council, etc., etc. . . . as authorized by an Act of the State Legislature, etc., etc. . . .

After having studied these certificates for some time, George looked up at his cousin Sue. "Was there any document connected with these things when you bought them?" he asked her.

The auburn-haired angel nodded and handed George a paper, all nicely embossed and embellished with scrollwork. Again I read over George's shoulder:

*APPLICATION TO PURCHASE OIL WARRANTS
AGAINST JEDRICK WELLS, UNINCORPORATED.*

I am to receive oil warrants calling for one barrel of crude oil per warrant, this being at the rate of fifty cents (50c.) per barrel to me; and Jedrick Wells, Unincorporated, agrees to pay me one dollar (\$1.00) per barrel for said crude oil when the same is taken from the property.

*Signed,
Sue Hammersmith*

"You see, Cousin George," Sue explained, "how it works. Mr. Jason Jedrick owns an oil lease ten miles outside of Yerkesville; but he didn't wish to incorporate and sell stock. So he devised this scheme to finance the drilling of an exploration well. He sold these oil warrants against the property at fifty cents a barrel; and he has agreed to buy back all the oil represented by the warrants, as soon as the well starts producing. He will buy back the oil at a dollar a barrel, thus giving the investor a hundred per cent return on the money invested."

George nodded brightly. "I understand," he said. Then he asked a question. "Has Mr. Jason Jedrick sold very many of these warrants?"

"Yes. He has sold them to practically everyone in Yerkesville. I bought four hundred dollars' worth myself. But after I'd paid my money, I began to wonder if everything was legal and proper. That is why I wrote to you, George. I wanted your opinion."

George thoughtfully rubbed his chin. "Well," he said, "as far as I can see, the warrants are legal enough. As to their being proper—that is another question entirely. It depends upon Mr. Jason Jedrick's integrity."

"Oh," the auburn-haired angel widened her eyes, "but Mr. Jedrick is honest. He must be! He is the wealthiest man in Yerkesville; he is president of the local bank; he is the town's Justice of the Peace. How could a man like that be dishonest, George?"

"How, indeed?" George agreed politely. But there was a glint in his eye.

ALITTLE later, George drew me into our guest room and tapped me on the chest. "Harry," he said in a low voice, so that Sue, outside, would not overhear him. "Harry, there is something fishy going on here."

"You mean about those oil warrants, George?" I asked him.

"Exactly. To me, that deal smells very much like the old gold warrant mooch, which reached its perfection back in 1925 under the direction of a slicker named Unverzagt."

"But George," I said, "it seems to me that these oil warrants issued by Mr. Jason Jedrick are perfectly legal." Then a thought struck me. "George," I said accusingly, "did you deliberately allow yourself to be arrested a while ago so that you might appear in Mr. Jason Jedrick's justice court?"

George nodded. "Yes. I wanted to meet him, and that seemed the easiest way to do it. However, to return to those warrants. As originally worked, the mooch dealt with gold mining property up in Canada. Warrants were sold at four dollars and a half each; and every warrant called for an ounce of pure gold, if, as and when mined from the promoter's property. The promoter then agreed to buy back each ounce of gold at a price of twenty dollars. But there was a knot in the string, Harry."

"A knot?"

"You bet. You see, the warrants called for gold *in the ground*. The metal was to be delivered to purchasers of warrants, *if, as and when mined from the property*. That's where the mooch came in. True enough, there was a gold-bearing vein on that mining claim. But that gold vein was buried deep beneath a system of submerged lakes and streams. There was no possible mechanical or engineering means to bring it out without spending more than the gold was actually worth. Therefore, no mining operations were ever carried out. And the suckers who had bought gold warrants were left holding the bag. If they wanted to, they could go to the property and try to dig out the gold for themselves—since they had purchased said gold *in the ground*. That was the stinger. Nobody could get the gold *out of the ground*!"

I said: "George! Then you think this Jason Jedrick is working a variation of that gold warrant scheme?"

"Perhaps. It would be easy enough to do. Suppose there is actually oil on Jedrick's property. But suppose it lies so far beneath the surface that no drilling procedure could bring it out? Where would that leave the purchasers of Jedrick's engraved oil warrants?"

"With their pants in disarray," I said.

