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HIS RISE TO POWER

"I'd like it," said Wash honestly. "Suppose," Murchell suggested, "you begin a campaign for delegates. We could use the delegates, even if we couldn't use you," he added thoughtfully.

The congressman smiled faintly. They discussed the matter at length. As Jenkins was leaving, his host remarked earnestly, "Hereafter consult only with Greene. Don't come here. I'm out of politics."

Neither gentleman smiled. When the Honorable Jenkins returned to Washington, he reluctantly admitted to an interrogative reporter: "No, I'm afraid the senator is in a bad way. I don't think he'll ever go back into politics."

Of John Heath you have never heard. Unhonored and unused until this hour, he has remained in that shadowy obscurity for which he was designed. And no man ever saw him.

It was at a crucial time for those whom this chronicle concerns when Jerry Brent and John Dunmende were marching from Dan to Beersheba and back and laboring with a patience worthy of larger results, to rally the slender hosts of reform; when Stephen Hampden was risking his all in one wild throw for vast fortune and Warren Blake was following that daring example; when the Consolidated Coal company was making many happy by declaring a dividend of 7 per cent.

In the kingdom things were awry. The rival monarch was thundering at the gates. Worse still, there was disaffection in the very source of dominion in the army. And the minister in power chose this hour to get drunk! Anxious glances were being cast toward the deposed minister in his self-exacted exile. Royal messengers were being sent scolding post haste to him to urge him, with fine unobscured irony, for the sake of just favor, to speak the word that would restore concord among the mutinous regiments. But the ominous silence continued unbroken.

At such a juncture, we say, John Heath stepped in to deflect the course of history.

Came to the exile, not many days after Miss Roberta, a messenger not under royal seal. Secretary, we may call him, to the new minister, having carried favor by desertion of the old. He was visibly perturbed and would not desert from his importunities until admitted to the presence of the exile. Even then, such was his feverish haste, as Miss Roberta had done, a vigor inconsistent with certain rumors rife. He plunged at once into the matter in hand.

"We've got Sherrod locked up in a room at the hotel. He's drunk as a lord and threatens to throw himself into the river!"

"Well—let him!" said Murchell, grimly heartless. "But," cried the messenger, "it may be something to bring on a revolution that will sweep us all—Sherrod, Parrott, me—you—off the face of the earth."

"I," responded Murchell calmly, "am out of politics and don't care. What do you want me to do?"

"Come with me to the capital, find what's wrong and straighten it out." "Go to Parrott."

"Parrott's a fourtusher. This is critical."

"I won't do it. It's trouble of your own making. Get yourselves out of it." The messenger sprang to his feet and began to pace the floor swiftly. He assumed to instruct a master. With wild gesticulation and passionate phrase he sketched the impending calamity. The times were ripe for a revolution. These mutterable foos, Dunmende and Brent, with their incessant creak about bosses and facts, were getting the people stirred up. There was trouble in the air—he, the speaker, could feel it. The organization was falling to pieces.

"Do you think," Murchell inquired calmly, "Sherrod's short in his accounts?"

"I don't know. There are books I can't see without exciting suspicion. And I can't get nothing out of him." The swift pacing ceased abruptly. The messenger confronted Murchell.

"Who," he demanded, "is John Heath?"

"I don't know," answered Murchell truthfully.

"Within less than two years he has received from the state more'n nine hundred thousand dollars for special services."

"Nine hundred thousand dollars. What is John Heath?"

The other, Sherrod, was slouched in a rocker by the table, head drooped forward on his breast and hands hanging inertly at his sides. The red rimmed eyeballs were half closed. Drunk evidently, and more than that. Occasionally his lips moved; senseless mutterings came from them.

Steps along the hall, and there was a guarded knock at the door. He opened a cautious crack, peeped out and then threw it open eagerly. Murchell and the messenger entered. Watkins seized Murchell's hand joyfully.

"Thank the Lord," he exclaimed, "I couldn't have stood it much longer." Sherrod seemed to hear the voice. He opened his eyes and stared at the newcomers glassily. Then a lightning flash of intelligence seemed to penetrate his stupor.

"Murchell!" He managed to stagger to his feet. Then a just wave of drunkenness swept over him. He fell sprawling, unconscious on the floor.

"He ought," said Murchell, "to have a Turkish bath."

CHAPTER XV. John Heath Makes Feint.

TEN hours later Sherrod opened his eyes. He started up, with a groan, and beheld the man who sat by the window. This man—Murchell—heard the movement and came to the bedside. He stood looking down pitilessly at the half-reclined sick man. Sherrod stared back, with bewildered, fearful eyes, for a moment. Then, with another groan, he fell back. His parted lips tried to frame a question, but nothing came of the effort save a dry, croaking sound.

