

# The Lovable Rogue

## THE ROGUE'S QUIET WEEKEND

BY  
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The hardest part of thwarting an unscrupulous financier's hostile takeover attempt is recovering one's energy once the deed has been done. The deed itself is tough and tiring. Offer, counter offer. Bluff, counter bluff. Perhaps even a little deception. When the stakes are high the ethical standards are low. It's enough to drain the old *joie de vie* and make you feel as if you had just spent the last 24 hours traversing the French countryside behind the wheel of a D-type Jaguar. A quiet weekend is typically required to restore one's passion for *le grand monde*.

My preferred destination for a quiet weekend is California's Gold Country. The abandoned mines and Sierra Nevada foothills calm one's soul and the stately homes filled with ghosts of the Gold Rush fortify one's spirit. My spirit certainly needed fortifying after saving Avalon Industries from that fashion wreck named Halzbee.



*"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."*

So it was off to Nevada City with high hopes and high expectations.

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"James," I said. "This is not what I had expected."

"No, sir."

I had not expected to find every parking space on Broad Street filled with an expensive automobile. It was worse than watching a sure thing stumble down the backstretch.

"Look, James," I said. "There are Jags and Mercedes everywhere."

"A few Rollers, as well," he said.

Tasteless new ones, of course. Their ostentatious owners were no doubt lurking about wherever it is that ostentatious owners lurk. All very distressing. Broad Street, Nevada City is not supposed to look like Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills.

"See if you can find a place to park."

"Yes, sir."

After several tours of Broad Street, a spot finally opened up in front of the National Hotel, a brick building with tall white, wooden columns and white, intricately carved wooden balconies. It was a nice place to park a classic Rolls Royce in front of.

James nudged the Rolls to within inches of a tatty, dark brown Peugeot 504 station wagon, the only unpretentious car on the street.

"Well done, James." Good chauffeur, that James. Do you know how hard, no you probably don't.

"Thank you, sir." He slid out of the Rolls and very properly opened my door. In case you're interested I was wearing an ascot tucked into a blue silk



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shirt and a white linen suit. A Panama hat completed what in my opinion is the perfect holiday look. Some may regard it as too Hollywood but a classic becomes a classic for a reason. And I'm sure I've told you before, but when one owns a Rolls Royce one's wardrobe must measure up. Even while vacationing.

The sound of James closing the Rolls' door rustled an elderly couple from the Peugeot. They were a friendly looking pair in British style clothes that were a bit worn at the edges. A wedge-shaped driving hat sat on top of the man's head and a thin, gray moustache sat on his upper lip. Quite dashing, actually. The woman's gray curls were stuffed into the type of hat worn by butterfly collectors.

"Nice automobile," the man said, admiring the beautifully anachronistic lines of my Silver Cloud III.

"Thank you," I said.

"I don't see many like that anymore."

"No, one doesn't,"

"What year is it?"

"1963."

He nodded and stepped back for a more panoramic view.

"Mr. Jepson has invited so many wealthy people here that we feel a bit out of place," the woman said.

I looked at James. Neither of us had a clue as to who Mr. Jepson was.

"You must be very wealthy to drive a car like that," the man said.

"Do not be deceived by appearances," I smiled.



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"Of course we're happy just to have the chance to hobnob with the rich and famous," the woman smiled. Her comforting face reminded me of toasted bread and warm honey.

"It's a wonderful opportunity, don't you think?" her husband said.

"Yes," I said. "I suppose it is." I exchanged another glance with James who shrugged with his eyebrows.

"I can't believe so many people have turned out," the man continued, nodding at the row expensive cars. "I had no idea so many people read this paper." He took a thin newspaper from under his arm.

"*The California Investment News*," I said. None of my business acquaintances cared much for that particular publication. Then again, none of them drove Peugeots.

"I guess it just goes to show you what a good deal Mr. Jepson is offering us," the man said.

I was beginning to wonder about this Jepson fellow and you know how I get when I get curious.

"May I buy you a cup of coffee?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed!" he said. The old man smiled at his wife.

James stayed with the Rolls while I led the couple into the cafe of the National Hotel.