"Precisely. And said purchasers would have no legal redress against Mr. Jedrick. He has merely peddled warrants for crude oil *if* and *when* the oil is struck. If it proves impracticable to drill deep enough to strike oil-bearing shale, the well can be abandoned—and Mr. Jedrick will have a lot of money which he extracted from the suckers who bought his warrants."

"George," I said admiringly, "that is one swell mooch; and I am astonished that we have not worked it ourselves occasionally."

"We have never," George pointed out to me firmly, "fattened upon small town widows and orphans. It is not ethical. I am surprised at you, Harry."

I was trying to think of an answer when Cousin Sue knocked on our door and said: "Dinner is ready, George. And we have a guest."

"A guest?" George asked her, opening the door.

SHE led us into the dining room, and I saw a lean, blue-shaven individual standing there. His eyes were narrow, and he had the sort of face you would like to paste in the teeth with your fist. I disliked him immediately, even before I found out his name.

Cousin Sue said: "Boys, this is Mr. Jason Jedrick. Mr. Jedrick, meet my cousin, George Hammersmith, and his business partner, Harry Foster."

Jason Jedrick acknowledged us with a porcine grunt, and we all sat down to eat. I did not like Mr. Jedrick's table manners, so I avoided watching him by keeping my eyes fastened upon the delectable Sue. That girl did things to my veins and arteries. She enchanted me.

After dinner, Jason Jedrick said: "Well, Sue, let us be going. Your cousin and his friend can wash the dishes for you. It will help them pass the time."

"Going?" I said. "Going where?"

"To the movies," Jedrick informed me. "Sue and I have had this date for a week."

"But, Jason," Sue protested weakly, "George and Harry are my guests. I can hardly leave them—"

"Why not? They look capable of entertaining themselves," Jedrick said in a voice that rasped like a file on cold iron.

Personally, I did not wish to see Sue go out with that man. It would be much more pleasant to have her stay home and spend the evening where I could keep looking at her. So I got an idea. I pulled a coin from my pocket and said: "Mr. Jedrick, let us match for the lady's company." I flipped the coin, caught it and covered it. "I'll take heads," I said. "If I win, Sue stays home."

"No," Jedrick grinned at me. "I'll take heads. You take tails."

There was nothing else I could do but uncover the coin. It was heads, of course. Jedrick had won.

He laughed at me. "I've never been stung yet," he said. "And it's too late in the day to try and fool me now. That is a trick coin. Both sides are heads. You tried to bamboozle me."

He was quite right. I had tried to flimflam him with a trick four-bit piece. But he was too sharp for me. He had eyes like a hawk, did Mr. Jason Jedrick.

A few moments later I met Sue alone in the hallway outside her bedroom. She was all ready to go out with Jedrick. She put her hand on my arm, which filled me with thrills. "Harry," she whispered.

It was the first time she had called me by name, and I liked the way she did it. Her voice was like a purling brook. I said: "Yes, Sue?"

"It was sweet of you," she smiled, "to try and keep me from having to go out with Mr. Jedrick. But you mustn't do anything like that again. Mr. Jedrick might get angry."

"What of it?" I asked her.

She flushed a little. "I—I am practically engaged to marry Mr. Jedrick," she confessed.

I felt as if she had thrown a bucket of ice water upon me. "You would tie yourself up to a man with a face like his?" I exclaimed in horror.

Her shoulders slumped. "I—I can hardly help myself. You see, Harry, there is a mortgage on this house of mine. The mortgage is held by Mr. Jedrick's bank, and it is overdue. I should have paid off the interest with the four hundred dollars I had saved up; but instead, I used the money to buy oil warrants, thinking to make a big profit. And now, unless I am nice to Mr. Jedrick, he will foreclose on me, and I will be homeless."

"It sounds," I said, "like an old-fashioned melodrama."

Sue smiled wistfully. "Life is just a stage, Harry," she said. And then she brushed past me and went in to where Jason Jedrick was waiting for her. Pretty soon Jedrick took her out to the movies.

When George and I were alone in the house, I started pacing the floor. George looked at me and grinned. "Harry," he said, "since you have so much energy, I think I will leave you here to wash the dishes. I have certain investigations to make, and time is fleeting."

