

Son of the President

by

Leslie Gordon Barnard

Illustrations by

Orison MacPherson

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SON OF THE PRESIDENT

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

ILLUSTRATED BY ORISON MACPHERSON

Seeing that he was the son of the president, the executive of his father's firm thought there was no harm in handing young Farnsworth a handicap of quite a few strokes—just to even things up a bit! But the crown prince brought two things to the selling game which made him a hard man to beat—intuition and imagination.

Farnsworth walked along the corridor behind her. Being very new to business, to walk along that marble corridor, with its lines of offices on either side bearing the names of executives—was always a thrilling thing to him. He imagined himself as one of those executives, his name, Hanley Farnsworth, on the door. Just which door he did not know; he was having a very complete round of departments with a view to finding out that very thing. Meanwhile, he was just that invariable nuisance around a place of business—the son of the president!

At the moment he was headed toward the sales manager, bearing a note from his father, the president. And here was this girl ahead of him—about three paces ahead. You couldn't tell, of course, by the back view only, but he decided this girl could not let you down that way when you saw her face. Too much dash and style about her for that. He wondered if it wouldn't be policy to hurry on ahead, turn in at Coulter's door with an air, get a glance at her by this strategy, and at the same time impress her with himself. She might take him for an executive . . .

Just then, being a little hesitant in her search, she turned.

“Could you tell me—?” she began.

He couldn't, of course! By jove, what a stunning girl! He couldn't have told a word she was saying, much less replied to it.

“Why, it's Mr. Farnsworth!”

Great Gad! Now, quick, quick! Where had he seen her, met her?

“You don't remember me, then?”

Memory leaped prodigiously to his aid.

“Oh, but I do. The Chatsworth links! I've dreamed of that day,” cried Farnsworth with audacious eagerness. “Spring-green links! Fluffy blue-white sky! Club-house gold outside, as we came up in the late afternoon sun. Inside: rose and silver—silver hangings, rose lights—the smell of brown leather, of incense, of tea and toast. There—is my memory exonerated?”

Her nose was a deliciously impudent thing, tilted up that way; it had no business being close to quite so nice a mouth. His head swam; the note became a crumpled wisp.

“Not bad for detail, Mr. Farnsworth. But I always like a human touch in my landscapes—and interiors!”

“Oh, I say you don’t think I’d forgotten you?”

“Why should I think anything at all about it?”

Well, why should she? There you were, tongue-tied as a dummy! He smoothed out the crumpled note vacantly; this note introduced him to the selling department. A nice salesman he would make. A dummy show-case would be as good. What was it his father said: “Don’t mind Coulter, Hanley—he’s no great friend of mine, and he’ll likely not welcome you. But if you can sell yourself to him, you’ll sell anything to anyone. Never let any situation faze you. Look it in the eye, and speak up!” Well there you were. This was a situation.

He looked her in the eye.

“My descriptive powers being limited,” he said, boldly, “I hardly dared. But if you would care to have me paint in the foreground—”

Her eyes fell.

“Oh!” she evaded, glancing at her wrist watch, “could you tell me which is Mr. Coulter’s office?”

“Going to see the old tarbucket myself,” he declared gaily, sensing his triumph.

“My uncle!” she told him.

“Ugh!” said young Farnsworth.

“And guardian,” added the girl. “I live with him!”

“—gug!” said young Farnsworth, and led her, mutely, down the hall.

He waited, politely, in the corridor until she came out. She seemed almost surprised that he should still be there; and indeed might have passed him as she would a doorman, or the statue of Henry Binks—the founder of Binks, Binks & Jessop, Paint & Varnish Mfrs.—which stood in the lobby, greeting those who entered, and following those who left by the revolving door, with the inscrutability of a male Mona Lisa. Farnsworth

could never quite forgive the old fellow his stony leer, and still less the paternal pride which, at the entrance to the firm of young Binks, had given to a new time-honored name that horribly repetitious touch. Binks, Binks—ugh! Because he was son of the president! It made young Farnsworth turn cold sometimes at thought of his own position here!

Well, here was the girl going past as if he were this stone sphinx. He forestalled that by ceasing to be still life, and becoming a motion picture.

