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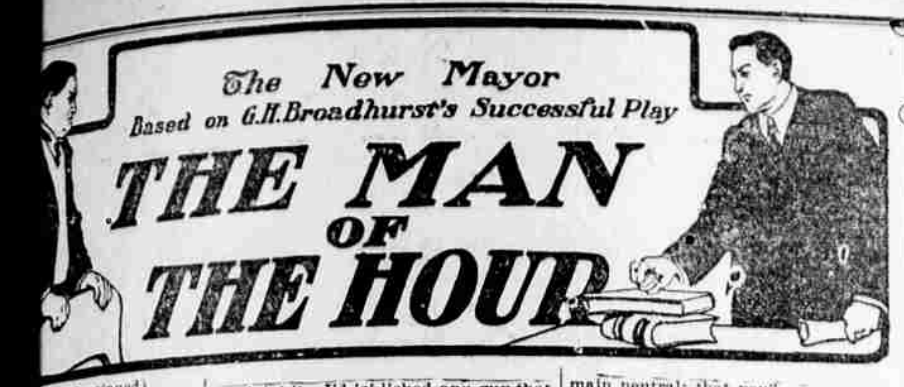
# THE MAN OF THE HOUR



X, Continued)

ed Phelan.
o, Cynthia?" pleaded
You can trust me, can't

cus. If you insist, I
ne. I"—
this minute than I've
my whole life!" smiled
gain clasping his sister
f you only knew, little
nged for this!"
an," announced Perry,
the corner of the door-
under a"—
short, open mouthed,
oless. Thompson and
in close embrace be-
Phelan looking on like
ature of a benevolent

ed from young Wain-
es grip and fell with
polished floor, its ivory
like icicles.

PTER XI.
f the breaking fan all
participants in the
reunion turned. For
nd or more they faced
d, dumfounded Perry
Here was an element
which neither Phelan
counted when giving
promise not to reveal
ey gradually realized
even the ready witted
s.
was first to break the

rved, with an assump-
n that was meant to
"you all seem quite
ind me! I'm sorry to
ute little love fest, but
here. Perhaps one of
what's happened to

exclaimed Cynthia,
I'll tell you all about
ls"—
squealed Perry, rage
s attempt at sarcasm.
aybe it might be just
ld condescend to ex-
promise to marry me,
later I find you in a
hug with this ugly
Phelan looking on as
eaten a canary! And
the gall to tell me
ne time!"
nthia in all the maj-
devotion, only to sur-
ng lady's face a look
violent struggle with
.
ll right, I guess not!"
nthia, you've mauled
oving heart, and I'll
myself by forgiving
ou," wheeling about
furious face to with-
Thompson's immo-
"as for you, I'm go-
of things to you the
rrison will have the
ay out of the room.
latives will have all
rting you out when
h you! Steal my
you, not ten min-

sed Phelan, shoving
good naturedly be-
unger men and link-
rry's. "Now you've
h of hot words off
'll be in better shape
n't you just a little

ttered Perry. "Who?

ter, and if you hol-
omp'ny I'll sure be
p by spankin' you.
here—no, over there
Miss Garrison—an'
Now, first of all,
be in love with this

ur measly business,

her to hitch up with

her and"—
d a lot of faith in
isted the alderman,
way she's"—
mused Phelan as
my young days if I
le beauty like that
n me I'd 'a' thought
Lucky Jim. I'd"—
rupted Perry hotly.

continuing in the
ologue:
'a' seen from her
gh head could see
s; that she had a
watermelon an' as
t an' as warm as a
h fire—well, if I'd
ot wise to the gor-
that same heart was
ull of love for my
skate self I'd 'a'
n knees an' sent
rs to be allowed to
never, never wake

this time Perry did
e half audible

sense to know that
those couldn't be
double cross the
r life depended on

her doin' it. I'd 'a' licked any guy that said she could, an' if I'd seen her kissin' another man I'd 'a' punched myself on the jaw an' called myself a liar. That's what Jimmy Phelan of the Eighth would 'a' done. An' "—

"Say," broke in Perry in a curiously subdued voice. "These eyes of mine do funny things sometimes. I'll bet $9 they played a joke on me just now. And even if they didn't I don't believe 'em. Cynthia, I'm dead stuck on you! You're all right even if you did happen to be acting a trifle eccentric a few minutes ago. You can explain or not, as you like. If you'll just say you love me, that's ace high with yours truly."

