

THE MAN HIGHER UP

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CHAPTER XX.

THE Saturday afternoon before election day found Bob in his office, pacing back and forth as rapidly as the restricted quarters would allow. He was on the verge of a physical breakdown, although his lack of experience of bodily ills hid the fact from him. He was beset by a wearing restlessness that did not permit of physical inaction.

Paul entered the outer office. Bob nodded through the open door.

"Hello, Paul!"

"Good afternoon," Paul answered, with cold formality, and passed into his own office, carefully closing the door behind him. Bob hesitated. Then he went to Remington's door. He was on the point of entering without warning, as had always been their custom, but he paused abruptly and knocked.

"Come!" was the curt answer.

Bob entered. He stood waiting for the invitation to sit down. As it was not forthcoming he calmly sat down without it. Neither spoke at first.

At last Paul dropped his papers and glanced coldly at Bob.

"Well, you've come for something, I suppose?"

Bob watched the curling smoke a moment before answering.

"I see your tip was good, after all. Did you go in on it?"

For answer Paul opened a drawer at his desk and drew out the check which Sanger had given him and which he had not yet deposited. He handed it across the table. Bob read over twice before he looked at Paul.

"That's a good deal of money," he said quietly, "more than the average man earns in a lifetime. Who staked you?"

Paul's head went up a trifle defiantly. "Sanger."

"Sanger?"

"I gave you the chance first."

"But Sanger's an enemy. It's bad policy to get under obligations to a man you've got to fight," Bob answered evenly.

"Your enemy, you mean," Paul sneered, "not mine, as this check proves."

"Evidently," Bob looked out of the window.

Another silence, again broken by Paul. "See here, McAdoo."

Bob turned slowly at the name. "Yes? You've upset the ink"—he paused—"Paul. There was a slight emphasis on the name, which Paul did not heed. The latter seized a blotting pad and impatiently sopped up the ink. Then he turned again to Bob.

"There are some things you and I've got to come to an understanding about. Did you take me up?"

"You've asked me that before."

"Don't temporize. I ask it again."

Bob smiled. "You seem to have put me on the witness stand. However, I'm not bound to answer."

"Aren't you?" Paul said with an angry laugh. "Maybe I can answer for you. It strikes me you took me up to make use of me and to keep me down where I could never demand what I've earned. That's true, isn't it?"

"It strikes you that way? A few thousand dollars put a different light on good many things, don't they?" Bob inquired with suspicious gentleness.

"Have your insults for your hired henchmen?" Paul struck the table angrily. "I'm not one of them."

"Is there anything else Sanger—your hired Sanger—suggested to you?"

"Yes," Paul declared with angry vehemence. "He is my friend. I want to be understood. I've learned from you what you didn't dare tell me—that offered to help make me governor."

"Well, what of it? You wouldn't take me up that offer, would you?"

"Why not?"

"I might refer you to a certain number of yours for reasons."

"Bob!" Paul threw out his arms in a gesture of supreme disgust. "Don't come that slush on me. The name of sanctimonious Pharisee doesn't fit you, McAdoo. We're in this game to help ourselves. Be decent enough to admit that to yourself, even if you're fooling the silly public."

"Do you class us all together, you Sanger and me—liars, hypocrites, and steers? Proceed with the insult. There are other counts, I assure you."

"You seem to take it all as a joke," exclaimed bitterly. "But I stipulate you have a right to consider me after the way I've played the game."

"I heard this outburst impassively outwardly seeming. "What do you say?" Sentimental protestations had the right to take me as a joke. I did that. Proceed."



"BOB! DON'T TRY TO COME THAT SLUSH ON ME."

"Very well," Paul continued sharply, pressing his lips together tightly.

"My next count confirms what I said about your usefulness for the virtuous role."

"One moment!" Bob raised a deprecating hand. "Don't you think it would be wiser—at least more charitable—to moderate your expressions a bit?"

