

The New Mayor  
Based on G.H. Bradhurst's Successful Play

# THE MAN OF THE HOUR



CHAPTER XII.

BENNETT sat in his own home in the big Bennett house that remained as the last landmark of middle nineteenth century fashion which had given a neighborhood long since the buildings and apartment was late. An hour and a half since the young mayor had returned from the city hall. The house and even the usually busy streets were wrapped in the quietude of the night. The stars were dimly visible through the gray of the twilight. Alwyn had made his evening toilet, and he had been sitting on the deck before the door, looking up the specifications for both jobs, and I turned them over to the old engineering firm of Morris & Cherrington. You know the firm, perhaps. If you don't, you can look them up. They don't belong to the organization; they're the best experts in their line, and they can't be juggled with."

"I know them. Go on."

"I paid them a fancy sum to go over those specifications and then examine the library and the aqueduct and see if they were up to the mark or if the city had been cheated by the Bennett Contracting company. I had a strong idea I was right, but I wouldn't speak till I had the proof. When I got home after the ball tonight I found the Morris & Cherrington report waiting for me. I brought a copy of it along with me."

"Well," asked Bennett indifferently, "what then?"

"Here's the copy of the report. Look it over for yourself. The crookedest job ever pulled off in this city! Third rate material, when the material called for in the specifications was used at all. Granite shell filled with mortar instead of solid granite; foundations barely half the depth called for; inferior tiles in place of freestone ones; cheap, crumbly iron and steel instead of first quality—oh, there's fifty such substitutions and frauds! It's the rawest, damnest job I ever heard of. If any of the organization tried it now, always the men who did it would be wearing stripes in a week. Graft, hey? Why, your father was the boss grafter of the century, the star graft getter of the bunch! He!"

"Hush! For God's sake, hush!" pouted Alwyn. "My mother sleeps only a few rooms beyond. I—"

"What do I care?" roared Horrihan in triumph. "Let everybody hear! The whole world is going to hear it unless that Borough franchise bill goes through. Beat that, and every paper in the country will have that report to publish. Stop your fight against us and the report is buried. That goes!"

See? Now, do as you please about the bill. You're a fine man to preach about graft, you are! The very roof over your head, the clothes on your back, were bought with graft money!"

Bennett scarcely heeded the coarse insult, nor did he note Horrihan's grunt of good-by and the clump of his departing feet on the stairs. The young man sat, lost, hopelessly, horror gripped, his eyes running mechanically over the closely typewritten pages of the engineer's report. Outsider as he was in matters of practical business, Alwyn could see that Horrihan had in no way exaggerated the document's contents. He knew, too, that the firm of engineers who had drawn up the report were the foremost of their sort and above all shadow of suspicion.

Little by little the numbness lifted from his brain, and in its place crept a horrible conviction of the truth. His father—the gallant young soldier who had won a nation's applause in the civil war—the man who, poor and unaided, had built up a fortune against keenest competition and had earned a reputation for sterling probity which had never been the delight and model of his son—this was the man whom a low blackguard like Horrihan now had the right to revile—a man apparently no better than the boss himself—than any dishonest heeler in the organization!

And, as if it were not enough that the idol of a lifetime were hurled, crushed and defiled, from its bright pedestal, the family name must next be dragged through the mire of political filth and ill repute and the dead man's memory forever blasted. Either that or his son must withdraw from the gallant fight he was waging against civic corruption, for that Horrihan would carry out his threat and blazon forth to the world the story and proofs of the elder Bennett's shame Alwyn had no doubt. With all his faults the boss was a man of his word.

"Stop your fight against us," Horrihan had said, "and the report is buried."

Yes, the boss was a man of his word. Even Bennett admitted that. He would fulfill his promise in either event.

Listlessly Alwyn began to review the case. On the one side a perhaps Quixotic fight for an abstract principle—a fight whose reward was political death, loss of the woman he adored, a family shame that might crush his fragile old mother to the very grave. On the other, wealth, honor, love, the Governorship, a future happy and glorious.

Was he not a fool to estimate? He! He had not saved his conscience sufficient by retreating the Borough franchise bill? Had he the right to bring this new shame upon his mother's gray head? Where lay his highest duty?

The soft rustling of silk and a hand laid in light caress upon his head aroused the miserable man from his reflections.

Bennett looked up to see his mother standing beside him. She had thrown on a wrapper and in slippers feet had stolen noiselessly into the study.

"I was awakened by voices," she explained. "I thought I heard some one talking excitedly in here. Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing dear," he answered gently, drawing the little old lady affectionately down to a seat on his knee and smiling manfully into her sleep flushed face; "nothing is the matter. Only a business call."

"A business call at 2 o'clock in the morning!" she exclaimed. "Dear boy, you are working too hard. Your father never brought his business worries and work home. He always left them at the office. Can't you do the same? You'll wear yourself out."

"My father"—began Bennett, but the name choked him.