He slipped an arm about her waist as he spoke, awkwardly seeking to atone for his recent anger. The secretary looked at them for an instant, then said briefly:

"You can tell him, Cynthia. He's a good fellow. Come on, alderman. I think you and I still have something to say to each other."

Cynthia and Perry drifted away toward the conservatory again, quite oblivious of the others, while Phelan and the secretary made their way to a deserted alcove off the ballroom.

* * * * * * *

"I've been looking all over for you, Mr. Bennett," called Judge Newman, hurrying out through the chain of anterooms as Alwyn wandered out of the ballroom into the foyer a few moments later.

"Anything important?" asked Bennett, pausing in his stroll and greeting the older man cordially. He had known the judge as long as he could remember and had always had a decided liking for the pompous henpecked little dignitary. Surrounded as he was by political intrigue, heartache and association with rogues, the harassed young man rather welcomed the variety promised by a chat with his old friend of his boyhood.

"Anything important, judge?" he repeated. "Or are you just taking pity on a lonely chap and giving him a chance to chat with you over old times?"

"Well," began the judge, his customary air of pompous nervousness tinged by an almost conciliatory manner, "I would like to have a little business talk with you if you don't mind discussing work at a ball."

*He slipped an arm about her waist as he spoke.*

"Not at all. I've had the honor of dancing with three of your daughters this evening, and the least I can do is to repay such pleasure by"—

"Did you, really?" beamed the judge, on whom the unmarried state of his four fast aging girls rested heavily. "I'm sure Mrs. Newman will be pleased. But this business matter. You—you won't misunderstand me"—

"Of course not," replied Alwyn heartily. "You and I are too old friends, judge, to"—

"I hope so; I hope so," conceded Newman, with growing anxiety in his tone. "You see"—

"I see you have some trouble coming to the point," said Alwyn, pitying the judge's evident discomfiture, "and I'm sorry you feel so. You were my father's friend, and I like to think of you as one of my own best friends. There surely should be no hesitation in asking anything in my power to grant."

Thus emboldened Newman blurted out:

"I—we—that is, seems to me you have been a little hard upon this Borough franchise bill, if you don't mind my saying so, Bennett. Couldn't you let up on them now?"

"Why, no, judge, I can't," replied Bennett, still failing to connect Newman with the Wainwright-Horrigan clique and attributing the judge's interest in the matter to an amateur's love of dabbling in politics. "I can't let up on that fight," he continued. "All perpetual franchises are wrong, and this particular franchise bill is rotten to the core. In sheer justice to my oath of office I must fight it."

"My boy," said the judge in a fatherly manner that he had often found successful in argument, "I was in politics long before you were born, and I'm speaking for your own good when I say I deeply regret the stand you've taken in this matter. You objected to the bill in its original form. Almost every change you demanded has been made in it. As the gentlemen who asked me to speak to you said"—

He checked himself a minute too late. The narrowing of Bennett's eyes and the vanishing of the friendly light in the young man's face warned Newman he had made a fatal error.

"So you come to me as an emissary, not as a friend," said Bennett slowly, "and the gentlemen' you come from"—

"Are the men who represent all that can make or break your career—capital and political organization."

"In other words, Wainwright and Horrigan?"

"Yes. All they ask is that you remain neutral; that you"—

"That I look the other way while they rob the city?"

"I am an old man, Bennett," evaded the judge, trying another tack, "and I've seen one rash step wreck many a bright career, just as this will wreck yours. Never antagonize wealth and the organization. The public for whom you sacrifice yourself will forget you in a month. Capital and politics never forget."

"I am not catering to the public. I am acting as my own conscience"—

"But this is stubbornness, not conscience. All you have to do is to remain neutral. If you do this I am authorized to promise you—now, listen—to promise you the nomination for governor when your term as"—

"That's the bait, is it?" cried Alwyn angrily. "If I consent to betray my trust I'll get the governorship. The bribe is golden, and I don't wonder at Horrigan for offering it. The only thing that surprises me is that he should have chosen such a man as you for his lackey and go-between."