"No. I propose to call things by their proper names for once. Oh, I admit I was fooled with the rest. I supposed that McAdoo had reformed his methods, at least, if not his ideals, until I was informed that you bribed the delegates whose votes nominated you."

"You get this from Sanger?"

"Yes. Even your enemies know of it. You're at their mercy now."

"I see," Bob nodded thoughtfully. "Some of Malasse's work, I suspect."

"You mean to say it isn't true?" Paul demanded quickly.

"No. The delegates were bribed, all right. Sanger through his agents had already bribed them the other way. I suppose you knew that."

But Paul, rather heavily let down though he was by this phase of the matter, was too far gone in his mood to retreat.

"No," he said surlily. "I don't know it. What's to hinder me from saving my reputation by disclosing the whole transaction to the public? I can do it, now you've confessed your guilt."

"Nothing in the world to hinder," Bob replied. "Only the fall of his cigar bitten through indicated any feeling. "Is there anything more?" He carefully flicked the ashes from his coat.

"Yes!" Paul went on impetuously, his mood gathering momentum. "There's one thing more. It concerns Mrs. Gilbert. I confided to you my regard for her. You took it upon yourself to object to it. You even went so far as to call upon her."

"I did."

"And you gave her to understand, how directly I can only imagine, that you opposed our intimacy?"

"Yes."

"You carried your interference so far that Mrs. Gilbert has refused to marry me unless you withdraw your opposition. I wish you to understand that I consider your action an unwarranted intrusion into my private affairs. I don't propose to endure your meddling. You understand," his voice rose. "I won't stand it."

"You make yourself entirely clear, I think," Bob said evenly.

"Furthermore, since you've intruded your opposition, I expect you to withdraw it finally and absolutely. Otherwise"—His pause was ominous.

"That's hardly necessary. You're not a minor, nor am I your guardian, that my consent is necessary. You will be able to persuade Mrs. Gilbert to take that view, I think, and threats do no good."

Bob made an effort to smile. It was not a smile you would care to see more than once, the smile of a strong man trying to conceal bitterest suffering and humiliation. By a trick of fancy Paul's angry, handsome face seemed to fade away and in its stead Bob saw the face of a stricken woman. Bob knew that they had come to the parting of the ways. Words had been spoken that neither could forget.

I think that even then Paul would have retracted his words had Bob offered him an opening. He had not

planned the conversation, but when it was begun Bob's composure had goded him to reckless lengths. He broke the silence with what was almost an appeal.

"Have you anything to say?"

Bob shook his head slowly. "No; there's nothing more to be said—now. They were counting on you to make a speech to the executive committee this afternoon. I suppose you will not be there?"

Paul shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "No; I have an appointment with my manicure. I have a weakness for clean hands, you know."

He caught up his hat and coat and walked out of the office.

As the door closed the mask of Bob's composure fell from him. The smile disappeared. His shoulders drooped, and his head fell forward.

"Paul!" he whispered. "Paul!"

How he got through the rest of the day Bob hardly knew. In the evening there was the final rally, to which flocked thousands and from which hundreds more were turned away for lack of room. Bob made a speech, but his recollection of that effort is hazy. When he rose to speak the waves of applause came to his ears as the far-away thunder of the sea. When his speech was concluded and the last outburst of enthusiasm had died away he quietly left the meeting and went home.

In his room Bob threw himself wearily into a chair by his desk and brooded hopelessly. He went over and over the events of the past few weeks, listening again and again to Paul's bitter words of the afternoon. He relentlessly tore at his wounds until they gaped, taking a kind of savage joy in his self castigation.

"Just one thing more is needed," he said to himself bitterly. "I will get out of this way—out of her way."

He seized a pen and began painfully to write.

Then his eyes fell upon the telephone at his elbow. He dropped the pen and opened the directory.

At last he roused himself and savagely jerked the receiver from its hook.