"I'm Winston Churchill," I said, shaking the man's hand.

"By Jove!" He gave me an astonished look. "You're not related to the Winston Churchill, are you?" He squinted at me.

"No, no relation," I said.

"My name's Ansley Duke," he said.



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"And I'm Mary Queen of Scots," his wife added.

"She's not really," Ansley growled.

"But my real name is Mary and I am glad to meet you, Mr. Churchill."

Her smile was as soft as billowy clouds. "I hope my little joke didn't put you off. Is your name really Winston Churchill?"

"It is, and a little humor is not wasted on me."

"I'm glad," she said. Her toast and honey look reappeared.

"We'll have tea instead of coffee if you don't mind," Ansley said.

"I don't mind at all," I said. Some day I'm going to write a treatise on the personality differences between tea and coffee drinkers. Keep an eye out for it.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Berkeley," Mary said.

In case you don't know, Berkeley is a university town across the Bay from San Francisco. Actually, it's a little world of its own, full of cultural diversity, unconventional thinking, and good intentions. It's also close to the horse racing at Golden Gate Fields.

"What do you do for a living?" I asked.

"We're teachers," Ansley said.

"College teachers," Mary added. "Professors."

"Naturally. How did you become readers of *The California Investment News*?" I asked.

Ansley placed the newspaper on the table.

"A colleague told us about it," he said. "We've subscribed to it for quite a few years. We've never invested in any of its recommendations, though. Seems frivolous to spend so much money subscribing to something we never use. To



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tell you the truth, we've always been afraid to invest in anything. We've always been conservative, putting all of our money into our savings account at the bank. We've let opportunity pass us by. But we're not going to let it happen again. We're tired of missing out on great investments."

"Yes," Mary said. "I guess we have been a bit stodgy with our money."

"But you still have it," I said. "There is something to be said for conservative financial planning."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," Ansley shrugged. "But it's time for us to be more aggressive. After all, we're not young anymore. We won't have many more opportunities like this one. Have you decided which parcel you're going to buy?"

"I'm afraid I didn't come here to transact business," I said. "I'm vacationing."

"Vacationing?" Ansley's moustache thickened. "But your car, I thought for sure..." He turned to his wife.

"As Mr. Churchill said, do not be deceived by appearances."

"Oh," Ansley swallowed hard. "You see, this investment opportunity is secret. I shouldn't have told you as much as I have."

"You have told me nothing," I said.

"It's invitation only," Ansley continued. "Invitations were sent only to long-time subscribers of *The California Investment News*."

"You don't have to say any more," I said.

"Well, it's a new Gold Rush," Ansley said. "Of course, if you haven't received an invitation from Mr. Jepson we shouldn't tell you about it."

"Then don't say another word. I respect your privacy."



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"But I think we can trust Mr. Churchill, don't you Mary?" He looked at his wife and then at me. "You won't tell anybody, will you?"

"Mum's the word."

Ansley reached into his tweed sport coat and pulled out a clump of papers. He handed them to me as if he were passing on state secrets.

"The prospectus," he whispered.

I opened it and read about the deal. Two hundred parcels of land were for sale with a limit of five parcels per investor. A detailed map indicated the location of each parcel and its selling price. One of the parcels was circled.

The prospectus also contained a market forecast written by a company called International Investments. The forecast detailed the plans of the Davidson Development Corporation to build an office park and a luxury hotel next to the property. A Davidson Development spokesman listed the area's proximity to the ski slopes of Lake Tahoe and the gambling of Reno as reasons for building in the Nevada City area. Those benefits, it was stated, would attract the necessary tenants.

"You're going to buy the circled parcel?" I asked.

"Yes, that's right," Ansley said. "You see, those development plans haven't been made public yet. When they are, land in this area will be worth a fortune."

"Especially the land next to the development," Mary said. "That's the land Mr. Jepson is selling."

Ansley looked around the cafe.



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"I'm just looking to make sure Mr. Jepson isn't here," he said. "He spends quite a bit of time in the cafe. He wouldn't appreciate our telling you about the deal."

"Who is Mr. Jepson?" I asked.

"Why, he's the publisher of the *The California Investment News*."