"'Lackey!' 'Bribe!' 'Go-between!'" echoed the judge in real indignation. "How dare you, sir? This"—

"Isn't it a bribe," insisted Alwyn, "and weren't you the man chosen to offer it? It will do you no good to bluster or grow indignant. In your heart you know the words I used were deserved. The governorship offer was a bribe, pure and simple, and worthy the modern highwaymen who made it, but that you, a judge—a former friend of my own blameless father—that you should come to me on such a vile errand turns me sick. Heaven help justice and right when our judges can be controlled by a political boss and a roll of bills! That's all! I don't care to go further into the subject!"

Bennett walked away, leaving the little judge to stare after him, pink with wrath, speechless with amazement. In all his sixty years no man had thus laid bare to Newman his own heart, stripped of its garments of respectability and self deception. And, as usual in such cases, now that the truth had been driven home to him, Newman wrathfully denounced it, even to himself, as a lie.

Still flushed and incoherent, he wheeled to face a trio who were just returning from the supper room. They were Dallas, Gibbs and Wainwright.

"Hello!" exclaimed Wainwright in surprise. "What's the matter with you, judge? Are you ill?"

"If—if Mrs. Newman should come to know of this," sputtered the judge, glaring from one to the other, "she"—

"To know of what?" queried Gibbs. "What has happened?"

"Happened?" fumed Newman. "I have been insulted—grossly, vulgarly insulted!"

"Insulted, judge?" repeated Dallas. "By whom?"

"By Alwyn Bennett!" snapped the judge. "Outrageously"—

"Impossible!" exclaimed Dallas. "There must be a mistake somewhere. Mr. Bennett is too well bred to insult any man, much less a man so much older than"—

"A gentleman, is he? I should not have believed it. He has insulted me most"—

"I'm not surprised," observed Wainwright.

"I am," announced Dallas.

"Naturally," sneered Wainwright. "If you can remain on speaking terms with him after his abominable treatment of me you can easily overlook any other brutality of his."

"Tell us about it, judge," interposed Gibbs, seeking to avert any further clash between uncle and niece.

"I went to him," began Newman, "bearing a request from—from"—

The judge paused. It was not wholly easy to present matters to this honest eyed young girl in such a way as to bring her in his way of thinking. But Wainwright felt no difficulty. His shrewd brain caught at a means of turning the affair to account.

"You see, Dallas," the financier broke in, with a warning glance to Newman, "I begged the judge to intercede for me with Bennett, to ask him to bury the hatchet and let us be friends again for the sake of old times. I thought Judge Newman's age and his high office would compel a certain respect even with a man of Bennett's character. But I was wrong, and I am sorry, judge, for the unjust humiliation I caused you."

"I don't understand," said Dallas, looking in bewilderment from one to the other. "Judge, my uncle sent you to make overtures of peace? And Mr. Bennett refused to"—

"He not only refused, but called Mr. Wainwright a highwayman and"—

"But why?" demanded Dallas.

"He pretended to misunderstand what I said about the conditions."

"Oh, it was a conditional offer, then? I thought"—

"Certainly there were conditions," cut in Wainwright, again coming to the emissary's rescue. "I asked that he take a position of neutrality in regard to this Borough bill. Simply neutral, mind you. Not to change his attitude in its favor, or"—

"That was a splendidly fair offer!" cried Gibbs enthusiastically.

"So it seemed to me," agreed Newman, "but Bennett would not listen when I tried to point out his proper line of duty. He called me a go-between and"—

"Even after you told him we were granting practically all the concessions he had asked in the bill?" queried Gibbs.

"Yes," said Newman. "He must have some motive behind it all. I can't"—

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Dallas. "What ulterior motive could he have?"

"That is more than I know positively," returned the judge mysteriously.

"But I do," declared Wainwright, pointing at Dallas. "There are the reasons!"

"I?" exclaimed Dallas, incredulous. "Explain, please."

