

# Exploits of an Honest Grafter



**H**ONEST JOHN, the circus "fixer," gets involved in an oil speculation, and the consequences are both extraordinary and diverting.

SIX weeks ahead of the show was Honest John Barker, fixer extraordinary for the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus. In addition to this he was seated in the buffet-car of the Pacific Coast Limited, dividing his attention between the dry, baking heat of a Wyoming afternoon, the succession of cold lemonades that had answered his energetic pushes on the bell, and the conglomeration of scenery out there in the straight range of the beating sun.

At least, call it scenery for lack of a better name—lack of scenery might be a better simile. True, once upon a time the country had been a place of free flat plains, with soap-weed and prairie-dog villages and perhaps a lone cowpuncher riding the ridge against the horizon, but that time was gone now.

Instead, every road had its cloud of dust, and that cloud, breaking now and then, revealed the

forms of chugging motors loaded to the limit with machinery, with steel pipes and great cumbersome tanks. Here and there a wagon would appear with its prairie-schooner covering—sometimes a train of them; motorcars scooted about where once the prairie-dog had cavorted, and in the place of the soap-weed were derricks, wooden, crossbeamed derricks, with engines snorting and puffing beside them, with men who did not even look up as the train rolled by, derricks with their pumps working at maximum speed, derricks of old lumber, new limber, big, medium and small. Now and then, as the train rushed on, a great group of heavy steel tanks half sunk in the ground clustered beside a spur of the railroad, or a pool of brownish-black liquid formed itself about one of the clumsy-appearing structures, and men worked as though it were their last day on earth. Miles and miles and miles—then the

immaculate Honest John pushed the button.

"Bring me another. Tom," he ordered as the porter slid to his side. "Put lots of ice in it: I've been sitting here thinking how hot it'd be if all that oil out there'd catch fire."

The porter chuckled.

"Hit shoah woold make some smoke," he agreed. "Hit shoah would!"

But Honest John's mind had taken another tack.

"Guess it's making a lot of money for everybody right now."

But the porter qualified.

"Hit would if hit was all ile," came his rather solemn answer. "Yuh see, boss, all dese yere wells yuh-all's looking at aint got ile in 'em. All yuh got to do up in his yere country is jes' to ac' laik yuh've got ile—dassall, jest ac' laik you've got ile—an' befo' yuh knows it, dey's a million bucks tryin' to git it befo' yuh does. Yassah, dassal—jes' ac' laik yuh've got ilw, an' right away you've got comp'ny!"

"All of 'em aren't producers, then?" asked Honest John as he fingered the lion's claw on his watch-chain and stared out of the winder. The porter chuckled again.

"Ah doan gits what yuh-all means by producers—but they shoah aint all got ile. Lot's o' 'em jes' got hopes-dassall, jes' got hopes. But dey's shoah diggin', aint they?"

"They sure are," agreed Honest John. "How much longer does this sort of thing last?"

"Dese yere derricks? Shucks, boss, we'll be runnin' pas' 'em fo' fifty miles yit."

"Don't go any farther?"

"Dassall, boss. Das as far as dey've exlo'ed dis yere field yit. But Lawdy, caint tell nuffin' about hit by to-morrow mawnin'. Dey's liable to be a new ile-rush bust out mos' any minute in mos' any direction up heah dese yere days. Dis yere kentry's jes' plumb ile-crazy—dassal, jes' plumb ile-crazy!"

MUMBLING to himself, the porter shuffled away in search of more lemonade and more ice. Honest John Barker straightened slightly in the big leather chair and once more looked out the window.

"Only fifty miles more," he mused as he toyed with his lion's claw. "And Barstow's only a hundred miles away. That's near enough for working-purposes—if I were to do it!"