I would have protested, because I know absolutely nothing about dishwashing. But George had already put on his hat. He waved farewell to me and departed. I could hear him gunning the motor of our roadster; and I knew that he must be in a decided hurry to get wherever he was going. But he left too abruptly for me to ask any questions.

It was around nine-thirty when the auburn-haired Sue returned from the movies. She was alone, and she looked somewhat mussed. Jason Jedrick had probably kissed her, I thought; and it made me sore. I was on the point of seeking him out and smiting him on the button, when George entered the house.

George drew me aside. "Harry," he said, "you and I are going to come into money."

"How?" I asked him. I was interested.

"I have been out to Jason Jedrick's oil well," George said. "And I have decided that it will be a good investment for us to buy up all the oil warrants which Jedrick has peddled to the natives of this village."

"You mean there is actually a chance for oil to come out of Jedrick's well?"

"There is no doubt of it!" George said enthusiastically. "Being something of a geologist myself, I know all the signs."

I was disappointed, because I had been firmly convinced that Jason Jedrick was a crook. I watched as George opened his Gladstone and extracted therefrom several thick rolls of currency. "George!" I said. "You did not tell me you were bringing all that geetus up here!"

"I brought it just in case," George grinned. He handed me the greenbacks. "Here, Harry," he said. "You are going to do the purchasing. You will pay sixty cents for every fifty-cent oil warrant, thus giving the natives a nice profit of ten cents on every certificate. We will get a list of warrant holders from Cousin Sue, who knows everybody in this town."

And so, despite the lateness of the hour, I got a lot of names from George's angelic cousin, and sallied forth. They took in the sidewalks of Yerkesville at ten o'clock at night, and it was now ten-fifteen. However, I persevered in my task, since George had insisted upon it. I made at least fifty calls before midnight; and when I returned to Sue's cottage, I had spent twelve thousand simoleons, and I was in possession of twenty thousand of Mr. Jason Jedrick's oil warrants. Moreover, that twelve grand I had spent, represented practically every dime of my own working capital, and George's, too.

OF COURSE I could understand why George had wanted me to buy up all those available oil warrants. George had discovered that oil was to be had from Jason Jedrick's well; and in that case, Jedrick would buy back all the outstanding warrants at a price of one dollar each. This would give George and me a profit of forty cents on every certificate we had bought—a total of eight thousand berries net, to us, on the twenty thousand warrants I now held.

Nor could it be said that George and I had cheated the natives by buying up their warrants. I had given each yokel ten cents per warrant profit, purchasing the certificates at sixty cents apiece when the original price had been only fifty cents. My conscience was clear on that score.

But what worried me was this: Suppose George had made a mistake in his cursory, casual inspection of the Jedrick oil well? Suppose that well turned out to be a dry hole, after all? In that case, George and I would be holding twenty thousand worthless warrants. We would be stung.

And I was firmly convinced of this possibility. I did not like the looks of Jason Jedrick. He had all the outward vestiges of a small-town slicker. Furthermore, I did not relish the way he had beaten me at my own game, earlier that evening—when I had tossed a double-headed trick coin, and he had called the turn on me. He had boasted that nobody had ever stung Jason Jedrick, and that nobody ever would. Guys like that get in my hair. I do not mind a man who remains unstung all his life; but I dislike hearing him boast about it.

So, as I returned to the cottage of George's Cousin Sue, I was filled with misgivings. George was not infallible; and he might have made a mistake about the profit possibilities in the Jedrick oil well. I hated to think about it.

I knocked on the door of the cottage, and Sue let me in. She looked worried.

"Where is George?" I asked her.

"He went out again. He said he had some errands to attend to," she answered me.

This disquieted me considerably. George was not usually nocturnal in his habits; and for him to go roaming the vicinage at midnight was entirely out of character for him. He must have had something on his mind; and I found myself wishing I knew what it was.

"Did George say when he would be back?" I asked.

Sue shook her head. "No, he didn't." As she spoke, I thought I detected the glint of a tear in her eye.

I faced her. "Sue," I accused her, "you've been crying. Is anything wrong?"

"I—I'm going to be married to Jason Jedrick tomorrow," she said in a weary voice, as if all the gimp had been taken out of her.