“Oh!” she said, halting and arching her eyebrows. She considered him for a terrible moment. “I mentioned you to my uncle.”

“Ah!”

“He didn’t seem to know anything about you?”

“He wouldn’t!” returned Farnsworth with a snap of his jaws. “I’m sorry he’s your uncle. It is the only thing I dislike about you. As for his ignorance of me,” he waved a hand at the door marked ‘Mr. Coulter’—“I am about to repair that condition. How about Chatsworth on Saturday? If I called for you at two, with the car, we could tee off before the links get messy with people!”

She tried to choke down a little gurgle of laughter.

“Don’t stop it,” he urged earnestly. “Heard of a Johnny once who tried to stop a sneeze. Blew up some kind of a thinnygum in his head. And these sacred halls are all too rarely filled with innocent, girlish laughter!”

“Do stop being ridiculous!” she chortled. “You haven’t said one sensible word.”

“How about Saturday?”

“Well?”

“At two, then! As for my nonsense, I beg you to understand that it is a mere exhaust valve, a prelude to one of the more serious and sensible moments of my career. If, as you steer a course past the statue of liberty yonder—I refer to one Binks—you cast a fleeting glance back, you will see me about to beard the—the—”

“Don’t stop on my account!” she urged.

“No reflections on present company,” he said, “but have orang-outangs’ dens?”

“This one has!”

“The phrase is felicitous then? We will let it go at that.” He bowed and set a hand on the knob of the door. “Until Saturday then. If I am living. You see me about in the act of entering the orang-outangs’—” Something queer had happened to the handle; it turned in his hand and instead of the felicitous phrase beating against the glass panel, it went trailing into the office over the shoulders of a heavily-built individual with jaws to match, whose eyes seemed within inches of young Farnsworth.

“—den,” completed young Farnsworth, unable to stop himself.

“Humph!” said Mr. Coulter.

“Ah,” returned Farnsworth, “you were coming out sir, I gather!”

“And you,” said the sales manager, “were coming in, I gather?”

“I—I was!”

“Then complete the process!” The door closed upon them. Silence formed a further enclosure about them. Farnsworth experienced a curious sense of suffocation. The big man sat down behind an immense varnished open field of desk. He did not offer his visitor a seat. He took a huge cigar from an enormous case and thrust it into a cavernous mouth, found a match, lit the cigar and puffed thoughtfully. In all this time, not once did he take his eyes from young Farnsworth.

“So you,” said the sales manager, “are the son of your father!”

“I—I hope so, sir!”

Coulter’s big head began wagging ponderously up and down; his hands smoothed out the crumpled letter from the president.

“You hope so, eh? I see you also hope to break into the selling game. What have you ever sold in your life?”

“Tickets for a guessing contest at a bazaar once,” said young Farnsworth truthfully.

Their eyes met in a clash again. In a minute more Farnsworth would have been beaten, but the steely eyes shifted to a little mother-of-pearl button ranged with others in a contrivance at the side of the desk. Coulter pressed one. “Bring me the Sowerby papers,” he directed a girl who entered. They were brought, a great file. Without comment, the sales manager handed it to young Farnsworth, who stared stupidly at it.

“What am I to do with this, sir?”

“Whatever you see fit! Nobody else ever has managed to do anything with it. You are welcome to try your hand. Ordinarily we put novices through a considerable course. I can see, of course, that is unnecessary with you. Anyone quite—so—bright—”

Farnsworth colored a dull red. Partly this was from the consciousness that he had made a consummate ass of himself; that he had played the fool too effectively; partly it was a slow-burning but increasing anger at his position. In every department it was the same. The president’s son! A nuisance! Had to put up with him! All right for the old man to say: “Treat him like anybody else.” Couldn’t take that literally! That was the attitude. Whenever he was praised, he hated it, feeling it was possibly not sincere. Well, this time it was different. This man was different! To wring grudging praise from him—that would be worth while! He was shaking so that he could not quite master his voice, but he managed to mumble:

“I will do my best with it, sir!”

He turned, hesitated.

“Where shall I work?”

“Work? Oh, wherever you see fit!”

