



BRIBED

By William Hamilton Osborne

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CHAPTER VII.—Continued

"I have since learned that Cradlebaugh turned heaven and earth to get Pemican to testify that no quarrel took place between you and Rafferty at Cradlebaugh's. I never could understand Pemican's holding out, or his attitude in that connection. There was that strange discrepancy at your trial, you may recall. I knew the pressure that was brought to bear on Pemican. Knowing it, I believed him honest—straight, until, finally, I found out his motive.

"Thornycroft knew the whole story; the records are public records. They are here. It was Thornycroft's duty, not mine, to communicate with you, I represent the people. I am not the counsel for the defense. But I see now, he was even afraid to let you know how it was. That's all."

Eloise, with flashing eyes, pressed forward. "And you?" she cried, pointing her finger at Murgatroyd.

Murgatroyd shrugged his shoulders, and still addressed Challoner.

"I closed Cradlebaugh's, when I found out; I had no trouble then, of course. And I set you free."

Challoner stood there, stupidly, blinking at the prosecutor. Miriam regarded him with beaming face. She knew now that her future happiness and Challoner's was assured, knew that the name of Challoner would be cleared of this stain.

But Eloise was not through. "No," she exclaimed hotly, to Murgatroyd, "you didn't set him free. The law set him free. He was innocent, and—"

She paused and drew a deep breath. "You," she went on, her voice rising, "took a million dollars to set him free."

Murgatroyd rose. He sighed wearily. He turned to Miriam. "This," he said, "is the second time this charge has been made against me. Once at the trial of this man for murder. And now, again." He looked full at Eloise. "You understand the nature of this charge?" he asked of her. "What proofs have you?"

Eloise turned to the woman at her side. "Miriam is my proof," she answered.

Murgatroyd looked at Miriam. "What proofs have you?" he asked. "Do you renew this charge?"

But Eloise would not be silenced. "Prosecutor Murgatroyd," she said, mercilessly, "look at me!"

He obeyed.

"You know it is true," she went on, scathingly. "You know what I thought when I first discovered its truth, when I first discovered that you had taken this money. I told you, then, in the courtroom, at that trial. And yet, in spite of that, here is Miriam, who almost won me over to the belief that it was not a crime—this bribe. I was almost persuaded. So long as you had kept faith with her, I felt, almost, that you were honest. But now—why, the law set Challoner free. And you," she exclaimed, "why, you're a thief—a thief—a thief. You have played double, committed a double fraud. You are a thief!"

There was a sudden knock upon the door.

"Come in!" yelled Murgatroyd, unmoved.

Muller entered.

"Prosecutor," said Muller, "Mr. Thornycroft is outside. Sorry to interrupt, but—"

Murgatroyd shook his head. "Muller," he answered, "I can't be seen. That's all."

Muller stepped out, closing the door behind him. Immediately he returned. "Counselor Thornycroft says," said Muller, "that he must see you. He won't wait."

Murgatroyd angrily waved his hand. "Keep him out," he commanded. "I can't see him."

Again Muller retreated.

And again Eloise stepped forward. "You are a common thief, that's all," she went on.

She was once more interrupted. The door was thrust open violently. Thornycroft stalked in. Behind him came Muller, trying to drag him back by his coat tails. Thornycroft stalked on, and lay his hat upon the desk, faced Murgatroyd, and held out his hand.

"SENATOR MURGATROYD!" he exclaimed.

Murgatroyd rose. "W—what?" he stammered.

"Shake hands," cried Thornycroft. "Am I the first to announce it? Good! You have just been chosen, on joint ballot, majority of both houses. Confirmed. Yes, fixed. Yes. Congratulations, my congratulations."

He said it as heartily as if he meant it. Perhaps he did mean it, after all.

Murgatroyd shook his head. "It ought to have been you, Thornycroft," he said, "you put up a good fight."

"We did, you mean," protested Thornycroft; "my crowd did, as usual. But you, Murgatroyd, you deserve your honors. With you it was one man against the field. Oh," he continued, frankly, "there are no secrets between us. It was one man against fillimtable backing, one man against much money. Senator," he said, bowing, "I take off

my hat to you. You have done it—you have done what has never been done here before—and you have done it without a dollar! You're the first man in the state," he went on, "to be chosen by the people, literally by the people. And," he added, "without a dollar in your pocket—without a dollar behind you."