Then Murchell spoke. "Who," he demanded, "is John Heath?"

A spasm of fear even more acute contracted Sherrod's face. "Wh—what do you know?"

"Who," Murchell repeated, still in the pitiless tone, "is John Heath?"

"Of which you're the receiving end?" Sherrod's lips formed a soundless "Yes."

"How much are you short?" "Nine hundred thousand dollars."

"What have you got to show for it?" "Some securities—oil stocks."

"Worth what?" "Three hundred thousand—about. I don't know—exactly."

"Where are they?" "In my private safe at the office."

Murchell turned sharply and left the room. Almost at once he was back, accompanied by Watkins. "Give Watkins the combination," he commanded.

There was another moment of hesitation, of inward struggle. But a great

fear was upon Sherrod, swallowing up even hate and anger. He mumbled the combination.

"Have you got that, Watkins? Then you and Paine fetch here all the securities in the safe. Everything you can find. Be quick."

Watkins obeyed, as promptly and unquestioningly as the soldier on the field of battle obeys his superior officer. As he went he found time to wonder how the man of instant decision, of crisp orders, was a useless victim of the decrepitude of age.

"Wh—what," Sherrod quavered, "are you going to do?"

Murchell shook his arm free. "I am going to get you out of the middle you have got yourself into, you!" He left the sentence uncompleted, as though he could think of no adequate epithet. Sherrod zapped foolishly, trying to comprehend the incomprehensible—the man above him, who least of all the world owed him services, would lift him over the impasse, around which he was appearing. Then suddenly he broke into tears and muddled haggard explanations, contradiction, gabbling, promises mingled disconnectedly.

Murchell listened in cold contempt. "You don't mean a word you say," he interrupted the flow at last. "You're only a coward frightened out of his wits. You'll be the same treacherous bound when it's over—I'm not doing it for you."

He turned and went out of the room, not to return until Watkins and Paine, the messenger, arrived with the securities.

An afternoon train, rolling down out of the hills into the flat lands, bore William Murchell to the city that had witnessed the last step in his overthrow. A cab took him, by appointment, to the home of Philip Wilder, where he lay overnight. "Philip Wilder was not a monarch, to be sure, but he was a prince of the blood, and he ruled over a province of street railways. Many things did this princely gentleman desire, and for them he was willing to pay—the least price that must be paid. He, like Miss Roberta and Watkins, was surrounded when he beheld, not a shuffling, harrassed shadow, but a man who showed the marks of age's buttering, yet was clear minded, hale and hearty, who had not forgotten how to drive a close bargain, who knew exactly what he wanted and who got it. So pleased was he by his discovery that the next morning, breaking a solemn promise to Murchell, he reported it to Sackett. "Richard," he declared, "is himself again."

But by that time Murchell was well on his way back to the capital.

A rumor that the puce great politician was on the train quickly spread among the passengers, and many of them found occasion to stroll past his seat. But there was no visible ripple of emotion to betray their curious eyes the swelling sense of triumph within him.

When, his energy tapped up by the sickness, the seriousness of which he did not yet realize, he had confronted Sackett and declared his purpose to quit, he had spoken in all truth; but, the operation over and strength creeping back into the body whose tissues austerer living had never derelictized, the hunger, the need for action asserted itself.

Hence he planned, not remissly to renege his old power and responsibility, but from his castle in the forest to make sudden, unexpected forays to harass those who had deprived him of his glory. Then came the opportunity to wreak the sweetest of all revenge, to save those who had thrown him over, to torture his enemy with the sense of inferiority and obligation, perhaps—the warrior soul leaped—to make of revenge also a lever to open the gates in the road back to supremacy.

Under the stimulus of sharp, successful action he felt almost the strength of his prime. Whirling wheel struck from rail an iron song of triumph in which his soul joined—the mad, exultant shout of the viking returning victorious.

But he found a Sherrod who had had time to think, to measure the situation, who had recovered his nerve. And of Sherrod this may be written: he was a great fighter, cunning and daring, conscienceless, proud, disloyal—yes—but even his treacheries were accomplished with a certain reckless grace and decision that gave them the seeming of the bora master's instinctive strategy. And he had what Murchell had not, a personal magnetism that often won faith even where interest failed; though he lacked what made Murchell great, inflexibility and self control. Coward he was not. Almost any man, beaten by the same knowledge of crime and imminent discovery, with so much to lose, would have suffered a lapse from courage. But the hour of cringing and weakness was past.

Murchell found him in the same hotel room, through the open windows of which a biting wind had swept the last trace of the fetid fumes of tobacco and whisky. Murchell carefully closed and locked the door and, without speaking, sat down across the table from him. Sherrod's eyes, cool, not defiant, but aggressive, menacing almost, locked with Murchell's steady ones.

