The Man of The Hour

[Continued from page two]

"No, I'm afraid the fault was mine," protested Dallas. "I'm a little tired, I think. May I sit here with you a few minutes, Mrs. Bennett?" she added as Gibbs bore Cynthia away for their dance.

"You don't seem very fond of Mr. Gibbs, Perry," observed Mrs. Bennett, noting young Wainwright's scowl of impotent wrath.

"Not fond enough to make me want to live in the same world with him. Mrs. Bennett, you're too pretty to be just a chaperon. Come and dance this two-step with me. Please do!"

He nodded with vast significance toward Dallas and Bennett, and the little old lady, catching the idea, accepted with alacrity.

"I'm so glad even to get this minute with you," began Alwyn when he and Dallas were alone. "It's so long since"—

"Since you came to see me? Yes, but that is your fault. Alwyn, why haven't you called since I came home?"

"Don't you know why, Dallas?"

"No."

"Are you certain you don't know?"

"I—I don't know absolutely," she faltered. "Oh, there are so many things I don't know absolutely!"

"What is one of them?"

"For one thing, you and I used to be such good friends and"—

"That is past," said Alwyn firmly. "There can be no talk of mere friendship between you and me, Dallas. I must be everything or nothing to you. Tonight I can't speak as I want to, but I can in a very few days. Trust me till then. You know I am fighting Mr. Wainwright's interests and"—

"Yes," she replied bitterly. "My uncle gives me no chance to forget that."

"Don't think I'm fighting him for my own amusement! I must oppose him or else give up a fight that I set out to win. And I mean to win it!"

"That's the same old fighting spirit I used to try so hard to awaken in you," said Dallas, a faint note of admiration in her rich voice. "I told you once it always took a blow to arouse you. That blow has evidently been struck."

"It has been struck!" he acquiesced, with a sad ghost of a smile.

She saw the haggard lines about his mouth, the tired look in his eyes, and a lump came into her throat. She leaned forward impulsively, but before she could speak he had unknowingly thrown away the golden moment by continuing:

"I must win this fight even though it affects others besides Mr. Wainwright. Even if"—

"What others do you mean?"

"Oh, I can't explain now. After Friday I can. On Saturday may I come to see you and tell you everything?"

"Why not now?"

"There are obstacles that"—

"Tell me what they are!" she begged.

"I can't. All I can tell you now is that I love you. I love you above all the world, sweetheart, and"—

But fate in the dual guise of Horrigan and Wainwright intervened. The financier and the boss, seeking some quiet spot for a chat, strolled through the foyer, where Horrigan on sight of Bennett halted with a glower of dislike, which he took no pains to conceal.

CHAPTER IX.

THE moment of strained silence that ensued upon Horrigan's entrance was broken by the irrepressible Perry, who, having rescued Cynthia from Gibbs at the close of their dance, was escorting her triumphantly from the ballroom.

"This is my dance," he remarked happily to Alwyn as he came up, "and we're going to sit it out. If Mrs. Bennett in her capacity of chaperon should ask for Cynthia, you can tell her we're going into the glass house to stroll among the romantic vegetables."

And he departed with his prize in the direction of the conservatory. The moment's interruption had sufficed for Wainwright to whisper an admonitory word in Horrigan's ear. Dallas, too, fearing a clash, took Bennett's arm.

"It's so warm in here!" she murmured. "Perhaps we can find better air in one of the other rooms. Shall we try?"

"Wainwright," exclaimed Horrigan, as the portieres closed behind the mayor and girl, "I don't like that! Is your niece on his side or with us?"

"I don't know," answered Wainwright discontentedly, "and I don't like to force an issue by asking her. It doesn't especially matter, I suppose. In any case, I can trust her."

"You're in luck!" sneered Horrigan. "That makes two people you say you can trust—first your secretary, Thompson, and then— Hello!" he broke off as a swarthy middle aged man hurried in. "Looking for me, Williams? What's up?"

