



Trent's Last Case, The Original Novel: (E C Bentley Masterpiece Collection)

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Between what matters and what seems to matter, how should the world we know judge wisely? When the scheming, indomitable brain of Sigsbee Manderson was scattered by a shot from an unknown hand, that world lost nothing worth a single tear; it gained something memorable in a harsh reminder of the vanity of such wealth as this dead man had piled up—without making one loyal friend to mourn him, without doing an act that could help his memory to the least honour. But when the news of his end came, it seemed to those living in the great vortices of business as if the earth too shuddered under a blow. In all the lurid commercial history of his country there had been no figure that had so imposed itself upon the mind of the trading world. He had a niche apart in its temples. Financial giants, strong to direct and augment the forces of capital, and taking an approved toll in millions for their labour, had existed before; but in the case of Manderson there had been this singularity, that a pale halo of piratical romance, a thing especially dear to the hearts of his countrymen, had remained incongruously about his head through the years when he stood in every eye as the unquestioned guardian of stability, the stamper-out of manipulated crises, the foe of the raiding chieftains that infest the borders of Wall Street. The fortune left by his grandfather, who had been one of those chieftains on the smaller scale of his day, had descended to him with accretion through his father, who during a long life had quietly continued to lend money and never had margined a stock. Manderson, who had at no time known what it was to be without large sums to his hand, should have been altogether of that newer American plutocracy which is steadied by the tradition and habit of great wealth. But it was not so. While his nurture and education had taught him European ideas of a rich man's proper external circumstance; while they had rooted in him an instinct for quiet magnificence, the larger costliness which does not shriek of itself with a thousand tongues; there had been handed on to him nevertheless much of the Forty-Niner and financial buccaneer, his forbear. During that first period of his business career which had been called his early bad manner, he had been little more than a gambler of genius, his hand against every man's—an infant prodigy—who brought to the enthralling pursuit of speculation a brain better endowed than any opposed to it. At St Helena it was laid down that war is une belle occupation; and so the young Manderson had found the multitudinous and complicated dog-fight of the Stock Exchange of New York. Then came his change. At his father's death, when Manderson was thirty years old, some new revelation of the power and the glory of the god he served seemed to have come upon him. With the sudden, elastic adaptability of his nation he turned to steady labour in his father's banking business, closing his ears to the sound of the battles of the Street. In a few years he came to control all the activity of the great firm whose unimpeached conservatism, safety, and financial weight lifted it like a cliff above the angry sea of the markets. All mistrust founded on the performances of his youth had vanished. He was quite plainly a different man. How the change came about none could with authority say, but there was a story of certain last words spoken by his father, whom alone he had respected and perhaps loved. He began to tower above the financial situation. Soon his name was current in the bourses of the world. One who spoke the name of Manderson called

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