"You are growing to be so much like him," went on Mrs. Bennett fondly. "And it makes me so happy that you are. Your splendid fight against that infamous Borough bill, for instance. How proud he would have been of that! It is just the sort of thing he himself would have done in your place. He was surrounded with wicked and dishonest men just as you are. But through it all he remained true, honorable, incorruptible. What a grand heritage for my son! He—Alwyn!" she broke off, alarmed, "why do you look at me that way? I never saw such a look in your eyes before. Are you ill? Has something happened that you are keeping from me?"

"No, no," evaded Bennett. "I only—"

"You had a caller here before I came in," pursued the mother, refusing to abandon the cleft to which her womanly intuition had led her. "He brought you bad news? Tell me, dear! I'm your mother, and I love you."

"You are making my course more difficult for me by asking such questions, mother," he answered wretchedly, "and I—"

"I only want to help you, Alwyn. I can't bear to see you miserable. A woman's wit and a mother's love are often a combination that can solve problems beyond even the wisest man's powers of logic. Let me help you."

"I was trying to make up my mind," vaguely replied Bennett, sorely distressed by her pleading, "whether a man ought to follow his conscience, even if it leads to heartbreak for those he loves, or whether he ought to let conscience go by the board for once and protect the happiness of his loved ones."

"Alwyn! How can you hesitate a second over such a question. One must do right, no matter what the consequences."

"I don't know about that," he said moodily.

"You know it perfectly well. It is what your father would have advised and—"

"But, Alwyn, you surely are not making yourself unhappy over a mere supposititious case?"

"Well," he continued, "let us take a 'mere supposititious case' if you like. Suppose, for instance, that a man holding a position of trust had had a father whose memory he honored and revered as I do my own father's—"

"Yes?" prompted Mrs. Bennett as he paused.

"Suppose some one tempts him to betray his position of trust, even as I have lately been tempted, and threatens in case of his refusal to make public certain facts which would prove his dead father to have been a scoundrel. Now, what should the man do? Should he let his father's sacred memory be trampled in the mud, let his duty go by default and save?"

"It would be an awful responsibility to decide such a question," said Mrs. Bennett, with a little shudder, "but there could be only one reply."

"And that is?"

"He must do his duty, be the results what they may."

"You really think so?"

"There can be no doubt. Right is right and—"

"It shall be as you say," groaned Alwyn.

"What?" queried Mrs. Bennett, startled at the despair in his voice. "Do you mean it is an actual case? Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

Bennett nodded.

"Oh, the poor, poor fellow!" she sympathized. "What a terrible position for him! It was he, perhaps, that I heard talking to you in here just now. No wonder he seemed excited! The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children even unto the third generation."

"It is something less hard on the children than on the wives," mused Bennett, half to himself.

"The wives? Your friend has a mother living? That makes it doubly harder. Oh, my son, every day I thank God in all humility that my husband lived so blameless a life and left so honored a name! How grateful you and I both ought to be!"

"It is easy enough to decide for some one you have never seen," retorted Bennett almost rudely, "but suppose the dishonest man in my story had been your father and—"

"I refuse to suppose anything of the sort!" interrupted his mother indignantly, rising to her feet. "I wonder that you can speak so! How can you suggest so horrible a thing?"

"Just a thoughtless, tactless speech of mine. That's all," lied Alwyn. "It's very late. You'll have a headache, I'm afraid. Won't you go to bed?"

"Yes, it is late, and I'm keeping you up. Good night, dear. I wish your friend—"

She checked herself suddenly with a little gasp. Bennett, glancing up to

gan's reasons for his present activity. He recognized that his prestige as boss was at stake—that in case of failure his hold on the organization would be considerably weakened, perhaps almost so much shaken as to permit Pelian to fulfill his own absurd threat to tear him down from his eminence. For the whole organization was viewing with breathless interest the duel between Horrihan and the youthful mayor the boss had "made." In such circles a beaten man commands scant respect.



Cynthia Garrison.

her, saw that her eyes were riveted on a bit of pasteboard lying on the corner of his desk directly beneath the reading lamp.

It was Horrihan's card.

Slowly the mother's gaze shifted from the card to her son. From her face the color had been crushed by some swift emotion that left it very old, pale and sunken.

"Mr. Horrihan!" she murmured. "It was he who was your visitor tonight? Surely he isn't the sort of a man to care about his father's reputation for honesty, he?"

"You're tired, mother," interrupted Bennett in haste. "Won't you—"

"Wait!" she panted. "His visit here—Alwyn!" her voice rising to a wall of panic stricken appeal. "Did—did that man dare to hint anything against your father? Tell me the truth! I have a right to know. Did he?"

Alwyn bowed his head in silence.

"Tell me what he said!"

"He said," muttered Bennett, almost incoherently, "he said my father made his fortune—by—graft!"

"And you thrashed him and threw him out of the house?" she cried, her old eyes ablaze.