The beast! He was not even offering him desk room! Just a file of papers and an impossible case that nobody could do anything with. Making a fool of him! Laughing behind his back! The beast! Young Farnsworth almost ran from the place; hot tears not far from his eyes. He caught up his hat, and fled, even from the building. Old Binks leered after him as he went, remembering in his stony way, perhaps, how, in his day and generation, it was a fight to get a junior Binks established in the firm, and musing, belike, upon the curious way history has of repeating itself.

The Sowerby file was a record of gloom. Waves dashing against a cliff, and retreating baffled! A whole selling division, well-officered and led, line on line, advancing upon the enemy trenches, and routed ignominiously; No Man’s Land dotted with the corpses of the fallen! In the earlier days someone had blundered. The records were vague. There were very brief, very vague references to a large shipment of some specially treated varnish for an exotic and tropical clime, from which the special treatment was unhappily omitted. Legend had glorified the incident: the varnish had been used eventually for fly-catching purposes, for adulterating molasses, for a potent kind of home-brew; the certainty at least was that it

could be used better as any one of these than as varnish. Since then, a flaming angel had guarded the gates of the Sowerby paradise against Binks, Jessop salesmen. For the Sowerby Company was a great and mysterious jobbing firm; it bought everything for everybody, everywhere. Its ramifications were immense, and mostly in far climes.

Farnsworth, timidly enough entering their offices, was conscious of this. Curious odors reached his nostrils from the sample room and warehouse adjoining; odd foreign scents. Farnsworth, being very, very young, and possessed of a quite saucy and inquisitive nose, began to follow it. The strange subtle scents led him through a dim archway into a tunnel-like place where trucks were being laden.

A leathery little man of uncertain age, but tremendously wrinkled, stood watching operations. Farnsworth, seeing no one else with leisure enough to answer, moved over and stood beside him.

“What kind of stuff is that?” he asked.

“Essences,” said the man, without moving his eyes. Farnsworth sniffed.

“By jove,” he said, “you know they make you think of queer things, don’t they?”

The leathery little man swung his eyes sharply upon his interlocutor; Farnsworth saw them in the dim light like points of burnished steel.

“What kind of queer things?”

Farnsworth grinned rather sheepishly; but his eagerness overflowed and drowned that.

“Oh, all sorts of fascinating things! Clear, green seas . . . old barnacle-covered tramps, and white-sailed ships with their yards across. Palm trees standing up against the sheerest skies, and lagoons mirroring all sorts of colors. Coral reefs, and dusky brown folk.” He caught himself, and the sheepish grin returned.

“Like to learn the business?” said the man abruptly.

“I’m trying to learn another one already!” objected Farnsworth.

“No matter! So was I until one day I wandered into a warehouse. Like this. My nose told me I’d arrived. Had the feel. Just like this has for you. Don’t often meet folk with it. How d’ye like to try it out?”

“But you don’t know even who I am!”

“Humph! Think so? I never look at a man’s written recommendations—waste paper! I never consider a man’s name! Look a man over, hear him talk—I know! I know! Always looking for young men with the feel for things. Not many about! When can you start?”

Young Farnsworth just stared. And at that moment an underling came from the regions beyond where the offices lay.

“Mr. Sowerby, sir!”

“Well!”

“I ’phoned the varnish company for those quotations. Mr. Coulter’s here himself!”

Farnsworth’s jaw dropped.

“Dammit,” snapped little Sowerby, “I won’t be hounded by people! You told them to mail particulars?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Well, why didn’t they? Tell him to get out and stay out. No, wait, I’ll see him!”

He started to walk away. Then he stopped abruptly and came back.

“What is your name, young man?”

“Farnsworth,” said the president’s son, feebly, his mind still swirling about Coulter.

“Ever play golf?”

“Oh, yes, sir!”

“Where?”

“Chatsworth!”

“Humph! I belong, but the hazards are a bit too youngish for an old fellow. Usually go to the Royal. May see you there sometime, though. Think it over!”

“Yes sir,” said the son of the president.

Farnsworth was off his game terribly on Saturday, and Millicent Ware told him so, quite frankly.

“Blame your illustrious uncle!” snapped the young man, as he sliced viciously at his ball.

“Why, please?” He liked the way her eyebrows arched.

