



The MAN of the HOUR



BY
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With all the advantages of youth, education and good looks and no vocation other than the enjoyment of wealth, the hero of our present story chose rather to sacrifice his ease and comfort on the altar of his duty as a citizen. His city called him to save her from spoliation and corruption, and he responded to the call. To lure him from the path of right came the seductions of love and the claims of a revered parent's memory, allied with the mighty forces at the command of political and financial malefactors. The firmness with which "the man of the hour," singled out for the highest post in a great municipality by those who saw in him only a weakling and a tool, resisted the very forces that had elevated him for their own purposes to official power will be an inspiration to the reader, as it has been an uplifting force in the minds of thousands who have witnessed its theatrical representation.

CHAPTER I.

THE country house of Charles Wainwright, financier, topped the ridge overlooking the water in a climax of architectural hideousness and extravagant cost. The grounds of Charles Wainwright, financier, stretched out into countless acres of landscape gardening. The whole estate of Charles Wainwright, financier, eclipsed those of his neighbors in the fashionable suburb, even as the name of Charles Wainwright, financier, eclipsed almost every other in the city world where money ruled as undisputed and absolute monarch.

Even when he turned from the bustle of city and fellow money builders and sought for a space the simple life on his \$2,500,000 country place, with its modest equipment of forty-one servants, Mr. Wainwright so far carried into the wilds the atmosphere of business and the burden of other men's wealth as to have a very complete little stockbroker room fitted up adjoining his big library and to keep a man night and day at his private wire.

Charles Wainwright, financier, was a bachelor. No obese or statuesque wife carried about with her a portable advertisement of his wealth in the shape of fabulously valuable jewels or made his name renowned in opera box, Newport casino or Lenox cottage. His only brother had died years before, leaving a mere beggarly million dollars or so and two children to divide it. These children—Dallas, a strikingly pretty and still more strikingly independent girl of twenty-four, and Perry, a delightfully lazy, lovable lad of twenty-one—lived with their uncle, who managed their affairs, let them go pretty much as they chose and—as they were more or less ornamental and entertaining and decidedly popular—was rather fond of them.

The trio had passed a pleasant, uneventful month at the big house on the hill early in the summer of 19—, when a day dawned whereon fate booked a number of decidedly interesting fateful happenings to occur.

Wainwright himself was up betimes and at work in his library, poring over market reports, cipher telegrams and a dozen other details of deals which his simple life cult did not prevent him from operating at long range. With him was his secretary, Thompson, a pallid, earnest looking young fellow, whose unobtrusive efficiency had long since won the financier's admiration.

This morning affairs in the financial world had gone more than ordinarily to Mr. Wainwright's liking. Moreover, a paragraph in one of the city papers that had caught his eyes had set his lean gray face to twitching with as near an approach to a smile as the great man ever permitted. Altogether he was in an unwontedly genial mood, and some of his good nature so far expanded as to include his busy secretary.

"Thompson," he remarked as the last batch of correspondence was cleared away, "you're looking pale. Do I work you too hard?"

"No, indeed, sir," replied the secretary, with a promptitude that was something almost slavish in it.

"Feeling all right?" went on Wainwright. "You need more exercise. Why don't you get out of doors oftener?"

"The work, sir?"

"Get another man to help you do the telegraph part of it, then. I—"

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind indeed; but, if it's just the same to you, I'd rather handle it all myself. I hope the work's perfectly satisfactory, sir?"

"Perfectly. Thompson. You're the only employee I have who seems to love work for work's sake. Seen anything of Mr. Gibbs this morning?"

"No, sir. I don't believe he's up yet. Coming by such a late train last night, you know, sir, and—"

"I was up as late as he was, and I was at work by 8. But when a man takes his first holiday in six years, as he is doing, I suppose oversleeping is part of the fun. There's a man to pattern yourself after, Thompson! I remember when he started out he hadn't a penny—nothing but the resolve to get money and then to get more of it. And now look at him! At thirty-five he's the head of one of the busiest brokerage houses in—"

"Good morning!" broke in a voice from the foot of the broad stairway across the hall. "Sorry to be so late. Do you know how the market is?"