The newcomer was visibly excited, and at first glance Horrigan had seen that something was amiss.

"What's up?" repeated the boss.

"Ellis has gone—deserted!" cried Williams.

"Ellis!" echoed Wainwright in dismay, for the man of whom Williams spoke was one of the aldermanic "solid thirteen" on whom Horrigan counted. The boss made no comment, but waited impatiently for his henchman to continue.

"Ellis has gone," repeated Williams. "He left a note for me saying his wife is very ill and the doctor's ordered him to take her south. So he can't attend Friday's meeting."

"Can't attend the meeting?" gasped Wainwright. "But everything depends on"—

"Oh, he'll be on hand, the cur!" growled Horrigan. "The rest are standing solid of course?"

"I think so," hazarded Williams, "but some of 'em are pretty scared. We've never had such a fight before as Bennett's putting up against us now, and"—

"I'll strengthen 'em up so as to knock out any weakening!" declared Horrigan confidently. "It's Ellis we've got to look after now. Go after him, Williams, on the first train south and haul him back. Have him here by Friday if you have to kidnap him. I'll stand for any damage or expense. Only see he's here for that meeting. It's up to you. Now jump!"

As Williams hastened toward the door Horrigan called after him:

"On your way out send word to Roberts that I want to see him here. Well, Wainwright," he resumed, turning back into the room, "it looks bad."

"Do you think"—

"I think we're in a tight place. If our aldermen found out about Ellis' quitting, there's no knowing how many of 'em would bolt. If we could only work Bennett!"

"Out of the question. He can't be turned."

"There's no man who can't be turned. I've one card up my sleeve yet that ought to land him. But I'd rather try something else first. I wish we could get a line on his price."

"He can't be bought! He"—

"Rot! Everybody can be bought. Only there's some that can't be bought with cash. I'm wondering what there is that'll buy him if money won't."

Gibbs, in search of an elusive partner, crossed the foyer and paused to greet them.

"What news?" he asked.

Wainwright surveyed the broker's well groomed figure with less approval than usual.

"You seem to be industrious enough tonight," said he. "It's a pity some of tonight's dancing energy couldn't have been devoted to your work this morning."

Gibbs flushed at the reproof in words and tone.

"I don't understand," he replied stiffly.

"Why didn't you notify me of the big block of Borough stock that was bought up just before noon?"

"I hadn't heard about it," answered Gibbs, with not quite all his customary assurance.

"Everybody else heard of it. You'll have to keep better tabs on the market than that if you're to be any use to us. Do you know who bought it?"

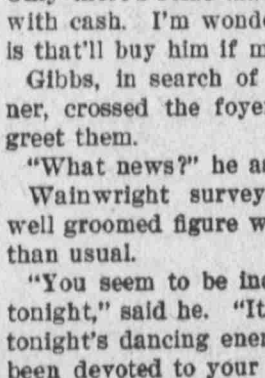
"No," returned Gibbs, with growing uneasiness. "Of course I don't. How should I know? What are you driving at?"

"This is what I'm driving at: Several big blocks of the stock have been unloaded on the market during the past few days and have been quietly snapped up. Somebody's evidently tailing on to our game. You don't know who?"

"I've told you twice that I didn't know," blustered Gibbs, masking his concern under a show of virtuous indignation.

The effort called forth all the astute young broker's nerve, for a certain shrewd scheme of his showed signs of falling through. By his original arrangement with Wainwright he was to have manipulated all the Borough stock purchases on the exchange floor and to receive 20 per cent of the profits on the condition that he invest not one dollar in the stock on his private account.

Having strong faith in the deal's success and having no equally strong incentive to keep faith with his partners, Gibbs had sought to swell his own profits by secretly buying up quantities of the stock for himself until every penny of his capital was involved. His troubled mind could not now determine whether or not Wainwright suspected him. Gibbs, while possessing all the ambition, selfishness and lack of conscience that go toward the making of a great financier, lacked the one chief essentials for the part—namely, a cold and unshaken nerve. It was this defect that now threatened to expose him.



