

# THE MAN HIGHER UP

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CHAPTER VI  
CHRISTMAS SCENES

AN old fashioned Christmas came that year, the air electric with the keen snap of 10 degrees above zero. You felt Christmas that day, the joyous relaxation, the pleasurable excitement.

Yet the spirit of good will was not universal, as three men in that city could have testified. They shivered in a downtown office and glowered hatefully at one another.

"It's no use talking," No. 1 was saying firmly. "I won't have it. He must never come to trial."

"But, heavens, man," No. 2 responded impatiently, "the man's so plainly guilty. It's a flagrant case."

"Caught with the goods on," No. 3 added. "I couldn't help getting a conviction if I tried."

"All the more reason why he must not come to trial."

"But think what it means!" No. 2 argued. "Everybody knows all about this thing. The newspapers have published beforehand the testimony of the bellboy who overheard him offering to take the bribe. They have published the check signed by Henderson and indorsed by Malassey. Every morning there is a fresh editorial howling for his conviction. The whole country is yammering. Malassey must go to jail! Our credit is a little strained as it is; we must do something to placate these howling fools."

"Bah! MacPherson, I'm not a fool. Do you think I haven't seen through your scheme? You're trying to discredit me through Malassey, because he's my councilman. Oh, don't bother denying it. Either this indictment is piecemealed—or you fight me." He brought his clenched fist savagely down on the desk.

"I'm not afraid of you," MacPherson snarled.

The square chin man laughed harshly. "That's another lie. You are afraid of me. You wouldn't be worth the powder it takes to blow you up if you didn't have me and the Sixth's majorities, while I can go out and get the old Harmon crowd together and beat you all along the line day after tomorrow. I don't want to do it, but if this trial goes on I will. Now put up or shut up! Is Malassey tried?"

There was silence a minute.

"No!" The monosyllabic sounded more like a wolf's bark than a human voice.

The square chin man laughed again. "All right. There's a good deal of profanity packed away in that 'no.' Save it until I'm gone." He put on his hat and left the office.

In a secluded corner of the city's most fashionable restaurant sat a man and a woman at early dinner. They were evidently brother and sister, having the same dark hair and eyes, the same regular features of the same slightly Semitic cast. The man was talking.

"And so I laid hold on the man who has life by the throat. Now what do you think of your most unworthy brother?"

"No one but you would have done it. What audacity!"

"Why not? I can't afford not to be audacious. It is the only role that suits me."

"Ah, but will you win with all your boldness? You say yourself that he threatened to crush you."

"My dear sister, the doubt is unworthy of you. Rest assured, he will yield. Tonight will prove me right."

Her eyes rested proudly on him. "Yes, the doubt is unworthy. When did you ever fail? Who can resist the witchery of your magnetism?"

"It is witchery, isn't it? But we come rightly by it. Strange how, after five generations of Puritanism, our breed should cast back and produce in you and me copies of our Hebrew ancestors—glorious woman—who fell in love with a Puritan, abandoned her people to marry her lover, deserted her husband to go on the stage and bring the world to her feet. A magnetic sensationally she lived! And we are her children."

The woman shuddered. "Don't! I always think of her tragic disappearance from the world and her hideous end. Perhaps that is part of our heritage too."

"Nonsense! Of what use are five generations of Puritanism if not to save us from that? But even if it were not so, what of it? While she lived she lived—as I shall, through him."

"Ah, but will you be good for him? Even in our philosophy there is the theory of equivalents."

"Yes. Of course that isn't why I seek him—and I have no illusions. But I like him, and, please God, I will be a good friend. I will teach him our philosophy. My friendship shall dis-

cover to him the tremendous appetite for life hidden away in the big soul of him. Through me he shall live."

"Let us hope so, and that you aren't playing with fire. But, to change the subject, what of your lady of dreams?"

His mobile face became dreamy, and he murmured half to himself:

"It is strange. I have the feeling that I am coming nearer to her. She grows more real to me every day. I can see her now, with her glorious hair, her sad eyes and her beautiful cold mouth with the tinge of bitterness. She will come—of that I am certain. But, come, enough of serious things. My watch says just one-half hour until I must start for the scene of battle, enough to see you in your train—if you insist on leaving tonight."

"I must. I have my battle to fight across the seas."

