

THE ROOT OF EVIL

BY THOMAS DIXON



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CHAPTER VIII A Straight Tip.

She received the announcement of Bivens' failure to settle Woodman's suit with a grim resolution to win now, at all costs. The sensational reports of her action against the big financier had given her quick mind the new line of stratagem. She was not going to give up a thing that she had won. She had not my heart on merely because Woodman's a fool, are you? she said to her husband, with a touch of sarcasm. "Jim Stuart is the best friend I have. He has become one of the most famous men in America. I will let him at our next entertainment." "The thing that puzzles me," Bivens said, "is why he will not come to my house. When I meet him down town he is always friendly." "His lips quivered with a queer little smile." "Will he succeed in this action against these men?" "I don't know. He can't get the facts. If he had the foundations of the case, he would not give the facts to him?" "I thought of that, but it might be a panic." "What have you to lose by it?" "Nothing, but a pet's a dangerous thing to monkey with." "Shouldn't you injure Stuart?" his wife said anxiously. "It couldn't hurt him. On the other hand, I might make him the unconscious instrument of a great personal vengeance, double my fortune and possibly land Jim in the White House." "You must do it, dear!" his wife trembled with suppressed excitement. "I'm playing with dynamite." "It's worth the risk to double your fortune. Do it for my sake!" "I leaned close and pressed her lips to his while her dark eyes shined in their way into his heart." "Do it," he said with firm accents. "I'll phone him at once." "Then Stuart sat down with Bivens in one of the magnificent private dining rooms of his millionaire club two days later he was struck with the person of the financier's dress and the elegance of his manners. "You have surely done wonders with that pretty crude material!" he mused, reading Nan's diary with grim contentment. "It took two years to thoroughly break so that she could always be sure that her nails were trimmed and his hair in perfect style. He had long ceased to struggle and had found happiness in late years in vying with her in the perfection of his personal appearance." "When the dinner was finished Bivens dismissed the waiter, lighted one of his huge cigars and drew from a mox case which he had placed beside his chair a typewritten manuscript. He held its leaves thoughtfully a moment and handed them to Stuart. "Here's a document, Jim, that cost \$100,000 to prepare; for whose suppression \$1,000,000 would be paid and questions asked." "But why this generosity on your part, Cal?" "I have anticipated that question I never fully and frankly. There is such dynamite in that document to blow up half of Wall Street and land nobody in the White House." "And many in the morgue?" "And some in the penitentiary. I've watched your work the past nine years with genuine pride, Jim. You've said a lot of hard things about rich malefactors, but you've never touched me." "No, I think you're too shrewd to be caught in that class, Cal." "I pride myself that I am. It's only the clumsy foot who gets tangled in the criminal law. But a lot of them have done it—big fellows whose names are in the world with noise. I've taken the pains to put into that typewritten document the names, the dates, the dates, the deeds, the names of the witnesses and all the essential facts. Do what you please with it. If you do what I think you will, some men who are wearing purple and fine linen will be wearing stripes before another year and you will be the biggest man in New York." "And your motive?" "Perhaps I wish to get even with some men who have done me a dirty trick or two, and perhaps incidentally the excitement which will follow this exposure of fraud and crime I

may make an honest penny. is that enough?" "Quite." "And you'll make the attack at once?" "Stuart glanced rapidly through the first page of the document, and his eyes began to dance with excitement. "The only favor I ask," Bivens added, "is twenty-four hours' notice before you act." "I'll let you know." "Stuart rose quickly, placed the document in his inside pocket and hurried home. The deeper the young lawyer probed into the mass of corruption Bivens had placed in his hands the more profound became his surprise. That men whose names were the synonyms of honesty and fair dealing, men intrusted with the management of companies whose assets represented the savings of millions of poor men, the sole defense of millions of helpless women and children—that these trusted leaders of the world were habitually prostituting their trusts for personal gain, staggered belief. He delayed action and began a careful, patient, thorough investigation. As it proceeded his amazement increased. He found that Bivens had only scratched the surface of the truth. New York, the financial center of the nation, had gone mad with the insane passion for money at all hazards—by all means, fair or foul. The nation was on the tidal wave of the most wonderful industrial boom in its history. The price of stocks had reached fabulous figures and still soared to greater heights. Millionaires were springing up, like mushrooms, in a night. Two months had passed since Bivens placed in the district attorney's hands the document which was destined to make and history in the annals of the metropolis. Stuart felt that the time had come to act. It was his solemn duty to the people. He sat in his private office in one of the great skyscrapers (downtown) holding in his hand a list of the men he was about to ask the grand jury to indict for crimes which would send them to prison, exile and dishonored death. "I've got to do it—that's all. But before I do, I'm going to know one or two things beyond the shadow of a doubt." He seized his telephone and made an appointment to call at once on Bivens. The financier extended his delicate hand and with a cordial smile led Stuart to a seat beside his desk. The only sign he betrayed of deep emotion was the low like coldness of his slender fingers. "Well, Jim, you've completed your very thorough investigation?" "How did you know I was making a thorough investigation?" "I make it my business to know things which vitally interest me. You found my facts accurate, and you are ready to strike?" "When I have confirmed some statements you have made in your story