Still Murgatroyd shook his head. "It ought to have been you," he repeated.

Thornycroft smiled. "No," he answered. "I've learned something by all this. We're all beginning to find out. There's one thing the people worship today above all else—above all other things."

Murgatroyd looked up, a question in his eyes.

"Honesty," returned Thornycroft. "Oh, yes," he went on hastily, "I'm honest. I understand that. But you—you're the real thing. You're honest. And the people know it, too."

Eloise turned to Challoner and to Miriam. "Honest," she sneered—"A common thief!"

McGrath had crept in behind Muller. He had let the excise violation and the Tannenbaum case go until this more important matter had been settled.

"Three cheers for Senator Murgatroyd," he yelled.

He, and Muller, and Thornycroft, born and bred to political meetings, gave them with a will. Eloise and Challoner and Miriam sat through it all, in a corner, silent.

Murgatroyd looked at his men in surprise. "Where have you been all this time?" he queried.

"Outside," they answered, sheepishly, "waiting for the news."

Murgatroyd strode down upon them. "You get that evidence," he ordered, "and have it here by 2 o'clock."

The two men retreated in confusion. Thornycroft took up his hat. "Congratulations, senator," he said, again holding out his hand.

As he turned to go, he saw, for the first time, the three people huddled together in the corner.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, without recognizing them. "I thought we were alone. I didn't know—"

Challoner stepped out in front of him. "Is it true?" he pleaded.

Thornycroft nodded. "Yes," he replied, "the prosecutor has been chosen. I am down and out."

"No," returned Challoner, "you don't understand. Is it true?" he insisted.

"True? What?" queried Thornycroft.

"Yes," said Challoner, "true—that you knew all these years that I was innocent of this Rafferty murder? Is it true?"

"True?" echoed Thornycroft, as if perceiving at last whom it was he faced. "Yes, of course, it's true."

"You never told me?" fiercely returned Challoner.

Thornycroft, counsel for the defense, was aghast. "Never told you," he exclaimed. "Why, I must have told you."

"You never did," retorted Challoner. His voice suddenly broke. "And I thought, for all these years—and because I thought—"

He stopped.

Thornycroft turned to Murgatroyd. "Preposterous," said Thornycroft, appealing to the prosecutor. "Of course I told him. Did you ever hear the like?"

Murgatroyd smiled grimly. "Never—till now," he added softly to himself.

Thornycroft waved Challoner aside. "You must be mistaken, Mr. Challoner," he said.

He turned again to the prosecutor. "Well, senator," he concluded, "good day. You've made a clean and honest fight. You deserve success."

Evading Challoner, Thornycroft reached the door and made good his escape.

Eloise broke forth immediately. "A clean and honest fight!" she exclaimed. "United States senator!"

Murgatroyd had resumed his seat. "Yes," he said, smiling, and as self-possessed as if he merely passed the time of day. "It is hard work to be chosen United States senator without at least half a million dollars, yes?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Eloise, almost beside herself, "you are a thief!"

But Mrs. Challoner stepped to the front. She raised her hand.

"No, Eloise," she exclaimed, "no more of that. You two must leave the room. Yes, you must. I insist. Jim and Eloise, both. Both. I insist!"

She said it eagerly. Evidently she had made up her mind to some course of action. So eager was she that she forgot she was in the prosecutor's office, or that he might possibly have other business to transact. But Murgatroyd didn't seem to care. He leaned back in his chair and watched them.

"Well," assented Eloise, "but we shall come back. We must see it through. Now is the time. Don't forget the lynching, Miriam," she whispered. "Call me in when everything is ready."

"They left the room. Miriam, without permission, locked the door. Twice before she had seen Murgatroyd lock it.

Murgatroyd glanced at her severely. "Mrs. Challoner," he said, "sit down. What do you mean by this? Do you recall the compact made nearly six years ago that your husband should go free?"