Following which, he dragged from a pocket the thing which had caused his journey, a report from the slangy, hard-working Al Butler, advance contracting-agent of the Mighty Maxwell, and turned to that portion headed "*Remarks.*"

"This here bird that owns the lot is sure one tough baby," he read. "I went and saw him when I first lit in the burg, and offered him what I thought was a reasonable price for the grounds, but he wouldn't stand hitched. I offered him twenty-five bucks, but he said no—that there wasn't no other show-lot in town and he knew it, and if we wanted to show in Barstow we could slip five hundred bucks for the lot and get business, or we could go out in the sticks and starve to death. Well, I would of liked to have told him where to go, but I didn't, and I said I would leave the lot for our special man to talk to about it, and then I went out and run my legs on trying to find some other place in town that was big enough to hold the show. But there wasn't any, so we are stuck for this bird's hold-up game if we want to show Barstow.

"I didn't do nothing about it, though and I didn't go back and see Mr. Williams, the bird that owns the lot, because I knew he would stand pat, and I figured that if you wanted to cut his price, you could send Mr. Barker on to give him the razz-ma-tazz some way and get the lot for a lower figure."

Honest John smiled thinly as he folded the letter and turned to raise the cold glass the porter had placed on the tray at his elbow.

"It's a nice little job!" he mused. "Porter—"

"Yassah?"

"What time do we get into Barstow?"

"Six o'clock, sah."

Too late to see the gold-seeking Mr. Williams at his office. Too late for anything, in fact, but dinner, a stroll about town and perhaps a theater. But four hours later Honest John had forgotten the last of the three possibilities. His after-dinner stroll about Barstow had led him to the circus grounds, and his sharp eyes had instinctively looked for the for-sale sign which accompanies every vacant lot. It was there. Carefully he read its wording, then very slowly squinted his eyes. A moment later he was in a taxicab bound for police-headquarters.

"Chief," he said confidentially after the cigars had been passed, "you've known me a good many years, and you know I don't usually hand a wallop to another guy until he's made a pass at me. Saying which, kindly tip me off to a crooked lawyer that isn't too tired to come down to his office to-night and talk a little business."

The chief grinned.

"How crooked?"

"Well not too crooked," Honest Joan hedged hastily. "Fact is, I don't need a crook at all—only I'd feel more at home with one. Think you can fix me up?"

"Easiest thing I know. Give me five minutes, and I'll put you in touch with a fellow who never pulled a straight thing in his life and never got caught in a crooked one."

HONEST JOHN gave him the five minutes, and twenty minutes after that he was talking quietly and confidentially in a strictly private office to a shrewd-appearing, black-haired, black-eyed young man.

"Now, as I understand it," he said for the second or third time, "you can buy without tipping off the name of the man who's putting up the cash."

"Simplest thing in the world. You've given me power-of-attorney."

"And as I understand it, you know the price?"

"Absolutely. Eighteen thousand."

"Fine. Suppose I should have the money in your hands by noon to-morrow. When could you put over the deal?"

"By two."

"Good enough—and you'll take half the profits as your share?"

"Providing I can't persuade you to give me all of them."

"Wait a m-i-n-u-t-e!" Honest John Barker laughed, and pawed at his lion's claw. "Nix on that sort of thing! Us quick guys have got to stick together. Get me straight: I'm after a good day's business for the show and all that, but if there's any outside profit, you've got to mark me down as being present at the trimming of the sucker."

"And there's one born every minute!"

"You said it. Look for me by eleven-thirty o'clock in the morning—with the cash."

Then, smiling very blandly, Honest John glided out of the office and back to his room with apparently nothing more on his mind than a heart-to-heart talk with the hotel valet on the art of pressing clothing. And what was more, this same self-satisfied demeanor still was apparent when he ambled into the Williams Realty office at two o'clock the next afternoon and smiled beamingly into the face of the stenographer.

"I'm one of those horrid circus-men," he announced. "Come to see about the lot as usual. Mr. Williams in?"

"No, he's out just now." Her smile was a reproduction of Honest John's. "And I can't say just when he'll be in. He's been terribly busy to-day."

"So?" Honest John corked his eyebrows with interest. "Pulling off a big deal or something?"