trust company?"

"You don't suppose I would make a statement like that unless I know it to be true?"

"How did you discover it?"

"Very simply." Bivens stepped to one of the great steel safes and drew out a manuscript notebook of some 300 pages of typewritten matter. On the back of the morocco cover was printed in plain gold lettering: "The Private Life of No. 500."

He handed the volume to Stuart, closed the safe and resumed his seat.

"You may take that book with you, Jim," he said quietly. "I trust to your honor not to reveal its contents except in the discharge of your sworn duty as an officer of the law. You will find in it the record of the distinguished president's private life for the past ten years without the omission of a single event of any importance."

Stuart glanced through the book with amazement.

"How did you come into possession of such facts?"

"No trouble at all," was the easy answer. "It only requires a little money and a little patience and a little care in selecting the right men for the right job. Any man in the business world who thinks he can do as he pleases in this town will wake some morning with a decided jolt. The war for financial supremacy has developed a secret service which approaches perfection. Not only do I systematically watch my employees until I know every crook and turn of their lives, but I watch with even greater care the heads of every rival firm in every department of the industrial world where my interests touch theirs."

"I'll not only watch the heads of firms; I watch their trusted assistants and confidential men. In that big safe a thousand secrets are locked whose revelation would furnish matter enough to run the yellow journals for the next five years. Modern business is war, the fiercest and most cruel the world has ever known. It is of greater importance to a modern captain of industry to know the plans of his enemy than it ever was to the commanding general of an opposing army."

"I see," Stuart responded thoughtfully.

"There are men down there in the street now," Bivens went on dreamily, "who are wearing silk hats today for whom the prison tailor is cutting a suit. I have their records in that silent little steel clad room. It's a pitiful thing, but it's life."

"The scariest thing in New York today, Jim, is the man who can't be bought and sold. The thing that's beyond price in the business world is character—combined with brains. That's why I made you the offer I did once upon a time to come in with me. There are positions today in New York with a salary of half a million a year waiting for men who can fill them. If I could find one man of the highest order of creative and executive ability who would stand by me in my enterprises I could be the richest man in the world in ten years."

Stuart lifted his eyes from the record he was casually scanning and smiled into Bivens' dark, serious face.

The look alienated the speaker. The little man knew instinctively that Stuart was at that moment weighing his own life and character by the merciless standard he had set up for others. Judged by conventional laws, he had nothing to fear. He was a faithful member of his church. He gave liberally to its work and gave generously to a hundred worthy charities. He loved his wife with old-fashioned loyalty and tenderness and grieved that she was childless. He stood by his friends and fought his enemies, asking no quarter and giving none.

Yet in his heart of hearts he knew that, however loftily he might discourse at present about "character," "honor," "integrity" and "fair dealing," he had stolen the formula from his big-hearted employer, Woodman, with which he had laid the foundation of his fortune. It was the first half million that came hard. It was this first half million that bore the stain of shame.

His other questionable acts on which the fate of millions had often hung he had no difficulty in justifying. Business was war.

Bivens waited for Stuart to speak. The moment was one big with fate. Stuart was about to reach a decision that would make history. No one knew so well its importance as the keen intellect that gleamed behind the little black eyes watching with tireless patience. Below he could hear the roar of the city's life. Men bought and sold with no fear of tomorrow. Yet a single word from the lips of the tall, clean-shaven young officer of the law and a storm would break which might tear from the foundations institutions on whose solidity modern civilization seemed to rest.

"Well, Jim," Bivens said at length, "you are going to act?" "You are going to act?"

(To be Continued)

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