"Tomorrow?" I exclaimed.

"Y-yes. Jason has made all the arrangements. He told me about it this evening when he took me to the movies."

"But you can't, Sue!" I protested. "I won't let you!"

She smiled wanly. "I've either got to marry him, or have his bank foreclose the mortgage on my home. What else is there for me to do, Harry?"

I said: "Let me pay off that mortgage payment!" And then it suddenly struck me that I couldn't pay off anything. I had spent all my money—and George's money, too—buying up those oil warrants.

Sue's eyes were now shining. "Oh, Harry—!" she whispered. "Do you mean—?"

I said: "Wait here, Sue darling. I am going out to get some money." And I grabbed my briefcase, which was stuffed with those oil warrants I had bought. I raced from the house.

SINCE George had taken the roadster, I had to walk. But it did not take me long to find the residence of Mr. Jason Jedrick. I hammered on his door for perhaps ten minutes before he finally condescended to open it.

He looked at me suspiciously. "What do you want?" he growled.

I said: "Mr. Jedrick, I need money."

He smiled, displaying his yellow teeth. "A common fault, Mr. Foster," he said. "But what do you expect me to do about it?" And he hitched up his nightgown.

"I wish to sell you," I said to him, "some warrants in your oil well."

He raised his sparse brows. "You own some of my oil warrants, Mr. Foster?" he asked me in an astonished tone of voice.

I said: "Yes, Mr. Jedrick. And I would fain sell some of my holdings back to you. I will accept less than their face value. I will take as little as twenty-five cents apiece."

"I would not," he grinned at me, "give you a dime a dozen. Good night, Mr. Foster." He started to close the door on me.

A still, small voice whispered in my ear. The voice told me many things, chief among them being this: Jason Jedrick was a crook!

How did I know? Why, because he had refused to buy back any of those warrants from me! It was obvious that he considered them worthless, or he would have jumped at the chance to get them back for half the price he'd sold them at. His refusal to repurchase any of the warrants was all the proof I needed that Jason Jedrick knew his oil well to be spurious!

And there I was, holding twenty thousand of the valueless certificates! George and I had been sucked in and taken to the cleaners!

For an instant I heaped mental epithets upon my friend George, whose judgment had been at fault when he had bidden me buy those warrants at sixty cents apiece. George was getting soft in the brain. He had been fooled. He and I had been loaded with a lot of wallpaper, and there was nothing to be done about it!

Moreover, we were broke. I could not help the angelic, auburn-haired Sue out of her mortgage dilemma. She would be forced to marry Jason Jedrick, or else lose her home. . . .

Thinking about Sue losing her home made me lose my head. I doubled my fist and popped Mr. Jason Jedrick on the snout. Then, before he could recover himself, I turned and legged it away from there.

When I got back to Sue's house, she was still waiting up for me. "Sue," I said, "the fat is in the fire. Everything is lost. And it's all George's fault."

"Wh-what do you mean?" she wanted to know.

I told her. I told her everything. I said: "Sue, I am in love with you and I wanted to help you out. But I have spent all my money for worthless oil warrants, and all of George's money as well. Moreover, I have bashed Mr. Jason Jedrick in the proboscis, thereby killing any chance I might have of getting any money back from him. Our cause is lost, and there is just one thing left for us to do."

"And wh-what is that, H-Harry?" she whispered.

"You and I will elope and get married," I told her. "Then I will try to get an honest job and keep you from starvation. That way, Jason Jedrick can foreclose on your house—but you won't have to marry him."

Sue shook her head. "No, Harry," she said quietly. "I could not do a thing like that without asking George's advice first."

"But George isn't here," I pointed out.

"No," she said. "George isn't here. . . ."

We were right. George wasn't there. And he did not show up all that night. Along about eight-thirty the next morning, someone knocked on the front door of the

cottage, and I went to answer it. When I opened the door, I saw a uniformed man.

It was the motorcycle minion who had arrested George yesterday for speeding and illegal parking.

The minion said: "I want George Hammersmith. He's due at Judge Jedrick's court at nine o'clock."

"George is out," I said. "And I do not know when he will return."

The minion cast me a dirty look. "Very well. I'll take you along in his place," he told me. "Come on."