"Then a toast. To our fortunes! And may life always glow red for us!"

"Ah, I'm afraid of that toast! And of our battles!"

But they touched glasses and drank.

"The refusal of the district attorney to prosecute this flagrant crime is an outrage upon the county. The audacity of our bosses in refusing to yield to the popular demand in this matter would be inexplicable were not the ruthless hand of a certain one of our politicians plainly felt. It is time this man was unseated. He is a disgrace to the community. Of all the men prominent in the public eye we know of none who stands forth so respectably as does Robert McAdoo. He represents all that is brutal and shameful in American politics."

In the fading twilight the man against whom this attack was directed read the bitter words, the concluding paragraph of an editorial in the Evening Press.

"He has begun already. The fool! He forgets he is attacking himself as well as me. To such lengths will passion carry a man!"

There was a knock at the door, and a young woman burst into the room. At twenty-eight Kathleen Flinn was still unmarried—to the wonderment of her many friends, since she seemed made for the home life. She was beautiful, with the beauty of health and of the cheery, unselfish spirit which made her a woman among women. In the Fourth ward school, of which she was principal, thanks to Bob's political influence, a thousand boys and girls loved her with an unwavering devotion they did not always accord their parents. She always remained a mystery to Bob McAdoo.

"What a shame!" she cried sympathetically, holding out a folded newspaper.

"So you've read it, too. Nice Christmas gift, isn't it?" Bob smiled in amused contempt. "I wouldn't care about it if I were you."

"I know such attacks are apt to make themselves true by imbittering the man assailed. And I think of your wonderful possibilities. No; don't laugh, please. I know what you are now, but I know, too, what you will become. I know that some day you will be and do far more and better than you have yet set your eyes on."

"Ah! Then you care only because of what I shall do when this mysterious change takes place? It isn't that you like me?" Again his tone voiced a purely impersonal inquiry, with no hint of disappointment in it.

"Why should I?" she laughed frankly, with a girlish toss of her head.

"Why, indeed?" he smiled back, pleasantly for him. "But won't you sit down?"

"You were slow giving the invitation!" she said gayly. "But I accept, for a few minutes, because I want to thank you for the beautiful books."

"Don't," he said, again pleasantly. "I still owe you more than I can pay." She did not try to thank him further.

For some minutes they sat silent before the fire. Kathleen observed him furtively, with the sensation of beholding a stranger. He seemed strangely less harsh than she was used to see him. She had never known him so—she cast about for the word—human.

He stirred from his contemplation of the fire.

"I have to be honest with you, Kathleen. It is true, that editorial, but—I don't care."

"Ah!" Kathleen leaned forward with a quick, impulsive movement. "Don't you want me to like you, to believe in you?"

"I'm not sure." She laughed outright at his evident hesitation. "But you are an exception. Long ago I determined to make my struggle alone. My own weight was quite enough without adding that of others, as, being what I am, I inevitably must if I assumed the responsibilities of friendship. In other and uglier words, since

I was placed here in the eternal scramble by a power over which I had no control I proposed to get on top no matter over whom I had to scramble. And I didn't propose to put myself in relations where I should hesitate to trample over any one when desirable."

"And does the theory satisfy?" she asked. "You put it in the past tense, I notice."

He frowned impatiently. "I should like to say to you, Kathleen, that's the worst of it. It brings the desired results, but it doesn't satisfy—you're Irish enough to understand that. I hope—because the struggle is so ridiculously easy. Sometimes I long for a real struggle, one that would test my energies to the limit."

For some time Kathleen stared thoughtfully into the fire.

"I suspect the only force that will give you the supreme test you desire is—yourself," she said at length and then demanded abruptly: "Why don't you abandon your theory? You admit it doesn't satisfy."

He laughed unpleasantly. "I'm as confidential as a sentimental girl to-day. I may as well go the whole length—because I'm afraid."

"Bob McAdoo afraid!" Kathleen's irony never carried a sting.

"Yes—of Bob McAdoo."

She arose and looked down on him pityingly.

"Bob, you make me understand, as I could never understand before, the



"YOUR BRUTAL THREATS DON'T FRIGHTEN ME—YOU BULLY!"

horror in the meaning of a certain word."

"Don't mind me. I'm in a humor for truth telling just now."