He found himself telling the whole thing. She drew him over to a low stone rampart, and the Saturday afternoon playing procession swept by them. Neither seemed to regard seriously this desecration of the sacred game. “We can finish it again,” she told him; “you’ll injure yourself or the turf or both, the way you are!” It was an immense relief to pour into her sympathetic ears the tale of Coulter’s perfidy.

“It’s an amazing thing,” he said. “One day I get the file; the next day mull over it; the third day tackle it, and on that very third day, after all these years of estrangement, Sowerby has his secretary ’phone our office for a quotation. Seems the firm he’s been patronizing haven’t been giving him what he considered a square deal lately, and he’s willing to let bygones be bygones with us. Coulter gets word of it, and dashes up personally. When he got back he sent for me! ‘Ah, Farnsworth,’ he said, ‘about that file I gave you—Sowerby, you know—better let me have it back. It’s really too heavy a thing to start you on. Just testing you out!’ ” Farnsworth swung viciously at a dandelion with his niblick. “Will somebody rise and tell me, please, why I docilely handed him the file back?”

Millicent laughed. “Without comment?”

“‘And never a word spake he!’ I was too disgusted, and then I began to think how he’d blundered up there against old Sowerby’s wishes, and I figured he’d do it again. Sowerby’s queer that way. Won’t be hounded, he says. And your illustrious uncle will hound him to death, or I miss my guess!”

“Let him!” cried Millicent. “It’s a beastly trick, anyway!”

“On the other hand,” said young Farnsworth slowly, “there’s the firm to be considered. My loyalty to them, you know! Loyalty is a watchword with the Farnsworths! Runs in the blood! As a very small child I aroused audiences to unwonted enthusiasm with my recitations of loyalty—

“‘Like hunters of the deer, they stormed the narrow dell,
And first in the shock with Uri’s spear, was the arm of William Tell!’ ”

He postured solemnly. Millicent giggled.

“‘Ho! strike the flagstaff deep, sir knight! ho, scatter flowers, fair maids!
Ho, gunners! fire a loud salute! ho, gallants! draw your blades!’ ”

She suggested gravely, “Aren’t you a trifle mixed in your loyalties? I fancy that last is the Armada!”

“No, is it?”

“And I should relax that pose, if I were you. There’s a little gorilla of a man staring at you as if you were crazy.”

“Where?”

“Over there. The man with the mashie on his shoulder?”

“My gosh!” cried young Farnsworth. “‘Ho, gunners, fire a loud salute!’ If that isn’t old Sowerby himself!”

Being inclined toward the moderns, Farnsworth refused to allow his emotions to carry him away foolishly. Take Millicent, for instance. There were impetuous moments when his head swam in her presence. But he controlled himself. Millicent, he admitted frankly to himself, was necessary at present to his happiness. That she would always be necessary was another matter. The odd mutations of an unstable, an impermanent world, must be considered. They were jolly good friends and there you were. No sticky sentiment or nonsense about it. Part of the attraction of the thing was the attitude of Coulter, her guardian. Quite ridiculously melodramatic, but just what you would expect from the blighter!

“Frankly, he doesn’t like you, Hanley!” Millicent told Farnsworth; “and—well, anyway, he says he won’t have you hanging round the house—or me!”

“My hat!” cried Farnsworth. “Does he think he’s a comic strip—or what? That’s about the only place where that kind of thing’s to be found now. It simply isn’t done! He should certainly have his complexes looked into. As for his home—his ancestral halls—catch me hanging around them!”

“Oh? And me?”

“That you must decide for yourself. You understand, I hope, the dangers of repression? The little insanity bug waving its feelers invitingly at you! You must consider yourself—your mental health.”

Her eyes twinkled.

“Do you mean to suggest, young man, that you are necessary to me?”

“Not at all. I am merely warning you of possible dangers. The picture of you being led, under guard, through portals bearing the sign ‘All hope

abandon, ye who enter here' distresses me more than I care to say!"

"It is lugubrious!" she admitted.

"There is this hope," he said cheerfully. "I must not overstate the case. More briefs are lost by lawyers, clients by salesmen, and seats by politicians for overstating than understating. There is this hope: they may introduce you to a little tropical creature, who will share his malarial disposition with you, and after a time you will be let out on probation!"

"Perhaps," she said, "I had better not risk it, after all! If you care to meet me on Saturday, again, I shan't feel compelled to bring uncle as a chaperon!"