"Willingly," replied her uncle, "if you'll give me a fair hearing. Bennett is in love with you. He knows Gibbs also wishes to marry you. He knows, too, that Gibbs' fortune depends on the success of the Borough franchise. If the bill is beaten, Gibbs will be practically ruined and thus in no position to marry. We've known all along of this reason of Bennett's for fighting our bill, but Gibbs forbade me to tell you. He was afraid you might think he"—

*"How dare you, sir?" said the judge.*

"I don't believe one word of it!" cried Dallas, her big eyes ablaze. "Alwyn Bennett could not stoop to such a thing."

"No?" said Wainwright. "Then you probably will refuse to believe what I am about to tell you now. I considered Borough stock a safe investment, and I put all your money and Perry's in it. Bennett knows this, and in spite of the knowledge he is trying to kill the franchise even on the certainty of beggaring you and Perry along with Gibbs. If only he can ruin Gibbs he cares nothing about making you and Perry paupers too. That is the sort of man you are defending against your own uncle. I have just learned besides that he has secretly, through his brokers, sold large blocks of Borough stock short. Thus his veto that ruins us will make him a very rich man."

"It isn't true!" affirmed Dallas in dogged certainty. "Mr. Gibbs, do you confirm this story of my uncle's?"

"Please leave me out of this, Miss Wainwright," answered Gibbs gently. "I prefer to say nothing to prejudice you. When I fight I fight fair."

"Even at the cost of all your money," amended Wainwright. "Gibbs, this is carrying your sense of honor to an absurd point. And Bennett will"—

"Pardon me," broke in Alwyn, entering the foyer and going up to Dallas. "I'm a little late for our dance. I was detained by"—

"Alwyn!" exclaimed Dallas in relief. "I'm so glad you came here just when you did. Now we can clear this up in a word."

"Clear what up?" queried Bennett, glancing about in suspicion at the three silent men.

"You know Mr. Gibbs is favored in the Borough Street railway affair," began Dallas. "He told you so at your office that day we were there. Well"—

"Yes, but don't let's discuss business tonight," replied Bennett. "This is our dance, and"—

"Wait, please. You knew his fortune was largely tied up in Borough stock,

*Charles Wainwright.*

but here is something you didn't know. My uncle says my money and Perry's is all invested in that stock and that if you defeat the bill we will be dependent on Mr. Wainwright's charity. If that is true, you didn't know it, did you?"

Her voice was almost tremulous in its eager, confident appeal, but Bennett forced himself to answer:

"Yes; it is true, and I knew it."

The eager glow died from her eyes, leaving a look of dawning horror.

"And, knowing this—knowing Perry and I shall be made paupers by your action—you still insist on"—

"On opposing the bill? Yes. I am sorry, but it is my duty."

"Duty!" sneered Wainwright. "Your 'duty' was done when you vetoed the bill. That act made your position clear and showed the public how you regarded the measure, so why go on fighting it after"—

"I won't discuss this with you, Mr. Wainwright," interrupted Bennett. "We already understand one another, you and I."

"My uncle says," pursued Dallas, "that you made your broker secretly sell Borough stock short, knowing the deal would enrich you. Won't you even deny this?"

"No."

"You realize what all this foolish stubbornness must mean to me—to all of us," continued Dallas, "and you still persist in your opposition?"

"I must," said Bennett. "I can't turn back. Oh, Dallas," he added, dropping his voice till none but she could hear, "can't you trust me—only till Friday? I'll come to you on Saturday morning and tell you the whole miserable story. I only ask you to wait until then. Please"—

"I see no need of waiting for an explanation," retorted Dallas aloud. "I understand everything."

"But you don't understand!" insisted Alwyn. "I"—

"I understand only too well," repeated Dallas. Checking his reply and ignoring the anguished appeal in his eyes, she turned to Gibbs.

"I have kept you waiting long for your answer, Mr. Gibbs," she said, speaking in a level, firm, emotionless voice. "I am prepared to give it to you now—publicly. You have often asked me if I would be your wife. My reply is, 'Yes.'"

"Dallas!" gasped Bennett in horrified surprise.

(Continued Next Friday.)

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