"Highland thirty thirty. Yes. Is that Highland thirty thirty? Will you call Mrs. Gilbert to the telephone? Robert McAdoo."

There was a long wait, during which all his will was needed to keep him at the telephone.

"This is Mrs. Gilbert," came the answer at last. She need not have named herself. He recognized her voice.

"I am Robert McAdoo."

"Yes, Mr. McAdoo."

"Mrs. Gilbert—the words were forced out painfully—"some time ago I called on you about a certain matter. You may remember?"

"I remember."

"At that time I objected to a course of action which you had planned—"

"Which you supposed I had planned. Mr. McAdoo," came the quick correction.

"It makes no difference. In either case what I said was an unwarranted interference in matters that did not concern me. Are you still there?"

"I am still here."

"I wish to say"—he dragged the words out slowly—"I wish to say I withdraw my opposition finally and absolutely."

A pause.

"That is not necessary, Mr. McAdoo."

"I realize that my opposition would not influence you—"

"That is not what I meant—"

"—but I owe it to you and to—"

Paul Remington to make the withdrawal. I wish to say that I do this of my own free will, not because of any threats made to me. Are you still there, Mrs. Gilbert?"

"Yes."

"There is another matter. I once said a brutal—a contemptible thing to you. You will remember that. I—I had no right to say that to you—no reason."

"You had no right, Mr. McAdoo."

"I—I apologize, Mrs. Gilbert. That is all."

"Mr. McAdoo! Can you hear me plainly? I don't dare to speak very loudly."

"Yes."

"Mr. McAdoo, there is a plot—a shameful trick. It concerns your election—and possibly Mr. Remington. I feel it my duty to warn you."

"Yes, I know."

"I am sure you cannot know of this that I speak of—"

"That is Mrs. Gilbert. I know of it. You have done your duty. You may now enjoy watching the plot work out. It will succeed, in my opinion. That is all."

"But, Mr. McAdoo—"

He hung up the receiver and slouched back into his chair. His head throbbled violently. A roar, like the far away thunder of the sea was in his ears. He was very tired.

CHAPTER XXI. THE POSER.

AFTER a sleepless night Paul rose late Monday morning. He heaped fresh coal on the grate, coaxed the dying embers into a roaring blaze. Then he spent a few minutes in vigorous exercise with the dumbbells, followed by a cold shower. After a quick, hard rubdown he dressed very carefully. The mirror told him that his sleeplessness had left no trace other than the faint shadows under the eyes and a slight pallor that was very becoming.

He went out and, boarding a car, rode downtown to his favorite grill-room, where he sat for more than an hour dawdling languidly over his breakfast. For another hour he tramped the streets listlessly, steering an aimless course through the bustling crowds. A faint, not unpleasant, melancholy fell upon him, such as some-

times comes to one who beholds an autumn sunset or the unhappy denouement of a play. He lingered luxuriously in the mood, tasting its flavor.

His course, without conscious intention, led him to the First National bank building. Nor was he conscious of any exercise of will one way or the other as he entered the elevator and was whisked to Sanger's offices. Sanger greeted him cordially, with no outward sign of exultation. Paul's only sensations were surprise that it was so easy and matter of fact, and somewhat of a disappointment that it was so flat and tasteless, this treachery upon which he had brooded so forebodingly. He read the formal statement twice before signing. He could not realize that it meant the end of six years' friendship, the beginning of a new scheme of existence for him. Only when the notary administered the oath did he feel a quail. A slight shiver passed over him. Then he laughed uncertainly. He drew a deep breath of relief—he thought—that it was over. The melancholy returned.

His next stop was at a telephone booth, where he called up the Sanger home. In response to his inquiries Eleanor's maid informed him that madam had signified her intention of going to a certain department store to do some shopping.

Paul hung up the receiver and steered a straight course for the department store designated. With a sigh of relief he espied the big hooded automobile standing before the entrance to the store. The chauffeur was fussy examining the machine. Paul stopped and abstractedly watched him. The latter touched his hat, importantly continuing his labors, which seemed to be superfluous. Paul sat in the machine and waited, smoking dreamily. An hour later he heard a surprised "What are you doing here?"