“Really, I couldn’t say.”

“Well, you wouldn’t mind if I waited awhile? Don’t guess there’s any circus sawdust on my clothing.” Honest John inspected himself carefully. “Guess I’m safe there—but I’m not so fortunate on passes. Always got a couple of them sticking around me somewhere.”

He laid the passes on the stenographer’s desk, and the stenographer in repayment showed the way to the private office of J. B. Williams. Honest John seated himself, twiddled his thumbs—and looked about the room. Evidently it was quite a busy day for Mr. Williams. The morning paper still lay in the center of his desk; at one side was the day’s mail, not yet taken from the carefully slit envelopes. Honest John Barker, noting it all, began to sing softly, in keeping with the clicking of the keys of the stenographer’s typewriter in the outer office:

“Goin’ down to de river  
By an’ by,  
Goin’ down to de river—  
There’s a reason why.  
‘Cause de river’s wet  
An’ Beale Street’s done gone dry!”

He tried the old “blue” chorus a second time, liked it better than before, nodded his head energetically to the voicing of it a third time, patted his hands and feet to a fourth rendition—then suddenly stiffened in silence. The outer door had banged, and steps were approaching the private office. A moment more, and Honest John Barker was smiling supergenially into the somewhat leathery features of Mr. J. B. Williams.

“Barker’s my name,” he was announcing with the extension of a chummy hand “official adjuster of the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus. Just thought I’d drop in and see if I couldn’t fix up that little disagreeemnet.”

“With whom?” Mr. Williams had sidled to his chair and begun an aimless straightening of

his desk. Honest John came closer.

“Our contracting-agent. Seems he objected to paying your price. Well, it was a little steep, but I realize that you’ve got the only lot in town, and—”

“Had the lot, you mean.”

“How’s that?” Honest John’s jaw dropped. “You haven’t—”

“Sold it? Yep! This afternoon.”

“Who to?” A handkerchief came forth and slid across Honest John’s forehead. “Gosh, this may put me up against it good and proper. Who’d you sell it to?”

Mr. Williams pulled some legal papers from his pocket and read a name:

“The New York Promoting and Development Company; they handled everything through Mr. Rollins, their attorney. Eastern comer, you know.”

“Yeh,” Honest John was squinting with interest at the papers. “Oil-concern, probably.”

“Oil?” The eyes of Mr. Williams took on a sudden glassy appearance. “Know anything about ‘em?”

“Not much that I can say truthfully, except that the real man behind it is interested in oil right now.”

“Sure of that?” The leathery face of the former lot-owner had grown several shades lighter.

“Never told a lie in my life.”

“Know where I can get hold of him?”

“Yep.”

“Where?”

“Down it the hotel. Happened to be looking in the big mirror in the lobby and saw him pass by. But,”—Honest John became suddenly serious,—“do me a favor won’t you?” Ask the attorney—what’s his name, Mr. Rollins—about him. He may be under cover or something, and I wouldn’t like to tip off a friend. Would you mind?”

“Well,” rather gingerly Mr. Williams turned to his desk, “if I can’t get it any other way,

guess I'll have to. You'll have to see Rollins if you want that lot. I—"

"Mind if I call him up from here?" Barker was wiping away perspiration again. "I'd be in a swell fix if—"

"Go ahead!"—grumpily. "Main 2120."

"Thanks."

**B**ARKER grasped the phone. Hurriedly and earnestly he talked to the man at the other end of the line, then turned anxiously. "What's the size of that lot?"

"Eight hundred by four hundred and fifty-two."

"Thanks." Then into the phone: "Sure, store all you want to on there. Plenty of room. I'll come right over and make the deposit."

"Store what?" The leathery-faced real-state man looked up sharply as Barker started to leave the room.

"Lumber."

"What kind?"

"Didn't say just what kind—just said he had some lumber and machinery coming in about the time the circus got here and wanted to know if we could get on the lot all right in case it got here before we did."

