

The MAN of the HOUR

CHAPTER II.

ALWYN BENNETT turned sharply toward the window, angry at the interruption, but Perry Wainwright, ushering two ladies in from the veranda, met his scowl with a wink of triumph.

"Not so bad, eh?" called the boy. "Met them as they were turning into the drive. You see?"

"Oh," observed the younger of the two women—a pretty, flower faced girl who since her entrance into the room had been engaged in exchanging delighted greetings with Dallas. "So you came to meet us? You said you just happened?"

"Did I?" asked Perry in deep amazement. "Well, well! The fact is, I wanted to do something startling in honor of meeting you, so I told my first lie. I—"

"Don't mind him, Cynthia!" laughed Dallas. "He's taken that way quite often."

"Oh, it's his usual pace, then?" queried Miss Garrison innocently. "I thought perhaps he was just warming up."

"And now," pursued Dallas, taking possession of Cynthia, much to Perry's disgust, "tell me all about yourself. Have?"

"There isn't much to tell. But there's going to be. I'm going to work."

"Work? What for?"

"For a living, of course."

"Not really?"

"Yes, isn't it ridiculous?" broke in Mrs. Bennett, a sweet little old lady who now found her first chance to edge in a word amid the general volley of talk. "But Cynthia is set on doing it."

"Why shouldn't I? I haven't a dollar, and there's a theory that one must live."

"But what are you going to do?" asked Dallas.

"I don't know. I have a pretty good education. I shall find something. I—Dallas, I think your brother is giving us a high sign of some sort."

"I am!" declared Perry. "I just wanted to tell you there's a surprise waiting for you. Two surprises in one kennel. Want to see 'em?"

"What is he talking about?" queried Cynthia, appealing to Dallas for light on the mystery.

"About Betty and Prince Charlie," retorted Perry. "Your two Boston terriers that I bought. Want to see 'em?"

"Oh, the darlings! Of course I do. Where are they?"

"Come along and I'll show you. The darlings, eh? Talk like that makes me wish I was a dog."

"Don't despair," suggested Cynthia. "Maybe you'll grow."

Still puzzling vaguely as to the meaning of this cryptic utterance, Perry followed Miss Garrison from the room, a grin of satisfied ambition wreathing his tanned face.

"To think of poor little Cynthia having to go to work!" sighed Dallas, looking after them. "One would as soon think of putting a butterfly into harness. Is it true she has no money left?"

"I'm afraid it's only too true," answered Mrs. Bennett. "Her father lost everything in speculating. He was cashier of the Israel Putnam Trust company and afterward president. He—"

She paused as the office door opened and Thompson, the secretary, came into the room. At sight of Mrs. Bennett he seemed about to turn back; but, changing his purpose, crossed to the table and began to look for some documents he had failed to gather up.

"What was the rest of the story about Mr. Garrison?" asked Dallas,

really interested in the older woman's recital.

Thompson's papers slipped through his fingers and went skidding across the polished floor. The others looked around in surprise.

"Excuse me!" muttered the secretary as he stooped to gather up the documents. "Very awkward! I'm sorry."

He went on arranging the scattered papers in his usual unobtrusive silence, effacing himself from the general talk.

"You were telling me about Cynthia's father," said Dallas.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Bennett, taking up the thread of her tale. "He was looked on as one of the most honorable bankers in the city. And so he was until his misfortune."

"Misfortune?"

"More misfortune than crime. His wife was a girlhood friend of mine, so perhaps I am prejudiced in his favor. A famous financier—a dear friend of his—induced him to make a very large loan that proved to be a mistake. He went to the financier for advice as to how to recoup the loss. The financier told him of an investment by which he could get all the money back without any risk and could make good the loan. Mr. Garrison took his advice, used the bank's funds for the purpose and—the investment proved worthless. The bank was insolvent. Mr. Garrison shot himself."

"Horrible! Horrible!" murmured Dallas.

"The horrible part of the whole story came out later," said Alwyn Bennett. "It seems the financier had deliberately ruined Mr. Garrison and was on the other side of the deal by which the bank's funds were lost. In other words, he persuaded his friend to put money in what he knew was a losing venture, then took that money himself."

"He did it willfully," chimed in Mrs. Bennett. "Knowing his friend would be ruined and that the bank's money which he lured Mr. Garrison into investing was going to swell his own ill gotten fortune."