"Oh."

Ansley turned pensive.

"You know, it sure was nice of Mr. Jepson to send us a personal invitation," he said. "I didn't think he even knew we read his newsletter. So many important people subscribe to it that I didn't think he would bother with us. We don't have that much money. Oh, we have enough to buy one parcel of land but that's all. It was so nice of Mr. Jepson to include us in his select list of potential investors."

"Yes," Mary said. "It was very civil of him. It shows that you don't have to drive a Rolls Royce or be Mary Queen of Scots to be taken into Mr. Jepson's confidence."

I smiled and gave the prospectus back to Ansley.

"Don't you find it a little odd that Mr. Jepson is selling his land?" I asked. "If it's going to be so valuable why isn't he keeping it?"

"That's the typical response," Ansley scoffed. "Mr. Jepson warned us of that. But you see, he's not greedy, Mr. Churchill. He's going to keep some of the land for himself and sell the rest of it. He mentioned something about taxes that I didn't fully understand but his main reason for selling is to reward all of us who have been faithful subscribers to his newsletter."

"He's being very charitable," Mary added.



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"Yes, very charitable," I said. "Still, one shouldn't rush into such things," I said.

"Oh, we won't," Ansley said. "We have until two o'clock tomorrow afternoon to make our decision."

"That's not much time."

"One must move fast in business," Ansley said. "The development plans will be announced Monday. If we don't buy now it will be too late. Once the plans have been made public the value of the land will skyrocket and we will have missed out on the chance of a lifetime. Opportunities are fleeting."

"Oh, Ansley," Mary laughed. "You sound like a TV commercial."

Ansley blushed and shrugged.

"Has anyone verified the market forecast?" I asked.

"Mr. Churchill," Ansley frowned. "I'm sure there's no need for that. There's no reason to question Mr. Jepson's integrity. We've read his newsletter for quite some time. When Mr. Jepson says it's a good deal, I believe him. You aren't jealous are you?"

"Sorry, just my suspicious nature." It was time to change the subject. "Where are you staying?" I asked.

"Here in the hotel," Mary said. "You know, it's the oldest continuously operating hotel in California."

"I didn't know that."

"Where are you staying?" Ansley asked.

"In a private house." I tried to remain nonchalant. As usual, the house belonged to someone else and I hadn't exactly been invited to stay there.



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"Oh, that must be nice," Mary said. She clasped her hands together and smiled. "There are such beautiful homes here."

"Yes. We're going to buy one with the money we make off this real estate deal," Ansley said.

"Yes, we've always wanted a Victorian," Mary added.

"I'm sure you'll be very happy with it," I said. I reached for the check.

"Oh, we'll pay for that, Mr. Churchill," Ansley said, grabbing the check.

"We might as well get used to spending a little money."

"Thank you," I said. "I've enjoyed your company."

"It's been our pleasure." Ansley shook my hand.

"Goodbye, Mr. Churchill," Mary said.

I nodded and returned to the Rolls. James opened the rear door and I slid into the back seat.

"Is something wrong, sir?" James asked.

"I'm not sure." I told him of Jepson's real estate deal.

"Very unusual, sir."

"Yes. Jepson's charity worries me. It's not that I don't believe in the basic goodness of mankind or anything like that, it's simply that basic goodness seldom has a place in business the way most people conduct it."

"Indeed, sir."

"If this real estate deal is a scam, a lot of people will lose a lot of money."

"Quite likely."

"Of course, I don't really care what happens to those folks with the Jags and Mercedes."

"One should not."



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"But the Duke's are nice people."

"I'm sure they are, sir."

"Someone should look after their interests."

"Certainly, sir."

"I suppose if we don't do it no one will."

"Then I take it the quiet weekend is over?" James asked.

I leaned back and adjusted my ascot.

"To the hunt, James!"

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I figured if Jacob Jepson was any kind of a big shot Harry Avalon would know of him. But Harry had never heard of him nor International Investments nor the Davidson Development Corporation.

"I'll do some research and call you in the morning," he said. "By the way, what's all this about? What are you up to?"

"I'm dabbling in real estate," I said.