"Fall through!" cried Gibbs, dismayed.

"Well," resumed Wainwright, as though dismissing the topic, "you should have made it your business to know who is doing this private buying. That's what we brought you into the deal for. Anyhow, the mysterious purchaser is liable to find himself in hot water before long."

"Why?" queried Gibbs in a voice he tried to make indifferent.

"Only because the deal will probably fall through."

"Fall through!" cried Gibbs, dismayed. "What do you— Why, you told me Mr. Horrigan could win over a fourteenth alderman, and that with his solid thirteen"—

"Yes," drawled Horrigan, who had been unobtrusively eying Gibbs from the moment of his entrance, "we had some such notion, as you say. But my 'solid thirteen' didn't happen to be as solid as he looked. He's bolted."

"Bolted! Then we—we will lose! We"—

"Say, Mr. Gibbs," observed Horrigan, "you seem to take this thing pretty hard for a man with only 20 per cent at stake. Mr. Wainwright stands to lose some millions. I'm interested to the extent of almost a million. Yet you don't see us getting pale and shaky, do you? If a man can't pay for the chips he has no right in a poker game. Brace up and act like a man, can't you? We haven't lost yet. I've sent after the fellow that bolted, and I think I can land the fourteenth alderman too."

"Good!" exclaimed Gibbs in wild relief. "And you'll do your very best to pull the deal through, won't you?"

"No!" snarled Horrigan in elephantine sarcasm. "I'm going to spend the time playing pingpong and diabolo with the kids or taking a course of lessons in fancy knitting. Oh, buck up, can't you, and quit acting like a baby! Judge Newman's out there on the other side of the ballroom. Chase over and tell him to come here."

Too confused to resent the boss' words, Gibbs meekly set out on his errand.

"That chap's got a streak of yellow a yard wide," commented Horrigan, gazing after him.

"Not as bad as that," replied Wainwright. "He's young and not used to reverses. You'll find he is game, all right, when it comes to a pinch. What did you want of Newman?"

"You'll see. Here he comes."

"You wished to speak to me, Mr. Horrigan?" piped the little judge, hurrying into the foyer. "Good evening, Mr. Wainwright. What a success the ball is! My daughters have been dancing all evening. And Mrs. Newman is so"—

"Never mind Mrs. Newman just now," broke in Horrigan. "There's something important I want you to do for me."

He spoke, as he always did to Newman, in the manner of one addressing an incompetent servant. The judge, for all his pomposity, deemed it wise to ignore the politician's mode of address.

"I want you to hunt up Bennett," went on the boss, "and persuade him to stop fighting the Borough franchise bill. Tell him"—

"Oh," gasped the judge in genuine alarm, "I really don't think I could presume to"—

"Yes, you can," contradicted Horrigan. "You can do it, and, what's more, you will. You don't feel shy about asking favors of me, and when it's the other way around you've got to come down or"—

"I know! I know!" protested the frightened little judge soothingly. "But you don't understand how"—

"I got you the nomination last fall. Are you going to be a white man or a welcher?"

"But I'm sure that Mrs. Newman"—

"To blazes with Mrs. Newman! Now listen to me. Go to Bennett and do what you can to make him keep his hands off our Borough bill. If he's difficult offer him, in my name, the nomination for governor next year. If you can get him—well, there's a vacancy next year in the supreme court and"—

"I'll do what I can," assented the judge. "I'm sure you are right, Mr. Horrigan, even if your way of putting matters is just a little ragged. I'll see Mr. Bennett tonight and use all the persuasion in my power. I'm quite sure civic welfare will be best served if he will cease his unseemly opposition to the Borough bill. Thank you, Mr. Horrigan. I'm very sure that Mrs. Newman"—

"I'm sure, too," cut in Horrigan. "Now run on. We're busy. Remember, now—the very next supreme court vacancy"—

"Do you really think he has any influence with Bennett?" asked Wainwright as the judge vanished.