"IT GLAD YOU'RE HONEST," SHE WENT ON ENTHUSIASTICALLY

"Yes—yes," she answered, soothingly. "He went free," replied Murgatroyd, "innocent or guilty, he went free. We did not know that he was innocent when we made our compact. We did not know, innocent or guilty, whether it was within the power of the law to hold him or to free him, when we made our compact. I kept my part of it in good faith. Finally he went free."

"Yes, yes," she returned eagerly. "Your part of it was silence," he went on, "and you have broken your part of it, twice in this building, and heaven knows how many times outside."

"Yes," she answered contritely, as if trying to propitiate him. "Yes, remember, I have no fault to find, Mr. Murgatroyd. None. I have always believed in you. I believe in you now."

"Eloise doesn't," said Murgatroyd, grimly. "She's going to lynch me, if you'll let her."

"Eloise doesn't understand. "But," went on Miriam, "I am glad—glad that my money could buy you the United States senatorship."

She stopped. Murgatroyd was silent.

"Glad," she continued, "that my money has done some good at last. That it has put the right man in the right place. "Yes, I was wrong to speak—"

Murgatroyd stopped her. "What do you want of me?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered eagerly, "yes, that's it. I must get to the point, listen!"

"You know what Jim Challoner has done in the last five years, what a man he's made of himself. Yes, you know. He helped you with the concrete frauds. Yes, and," she leaned forward, her breath going and coming as if a life hung upon her words, "he's gone in business for himself."

She stopped. She laid her hand upon the desk in front of her and tapped the wood softly with her fingers.

"Listen! Jim can get that hospital job. He wants to get it. He wants to do that job right. He knows that he can do it. If he gets it, it will be the making of his business."

She stopped again. "Listen," she said finally, pleadingly, "Jim needs a bonds-

man to get that job. He needs a man with \$50,000 to go on his bond. Jim doesn't want the \$50,000. He only wants somebody who's worth that much to go on his bond—a bond that he'll do the work and do it right. Can I ask you—"

Murgatroyd rose. "You ask me to go on a \$50,000 bond?" he queried.

"Yes," she exclaimed eagerly. "I have said \$500. Still, if he should get that job—yes, a little money, just a little, to buy material. He has worked so hard. And I don't want him to get discouraged. Oh, he wouldn't ask these things for himself. No. But just \$5,000, as a loan, and you going on his bond—to get that job."

"You want me," said Murgatroyd, evenly, "to lend him \$5,000, and you want me to go on his bond and for \$50,000, too?"

He held up his hands as if in amazement.

"Mrs. Challoner," he exclaimed, "why, I haven't got the money. I couldn't go on a bond for \$50,000 cents. Five thousand dollars? Why, I haven't got \$500 to my name."

To her it was only a refusal that he had a right to make.

"But," she persisted, "if you only could—"

Murgatroyd, standing, looked down upon her. He stood so for an instant. He seemed to be making up his mind to something of more or less portent.

"Wait," he finally conceded, "you go out there, and call those people back—just Challoner and Eloise. Yes, I think I may arrange it for you, but—call them back."

Miriam obeyed. She unlocked the door, and strode out into the narrow passageway and into the anteroom beyond. While she was gone, Murgatroyd had stepped for an instant into his vaults.

When they entered—Challoner, Eloise and Miriam—Murgatroyd was standing on that side of his desk that was nearest to them, his hands in his trousers' pockets, his back to the desk.

"Are you ready for the lynching, Miriam?" whispered Eloise, once more starting to roll up the sleeves upon her shapely arms.

"Lock that door," commanded Murgatroyd.

Challoner started to obey, but Miriam did it for him.

"Challoner," said Murgatroyd, "your wife here has asked me to go on a

\$50,000 construction bond for you, and she has asked me to lend you \$5,000."

"She has?" queried Challoner, in surprise.

"Yes," returned Murgatroyd, "5,000." Suddenly he stepped aside from his desk.

"There it is," he exclaimed.

They looked, there, upon his desk, were two boxes, dark covered boxes, battered, old, made of sheetiron.

"What are those boxes?" exclaimed Miriam, "and—what is in them?"

"I don't know," returned Murgatroyd. They stepped forward and inspected them. Miriam knew, and Eloise suspected, that they were the same boxes that Miriam had brought there so long ago, filled with negotiable securities to the extent of \$80,000.