"What?" I could see his perturbed face through the telephone line. "You just wait for my call." His words were followed by a click and a dial tone.

If you know me you know there is one thing I cannot do and that is wait.

"James," I said. "I think we should have a look at Jepson's property. Perhaps we can learn a few things for ourselves."

"Perhaps, sir."

"Good. Put on your Wellingtons. *La campagne* is calling."

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The soil outside of Nevada City was deep orange. The south fork of the Yuba river meandered somewhere a few miles away. The land itself was



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nondescript and was covered with tall grass and thick trees. The small access road leading to Jepson's property was unpaved and more suitable to a Range Rover than a Rolls Royce. The road ended abruptly in a small clearing. It was hard to imagine office buildings and hotels on the property but I suppose I don't have the vision of a real estate developer.

"They will have to put in roads and sewers," James said as he surveyed the area. "Have they filed an environmental impact study?"

"I didn't see one mentioned in the prospectus," I said.

James stopped the Rolls and we hiked through tall grass until we came to another small clearing. We were surprised to find a raggedy shack with smoke rising from its flimsy chimney. An old man sat on a tree stump in front of the shack. He was cleaning a large hunting knife with a dirty rag. His prickly beard and sandblasted hair covered all of his face but his eyes. It made him resemble a porcupine, actually.

"Hello," I said.

The man looked up, squinted, and rose from the stump. His eyebrows twitched with suspicion. I kept an eye on the knife.

"Howdy," he said.

We ventured a few steps closer.

"Nice knife," I said.

The man looked at the knife.

"Mighty fine huntin' knife, that is." He held it up so we could see it better. "Used to belong to my father. He skinned quite a few bears with it."

"Bears?" I looked at James.

"Don't get nervous, mister. Not around here, up in Washington State."



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"Oh," I said. "I don't suppose you see many bears around here."

"No, and I don't usually see many folks either," the man replied.

"Well, you'll probably be seeing many more of them pretty soon," I said.

"What do you mean?" He squinted again.

"Do you live here?" I asked.

"Yup." He tilted his head and stopped squinting. "You got a problem with that?"

"No, not at all. But you don't own this land, do you?"

"Nobody owns this land, mister. Nobody wants it."

"Well, someone wants it now."

The old man twitched.

"What, you own this land now?" he asked. He tilted his head in the other direction and looked at me with half-closed eyes.

"No, I don't own it. What's your name?"

"Emery."

"What do you do around here, Emery?"

"I used to pan for gold," he said. He was still suspicious.

"Gold?"

"Now don't get excited, mister. There ain't none anymore. Used to be plenty of it. Not here, up by the river, little ways up north. I panned more gold than you've probably ever seen. I remember those days. We'd strike gold and then rush off to the National Hotel and buy everyone drinks. Those were good days, mister. Drank quite a bit. But them days are gone and they won't come back. No, mister, there ain't no more gold here."

"How do you know? Maybe the gold's underground?"



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"Listen, mister, I can smell gold. I can take a hand full of dirt, bring it up to my nose and smell if there's gold down below." He reached down for a handful of soil, brought it to his nose, sniffed, shook his head and dropped the dirt. "Nope, no gold here."

"Very scientific," I said.

"Science ain't got nothing to do with it," he snapped.

"I see."

"Mister, I've smelled every bit of land in this county and there ain't no gold here. Not here, not in the river. None, nowhere. There ain't no gold nowhere around here."

"Then why are you still here?"

"I ain't doing no prospecting, if that's what you mean. Oh, I go down to the river every now and then but it ain't no good. I live off the gold I panned fifty years ago."

"Well, there's new gold on its way, Emery," I said. "Someone's going to build offices and hotels on this land. "

"Offices? Hotels? Why would anybody want to build those things here?" He looked around the rough land. "This land's worthless, mister. That's why nobody cares if I live here."

"I'm afraid those days are over, Emery."

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"James, we need an airplane."

"Sir?"

"Harry Avalon may on to something but he needs more information and that information happens to be locked up at the moment."



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"I see, sir."

"So he needs to utilize some of your more practical skills."

"Very good, sir."