"Can't do any harm to try. They're neighbors in the country and in the same crowd in society and all that. If it fails, I've another card that's even stronger. Roberts ought to be here by now. You found out about those notes of his?"

"Yes; both of them. One for $7,000, one for $15,000. Both secured by mortgaging his factory. Roberts can't meet them. They've been extended twice, though the security must have been fairly good or the Sturtevant Trust company wouldn't have lent"—

"Williams said you wanted to speak to me, Mr. Horrigan," said a nervous voice from the door, and a pale, middle aged man came forward. He wore worry's stamp between his perplexed eyes, and care had bent his narrow shoulders.

"Yes. Good evening, Roberts," replied Horrigan cordially. "See you later, Wainwright."

The financier took the hint and walked toward the ballroom, on his way out nearly colliding with Phelan, who was entering the foyer. At sight of Horrigan and Roberts together Phelan's eyebrows went upward, with a jerk, and he tiptoed out in the opposite direction as fast as his stout legs could carry him in search of Bennett. Meantime Horrigan had come directly to the point, as usual, in his appeal to Roberts.

"Look here, alderman," said he, "you've been trying for years to get through a park bill for your ward. Still want it?"

"Yes," returned Roberts. "My constituents are at me all the time about that park. They"—

"It would make your ward's property values go up 50 per cent, and it would make you solid there forever, hey?"

"Yes, but"—

"Introduce that bill again, and I'll guarantee it will go through."

"Are you in earnest?"

"There's my hand on it. Only, of course, it's understood that your park bill won't come up until after the Borough Street railway franchise is passed. Understand?"

"I'm afraid I do," said Roberts after a pause, "but I voted against that bill, and"—

"You voted against the bill in its original form," Horrigan interrupted reassuringly, "and you were right, too. It had a lot of clauses that you thought weren't square. But all those have been cut out."

"But I still"—

"But you'll be doing what's best for your own constituents by looking after their interests in the matter of the park. You'll be their hero for that. Of course if I wanted to put it another way I could remind you that your

Judge Newman.

business is in a bad way and that a friend of mine has bought up your notes at the Sturtevant Trust company and means to send them to you tomorrow. But that has nothing to do with the case. So I just"—

"I'm honest, Mr. Horrigan," faltered Roberts. "I"—

"Sure you're honest! That's why you'll have the courage to vote for the bill when you see it's been amended so as to be a good thing for the city. That's being honest, isn't it?"

"I—I suppose so. And the notes—the"—

"They'll be sent you by registered mail tomorrow if you want them. Do you?"

"Y-yes. That is, I"—

"That's settled, then. You've got a level head. Good night."

The boss strode out, a grim smile of victory on his big face, leaving Roberts standing confused, doubtful, his brain awhirl. How long the tempted alderman stood thus—oblivious to the music, his surroundings and all else—he could never remember, but a voice at his elbow brought him to his senses with a start that was followed by a thrill of fear as he wheeled and recognized the speaker.

CHAPTER X.

ROBERTS' eyes rested on the grinning, complacent features of Alderman Phelan. At the latter's side was Bennett.

"I was saying," remarked Phelan blandly, "that it's a fine ball, isn't it now, Roberts?"

"Yes," said Roberts hastily, preparing to move away. But Phelan buttonholed him.

"Stay an' swap talk awhile with his honor and me, Roberts," he begged.

"I'm in a hurry," began Roberts. "and"—

"Alderman Phelan has been trying to cheer me up a bit," said Bennett. "He knows I'm worried about the Borough bill's outcome. I wish Friday was past."

"Same here," chimed in Phelan. "An' you, Roberts?"

"I?" muttered the uncomfortable man. "Why?"

"It's Friday that the Borough bill comes up again," explained Bennett, as though imparting new information. "You will vote against it, of course, Mr. Roberts?"

"I'm not sure. You see, it's been altered so as to"—

"The alterations don't affect the main issue, and they can't change any

[continued on page six]

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