"It's opened even stronger than I hoped," said Wainwright. "Take a look at these dispatches and see for yourself. Had your breakfast?"

"Yes, thanks," answered the newcomer, a well-groomed, stockily built man, lounging into the rooms, with a nod at Thompson, who discreetly withdrew into the adjoining office.

"Seems queer to have a whole day away from the office. I hardly know what to do with so much spare time."

"It's the everyday hard work that's put you where you are today, Gibbs."



Scott Gibbs.

and that's interested me in you. For instance, that deal of yours in South Sea copper?"

"Yet that was the deal the papers all—"

"All denounced you for? What do you care? You were within the law. They've been hammering me for years and attributing all sorts of low motives to me. As long as the law doesn't interfere I'm going to get all I can. So are you. So is every sane man. As long as it can be done without any fuss or shouting. A mosquito could bite twice as often if only he didn't sing a song about it. By the way, have you seen the papers?"

"No. Anything new?"

"One thing at least that ought to interest you. Listen to this: The engagement of the niece of a world celebrated financier to a prominent young broker is about to be announced. The young lady and her brother are orphans and are not only their famous uncle's wards, but also the sole heirs to his vast wealth. They are summering at his magnificent country place, where the fortunate broker is said to spend

every one of the very few moments left vacant by his daring stock manipulations.' No mistaking that, eh, Gibbs?"

"It—ought to bring matters to a head, I should think."

"It certainly should," assented Wainwright. "In fact, it's such an audacious master stroke that I've a notion you may possibly have been at the bottom of it. Now, confess. Weren't you?"

"Well, of course I didn't exactly write it. But—"

"Clever boy! Dallas will have to show her hand now or never. She's kept you on the anxious seat too long as it is. That's the reason I asked you up here for the day. She must settle it today if I can manage it. She knows how anxious I am for her to accept you."

"But I'm sometimes afraid she does not care for me."

"Then make her care. As long as she cares for no one else you can persuade her to believe she adores you."

"How do you know? You're a bachelor."

"Perhaps that's how I know. And she doesn't care for any one else."

"You're sure? There's Bennett, for instance."

"Alwyn Bennett? Why, absurd! She's known him all her life. They're just good friends; nothing more. He's our nearest neighbor here, and it's only natural. Besides, he isn't the sort of man she wants. He's an idler. She likes men who have made something of themselves—like yourself, for instance. So make yourself easy on that score. If Bennett loved her, he'd have proposed long ago."

"Not necessarily. He's not a man to get started easily, but once start him and—"

"Then don't start him. Go in and win. What is it, Thompson?"

The secretary entered from the office with a dispatch.

"There's an answer, sir," said he. "Here's a blank."

Wainwright read the message, scribbled a few lines and handed the reply to the secretary, who hurried out with it.

"So Thompson is not only a secretary, but a telegraph operator as well," remarked Gibbs as the clicking of a Morse instrument sounded from the office.

"He's everything," replied Wainwright. "He's a wonder. He heard me say I wished I had a good operator up here whom I could trust, so without a word to me he goes and learns telegraphy. I've had him nine years now and tested and tempted him fifty ways, but he's as true as steel, the one employee I ever had that I could trust. By the way, the message he just brought me ought to interest you. It tells me Borough Street railway stock is offered now at 63. I've given orders for your office to take all they can get hold of at that price quietly and without making any bids or attracting attention. That'll be the biggest deal of my career if I can carry it through. You understand your part perfectly—take for yourself 20 per cent of the deal, handle the whole affair on the floor and not buy any of the stock for your own private account? Stick to that and there's just one thing that can possibly block us."

"You mean the defeat of the present city administration this fall?"

"Just that, and I don't believe it will be beaten. The organization's solid as a rock. They have the police, the officeholders and—"

"But the people at large?"