"I did not think any one lived who could do such things," shuddered Dallas. "Poor Cynthia!"

"Cynthia suffered least of all," said Mrs. Bennett. "She was little more than a child at the time. Her mother died of grief, and her brother—a promising, clever young fellow just entering college—disappeared."

"Deserted Cynthia?"

"Not so bad as that. He probably went away sooner than face his father's disgrace and began life somewhere far from home. That was nine years ago, yet ever since then he sends Cynthia a little money every month—not much, but no doubt all he can scrape together above his bare living expenses. She has tried in every way to get in touch with him, but she can't locate him anywhere. There is no clew except that monthly money order. I never knew him very well—in fact, I only saw him once or twice—but I've heard he was a fine, manly boy. The shock must have been worst of all on him."

"So a man lost his good name and his life, his wife died, his son's life was wrecked and his daughter impoverished," mused Dallas, "and all that a financier might grow a little richer. I can't believe it!"

A little ashamed of displaying such vehemence in the presence of one of her uncle's dependents, the girl glanced toward the table. But the secretary had gone.

"My husband," prattled Mrs. Bennett complacently, "always said that the men who rose highest in the money world reached their lofty places over the despoiled bodies of hundreds of victims. Thank God, my boy has no such parental record to look back on. My husband was one man in a million—the soul of honor both in business and in private life. You've read of his splendid civil war record. Then he went into business as a contractor and engineer and earned a fortune, every dollar of which was honest. That's something to be proud of in these money loving times."

"What was the name of the financier who ruined Mr. Garrison?" asked Dallas, still haunted by the narrative she had just heard.

"No one knows. It was suppressed at the time. The facts in the written confession left by Mr. Garrison became public property; but, through political influence, the name of the man responsible for the tragedy was suppressed. Here I sit chatting on delightful topics, while those two young people are running all over the place unchaperoned. Excuse me, won't you, and I'll look them up?"

She smiled at Alwyn as she left the room, and his answering smile showed how fully he understood and appreciated her motive in leaving him alone with Dallas Wainwright. Perhaps Dallas, too, understood, for she made as though to follow Mrs. Bennett out into the lawn. But Alwyn stepped between her and the window.

"Don't go just yet," he begged. "I've so much to talk over with you. When they came in we were speaking of that paragraph about Gibbs and yourself."

"You don't love him, do you, Dallas? Tell me you don't!"

"What right have you to ask me such a question?"

"Only the right that my love for you gives me, dear heart. You must have known I loved you even though I've never said it before. I love you, Dallas, though till today, I think, I never realized how much. Tell me it isn't true that you're going to marry Gibbs."

"Even if it weren't true I should not marry you, Alwyn."

"Ah!"

The exclamation was wrung unconsciously from his whitening lips. It was as though a pang of physical pain had pierced him.

"I wouldn't marry you," went on Dallas, though more gently, "because you don't really love me."

"I do! I do! With my whole heart, I—"

"Oh, Alwyn!" she exclaimed with almost mother-like tolerance, "what a child you are! What a mere child! Some one tries to take away from you a plaything you've grown used to having. You never cared especially about the plaything before; but, now that you're in danger of losing it, you cry out: 'Oh, I love it! I love it!' You'll soon find another toy that'll make you forget—"

"Dallas, you are unfair! You have no right to treat my love for you as if—"

"As if it were a mere whim? Isn't it? Now, don't say 'No,' but look me in the eyes and answer one question. If Scott Gibbs hadn't proposed to me—if that paragraph had not appeared in the paper—would you have come here today and told me you loved me? No, you know you wouldn't!"

"Don't talk like that, dear!" implored Bennett. "I tell you I love you! More than I ever dreamed a woman could be loved. I love you! I—"

"There's an easy way to prove it, then."

"What way? Anything?"

"By doing something to make me feel proud of you. I don't feel so now. I could not marry a man who loiters his life away—a man who sits idle while others are thronging past him in the upward climb. You are rich, thanks to your father's efforts. What have you done with that wealth? If you've done no harm with it you've at least put it to no good use. You are young, talented, highly educated. What have you done with your youth, your talents, your education? How have you used them for your own betterment or for your fellow men's? What have you to offer me? Money? Social position? I have plenty of both. What else can you offer me? Nothing—absolutely nothing."