"You don't know what's in them?" queried Eloise.

"No," returned Murgatroyd. "There's only one person in this room who knows that. It's Mrs. Challoner. She has seen the inside of them."

He paused. "I never have," he added. "I—"

Murgatroyd nodded. "Mrs. Challoner," he said, beckoning to her, for she had drawn away, "look at these. Do you see these seals?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Unbroken, are they not?" he asked. "Yes," she assented, faintly. "What does it mean?"

Murgatroyd shook his head. "You told me once," he went on, "that there was \$80,000 of negotiable securities in these boxes. I took you at your word. If what you then said was true, there they are, coupons and all."

"But," she protested, "you said you didn't have \$500 to your name."

"True," answered Murgatroyd. "I did not. But you had—"

"Challoner," he said, fiercely, swinging about. "Look at me! Listen! Do you know what's in there? Look at me! Can you stand having all this back again?"

Challoner was puzzled. "Can I stand—"

"—begin," he began.

"Yes," said Murgatroyd. "You know what all this did for you before, don't you? You know to what it led?"

"I told you once, Miss Bloodgood," he said, "some six years ago, that there was but one way to cure a bad millionaire, but one way to reform. And that one way was to take away his millions. I took away his.

He drew a long breath. "And do you remember the day, Miriam," he said, "that we saved up \$10? Can you forget?"

"That \$10," said Murgatroyd, solemnly, "the \$10 that you've saved, is worth more than all this, Challoner."

"I should think so," returned Challoner.

He was sober for an instant. And then the joy came back into his face.

"Eight hundred and sixty thousand dollars. Oh, I shall build that county hospital, all right."

Murgatroyd glanced at him sharply, nodded, and pushed the boxes toward Challoner and Miriam.

"There it is," he said, "it all belongs to you."

But Eloise was not through. "Mr. Murgatroyd," she said icily, "do you mean to tell us that this was your motive, just to save Challoner?"

Murgatroyd strode to within two feet of her and looked her full in the face. "No!" he thundered. "You were right, and you alone, were right. I was bribed. I was corrupt. I was a thief."

"No?" exclaimed Eloise, relenting.

"Yes," he answered, mercilessly. "It's true. It was my ambition that did it. And on top of that, I was tempted by a woman—"

"A woman?" faltered the girl.

He nodded. "Like Adam," he went on. "I am blaming it on Eve. A woman, this was, who wanted me to be well—really great."

"No!" he persisted. "I was bribed. I took the money. Oh, you don't know about me. You don't know what I was five years ago. To me, then, money was the only thing, it seemed, that could make me really great. I knelt at the shrine of money. I loved it as a toper loves his bottle."

He stopped. "I took it—money," he continued, in a low voice, "and then I added, 'I convicted Challoner. I took money to acquit him, and then I convicted him. Why? I'll tell you. Because there was within me some instinct that was stronger than desire, that had to convict. Something made me. My duty was to convict. All the evidence was against him. He had confessed. I convicted him. I did my duty."

"And the money—"

Murgatroyd nodded. "Like a toper—a reformed toper, I put that money, as I might his bottle, upon the shelf, corked. There it was. I could have it any time I wanted it." His face became grave. "Then," he said, "I kept on being a thief, for there was a new and overpowering motive that got the best of me. Like the reformed toper, I was determined to see what I could do, not with it, without it. It was a passion, this thing. I knew that every

move I made meant the expenditure of money. I knew it would take money to fight the brewers here in town. I made up my mind that I must fight them without money. A hundred times, a thousand times, I have had my fingers on those seals about to break them, and then have crawled away—once more to do without. But I knew that my time must come. Behind me was an overwhelming ambition, fed by a woman."

"A woman?" repeated Eloise, vaguely.

"Yes," he said, fiercely. "She must have her due. Yes, it was up to me to be more than merely honest. Anybody could be honest. It was up to me to be great. And there was something I was sure of. I knew I could buy the fairest office in the state. I knew I could buy, not earn, but buy the United States senatorship with the money for which I had sold my soul. I knew it. I knew that had a million dollars I would do the trick. I crept in solitude once more, again, and again, and again, to crack the seals from the covers of those boxes,—to buy the United States senatorship."