NOW, I knew he was not within his legal rights; but it does not pay to argue with a minion of the law at any time. Not until you have had time to get hold of a good mouthpiece. Since I had no attorney in my hip pocket, I decided to go along like a good boy. I grabbed my briefcase, told Sue where I was going, and allowed the minion to drag me down to the two-by-four courthouse.

We entered an exceedingly small and dirty courtroom, and the minion led me up to the bench. "Your Honor," he said, "I could not locate Mr. George Hammersmith; but I brought the man who was riding with him in his roadster yesterday at the time I made the arrest."

I looked up at the bench, and saw Jason Jedrick glaring down at me with a saturnine, pleased expression. His nose was somewhat lacerated where my fist had impacted against it the previous midnight. He grinned and said: "Ah! Mr. Foster. This gives me great pleasure, indeed. You are appearing for your friend, George Hammersmith?"

"Well, not exactly—" I started to say.

"You are appearing for him!" Jedrick rasped. "Otherwise I shall sentence you for contempt of court."

"Yes, Your Honor," I said.

"The charges are speeding, passing a boulevard stop sign, and parking in front of a fireplug. Guilty or not guilty?" Jason Jedrick asked me. His eyes said: "I dare you to plead not guilty!"

"Well, Your Honor—" I started to say.

"Sixty days in jail!" he rapped with his gavel. And I knew that fifty-nine of those sixty days were on account of my pasting him on the schnozzle the night before.

I started to protest; when all of a sudden I heard a commotion behind me. Two people came dashing into the courtroom. I turned, and beheld George and his Cousin Sue, all out of breath.

"Judge Jedrick—!" George said.

"Ah! So you decided to show up, after all, eh, young man?" Jason Jedrick purred. He had an expression of a lion scenting a Christian martyr being tossed into the Arena.

"I can explain why I was late," George commenced.

"I have not asked for explanations, Mr. Hammersmith. Your failure to be on hand at the

appointed time constitutes a violation of the statutes. I sentence you—”

“But wait, Judge!” George interposed swiftly. “I was out looking at your oil well, and when the gusher started, I forgot all about the time—”

Jason Jedrick leaped to his feet, and he had a queer expression. “What’s that you said?” he rasped. “A gusher?”

“Yes, Your Honor. Your oil well blew in at eight o’clock this morning, and it’s spewing oil all over the place!” George said.

Jason Jedrick seemed to forget all about his judicial dignity. He even forgot me. He jumped down from the bench, clapped on his hat and started away from there, full steam ahead and churning the earth with his flying heels. The motorcycle minion started after him.

George grabbed my arm. “Come on, Harry, and see the fun!” he grinned. And he dragged me out to the roadster. Sue sat between George and me, and George drove. We made knots.

TEN miles out of town, we came to a cheaply-constructed oil derrick. A lot of people were gathered about, and there were two or three dozen autos, trucks and whatnot clustered nearby. At the base of the derrick, the ground was saturated with thick, black, gummy crude oil which still seeped out of the well, although a temporary cap had been placed over the hole from which the drilling implements had been withdrawn. You could see the black, thick, sticky stuff bubbling around that temporary cap.

Jason Jedrick was dancing up and down in oily muck over his shoe tops. “Oil, b’Gosh! Oil!” he was screaming. From his expression, you could see that he had never expected such a miracle to take place.

George clucked enviously. “You certainly are lucky, Mr. Jedrick!” he said. “This morning’s paper quotes crude at a dollar-ten a barrel.”

“A dollar-ten? A dollar-ten, b’Gosh?” Jason Jedrick wheezed. Then he seemed to be remembering something. He whirled on me. “Young man,” he said, “last night you came to my house and offered to sell me some warrants against this well—”

I nodded. “Yes, sir,” I said. “I did.”

“Well, I’m ready to buy ‘em from you now!” Jedrick told me with what he evidently thought to be a fatherly smile.

George stepped in. “Wait a minute, Harry,” he said. “How much did you offer those warrants for? What price did you set?”

“He offered ‘em at twenty-five cents apiece!” Jedrick spoke up.

George smiled. “Obviously such a price won’t hold now, Mr. Jedrick. The well has proven itself. It’s a gusher. Which means that the warrants you issued are

now worth their face value of one dollar—or a barrel of crude oil, worth a dollar-ten.”