"My love, for one thing. I can offer you that."

"In what is your love better than any other man's? Behind it is not a record of hard work, of self sacrifice, of achievement—of any of the things that go toward making love strong and enduring and beautiful—to make it a support that a woman can lean on for life? What have you to offer me or any other woman?"

There was a silence. Yet when Bennett spoke there was a new note in his voice—a ring of awakening strength that impressed Dallas in spite of herself—that sent a wholly strange thrill through her and set her heart beating with unwonted quickness.

"You are right," said he. "I have done nothing. I've been content to be a rich man's son, and I've nothing to offer that is worthy your acceptance, but that does not mean I never shall have. And, by the grace of God I shall! You've put things in a new light. I see them as I never did. It isn't a wholly pleasant experience, but it's good for me. There's nothing yet that I'm fitted to do, but I'll find something, never fear. And when I do—"

"Don't say there's nothing you're fit for," protested Dallas. "There's nothing you couldn't accomplish if once you set yourself to it. Why, just think of those speeches you made for Mr. Lorimer last campaign. They were fine, I was so—"

"Oh, those amounted to nothing. I just did it to oblige him. And, besides, it was fun to sway the crowds."

"That's just it. You did it for fun and for a friend. Why not do something in earnest and for yourself? The world is fairly bristling with opportunities for such a man as you. Grasp those opportunities. Won't you?"

"Yes! And when I do—is there any hope that you will?"

"I have given Mr. Gibbs no promise. I told him to wait."

"Then my chance is as good as his. From now on I am going to drop the role of rich man's son and be something on my own account. If you have faith in me—if you believe in me—if there is a ghost of a chance that you can some day love me—"

"I have faith in you, Alwyn," she answered softly, letting her hand lie passive in his grasp. Then, withdrawing it with a pretty gesture of petulance, she added:

"Only I wish it didn't always require a blow to rouse you to action. Did you ever happen to notice that

trait in yourself?"

"Why, no. I don't quite understand."

"Then here's an instance that will show you what I mean: In your senior year, at Yale when you were playing halfback on the varsity eleven I saw my first football game. It was against Princeton. You were the only man on either team I know, so I watched you from first to last. Little as I understood football, I could see you were playing a clever, hard, conscientious game. But it wasn't a fighting game—not the sort of game that carries everything before it. Then, in the second half, in one of the scrimmages I saw a Princeton man strike you. Oh, it was a dastardly, cowardly blow! He struck you when your head was turned away. You saw who it was, and you made no appeal to the referee, but in the next scrimmage you broke that man's collar bone and stunned him. He was carried senseless from the field, and you kept on. You had begun to play a fighting game, and it carried you through the Princeton line for the only touchdown of the day. You won the game for Yale. You were the college hero—the man of the hour. But it took a blow to rouse you. Now do you understand?"

"Yes, I think I do. Perhaps you're right. I certainly remember the blow well enough. Do you happen to know who it was that struck me that day on the football field?"

"No, I know none of the players except you. Who?"

"It was Gibbs."

"No!"

"I'm not likely to have forgotten. Ask him yourself. He will remember it, I fancy. It was a week before he left the infirmary."

"But I can't realize that Mr. Gibbs would do such a thing! It was so cowardly, so—"

"Oh, don't hold it against him. He was excited and—"

"Tell Mr. Phelan I'll see him in the library," called Wainwright from the hall.

"More politics!" exclaimed Dallas. "Come, shall we go out to the tennis court?"

They passed through the open French window as Wainwright and Gibbs entered the library from the opposite door.

"The alderman's a little behind time," said Wainwright. "He's a character in his way. You'll be interested in meeting him, Gibbs."

"Mr. Phelan," announced the butler. "I know my own name, son," remarked a voice behind him. "You needn't go hollerin' it at me like I was been' rattified at an east side meeting. Mornin', Mr. Wainwright. Maybe it was you he was hollerin' at."

"You're a little late, alderman," said the financier.

"I always am. Let the other feller do the walkin'. That's my motto, and many a good hour's time I've saved by it. Whose your friend?"

"My wife's friend."

Gibbs, this is Alderman Phelan."

"Of the Eighth," amended Phelan. "Only man to carry his ward last election runnin' independent. Pleased to meet you. Yes, sir, I ran independent, and I win, as Wainwright here can tell you. Horrigan's out against me this year, and he's got carried away by some fool idea that he can down me next campaign."