He turned quickly, his eyes lighting up warmly. "Waiting for you."

She laughed. "I was so vain as to guess that. Are you going somewhere? Perhaps we can set you down there?"

"Yes," he said, with a proprietary air; "I'm going to luncheon, and you are coming with me."

"Is that an invitation? Then I accept. I'll let you into a secret. I have been wretchedly lonely all morning. I came shopping just to escape it. And I was dreading the prospect of an afternoon alone in that big empty house."

"Then I'm twice glad I waited."

He opened the door, and they both entered the car. James cranked and deftly dodged through the crowded thoroughfares toward the restaurant Paul had chosen.

He turned dreamily to her.

"You shouldn't be lonely," he said in the hushed tone one would use at a deathbed, "since you have for company—"

"I find myself sorry company some times," she answered, with an attempt at brightness.

His beautiful woman's mouth curved in a dreamy smile. "It is company worth any sacrifice to win."

When the car came to a stop before the restaurant they alighted and went in. Paul made only a pretense of eating.

"You're eating hardly anything," she said. "Aren't you well?"

For answer he pointed to her own plate, hardly touched.

"I had a very late breakfast," she explained.

"So had I. Hush!" he almost whispered. "Let us not talk."

With a half contemptuous shrug of her shoulders she gave over the attempt to disturb him. She wondered how she could ever have deceived herself into the belief that she could love or that she wanted to love him.

"It was pity only," she thought. "Always pity."

Paul stirred uneasily, lowering his eyes to meet hers. He looked at her long and steadily.

"Eleanor, Eleanor!" he cried, softly pleading. "It isn't true?"

"What isn't true?" she asked, though she knew the answer.

"That you will never love me?" he whispered tremulously.

She put out her hand uncertainly, as though she would lighten the blow.

"No," she said pityingly. "I can never love you as you wish."

He caught her hand in his own. In their secluded corner they were safe from observation, though neither thought of that.

"Ah, dear, don't say that! You don't know how great my love for you is. It is the one reality in my life. I have always loved you, even before I saw you. And I always shall love you. I will make up to you what suffering has taken out of your life."

Tears came to her eyes. "Paul," she said sadly. "It hurts me to tell you—"

"Don't! I'm willing to wait even unto death to win from you one thousandth of what I give you. My love isn't a thing of the moment, but of all time. I'll try so hard to please you, to cast out of my life everything that is inconsistent with my love, even to break with the man who has stood between us."

"No, no," she cried involuntarily, her fingers tightening around his hand. "You mustn't desert him. It wouldn't be honorable!"

"Ah! There is neither honor nor shame, right nor wrong, kindness nor cruelty, loyalty nor treachery, only you, always, supreme!"

She drew her hand sharply from his clasp. "Romantic phrases," she said scornfully. "There are suffering and sin and remorse; there would be his unhappiness and the knowledge that we had caused it. Do you think I could be so mean, so little, as to seek happiness at that price?"

"I don't understand," he said, passing his hand across his brow in bewilderment. "You said yourself once—"

"Ah, yes!" she answered, softening. "I have no right to be angry with you, since it was I who first suggested it to you. That is my shame. Believe me, what I said then was spoken in a miserable selfishness far worse than I have accused him of. I had no right to say it. I see my act in all its contemptible unwomanliness."

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"What you ask is impossible," she went on sadly. "But even if I could care for you I couldn't accept happily."

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"NO, NO! YOU MUSTN'T DESERT HIM."

ness at the sacrifice of a man who cares for you so deeply, who has done so much for you."

He smiled bitterly. "There is something you don't understand. He has been the first to sacrifice me. You probably don't know that your brother offered to help him elect me governor, but was refused. My friend refused to sacrifice a policy for my sake."