"Well?" The voice was cool. "I went to Wilder," said Murchell, almost in a whisper. "He is selling your securities today at the market. He will send you the balance. Tomorrow a man will come with the cash."

"And in return?" Sherrod knew the price.

"He wants some charters in Adelpia and some traction legislation. He will explain in detail when you see him. I have promised him what he wants. You will see that he gets it."

"Yes. The balance—you say it is a loan. How am I to repay?"

"That is for you to say." Murchell paused, then added, "I understand banks are still paying for the privilege of state deposits."

"How much do Paine and Watkins know?"

"As much as I guessed." "I can keep their mouths shut."

Again silence, broken first by Sherrod. His lips twisted in a faint sneer. "Are you waiting for my gratitude? I have none. I'm sick still, but I'm not afraid, as I was yesterday, and I understand the situation. You haven't done this for me."

"Is there any reason why I should do it for you?"

Sherrod began to feel that he could no longer endure the other's contemptuous, relentless gaze—that, in spite of his will, his own was wavering. The coolness vanished. He almost blurted out his words.

"You came here expecting to gloat over me, didn't you? You think because you've caught me with the goods on you're a superior being. You needn't. Everything I am, Bill Murchell, you are. I s'pose when you were sick you had the parson around to pray over you, didn't you? When you were praying did you tell the parson how you got to be so rich?"

"At least," Murchell said quietly, "I didn't steal it from the treasury of the state."

Under the taunt Sherrod, seemed to

lose all hold on himself. He sprang to his feet. His face was convulsed. His voice and the pointing hand shook in a very hysteria of hate.

"You dare call me a thief? You! How about the market tips you got for your votes in the senate, the bribes you authorized to be given, the black mail you levied for your influence in the legislature? Maybe you called them legal fees? You a lawyer, when there isn't a business man in the country would trust you with a case?"

Into Murchell's eyes had come a steady gleam that in a single moment would have restored Sherrod to self control, but now was unheeded. But his voice continued cold, cuttingly contemptuous.

"Thought you'd come into this affair and use the knowledge as a club to bully me out of politics with, didn't you? Well, swing your club. I'm not afraid. I know why you did it, not for me, but for yourself. You're trying to sneak back into the game after you've been thrown out, and you know that this thing if it came out would kill your chances as well as mine. It would help nobody but that fool Dunmende, and by helping me you've made yourself an accessory. So then—crack your whip if you dare!"

Murchell got slowly to his feet. He spoke still in the cold, even voice that cut.

"Just why I have done this isn't important at present. I had a good many reasons, some, probably, that you are not qualified to understand. And I'm not trying to sneak back into the game I've never been out of it. As to whether I want or dare to swing my club that remains to be seen. You'll have to chance it, Sherrod."

Sherrod laughed, a harsh, snoring, vindictive laugh that must have carried into the adjoining room. "I'll chance it. You're not the kind of man in whose hands such knowledge is dangerous. And I know all about your game. Do you think I've been fooled by your pretense? I know all about Wash Jenkins' question, answer for delegates. I can be nominated governor even from behind the bars of the penitentiary."

Murchell was fully master of himself once more. "That," he remarked, "would be a fitting retribution for you. In the meantime, we'll put it out of your power to seek the nomination from that quarter."

He left the room abruptly, returning immediately with Watkins. He carefully closed the door behind them. Then he faced the two men.

"Watkins, it's fortunate that you're cashier in the treasurer's office."

Watkins agreed.

"Because from this minute I am state treasurer, Sherrod will be allowed to sign vouchers that I approve—that's all. You will report to me once a week in person. And not a voucher must be cashed until O. K.'d by me. You understand?"

Watkins looked at Sherrod, then back to Murchell. He nodded.

"Sherrod will do nothing to disturb this arrangement, if he tries—let me know, good day?"

He went out of the room, quietly closing the door.

CULTIVATE CHEERFULNESS.

There is no greater everyday virtue than cheerfulness. This quality in woman is like sunshine to the day or gentle renewing moisture to parched herbs. The light of a cheerful face diffuses itself and communicates the happy spirit that inspires it.

The sourest temper must sweeten in the atmosphere of continuous good humor. As well might fog and cloud and vapor hope to cling to sun illumined landscape as "the blues" and moroseness to combat jovial speech and exhilarating laughter.

There is no path but will be easier traveled, no load but will be lighter, no shadow on heart or brain but will lift sooner in the presence of a determined cheerfulness. It may at times seem difficult for the blippiest temper to keep the countenance of peace and content, but difficulty will vanish when we truly consider that sultry gloom and passionate despair do nothing but multiply thorns and thicken sorrow.

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Fancy requires much, necessity but little.—German Proverb

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