"Can he?" asked Gibbs politely.

"Can he?" roared Phelan, his close clipped hair a-bristle. "Can he? Can he?"

"You were the college hero—the man of the hour."

Alderman Phelan.

cheery Dick Horrigan down Alderman Jimmy Phelan? Well! Nothin' to it, son. When I'm through with Dick Horrigan he'll have worried himself so thin they'll have to wear glasses to shave him. I'll bury him so deep this fall that they'll never find him till they start diggin' a subway to China."

"You seem pretty confident," observed Gibbs.

"Confident? Why not? Why not, I ask you? Why wouldn't I be confident? Is there a voter in the ward—black, white, yellow or greenhorn—that I can't call by his first name and ask after all his children by name? Is there a voter in the ward I haven't staked to coal or outtings or ball or booze? Is there? If so, name him to me. Put a name to him. They're my friends twelve months of every year, not just at election time. Horrigan, indeed! Say, if he starts runnin' any man in my ward he'll have to sight him by a tree to see if he's makin' any progress or not. Horrigan, hey?"

"Come, come, alderman," interposed Wainwright. "Why don't you and Horrigan smoke the pipe of peace? Why?"

"The only pipe me an' Dick Horrigan will ever come together over will be a yard of lead pipe, an' my fist will be at one end of that an' his thick head at th' other."

"But," remonstrated Wainwright, "he is a strong man. Is it safe to fight him?"

"Why isn't it? He's got to come into the Eighth to lick me, and he'll be about as strong there as a barkeep's influence with the Prohibition party. Besides, I like a fight. I'm the original 'Stop, look and listen' signal at Trouble station. I—"

"As a personal favor to me, alderman," wheedled Mr. Wainwright in his most persuasive manner, "won't you make a friend of Horrigan?"

"I'd gladly oblige you by makin' a line, fashionable, rollickin' funeral of him, but friends—friends—"

"But if I asked him here to meet you

wouldn't you try to be cordial to him?"

"I sure would—as cordial as a bankrupt to a rent collector. He'd be as pretty near as welcome as a broken leg."

"I'm sorry you look at it that way, alderman, because I've asked him today."

"To come here? Quit your joshin'!"

"But he doesn't know he'll meet you."

"An' he'll never find it out, for I'm on my way. I'd sooner meet a p'rade from th' contagion hospital."

"Of course, if you're really afraid of him—"

"Afraid of him?" snorted Phelan, coming to a full stop at the door and then returning to the middle of the room. "Afraid of Dick Horrigan? Show me the man I'm afraid to meet and I'll meet him with pleasure just to show you it's a lie. As for—"

"Mr. Horrigan!" came the butler's announcement from the threshold.

The man who followed the announcement was one who carried in his bearing the chief reasons for his success. Tall, stout, square of jaw, square of brow, hard of mouth, he seemed to dominate his very surroundings and to exhale a rough forcefulness that carried all before it. His physiognomy was essentially that of the born fighter as well as leader—the man that neither gives nor asks quarter. From the days when as a ferry ticket seller he had laid the foundations of his later fortunes by "knocking down fares," up through his varied career as policeman, contractor, politician and boss, he had fought his way ever to the front by that same force, backed by a bulldog pluck, a genius for organization and a mentality wholly devoid of scruple and conscience.

It could not be said of Richard Horrigan that his morals were bad. He simply had no morals at all. By contact with men of higher culture than his own he had lost his early incorrectness and vulgarity of speech. His domineering roughness of manner he had no wish to lose. It was by far too valuable an asset.

"Good morning, Mr. Wainwright," began Horrigan, with a breezy familiarity, as he strode into the library, quite unabashed at finding himself in the presence of the dreaded financier king. "I'm a bit ahead of time, but—"

He stopped short, with a grunt of rage. His eyes had fallen on Phelan. Bristling like a plucky terrier at the onset of a mastiff, the alderman stood his ground, giving the boss glare for glare.

And so for a moment the enemies faced each other.

To be continued.

"Miss Hook of Holland," now in the fourth month of its engagement at the Criterion Theatre, will in two months end its New-York career for this year and begin a Spring and Summer season at Powers' Theater, Chicago.



Perry follows Miss Garrison from the room.

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