Well, there was a certain spice to doing it under that fellow Coulter's nose! And it wasn't every girl, even in these latter days, who could bring her friendship to the touchstone of a saving humor.

And then there was the business end of it to be considered. Here again, Millicent was necessary to him. On the one hand he held old Sowerby by the comradeship of golf; and of a kindred affection for exotic scents and sounds and sights; on the other he had a line on Coulter, through Millicent!

Old Sowerby undoubtedly had taken a real liking to him. It amused Farnsworth at first—then he began to estimate it more seriously. Not even when Farnsworth said baldly: "I'm Farnsworth, of Binks, Binks & Jessop, I think you know our firm," did old Sowerby bat an eye. "Knew it!" he said. "You don't expect me to dislike you because your firm makes rotten varnish, do you—heh?" So that was that. And on top of it he had asked Farnsworth to his home. Why?

Sowerby admitted, of course: "I've taken a fancy to you. When are you coming to work for me? Good prospects, if you make good yourself!"

And then Farnsworth struck it. Old Sowerby was showing him a bit of jade in his Chinese collection. "First time I clapped my eyes on that thing," he explained, "I determined I must have it. It's not as fine as some others—relatively unimportant—but I took a fancy to it. It took me just ten years to get—but I got it!"

There you had it! By gad! If he took a fancy to a thing, even relatively unimportant, have it he would. And the more unattainable it was, the more he wanted it.

Farnsworth supposed that was a fairly general human trait. He had support for this argument a fortnight later. Installed now in a dark corner of

his own in the sales department, he found himself being introduced to a rather suave, and exceedingly well-dressed man, considerably his senior. "Mr. Wantage, our new assistant-sales-manager, Farnsworth!" said Mark Coulter. They shook hands. Farnsworth took a dislike to the fellow. 'Superiority complex' was written all over his face. Two days later, going home one evening, Wantage overtook him by the statue of the departed Binks. "Give you a lift, Farnsworth!" said Wantage briskly. "That is, if you're going my way. I'm stopping up at Coulter's meanwhile."

Millicent confirmed this when he saw her.

"Infernal cheek," declared Farnsworth fiercely.

"Why?"

"Foisting himself upon your uncle—"

"Why your sudden solicitude for the—the orang-outang, Hanley?"

"Ugh! You know what I mean—"

"What?"

"Well it makes more work for you and—well, less time for me. Hang it all, Mill, you're not going to the opera with the blighter to-morrow? I've been planning—"

She glanced up at him complacently.

"My dear Hanley, one would think you had a first mortgage on my time. You forget I knew him long before I did you. Wanny and I are old friends—bless your heart, we had a romance before I was out of pigtails!"

Farnsworth experienced a scowling, almost a sulking anger over it.

"Don't be Victorian!" said Millicent. "It isn't done!"

The shattering idea came to young Farnsworth on the day that Wantage approached him about the Sowerby affair. Wantage held the famous file in his hand, and desired that Farnsworth should add personal knowledge to this repository of paper facts and figures. "Millie says you're quite thick with old Sowerby. Why haven't you landed him for an order? I suppose you know that Coulter thinks you a dud. Well, he's turned over the business to me. Now look—if you can put me wise to anything, I won't mind putting in a good word for you with Coulter."

Young Farnsworth licked his lips. He felt like a dog with a muzzle. Millicent held a brief for this fellow; he must be allowed to live.

“Here’s the lay,” Wantage was saying. “You know that new line we’re developing—Sunproof products?”

Farnsworth did. With Sowerby’s wrath over the mess of stuff that melted under tropical suns, as a scourge, the laboratory had developed this new product, perfected it.

“The chief would like to tie up with Sowerby on it. Give him exclusive export territory. It’s to his advantage, but you can’t get near the beggar to tell him a word about it. We want to feel him out before we commit ourselves on paper—so we won’t write! And he’s forbidden us entrance again.”

The shattering idea began to grow on Farnsworth.

“I’m wondering,” said Wantage, blandly, “if you—Look here, Farnsworth, I’m taking Milly golfing on Saturday!” The shattering idea took a leap towards the light. “Suppose you induced the old boy to have a round with you at the Chatsworth links—we might work a foursome quite informally, and I’d meet him.”