"Lumber and machinery?" The glassy appearance had returned to the real-estate man's eyes. "Say anything about a rig or a derrick or anything like that?"

"Nope; don't guess he'd use those terms, anyway. Thanks for the use of the phone. Got to beat it to see Mr. Rollins. S'long."

But for some strange reason, Honest John Barker of the Mighty Maxwell did not reach his destination until late that night—just before hurrying to catch the midnight train back to the show. A smiling attorney greeted him.

"The yeast's working," he announced. "The sucker's called up here three times wanting to know the name of the man behind the New York Promotion and Development Company. Even went to the extent of offering me two

hundred dollars if I'd loosen up."

"You stayed put?"

"Better than that. Told him that when he stopped talking cigarette-money and got into real figures he might be able to find me in my office."

"Fine and dandy!" Honest John looked at his big watch. "I'll have to beat it. You've got this thing all straight in your head now?"

"Straight as a die. When he offers me real money—"

"Six figures."

"You said it. When he's willing to come through, I'll discover for him—"

"After payment in cash."

"Of course, when everything's O. K. I'll discover for him that the deed was faulty and that there was no sale; whereupon he'll turn back to the poor deluded New York Promotion and Development Company the purchase-price and slip me the bonus. And I'll do my best to put over the deal by circus day, so that we can split the pot personally. Don't see any reason why it shouldn't go through. He's got the cash, and he's just stingy enough to be a sucker."

"On top of which," added Honest John as he shook hands with his comrade in complicity, "there's one born every minute!"

**T**HIS remark Honest John repeated two days later as he sat in the private car of the Old Man, giving the reason why he had, without even a telegram of explanation, drawn on the Mighty Maxwell for twenty-two thousand dollars.

"Take it or leave it, boss," he said finally. "That country out there is just nutty enough over oil to make a rush on any place that shows indications of being a new field. I know what I'm talking about there, so I drew the purchase-price of the lot and four thousand for emergencies. Now, to go on with the argument; whether the scheme works or not, we can always sell the lot for a couple of thousand less

than we paid for it; take five hundred dollars off of that for the rent we don't have to pay, and that leaves fifteen hundred plus the expense-money, against Old Leather-face's wad. If he falls, fine and dandy. If he don't, and if there's any kind of a rush in there, we'll do a turn-away business and get rid of the lot at a profit. And if neither one of those things turn up, we've lost a few thousand bucks, which is a good deal less than we slough off on a rainy day—so where's the holler?"

The Old Man chewed at his cigar.

"You win," he grumbled at last. "I aint saying a word—only be sure to get some cash back by circus-day. We're not overwealthy just now. Let me know if you get any news."

The answer to his request came a week later, in the person of Honest John and an edition of a Casper newspaper. Only a small item it was, but significant, for it noted the fact that rumors of a new field in the vicinity of Barstow had become current, and that the floating population of the Casper field was beginning to migrate. The Old Man grinned as he read it.

"There's a sucker born every minute," he chuckled. "Now, if the sucker-in-chief'll only bite, I'll say you're a regular fixer!"

"He'll bite," agreed Honest John, peering over his shoulder. "He's got to. Too many others will be nibbling at the bait."

In fact, as the days passed, it seemed that the sucker population was increasing mightily. A letter arrived from the hardworking Mr. Rollins to tell of the fact that he had begun to hold conferences with the leathery-faced person who formerly possessed the lot, and that these conferences were becoming highly interesting, especially since a carload of heavy timbers, such as are generally used in building an oil-rig had arrived in the railroad-yards. Honest John read that part of the letter to the Old Man, and the Old Man chewed at his cigar.

"Fine stuff!" the boss grunted. "What's he say about the chances for business?"

"Never better!" Honest John Barker was beaming. "Just what I thought has happened. Those oil-nuts have gotten the tip that something's going on around there and they're beginning to flock in. Needn't worry any about the business—there'll be plenty."