"The people at large are sheep that like to be driven by the strongest shepherd. If they weren't, they'd have broken loose a century ago and run the city and the country to suit themselves. Just now Dick Horrigan happens to be the 'shepherd' who can make them go wherever he says."

"Shepherd and 'crook' combined, I should say," commented Gibbs, chuckling at his own feeble joke.

"I wouldn't let a speech like that get back to Horrigan if I were you," returned Wainwright dryly. "Your career might suffer. Nothing (except, maybe, gratitude) is so bad as humor for spoiling a man's chances in business or politics. A laugh costs more than people think. But, speaking of the election this fall, a reform wave or any change of city administration would smash our Borough Street railway deal. To offset that, I've joined hands with Horrigan. If I can bring him to see things my way, he shall have cash enough to buy all the honest voters he needs. He's coming here this noon to talk things over with me. Phelan's coming too."

"Phelan? You mean the alderman of the Eighth? You'll have a pleasant little gathering. Perhaps you didn't know that Phelan and Horrigan have had a row and—"

"And that's why I'm bringing them together here today. I want to patch up their quarrel if I can. I need them both. Phelan's a useful man."

"But Horrigan is boss of the organization. If you have him on your side, why do you bother about getting Phelan too?"

"Yes, Horrigan is boss. He's fought his way up by bulldog tactics. He has no diplomacy—nothing but brute force. Now, Phelan has just as much force in his way, but he's as tricky as a fox too. I've known him ever since he was chief of police. He's a dangerous man. If he's against us, he can make trouble. I want him. He's—"

"Judge Newman!" announced the butler.

A whimsical frown crossed Wainwright's face, but cleared into a passably hospitable expression as a little gray haired man, with a solemn, weak face, trotted pompously in on the heels of the butler's announcement.

"Good morning, Judge," said the host pleasantly. "You don't know Mr. Gibbs, I think, of Gibbs, Norton & Co. Judge Newman is my next door neighbor on the left as you come from the station. Gibbs. You must have noticed the place—Queen Anne house, with—"

"Oh, he probably never gave it a glance," put in the judge. "A mere cottage, that's all. When a man with my meager judicial salary has a social position to keep up and four daughters that aren't married and—Charles, you can't realize what it means to have four unmarried—"

"No, I cannot," assented Wainwright quickly, "and from present signs I'm not likely to. I hope Mrs. Newman is well?"

The little judge's face grew doubly important.

"Extremely well, thank you," said he. "A wonderful woman! You've met her, Mr. Gibbs?"

No? But of course you have often heard—By the way, Charles, it was she who told me to drop in on you this morning. You see—she—Mrs. Newman is most anxious for me to come up for re-election this fall. Mr. Horrigan, to whom I broached the subject, doesn't quite seem to see it that way. He doesn't want to have me renominated. I thought perhaps, as a personal favor to so old a friend, you might say a word to Mr. Horrigan in my behalf."

"Of course I'll do what little I can. Horrigan will be here today. Drop in a little after noon and I'll tell you how my intervention turns out."

"Oh, thank you so much!" cried the judge, positively wriggling in his delight. "Mrs. Newman will be so pleased. And, by the way, won't you ask Perry why he never comes over to see my daughters? Please ask him if he won't. I'm sure Mrs. Newman would be glad if he did. Well, till afternoon, then. Good morning."

"Queer little rat!" observed Gibbs as the judge bowed himself out. "Mrs.

Newman must be a marvel if all he says is—"

"She is a wonder as a husband trainer. She's tamed him so he doesn't know his soul's his own. A good little man because he's never had a chance to be otherwise. I'll speak to Horrigan about him, though. It's always well to have a friend on the bench. One never can tell when—"

But Gibbs was not listening. His heavy face had lighted with a sudden glow of eagerness. Turning to note the cause, Wainwright saw his niece Dallas descending the stairs. Involuntarily she halted as she reached the threshold and saw Gibbs. Then, her sense of hospitality triumphing over impulse, she came in and greeted her uncle's guest with some show of cordiality.