"But we don't much time. If Jepson's deal is a scam we'll have to be back before two o'clock in order to save Mr. and Mrs. Duke from losing their life savings."

"And if it is not a scam?"

"Then we'll relax and enjoy the flight."

We drove to the local airport at a speed the Rolls found slightly uncomfortable. The sun was still in the process of rising. The only sign of life was a sleepy tabby who was looking forward to sunning himself on top of an oil barrel. We borrowed an airplane and flew to San Francisco. Harry met us at the airport.

"What are you doing in Nevada City?" Harry asked.

"Having a quiet weekend."

"That's what I was having until you called." He looked me over the way he looks people over. "I suppose I owe you one, though. Come on." He led us to his car.

"So what have you discovered?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. I may have found something but I need more information and that information isn't at my immediate disposal."

"You shall have it," I said.

Harry stopped his Mercedes at the fringes of the Financial District just a few blocks from the offices of International Investments. James slid out of the



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car and immediately went to work. He did his usual superb job and obtained the information without a hitch.

"I don't want to know how you got that," Harry said, nodding toward the bundle of papers in James' arms. "But it was a damn fine job."

I smiled. Harry drove us back to his spectacular Russian Hill home and we settled into a den that housed more books than most municipal libraries. A few vintage first editions shared self space with law books and business tomes. He took a bottle of port from a wine rack that someone had ingeniously built into an antique glass-doored bookcase. The port was a 1963 vintage from the Rio Torto valley. It had a fine color, fine nose, and a fine taste.

We toasted each other then Harry sat down to examine the papers James had obtained for him.

"It's a very complicated scheme," he said after a while. "There are so many holding companies involved that it's hard to follow. But it boils down to this: two men named Jacob Jepson and Ernie Davidson run the entire show. Look," Harry said, showing us some diagrams he had drawn. "At the top we have Ernie Davidson and Jacob Jepson. Each of them own 50% of West Coast Construction. West Coast Construction owns 50% of Davidson Development and also 75% of International Investments."

"The firm that did the market forecast," James said.

"Correct. Jacob Jepson owns the other 25% of International Investments. He also owns all of *The California Investment News*."

"What about the other 50% of Davidson Development?" I asked.

"It's owned by *The California Investment News*."

"What? Harry, you're talking in riddles."



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"Listen," he grumbled. Harry never did have much patience with financial neophytes. "What it all means is this: Ernie Davidson and Jacob Jepson own everything. They own the company that did the market forecast and they own the firm that is supposed to do the development. They also own the newsletter that is providing them with investors."

"Shady," I said.

"Shady? It's more than shady. Now listen to this. The important part is the history of these firms. It appears that West Coast Construction has embarked upon several other developments recently, each time using different holding companies. Each time nothing was built. In fact, as far as I can tell West Coast Construction has never constructed anything, and Davidson Development has never developed anything. In all cases International Investments did the market forecast. Several lawsuits have already been filed against them in other States. Winston, Davidson and Jepson are crooks. What you've got here is a scam."

"I was afraid of that," I said. "That's bad news for the Dukes."

"Who?"

"Never mind. You don't know them. Anyway, thanks for the analysis, Harry. May I take these papers?"

"Sure."

"Now, if you'd take us back to the airport we've got to be back in Nevada City before two o'clock."

Harry looked at his watch.

"Good luck," he said. "You haven't a chance in hell."

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Harry was right. It was 2:15 by the time James brought the Rolls to a halt in front of the National Hotel. I did not wait for him to open my door. Ansley and Mary were in the cafe.

"Mr. Churchill," Ansley called. He looked like a teenage boy who had just received his first kiss. "Where have you been?"

"In San Francisco."

"San Francisco? What were you doing there?"

Mary looked at me funny.

"Did you buy that land yet?" I asked.

"Yes, of course," he said. "So did many others. You should have seen them all, Mr. Churchill!" His moustache twitched with self-satisfied excitement.

My heart sank to the floor and I sat down to join it.

"You don't look too well, Mr. Churchill," Mary said. "Is something wrong?"

"I'm afraid I have some bad news for you."

Mary tightened and her face lost its toast and honey appearance.

"Oh?" she said.