"Yeh!" The Old Man champed at his cigar. "And plenty of suckers walking the ties back to a paying field when the thing's over."

Honest John Barker was silent a moment, watching the crowds in front of the kid show, the raucous-voiced ticket-sellers, the sweating "wild-man" as he danced up and down the lecture-platform to the adenoidal effusions of the ballyhoo man. "Yep, boss," he said at last, "I'm afraid that there'll be plenty of 'em walking back—and if you searched real hard for the guy that was the cause of 'em getting trimmed, I guess I'm it. Not that I tried to stick those poor simps, but to cop the coin from one bird who deserves trimming, I've got to cause trouble for a lot of other people. There are too many suckers in the world, boss—too darned many for the conscience of a guy who tries to be a straight crook. Every time you pull a trick that's clever and worth while, you've got to kick yourself for three weeks afterward because a lot of fool boobs who didn't have any business in the deal rushed in and got burnt. Believe me, the guy who said there was one born every minute didn't make any mistake.

"Look at that mob out around the ballyhoo-stand," went on Honest John, "All of 'em so darned anxious to give up their shekels that they can't see straight. And why? Because some bird they never saw before assures 'em confidentially that here is a real wild-man, straight from the Isle of Madagascar captured after a terrific fight with fourteen sailors and a bottle o' rum—and in five minutes more they'll be walking over one another trying to get inside so they can have another peek at him. If they'd stop to think, they'd know that if a guy was really wild, he wouldn't be out there on that

ballyhoo-stand dancing a fandango; and even if he was wild, haven't they had one look at him for nothing! Oh, you can't beat a sucker; he's a strange bird!"

"You said it!" The Old Man moved away into the menagerie, while Honest John Barker sidled through the main gate toward the treasury-wagon, where in peace and quiet he could write a letter of instruction to the fervent Mr. Rollins—a letter, by the way which brought a quick answer, and many newspaper clippings for oil-interest in Barstow were booming.

THE clippings told of rigs that were going up on every ranch, work being done on mysterious information that seemed traceable to nothing except the fact that a large development-company had bought the biggest section of ground in the heart of the municipality and was assembling oil-drilling machinery, evidently in the hope of extracting oil from beneath the very streets of the city. "Floaters" were coming in droves from other oil-fields: a few geologists had made their appearance, doing much work and saying very little, reserving their remarks, of course, for the men who had hired them. Barstow was beginning to boom.

All of this created a sense of benign happiness in the heart of Honest John Barker as he turned from the clippings to the letter. For a moment he whistled as he read: then gradually the pucker faded. The letter contained bad news:

I have held two or three more meetings with Williams, but I am afraid that he is beginning to get cold on the proposition. The truth of the matter is that he has gone wilder over this oil-proposition than anyone and in trying to buy up all the land in sight outside the city. The result is, of course, that he has pulled on his money pretty hard and is getting strapped. However, I'll keep dangling the proportion before him—and keep my eyes open for any other sucker who comes along.

Honest John Barker hesitated only a

moment. Then he made a rush for the typewriter in the treasury-wagon.

"Dear Rollins," he wrote. "If you have to cut your price on the deal, do so, as I must get rid of those lots by the day of our exhibition in Barstow. If you can't gyp him for a hundred thousand, try seventy-five, and if seventy-five won't work, let 'em go for fifty-only get rid of those lots. You know a good profit is better than no profit at all. Let me hear from you."

In four days came the answer:

Don't worry. I'm doing my best. Town booming. Have pulled a stunt that is worth looking at. Natives are excited and people coming in droves on every train. You'll have the biggest day here you ever had in your life; the town is simply jammed to the guards. My stunt is getting great publicity, and I'll pull some kind of a deal for you by the end of your date here or bust a ham-string.

This restored the glint to Honest John's eyes and the pucker to his lips. Hastily the fixer sought out the Old Man and showed him the letter, on the strength of which the Old Man lighted a new cigar.

"Now that guy's talking!" he announced. "The finest words of tongue or pen are that I'll get that cash again. Say, listen, that's a wad of money!"