The shattering idea sprang, full-orbed, into being.

“O.K.” said young Farnsworth dreamily, and then: “At owner’s risk of breakage! Keep from frost—use no hooks! You know what I mean. You take your own chances of the result. I warn you!”

“Rather!” assented Wantage with assurance.

It had become almost an obsession of Sowerby’s to golf with Farnsworth on Saturdays. That Farnsworth tried to wriggle out, having much more liking for Millicent as a partner, only made the old gentleman more determined. So it was easily arranged. “There’s just this,” said Farnsworth, ’phoning him: “we’ve a new assistant in the sales department—fellow named Wantage—I’ve promised him I’d arrange a foursome.”

“Go ahead—that’s all right!”

“He might talk business!”

“Let him try!”

Farnsworth grinned into the black mouth of the ’phone. “Aren’t you afraid, with two Binks men about you, Mr. Sowerby? I warn you!”

Old Sowerby laughed. It had become rather a standing joke between them. Well, Farnsworth had warned both sides! Let them go to it!

Standing on the green with Millicent on Saturday, Farnsworth observed the movements of Wantage keenly. Quite obviously he was flattering Sowerby, and trying to cast the flies of salesmanship on the stream of a new friendship. The poor dub! Millicent caught his arm.

“What are you grinning at, Hanley?”

“The open season for suckers is all the year around,” he said cryptically. “But you’ve got to be sure it isn’t ’lunge or salmon you’re casting your bait before, by mistake!”



Millicent sent for young Farnsworth one afternoon, late. Before he had time to tell her how well her orange gown fitted against the dark hangings and black cushions of the window seat, she launched her attack.

“Hanley—what have you been up to?”

“Up to?”

“Don’t look injured. I’m deadly serious. Wanny’s upstairs!”

“That’s not my fault. I’d have kicked the beggar out—”

“Hanley! He’s—had a—a bad time. That old Sowerby assaulted him!”

Farnsworth brightened. He said eagerly: “Not really? Tell me the ghastly details!”

She stared at him.

“So I am right in supposing you’re back of it? Wanny said you told him to go to old Mr. Sowerby to-day, that he had something for him. He thought you meant an order.”

“I didn’t tell him so,” grinned young Farnsworth. “But—what did he get?”

“Mostly a black eye!”

Farnsworth said admiringly: “So the old fellow soaked him one! Bully for him! Saves me the trouble!”

“Hanley!”

“Don’t look at me like that, Mill! Wantage got what was coming to him. I sized him up from the first as one of these modern efficiency salesmen—‘May I have two minutes of your time, sir?’ . . . ‘Would you be interested in something given away free?’—that kind of a Johnnie. And he was so dashed superior! And he had such an infernally proprietary air about him!” Young Farnsworth spread his hands. “I was tied up like a sack,” he said. “I couldn’t very well knock sense into him, myself, under the circumstances—your guest and all. So I had to turn him over to the old man.”

“Sowerby?”

“Exactly. When Wantage asked my advice I told him plump and plain: ‘Don’t ask me. You and Coulter think I’m a dub.’ He waved that aside, but I saw he thought so, and was only pumping me on the basis of my friendship with old S. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘Sowerby got where he has by persistence. He has a bit of Chinese jade that it took him ten years of effort to get. He’s often told me: “You can get anything if you go after it hard enough—and long enough.” That seems to be his line.’ Anyway, Wantage took the hint. I knew if I threw his persistence at old S., something would break sooner or later. And maybe”—he grinned—“maybe I did throw every chance of meeting Sowerby in Wantage’s way.”

Millicent took a sudden step back in alarm. Somebody had entered quietly. It was her uncle, home from work.

“So,” said Coulter, ironically, “I’m just in time to hear your interesting confession. You disloyal little pup—that’s all you are! Using your firm to play your little petty spite and your silly love affairs!” He moved forward threateningly. “By gad, you’re fired! Understand. I don’t care if you’re old Farnsworth’s son. You’re fired!”

Millicent went white, biting her lip.

Young Farnsworth stood his ground.

“Is that final, sir?”

“What do you mean?”

“If I were to get—that Sowerby connection—for Sunproof products?”