"He hasn't told you?"

"Your brother has told me—"

"I mean Mr. McAdoo hasn't told you that he went to the capital and agreed finally to join John Dunmeade on the condition that they support you for governor next year?"

Paul stared at her bewildered, stunned. "He did that?" he asked slowly, incredulously.

"Yes."

His arms fell limply to his side. For some minutes he sat motionless. When he looked up again his hand some face was marred by a sneer.

"You pleading for him? You seem to have executed the volte face."

She flushed. "I have no right to resent that. The one thing a woman asks of a man is loyalty. She should be the last to seek to turn it away from another. That I have done so is my shame."

He shook his head in perplexity. "You have changed since you went away."

"I've found out that the world wasn't created merely for my pleasure," she answered quietly.

"After all," he continued, "the thing in which he has been fairest was in coming between us. If he hadn't done that you could have loved me. That Sunday when you sang you almost cared for me. And you would have let yourself love me had it not been for him. Even now you wouldn't refuse me finally were it not for his opposition. But he and I have come to the end."

"You're mistaken," she said gently. "That isn't my entire reason. He has told me that he no longer objects. He proves his friendship by that."

Again Paul fell back limply in his chair. "He has—told—you"—he gasped. "When?"

"Saturday night—over the telephone."

"It was too late—too late!"

The music of the string band and the voices of the other diners receded. He lost sense even of the presence of the woman before him. He felt miserably alone. Life had dealt hardly by him, he thought bitterly. There was no hint of self blame in his bitterness. His heart contracted in a spasm of exquisite sorrow. Tears of self pity stood in his eyes.

"The end of the dream!" he sighed. "It was too good to be true. Nothing remains but a memory—the deathless memory of what might have been." Even in his bitterness he could turn his pretty phrase.

Tears were in her eyes too. "You'll forget. I'm not worth even a memory."

She could with difficulty preserve the steadiness or her voice as she spoke.

"I have no right to ask you anything. I haven't been fair with you. But I am fair with you now—I'm trying to atone for my selfishness—when I say go back to him and forget me. You are all he cares for, and he is far more worthy of your love than I am. You will find your true happiness working with him and John Dunmeade. And I—I will go away where you can both forget me and I can no longer stand between you. I, not he, have been the marplot."

"It's too late," he said listlessly. "He and I have parted forever."

"It is never too late to atone for a fault. Be generous to me, if not to him," she pleaded anxiously.

The quality of his smile changed. "To you? What is he to you?"

"He is a man who despises me—justly," she answered steadily. "He is a man whom my brother is cruelly seeking to destroy and to whom I

have carelessly, selfishly, done the greatest injury one can do to another. Paul, I know how my brother is tempting you. You will not do what he wants; please say you will not. See, I'm putting aside my woman's pride to plead for a man who hates me. Because if you do what Henry wants I must always feel that the crime is mine."

"It's too late! It's done!"

"Paul!"

A man at the next table turned sharply, hearing the low, gasping cry. He looked away again quickly. The cry pierced even Paul's self pity. He saw her face go death white; a piteous, stricken look crept into her eyes. An unbelievable, stunning thought stirred in his heart.

"Do you mean that you?"

The sadly beautiful picture faded. The pity of self-of the man upon whom circumstances had played so hardly—died. He saw his deed in all its shamefulness, its nakedness of defense. The sense of unreality fell from him. He saw the misery he had wrought.

"What have I done?"

"What have we done?"

Mechanically he fumbled for a bill and threw it on the table. He rose from his seat. As mechanically she followed him out of the restaurant into the street.

He gave her one long look, in which she saw written all his shame; then, without a word, he turned and left her. She watched him until his figure was lost in the crowd.

(To Be Continued)

Sheriff's Sale of Real Estate Under Execution in Foreclosure

In the Circuit Court of the State of Oregon, for the County of Crook, Redmond Bank of Commerce, a corporation, plaintiff,

vs.