"You mean that twenty-two thousand I had to put up on this deal?" Honest John pawed his lion's claw. "I know it is—but it takes money to make suckers bite. I had to have eighteen thousand for the ground, and while I was getting it, I just drew that other four grand to let Rollins pull stunts with, and you can see from this letter that he's begun to pull them."

"All I hope is that they work," grunted the Old Man. "Not that I don't trust your judgment, John," he added hastily, "but in three weeks more we'll be on the death-trail getting down to Frisco, and hardly taking in a sad dime, and that twenty-two grand'll certainly be a life-saver."

"I'll have it for you or quit the show," the fixer answered confidently.

**B**UT at noon of circus day Honest John Barker had begun to doubt somewhat even his own word. For four hours he had searched for the busy Mr. Rollins, without success. He was not in his office—out in town, or down at the hotel, or at the circus grounds, the girl had said. He was not at the hotel, or the circus grounds, for Honest John had searched assiduously at both places. He was not at home—for Honest John had telephoned.

But at least he had been busy. Stretching high above a tall board fence at one corner of the lot rose the latticed rig of an oil-derrick, a cloud of steam and smoke ascending beside it. Honest John Barker knew without the telling that this was the publicity-stunt of which Rollins had written the one that had gained columns in the local newspapers, and brought floaters in from the other fields by the hundreds. Resigned at last to a waiting game, Honest John approached the taciturn-appearing person at the gateway of the high fence.

“Got an oil-well, eh?” he asked genially.

“Ain’t sayin’. Never say those things till you strike oil.”

Honest John fondled his lion’s claw. Rollins was working according to directions—never tell a lie. He began again.

“How far down are you?”

“Ain’t saying.”

“Got any prospects?”

“Ain’t saying.”

Honest John laughed.

“You don’t need to—to me,” he said.

“Guess I’ll go inside and take a look around.”

“Guess you won’t.”

“But—”

“But all you want to. That ain’t going to let you in. Nobody allowed.”

“Cut the comedy! I’m the owner of this land.”

“Do you? Are you the Eastern Development Company?”

“Yes, I’m the Eastern Development Company. And—”

“Don’t care if you are!” The taciturn one cocked his head. “Lawyer Rollins hired me and said to keep everybody out that didn’t have a pass. Got one?”

“No, I haven’t got a pass, and I don’t intend to have a pass, and—”

“Stay out, then!” Saying which, the taciturn being quickly slid through the gate, shut it behind him and refused to answer the hammering of Honest John’s fists thereon. Red-faced, the circus fixer whirled, once more to make his way to the lawyer’s office. But this time even the stenographer was gone. A vague fear shot into the heart of Honest John Barker.

“Well, I asked for a crook,” he said at last, “and maybe I got one. But what good’s it going to do him to hide out? I’ve got the deeds to this land in my pocket.”

Again fear crinkled its way up the spine of Honest John. The best trick that a confidence man knows is to give a sucker a faked deed to the Metropolitan Tower or the Chicago Elevated System. Honest John’s eyes went wide.

“And I took it for granted that they were on the square!” he mourned as he turned back toward the circus lot. “He could gyp me with both hands tied behind him. Sweet cookie!”

**T**O the lot he wandered, to search the crowds, then ineffectually to attempt to sidestep as he suddenly faced the Old Man. Impossible!

“Got that money yet?”

“Not yet, but soon.” Honest John looked about him with a forced air of unconcern. “By the way, haven’t happened to see Mr. Rollins around here, have you?”

“Wouldn’t know him if I did see him,” was the Old Man’s rejoinder. “Looks like we’re going to have a whale of a day.” This was true, but it did not interest Honest John Barker in the slightest. He was looking for one person only,



Mr. Rollins, the busy attorney—and looking in vain.