"I went to San Francisco this morning to investigate Mr. Jepson and the companies involved in his real estate deal."

"What? Mr. Churchill, you didn't?" Ansley was a mixture of anger and surprise.

"What did you find, Mr. Churchill?" Mary asked. She clasped her hands tightly together.

I placed Harry's papers on the table.



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"Unfortunately, Jepson's real estate deal is a scam," I said. "Jepson and his partner are swindlers. They are very good at selling land based on phony development plans. Several lawsuits have already been filed against them. These men are frauds."

"Oh, my," Mary said. Her voice was barely a whisper.

"Are you sure?" Ansley asked. He rose and looked down at me. "You better have proof, Mr. Churchill. You can't just go making accusations like this without proof."

"It's all here in these papers," I said. "With the lawsuits piling up against them they'll probably take the money from this real estate scam and flee the country if they can."

Ansley sat down and looked at the papers and then stared into space. Reality hit him like a hard left hook.

"Our entire savings," he said. "We've lost it all." His colorful face turned colorless.

"We should have been more careful," Mary said. "But we were so excited."

"I'm not very excited now," Ansley groaned. They sat quietly and stared at the table. "I guess we should have listened to you, Mr. Churchill. But how were we to know?" He looked at me as his eyes pleaded his case. "We shouldn't have rushed into this. You were right."

"Oh, dear," Mary said. "Oh, dear. What should we do now? Can these men be stopped?"

"The deal will eventually be exposed for the scam that it is," I shook my head. "You can then sue Jepson and his partner, but there will be so many



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other claims against them that the chances of recovering your money are not very good. And it will take time."

"Can't we call the police or some other authority?" Ansley asked.

"They really haven't done anything illegal yet," I said.

"Then there's nothing we can do?" Ansley's moustache disappeared as his lips puckered.

"Nothing legal."

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"James, pack up the Rolls," I said. "I want to leave Nevada City as soon as possible. This quiet weekend has been a considerable disappointment."

"Indeed, sir."

We packed in silence then he packed the Rolls.

"To the National Hotel, James. I want to say goodbye to the Dukes."

"Yes, sir.

He drove me to the hotel then went on to pick up a very important package that was waiting for us. Jepson was in the hotel, taking an early supper in the cafe. He was a slovenly beast of a fellow. He had too many gold and diamond rings on his fingers and probably drove a Cadillac.

The Dukes desolately sat at a table next to the window. Have you ever seen the lost expression on hunting dogs when the fox gets away? No, you probably haven't. But if you have then you know how the Duke's looked.

"Hello," I said to them.

"Hello," Mary replied. Her voice was tired.

Ansley was quiet.



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"Awfully decent of you to stop in and say goodbye," Mary said.

"Not at all. Actually, I'm here to get your money back."

"What?" Ansley nearly jumped out of his chair. "By Jove, Mr. Churchill, are you serious?" Ansley looked at Mary.

"What do you intend to do?" she asked.

"Buy the land from you."

"Mr. Churchill," he recoiled. "We will not accept charity."

"It's not charity, it's a business deal. I don't have the money right now, but if you sign over the title to the land, I'll sign a promise to pay."

"Mr. Churchill..."

"Trust me," I said. I looked Ansley straight in the eye. "If you had listened to me before you wouldn't be in this fix." I already had the papers prepared and I laid them on the table.

"I don't know," Ansley said.

"Do it," Mary said.

Ansley looked at his wife and capitulated. We signed the agreement.

"I don't feel right about this, Mr. Churchill," Ansley said. "No matter what you say it's still charity. What are you going to do with that land?"

"Oh, I'll find a use for it," I said. James drove up in the Rolls and I smiled.

Ansley resumed his argument but was interrupted by Emery's appearance in the cafe.

"Whee, drinks for everybody!" Emery shouted.

"Who's that and what's he talking about?" Ansley asked.

Jepson looked up from his pork chops.



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"Gold! I found gold!"

Nothing captures people's attention like gold, does it? It certainly caught Jepson's attention. He rose from his table, threw down his napkin, and approached Emery.

"Gold?" he said. His nose sniffed like a bloodhound's.