"No."

"Alwyn!"

"He—he proved what he said!"

"It is a lie! A wicked, abominable lie!"

"It is the truth, mother. Would I have told you such a thing—would Horrihan have left this room alive—if it were not true?"

A silence—dreadful in its intensity—fell over the room. Alwyn dared not look at his mother. At last she spoke: "I must know more. I refuse to believe one word. You spoke of proofs. What are they?"

Without a word, Bennett handed her the report left by Horrihan. For a time silence brooded over the study, broken only by the occasional turning of a page of the report. Then, after what seemed to Alwyn an eternity of waiting, the document slid to the floor.

Bennett glanced at his mother. She was standing rigid, her face cold and hard as granite.

"Horrihan has ferreted this out," he said, not daring to draw nearer or proffer comfort to the woman whom the boss' disclosure had turned to stone. "He has secured the proofs and says he will publish them broadcast unless I withdraw my opposition in the Borough franchise matter. If I let that bill pass, Friday he will burn the report, and—"

"There is only one thing to do," interposed the mother, speaking with slow decision, her voice as cold and colorless as her face. "Right must prevail, no matter what—"

"Mother!" cried Alwyn, trembling. "You advise me to— You advise me to—"

"I do not advise, I command. Do right!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE momentous Friday had arrived; the day when the famous—or infamous—Borough Street railway bill in its amended form was to come up for the aldermen's consideration.

Every paper in the city devoted columns to the situation. Everywhere it was known that the "boy mayor" was fighting with all his might the bill he had already vetoed. Equally well was it understood that Horrihan was making the battle of his whole career in behalf of the measure. If he could induce his "solid thirteen" aldermen to stand firm and could maintain his hold on Roberts for the fourteenth, all would be plain sailing and the bill would pass by a two-thirds vote in spite of the mayor's veto.

More than the mere bill and its price for it were included in Horri-

gan's reasons for his present activity. He recognized that his prestige as boss was at stake—that in case of failure his hold on the organization would be considerably weakened, perhaps almost so much shaken as to permit Pelian to fulfill his own absurd threat to tear him down from his eminence. For the whole organization was viewing with breathless interest the duel between Horrihan and the youthful mayor the boss had "made." In such circles a beaten man commands scant respect.

The board of aldermen were in session in the city hall. Of the antechamber of the great room where they met was a small, snugly furnished apartment, first of a series of similar rooms that stretched away, with connecting doors, to the far end of the main corridor. This place, with the room adjoining, had once been the comptroller's office. Of late, however, that official had changed his quarters and the room nearest the antechamber had been appropriated by Horrihan himself as a sort of unofficial snuggery, where he could sit at ease and transact business at close quarters whenever the organization's secret interests demanded his presence at the city hall.

Here, his whereabouts known only to his intimate and personal lieutenants, the boss was wont to sit at ease, like some fat, rubicund spider in the center of a web of intrigue, and issue his orders or plans of campaign. Some of these were carried by word of mouth through the anteroom into the aldermanic chamber. Others he transmitted by means of a telephone that stood ready on the center table, before which his great easy chair was always placed.

Around this table as the board of aldermen were about to convene on the fateful Friday of the Borough bill's final consideration sat three men—Wainwright, Gibbs and Horrihan. The former, in spite of his habitual steady coolness, was plainly uneasy. Gibbs made no effort to deny his anxiety. His eyes were bloodshot, his manner abstracted and his nerves evidently strung to breaking point. Horrihan alone of the trio had abated not one jot of the colossal calm and brutal power that were part and parcel of the man's mighty character.

"When will our bill come up, do you suppose?" asked Gibbs, breaking a brief silence.

"In half an hour or so probably," answered Horrihan, glancing at his watch. "I thought it was better for us to get here ahead of time."

"Half an hour," fumed Gibbs, "and neither Ellis nor Roberts here yet! Suppose they don't get here on time?"

"They will," granted Horrihan placidly.

"Do you think it is possible either of them has come yet?" went on Gibbs, with a glance at the antechamber door.

"No."

"How do you know? Perhaps—"

"Williams would have told me. He knows where I'm to be found."

"You're sure Ellis and Roberts will show up?"

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"In good time."

"But suppose they don't?" insisted Gibbs nervously. "What then?"

"Why, if they don't, then they won't. What do you suppose?" snapped Horrihan. "What's the matter with you, anyhow? Are you looking for a museum job as the 'human question mark'?"

"Gibbs is naturally nervous," explained Wainwright. "He's not so old at this game as you and I, Horrihan, and we must make allowances."

"Nervous?" granted the boss. "I should say he is! Just look at that cigar I gave him. He's been chewing it as if it was a sausage. That's no way to treat a fifty cent cigar, man! Here, try another, and see if you can't smoke it instead of eating a free lunch off it. Nothing like a good smoke to steady your nerves. If—"

(Continued Next Friday.)

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