"And I could not do it. Something said to me, 'You must do without. You must win without. You must be honest. You must be honest. You must make a clean fight.' Yes, still I was a thief. Still I was holding thousands that didn't belong to me and that I had never earned. But that all absorbing passion was upon me—a passion, not to use, but to do without the thing that was at my fingers' ends—and I had to keep the money, to succeed." He gasped. "I went in—and won—without it."

Eloise had watched him narrowly, her eyes aghast, her lips parted.

"Mrs. Challoner," he commanded, "break the seals."

Miriam obeyed.

Eloise sighed.

"Now," she said, as if the burden that had rested upon her soul had rolled away, "do you believe you?"

For there were the securities, untouched, undisturbed, just as he had taken them, dollar for dollar, bond for bond.

"Thank you," he said dryly to Eloise. "It is a satisfaction to see, isn't it?"

Eloise smiled. "You were honest, then," she said, finally. "You were not a thief."

"Yes," he protested, "I was a thief. I was a thief."

"Challoner," he said suddenly, "this money is your wife's. Take it. And great God, man," he groaned, "don't forget what it made you, years ago."

Mrs. Challoner shivered. "How could it be in here," she exclaimed.

Challoner hesitated for an instant. Then he pressed forward.

"Yes, I was afraid," he said, "but I'm not afraid now. I know. We'll take it Murgatroyd. He held out his hand. "If you hadn't taken it," he added, "where would I have been today?"

"Free, as you are today," said Murgatroyd.

"Yes," assented Challoner, "free of the jailhouse, but—"

"Yes," assented Miriam, "we shall take the money. Yes, we shall."

"Wait, Murgatroyd," said Challoner, "until you see that county hospital."

Challoner and Miriam quietly left the room.

"Wait a minute, please," Murgatroyd had said to Eloise. "I want to talk to you."

Eloise had waited.

"Well," she queried, after the door had closed upon the others.

"What do you think?" he queried. "You're not so bad as I thought you were," she conceded.

"Is that all?" he asked. She shook her head. "Do you want to know what I really think?" she queried.

"Do I?"

Eloise drew herself up to her full height.

"I think," she said, "that it was a far finer thing to take it and not to take it, than never to have taken it at all."

He shook his head and smiled. "The habit may grow upon me," he protested. "You're not to know that graft awaits me down at Washington."

"I'm glad you're senator," she said somewhat listlessly.

"Are you?" he returned. "Do you know what I mean by this? I mean—what is it, now, \$5,000, or \$7,500 a year or something like that? It means that you've got to keep up the social game and the club game and the political game on that. An unmarried man must starve. And heaven help the married senator. It means that he, and his family, must live on a back porch in the capital and freeze. That's what it means to a senator who lives upon his salary."

"That is what it is," said Eloise, "to be really great. I'm glad you're honest," she went on enthusiastically. Then she added, "And I'm really glad that you took that money."

"So am I," he answered, lowering his voice. "For there's one thing I didn't tell Challoner and his wife. There's one thing more. Do you know what that something, that instinct, was, that made me keep my hands off the seals of those iron boxes every time?"

"What?" she asked looking down. "It was my love for the woman who wanted me to be great. That was the motive that beat down all the others."

"Billy," she cried softly.

"Yes," he went on, "her lips had told me to go wrong. But," he added, "her soul was keeping me straight."

"And I am she," she whispered. He held out his arms and she came to them.

"My revenge is now complete," he exclaimed.

"Revenge?" she faltered.

"Yes," he answered. "I'm going to marry you—and I'm going to take you down to Washington to live on a back street. And there, we're going to freeze, and starve together."

Before he could kiss her a second time, Eloise had darted to the door, had opened it, and was calling down the passageway regardless of Muller and McGrath and the other attendants.

"Jim!" she cried. "Miriam! Come back! Come back!"

Wondering, they came. For they had been waiting for her.

"Come back," said Challoner, appearing at the door, "what for?"

"What for?" echoed Miriam.

"You forgot all your money," returned Eloise, waving her hand toward the boxes on the table. "And besides," she added, "we've just started with the lynching. Don't you see?"