Jedrick scowled. I could tell what he was thinking. If he redeemed his outstanding warrants for a dollar each, he could still sell his oil at a dollar-ten, thus netting himself ten cents a barrel profit on each outstanding warrant. But from his expression, I could see that he considered ten cents per barrel profit to be entirely too picayunish. I could also guess that he was disgusted with himself for ever having sold any warrants at all. I was willing to wager that if he had even suspected the presence of oil in that well, he would never have sold a single warrant. Not Jason Jedrick! He was the type who did not like to share any gravy with anyone.

No; the only reason Jedrick had peddled warrants was because he had thought that well to be worthless. Now that oil had been struck, he saw himself having to share the profits, and it did not sit well on his digestion.

He proved it by his next words. He whirled on me and said: “Mr. Foster, I will make you a deal. Sell me your warrants for a flat ninety cents each, and I will suspend the sentence I just imposed upon you. You will not have to spend that sixty days in jail. I shall also dismiss the traffic charges against your friend, Mr. Hammersmith, here.”

I looked at George. George looked back at me and nodded. So I said: “Okay, Mr. Jedrick. It’s a deal.”

Jason Jedrick grinned. “How many warrants have you, Mr. Foster?” he asked me.

I told him twenty thousand, and it almost floored him.

“Twenty thousand?” he gasped. “Why—you must have bought up practically every warrant I sold in this town!”

“Yes,” I answered. “I did.”

Then George spoke up. “What’s the difference, Mr. Jedrick? We are willing to sell you the warrants for a flat ninety cents each. Whereas, if the warrants were still held by the original scattered purchasers, you would be obligated to redeem them for a full dollar each. You’re saving ten cents on every warrant we sell back to you.”

Jason Jedrick grew thoughtful. “That’s right,” he said, stroking his nose. “Well, then, come on back to my bank and I’ll give you the money.”

SO WE went back to Yerkesville, and Jason Jedrick paid us eighteen thousand clams for those warrants. And since I had paid only twelve thousand for them, George and I made a profit of six grand on the deal. We immediately paid off Sue’s mortgage out of our winnings. Jedrick didn’t like that very much, but what could he do?

After it was all over, George and Sue and I went back to Sue’s now-unencumbered cottage. Over a cup of coffee, I heaved a sigh. “It strikes me,” I murmured somewhat bitterly, “that Mr. Jason Jedrick is an

exceedingly lucky man. He has bought back all his warrants, and now has practically no outstanding indebtedness against his oil well. He will acquire great wealth from that oil lease, and it's not right. Jason Jedrick does not deserve it."

"But my dear Harry," George said gently, "Mr. Jason Jedrick will not acquire riches from his oil well. Because there is no oil in it."

"No oil?" I exclaimed.

"Not a drop. You see, that's what I was doing last night and this morning," George explained. He smiled. "You have heard of mines being 'salted'—?"

"Yes," I said. And I began to see daylight. "Do you mean that you . . .?"

George nodded. "You noticed a lot of automobiles and trucks parked near that oil derrick? Well, one of them was a tank-truck, as perhaps you observed. That tank-truck was planted there last night by Yours Truly. It was full of crude oil. I ran a pipeline from the truck to the oil well, about a foot below the surface of the earth. I bribed the two drillers who were operating Jedrick's rig.

When the proper time came, we merely pumped oil out of the truck and made it gush from the well, by way of the concealed pipe line. By this time, the two drillers have departed, and the truck has left these parts forever. When Jason Jedrick goes back to his well, he will find it in its pristine state—a dry hole."

"George!" his Cousin Sue whispered, her eyes shining. "You mean you bamboozled Mr. Jedrick into buying back all his worthless warrants for almost twice as much as he sold them for? And now he hasn't anything to show for it? He's out six thousand dollars, all the natives of Yerkesville have got their money back and more besides, and you've made a profit on the deal?"

George nodded. "Yes," he said. "Mr. Jason Jedrick is no longer the Great Unstung. He has been chiseled. The mooch turned on him and bit him."

"Oh, George!" Sue said. And she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

One of these days I am going back to Yerkesville and make a play for that girl.