Coulter wriggled.

“What makes you think you could get it now?”

“Have I your promise, Mr. Coulter?”

“Well—yes!”

Farnsworth shot a glance at Millicent. With a kind of semi-impudent triumph he teetered back and forth on his heels and toes.

“And you will permit me to state my case also, plainly?”

“H’m—yes.”

“You gave me,” said young Farnsworth, distinctly, “because I was the President’s son—and you disliked me—a raw deal when I joined your department. You thought that Sowerby file was a dud. When you found it wasn’t, you grabbed it back—and my chance of making good on it, and turned it over to Wantage. Maybe you think that was playing fair? I don’t! You thought me a dud of a salesman because you wanted to think so. Well—maybe I am. And maybe I’m not. I’ll report later.”

Well, there—he’d burned his bridges. If he didn’t make good now he’d look a nice fool, before Coulter, before Millicent. He’d not hold up his head again. He had felt confidence, in there, but now that he was out of Coulter’s presence, and the cool night air tempered his defiance, he experienced qualms. He didn’t even know where to find Sowerby. He tried successively the Sowerby office, warehouse, and home. They thought he might have gone to his Club. Young Farnsworth braced his shoulders, taxied swiftly thither, bearded the doorman, and presently discovered himself, for

the first time in their rather curious friendship, abashed in the presence of the old gentleman.

“Oh,” said Sowerby, “it’s you! Come over in the corner here where it’s quiet. Have a chair.”

Farnsworth sank into one and fiddled with his hat, foolishly. Sowerby regarded the youth’s face and then his hat. A slow, almost grim smile crept upon him. Farnsworth, appraising it, felt that he had lost. Sowerby knew what he had come for. The old gorilla!—he was almost a mind reader when it came to the selling game!



*“Well, I see you’ve decided to come to me,”
said Sowerby.*

“Well, I see you’ve decided.”

What was that? Decided!

“To come to me!” added Sowerby.

Farnsworth started, his heart thumping tremendously. For a moment he was confused; then a bright light illumined him. Old Sowerby had interpreted this embarrassed approach, not as a preliminary sparring for an

order, but as a capitulation. He thought Farnsworth had come to advise him of a favorable decision! He fancied he had captured his bit of jade!

Wait now! The thing would work yet, if one were careful. If he were to land his salmon he must play his line deftly, deftly!

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, sir,” said Farnsworth, “but doesn’t this rather upset things?”

“Doesn’t what?”

“Your treatment of Wantage. After all he’s a guest of my—my—”

“Humph! Your girl’s—well, what of it?”

“And the representative of my firm, sir!”

“Humph!”

Silence! A pool of silence, in which the salmon swam about. Now was the time to dangle a bright fly within reach! But cautiously—cautiously. Not too big a splash.

“Of course, sir,” said Farnsworth, “it was ridiculous of Wantage to do what he did, to keep after you everlastingly that way. It’s partly Coulter’s fault, too. The real fact of the matter is that the old sore rankles—losing out with you after that varnish went bad in the tropics. It’s more that than the value of any order you might give, sir!”

Sowerby said: “You really think, Farnsworth, the Sunproof products are all that’s claimed for them?”

“The tests are beyond peradventure, sir!”

Another pool of silence. Now was the time to deftly draw the line away a little.

“So you see, sir, how silly it is of them to worry over that past trouble. We did you a bad turn; you’ve done us a good one by forcing these laboratory tests. Better forget the past. It was crazy of Wantage to bother you so, when he knows how you feel towards us. There’s Scott & Dixon just waiting for a chance at exclusive control for export. They’ll take it like a shot.”

Old Sowerby sent a shrewd glance at his visitor, but Farnsworth’s face betrayed no guile.

The old salmon was suspicious! Better draw away the fly . . .

“About that tournament, sir,” said Farnsworth, “I’ve talked it over with one or two, and if you and Brynner are agreeable—”

Sowerby nodded vaguely. Farnsworth stood up to go. The hand holding his cigarette shook a little; so might the hand of a fisherman shake, holding a salmon rod, ready for the crucial moment.