Matinee-time came, with the crowds jammed before the main gates, with shouting ticket-takers and busy attendants, with all three windows working on the treasury-wagon to supply the demand for tickets, with the reserved seats sold out before half the crowd had even reached the Menagerie—but Honest John Barker failed to exhibit the interest that he would have shown under other circumstances. Mr. Rollins had not appeared. Concert-time arrived, and with the milling throng from the big show, Honest John left the circus lot, once more to make the rounds, from hotel to office, office to hotel, and back again, without success—and the stenographer was locking up for the day when he made his third trip.

The calliope screamed on the corner the circus-lot with the falling of the evening shadows, issuing the call to the circus grounds. Once more the crowds flocked to the great stretches of canvas, while under the flickering chandeliers Honest John Barker watched every face fruitlessly. His companion in complicity was not among them.

“Got the cash yet?” It was the Old Man, a new note in his voice, Honest John hurried away, pretending not to hear. The show began; it ended; the wagons began their journey to the trains; and then—

“Mr. Barker—Mr. Barker? Where’s Mr. Barker?” From roughneck to Razorback the called radiated, at last to reach its goal. Honest John, doleful a moment before, whirled excitedly and ran forward. A dusty, road-grimed man awaited him. Honest John stuck forth an arm.

“Get it?”

“Yeh,” panted the other as they headed for the treasury-wagon. “Had to chase clear to Thermopolis to put it over. I did the best I could—thirty-five thousand.”

“And of course the original eighteen?”

“Sure.”

“I’m thankful for small favors. Come on!” They stumbled through the darkness to the treasury-wagon. Papers came forth. A pen scrawled. Dully the busy Mr. Rollin turned in his chair.

“Sorry I can’t stick around and explain the whole thing,” he said wearily. “I’m all in.”

He rose. Honest John watched him make his tired way down, the wagon-ladder, then leaned back in his chair. Lovingly he fondled the thousand-dollar bills which represented his half of the profits. Complacently he handed them over to the Old Man when he made his entrance. And—

IT was three months later that Honest John Barker and the Old-Man sat beneath the marquee of the Mighty Maxwell Three-ring Circus, awaiting the return of the parade. The circus mail-carrier passed through the front gate and fished in his bag.

“There was a registered letter for you,” he said to Honest John, “so I signed for it.”

Carelessly the fixer took the letter. He glanced at the envelope—then stared.

“Where’d I ever hear that name before?” he asked, “The Eastern Promotion and Development Company?” Then he gasped with returning memory and hastily tore open the envelope. The Old Man, watching curiously, saw him—somewhat like a sleepwalker—take out a check and stare at it goggle-eyed.

“I’m—I’m a sonvagon!” he exclaimed. “I’m a—”

“What’s the row?” The Old Man moved closer. But Honest John already was reading the letter aloud—like a boy with a primer lesson:

“Dear Old Boy: Forgive my not having written this before, but I have been awaiting developments. Inclosed is my certified check for sixty-five thousand dollars, the balance of the one hundred thousand dollars we agreed upon as the right and proper amount that should be

gotten out of our little deal; and just to show I'm a good fellow, I'm not going to ask for my half of the proceeds. As you doubtless remember, you told me that you would be more than happy if I could sell that lot for six figures. Of course, at the time, you rather figured on Mr. Williams as a purchaser, but you did not bar anyone else.

"Well, to make a long story short, you know how easy it is to become interested in oil, and before I did anything I had a little talk with a geologist. It all sounded so good that I sold the land to myself; but since money was a little tight, I had to do that rush act on your circus-night to get away with the price at a small

figure. However, a week ago my well came in with a three thousand-barrel-a-day production—and others around here are doing nearly as good. So, you see, it would be the basest ingratitude if I did not live up to all the desires of the man who made me a millionaire.

" 'Yours for a bigger Barstow—L. V. Rollins, President, The Eastern Promotion & Development Co.' "

There was silence. Then the Old Man champed at his cigar.

"What's that Barnum said?" he asked at last.

"There's one born every minute," answered Honest John Barker, "—and two to grab 'em!"