"Yep!" Emery said.

We all gathered around the scruffy prospector.

"You found gold?" I asked. "Where?"

"Right here." He pulled out a musty map and pointed to Ansley's parcel of land.

"That's my land!" Ansley said. He looked at Mary and grinned.

"No, that's my land," I said.

Ansley's jaw dropped like a runaway elevator. His face became a kaleidoscope of colors before settling on red. You could have skated on his eyes.

"You, you, you cheated me!" he cried. "You must have known there was gold on my land! You crook! You big crook!"

Jepson's mouth exploded and his eyes glazed over.

"Quiet down, would you?" he yelled.

Emery looked at Jepson.

"What for?" he asked.

"You don't want to start a stampede, do you?"

Emery became subdued.

"No. I guess not," he whispered.

"There," Jepson nodded, wiping his forehead.



*"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."*

"But I'll tell you one thing," Emery continued. "That whole area's full of gold. I can smell it."

"What are you saying?" Jepson asked. He stuck out his jaw and stared at Emery.

"Look here. See there?" He pointed at the map. "There's gold there."

Jepson's eyes also became large enough to skate on.

"There's gold there?"

"You bet there is," Emery nodded.

Jepson turned to me.

"That's your land, is it?"

"It was mine," Ansley growled. James had to hold him back. It didn't take much effort. "I bought it from you this afternoon."

"Oh yes, I remember," Jepson said to Ansley.

"But I just sold it to this man." Ansley glared at me.

"Yes," I grinned. "And that land is now worth a fortune. So is all the surrounding land."

"Mr. Jepson," Ansley said. "Didn't you know there was gold out there?"

Jepson snarled.

"No he didn't," I said. "If he had he wouldn't have sold it. Now I'm going to find all the other people he sold land to this weekend and buy it from them before they find out about the gold."

Jepson reeled. You can always tell when a man is sick to his stomach by the way his skin turns color. Jepson's skin was like an empty snakeskin. When his color returned so did his attitude.

"You got enough money to buy all that land?" Jepson asked.



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"I don't think he does," Ansley sneered. He raised his head in defiance. "He had to sign an IOU in order to buy my land."

"Is that right?" Jepson laughed. He had a repulsive laugh that sounded like someone banging on an empty metal barrel. "You've got to have a lot of bread to play the real estate game." He laughed again and patted me on the back. "I've got that kind of money. You don't. I can afford to buy back the land. You can't."

"Perhaps we can make a deal," I said.

"Deal? What kind of deal? You've got nothing to deal with." He had an awful grin on his chubby face.

"I've got information."

He stopped grinning.

"Once everyone learns about the gold you'll never be able to buy back the land," I said. "At least not at a reasonable price."

"You wouldn't dare ..."

I examined the pieces of gold in Emery's hand. "Very good quality," I said.

"See that?" Emery said, pointing to one of the pieces. "That means the area's full of gold. I can tell just by looking at it. Whee! Drinks for everybody!"

"Pipe down!" Jepson yelled. "What's your deal?" he said to me.

"You buy my parcel of land, at a healthy premium, of course, and I'll keep quiet about the gold."

"That's blackmail," he said.



*"Style, you either have it or you don't, and if you have it you have it all the time."*

"Land prices will skyrocket once news of the gold gets out," I said. "My silence is worth something. It turns out you were pretty foolish to sell that land."

"Let's talk money," he said.

We settled the deal and Jepson rushed off to buy back his land. I ushered the Duke's out of the cafe and paid them for their parcel. James waited in the Rolls.

"Mr. Churchill," Ansley said. "I don't understand it. At first I thought you had cheated me out of my land. Then you gave me all of the money, including the extra that Jepson gave you to keep quiet about the gold. Aren't you going to keep some?"

"Yes," Mary said. "You certainly deserve a share."

"No. You take the money and put it in the bank," I said. "Return to your conservative ways."

"But you knew there was gold on that land," Ansley said. "Couldn't we have made more money if we'd kept it? Gold is very valuable."

I climbed into the back of the Rolls and lowered the window. "Mr. Duke," I said as James started the engine. "The only gold on that land is fool's gold. Home, James."