“I hope you won’t mind, sir, what I said about that Wantage affair. Apart from my loyalty to the firm, I personally think he played the fool. He imposed, in a sense, on a golf links acquaintanceship. He could have gone to Scott & Dixon. They’re a young firm, looking for new openings—”

The salmon leaped at the barbed hook.

“Scott & Dixon are upstarts,” Sowerby said brusquely. “I shouldn’t recommend them!”

Now—let out the line—quickly! The hook was well in, he’d not get away.

“I’m afraid you’re prejudiced, Mr. Sowerby,” laughed Farnsworth. “Well, good-night, sir! I’ll let you know what Brynner says about that tournament.”

He moved off.

“Oh—Farnsworth?”

He affected not to hear, walking briskly away. Let the salmon tire itself out; the landing would be all the easier! Let Sowerby whistle a bit for this suddenly desired bit of jade. He’d turn heaven and earth now to get the Sunproof products, to keep them from the upstarts, Scott & Dixon!

Farnsworth deliberately shunned the telephone all evening. When he got home late, word was waiting for him. Someone had been trying again and again to get him. Yes, he had left his number; and would Mr. Farnsworth ’phone whenever he got in—no matter how late. Farnsworth looked at the familiar number on the telephone pad.

“The old salmon!” he grinned. “Hooked for fair! And it’ll cost him something to get the hook out!”

He lifted the receiver, and called up old Sowerby.

Young Farnsworth walked along the corridor, passing the statue of old Binks, and coming to a halt outside the door marked with Coulter’s

name. He knocked briefly and entered. Wantage was closeted with the sales manager.

Wantage's eye was a distinct purple—a blue-black, Farnsworth decided, mollified by beefsteak into this gentler hue.

“He can't get away with that stuff,” Wantage was saying. “There's a law of assault and battery. I'll have him summoned—”

They saw Farnsworth then, and regarded him gloweringly.

“Excuse me,” said Farnsworth gently, “but if you are referring to Mr. Sowerby—I—suggest you defer action—strictly on a business basis!”

Under his arm he had the bulky Sowerby file—that record of gloom that had been handed to him on his first visit to this office—that had been taken from him when it showed signs of revival—that he had surreptitiously, with a sense of dramatic values, secured again to-day.

He set it down on the desk before them. From it he drew a document.

“That's the contract, sir, that Mr. Wantage left behind in his haste. Sowerby signed it this morning—but I took the liberty of filling in slightly better terms for Binks, Binks and Jessop. I should like you to understand, sir, that I was loyal to the end.”

Coulter grabbed the document, his eyes protruding. After a time he seemed to recall the words.

“To the end?” he repeated. “I promised you if you got this I would cancel what I said about your—er—dismissal. Frankly, I was skeptical. But I hope you understand I am a man of my word. I—I congratulate you on this, young man!”

He held out his hand. Wantage sat back aggrieved but silent. Farnsworth accepted the generosity.

“The reason I asked the promise, sir,” he explained, gently still, “was that I wished the—the President's son—when he left—to retire honorably. So you have my resignation, sir!”

Coulter stared.

“You—you resign?”

“I shall be, in a sense, linked with you,” Farnsworth told him amiably. “Mr. Sowerby has offered me the handling of the Sunproof products for him. It includes a considerable trip almost immediately.” He stared dreamily at a steamship calendar. It conjured up visions of clear, green seas, of old

barnacle-covered tramps, and white-sailed ships with their yards across, of palm trees standing up against the sheerest skies, and lagoons mirroring exotic colors, of coral reefs, and brown dusky folk . . . He caught himself, stared first at Wantage, and then at Coulter almost sternly. “Millicent has agreed to accompany me!” he said simply. “I trust the necessary hastening of the wedding will not too seriously inconvenience you, sir!”

A curious sound escaped from Wantage, but Mark Coulter was silent. He glanced first at Wantage, sitting there hunched up, mouth opened, one eye purpling; and then at Farnsworth, and a little sound also escaped him—like a strangled chuckle. Farnsworth, taking it as such, nodded once, went out, closing the door behind him; went swiftly down the corridor where once he had met Millicent, bowed to the statue of old Binks at the entranceway, and shot through the morning traffic to tell Mill she’d better get busy on a suitable trousseau for tropic climes.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Son of the President* by Leslie Gordon Barnard]