"Loneliness!"

Without waiting for his reply she left the room. Bob stood gazing at the door through which she had disappeared.

"Loneliness! I didn't expect that, but it hits close. God! I am lonely. And yet—that woman is a living denial of my theory. Here is the exact opposite—service, always service. And she gets far more out of life than I with all my brutality or a thousand Remingtons with the love of sensation. Nevertheless I am far—Humph! How trite phrases will slip into a man's thoughts! I was about to say 'far from the kingdom of God!'"

For that evening Haggin's back room had assumed its official habit. This was accomplished by consolidating the three small tables into one. Around this oblong sat a dozen men. They leaned forward over the table, silent, amazed, intent on the words that fell from the lips of a very handsome young man in evening dress—the first garment of that sort to penetrate the fastnesses of Irishtown, as one may well suppose. This young "silkstocking" had dared to defy the "old man," and his nerve had shown no diminution when confronted by the boss in person. Across the table from the young man sat Bob McAdoo, motionless and inscrutable as the sphinx, his mouth twisted in a peculiar, wry smile.

The plea ceased. All eyes were turned to the boss. "Is that all?" He spoke quietly, but the words somehow carried a perceptible sting. The young man flushed and sprang impulsively to his feet again.

"No," his voice rang out. "It is not all. There's one thing more—for you, Boss McAdoo! You've given your orders that Smith be set aside and Stoughton be given his place, for no good reason, but what, arbitrarily, just because it happens to please you. These other fellows may obey your orders. They almost certainly will. But so long as I am on this committee my ward votes for Smith. You promised to crush me if I stuck to this. All right. You'll find I can take a lot of crushing. Your brutal threats don't frighten me—you bully!"

Bob rose slowly to his full height. The rest of the committee, too, stood up involuntarily. Bob's eyes were glued to the handsome flushed face across the table. The others' glances were fastened on his big right fist. "Ha!" they breathed as they saw it clinch convulsively. More than one face went pale. They expected nothing less than to see a murder done. But Bob's hand unclenched immediately.

"Put the motion," he commanded quietly, maintaining his steady gaze.

"It has been moved and seconded that this committee indorse Stoughton for the legislative nomination," the chairman repeated mechanically. "All in favor?"

"Aye," said all but Remington and

Bob. The chairman paused.

"All opposed." The suggestion came from Bob.

"No!" Remington's voice rang out. "I guess that settles it, Remington."

"It settles the immediate question," was the defiant answer.

"Meeting's adjourned." Bob motioned the committeemen out of the room.

"Nothin' but a drink as high as the ceiling will do me after that," whispered one. "Reminds me of the night the old man licked Haggin."

"Me, too; only there wasn't no scrap," and there was a shade of regret in the low voiced reply. "I thought fer awhile, though, to buy flowers for the kid's coffin. Five years ago I'd had to too."

"Oh, Remington," Bob said casually. "Just wait a minute, will you?"

"Well?" He turned toward Bob with a certain graceful recklessness.

"Here, smoke this," Bob said gruffly as he handed over a cigar. "I don't like to see a man smoking cigarettes."

Remington hesitated, then accepted it.

"And I wouldn't take this business to heart if I were you. We have to preserve discipline in the organization, you know. There's nothing personal in it."

The handsome face flushed eagerly. "Do you mean that? Then call in the boys. I want to apologize for calling you a bully."

"No! Come, now; no theatricals. You're too good a man to be wasted in such childishness."

So the descendant of the renegade Jewess won his fight.

Bob, returning home, found Kathleen alone in the library. He entered and began without preliminary:

"Kathleen, this afternoon I told you that I didn't want any friends. You remember?"

"Yes."

"The other day a young chap—a fool, an ass, judged by my standards—met me on the street and without introduction or by your leave demanded my friendship. He was most theatrical and asinine, and I liked him for it. He had been fighting me politically, though he's a greenhorn. I told him I would crush him—kill him politically. Tonight he continued his opposition. He took the opportunity to tell me a few things about myself which he seemed to think I had overlooked. I have not crushed him. I shall not. He—he has much that I lack. And is—you hit it exactly—I have been very lonely. I am going to test your theory, Kathleen. Good night!"

(To Be Continued)



April 9th.

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