"Remember, Dallas," said Wainwright as he prepared to go into his office, "Gibbs is here only for the day. I count on you to make his holiday as pleasant as you can." He glanced covertly at Gibbs, who had strolled to the window. Then the financier lowered his voice and said rapidly:

"Please be nice to Gibbs for my sake, Dallas. I do a great deal for you, and I don't often ask anything in return."

He patted her on the shoulder with a gesture meant to be affectionate and hurried into the adjoining office. Scarcely had the door closed when Gibbs turned from the window, crossed the room to where Dallas stood and in his usual direct fashion said:

"You saw that?"

"The article in this morning's paper? Yes."

There was no confusion, no embarrassment, neither in the clear, girlish voice nor in the honest dark eyes that met Gibbs' so calmly. He went on with a shade less confidence.

"It annoys you?"

"Very much indeed."

"You can't feel worse about it than I do, Miss Wainwright. I—"

"You didn't write it yourself, then?"

"I? Of course not! How could you think—"

"I didn't; I just wondered. Please see that the rumor is denied."

"Why should I? You are going to marry me some day, aren't you, Dallas?"

"Have I ever given you reason to think I would?"

"You have let me keep on coming to see you. You have—"

"I have told you that I don't care for you the way you want me to. I have great admiration and respect for you, but that is all. And it is not enough to marry on."

"It is enough for me. If I have your admiration and respect to start on I'll soon make you love me."

"You would be satisfied with so little?"

"Yes. Knowing I could in time win more. You aren't the sort of girl who could marry a man if she didn't respect him—didn't admire him. You—"

"Perhaps I couldn't marry such a man. But perhaps I couldn't help loving him."

"Your chances for happiness would

be better with me. Oh, Dallas, you know I love you! You've kept me waiting so long! Is it fair to either of us?"

"I hesitate because I want to be fair to us both. For that reason I must still ask you to wait."

"But I've waited so long! Tell me one thing: Is there any one else that—"

Steps, none too light, clattered down the stairs, and into the library bounced a lad in tennis flannels. He was tall, well set up and good to look at and seemed always to have stepped directly from a bandbox and to have had extremely recent acquaintance with much soap and water.

"Hello, Dallas!" he shouted, encompassing his sister in a bear hug. "How soon are you—"

"Here's Mr. Gibbs, Perry," Dallas reminded him as she emerged, some what crumpled, from the embrace. "Have you—"

The lad's manner underwent a lightning and frigid change.

"Oh, good morning!" he grunted, with a curt nod to the visitor, and, picking up a paper, turned to the sport sheet and became immersed in its contents, oblivious of all else.

"Mr. Gibbs is only spending one day with us," admonished Dallas, trying to soften her young brother's rudeness.

"Hope he'll enjoy it," came in absent tones from the depths of the paper.

Gibbs rose.

"I'm going out for a cigar on the terrace," said he. "I'll join you a little later."

"Perry," scolded Dallas as soon as the broker disappeared through the long windows, "how could you treat a guest of uncle's so rudely?"

"I don't like the fellow. And I don't like what I read in the paper today about him and you. Gee, what a meanly paragraph! It's enough to make a white man want to dash out his brains with a cigarette. You're going to deny it in time for the retraction to get into tomorrow's papers, aren't you?"

"I—I'm not quite sure."

"Good Lord!" gasped Perry, slumping down in the nearest chair. "Are you crazy? Say, if you are looking for a real good, exciting match why don't you marry a Wall street stock report? It'd be better 'n Gibbs. If you marry him you'll only be an 'also ran' with the ticker tape and the market news. Oh, keep out of it, old girl! You owe something to your intelligent and distinguished little brother. If you've got to commit matrimony, marry some one I like, can't you?"

"I haven't given him a definite answer yet," admitted the girl, a little touched by the real feeling that underlay her brother's flippant words.

"That's good medicine. Confidence restored and the run on Brother's Emotions is checked. Next time you get the marry bee I have a dandy candidate to suggest for the job."

"Who?" laughed Dallas, amused in spite of herself.

"Alwyn Bennett!"

"How silly!"

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