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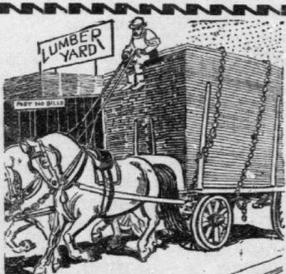
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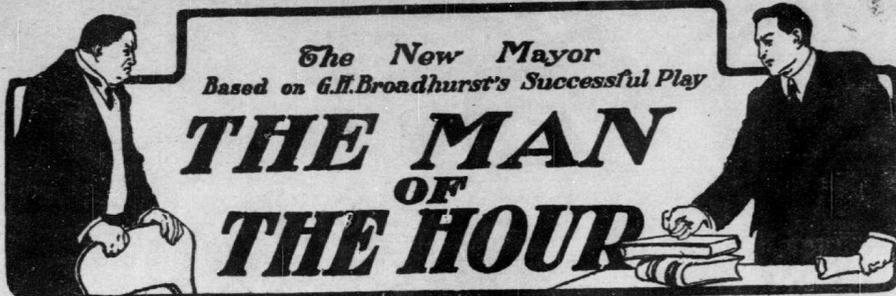
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The New Mayor
Based on G.H. Broadhurst's Successful Play

THE MAN OF THE HOUR

BY
**ALBERT
PAYSON
TERHUNE**
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GEORGE H. BROADHURST

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 honest man's views. So I can count on you to continue opposing it, can't I?"

"I object to this catechizing!" flared up poor Roberts. "I won't stand for it."

"I'm my own master and—"

"Are you sure you're your own master?" demanded Bennett. "If so, why should you be afraid to say how you are going to vote?"

"Do you accuse me of—"

"I accuse you of having changed your mind about the bill for some reason that won't bear the light. And I warn you to be careful. Somebody's going to prison before this matter's ended."

"I'm not answerable to any one but my constituents," said Roberts, with a pitiful attempt at cold dignity, "and they—"

"And they shall demand an answer from you," warned Bennett. "I'll see to it that they do. Now, you can go if you want to," turning his back on the confused Roberts, who eagerly took the opportunity to escape.

"I'm afraid friend Roberts ain't havin' the happiest time of his life to-night," remarked Phelan, going to the doorway and looking after the departing alderman. "There's not much of what the poet gezer calls 'whoop' about him. Poor fool! He never was cut out to be a crook. He makes a punk job of it in spite of the trimmin's Horrikan's dec'rated him with. If I hadn't the sense to be crooked without makin' a monkey of myself, I'm blest if I don't believe I'd turn honest. Hey! Here's a couple of folks, though, that's gettin' more fun out of the ball than ever I had at a dog fight!"

As he spoke Perry Wainwright piloted Cynthia in from the conservatory at top speed, his jolly young face alight with a joy that reflected itself in Miss Garrison's own very flushed countenance.

"Alwyn," shouted young Wainwright, not seeing Phelan in his excitement, "guess what's happened! I'll give you three guesses and—"

"And I can't possibly guess if you gave me a thousand," retorted Bennett, with vast gravity, "so I won't try. I'll just congratulate you with all my heart, old chap, and wish Miss Garrison every happiness that—"

"Gee! How'd you know? We haven't told a soul. It only happened about four minutes ago. I was telling Cynthia what a daisy little girl she was, and she said she thought I was pretty nice, too, and so I got brave and said, 'Then why don't you?'"

"Perry!" reproved Cynthia sternly, jerking his arm to show that Phelan as well as Alwyn was recipient of the highly intimate tidings.

"Oh, don't mind me, children!" put in Phelan. "I'm used to it. I was young myself once, so I've been told, though I don't clearly remember it myself. Can I butt in with a line of congratulations?"

He extended his hand with an

honest cordiality that quite won Cynthia.

"Thanks, alderman," grinned Perry effusively. "Now, Alwyn, we've got to go and break it to your mother if we can find her. Come along and back us up."

Dragging Bennett between them, the two youngsters started off on their quest. Phelan was about to return to his beloved bar when he was checked by seeing in the opposite doorway a man who stood as though petrified watching Cynthia Garrison's departing form. The intruder was about to withdraw when Phelan hailed him.

"Good evening," called the Alderman. "Good evening, sir," said the newcomer respectfully, pausing on the point of leaving the foyer.

"I've met you before, I think," went on Phelan.

"Some days ago in the mayor's office," assented the other. "I am Thompson, Mr. Wainwright's private secretary."

"I'm Alderman Phelan of the Eighth, and I've seen you before we met at his honor's."

"So you said then, sir. But you were mistaken. Good evening."

He turned again toward the door, but Phelan resumed, without seeking to stop him:

"A mistake, was it? I'm not a man who makes many mistakes, Mr. Garrison."

The retreating secretary halted as though struck.

"That is another mistake, sir," he said in a muffled voice. "My name is Thompson."

"Is it, though?" inquired Phelan innocently. "It's queer how I could get mixed up so. When I was chief of police there was a bank president named Garrison who shot himself after bein' swindled an' whipsawed by a financier who was his dearest friend. He left a little daughter, Miss Cynthia, who you was lookin' at so keen just now, an' a son, who disappeared. That was nine years ago, an' I only saw the boy once, so maybe I've overplayed my hand in pipin' you off for him. But," added Phelan, laying a strong, detaining hand on Thompson's shoulder, "here comes some one who can clear it up easy enough."

The secretary twisted in the iron grasp and sought vainly to break away as Cynthia and Perry entered.

"Cynthia's lost her fan," explained Perry at sight of the alderman. "She's had me looking all over for the measly thing. Wait here a minute," he added to her, "and I'll chase into the conservatory and see if we left it there."

And, depositing the girl in a chair, he bolted away in search of the missing article.

"Now then, young man," said Phelan, "if your name's Thompson, as you say, there's no reason why you should object to my introducin' you to this young lady. Step up, son."

Still holding the reluctant, struggling secretary by the shoulder, Phelan turned to Cynthia.

"Miss Garrison," said he, "here's a gentleman I think you know. Would you mind lookin' him over?"

Wondering at the odd request, Cynthia raised her eyes to the stranger. But the latter persistently kept his face averted.

"I don't think I know him," she answered doubtfully. "There is something familiar about—"

The secretary shifted restlessly, unconsciously bringing his profile into

Don't you know me? It's Cynthia! Don't!"

"I am afraid you've made a very strange blunder, Miss Garrison," returned the secretary, his voice hoarse and tremulous. "My name is—"

"Your name's Harry Garrison?" Phelan shouted. "What's the use of lyin' to your own sister? I give you credit for havin' good reasons for callin' yourself Thompson, an' I think I begin to see what them reasons are, but when it comes to denyin' your own sister you're playin' it down low, whatever your game may be, and I've a good mind to—"

"Harry," the girl was pleading, "you do know me! After all these nine lonely years have you no greeting for me? Every night I've prayed that God would bring you back to me, and now—"

The secretary's pallid, expressionless mask of a face broke in a flash into a look of infinite love and yearning. With a single gesture he gathered Cynthia's fragile body in his arms and crushed her against his breast.

"Oh, my little sister!" he murmured, a great sob choking his words. "My little, little sister!"

Phelan cleared his throat and coughed savagely to express his contempt for the mist that sprang into his own hard old eyes. The sound recalled the secretary to himself.

"You've trapped me into this," he exclaimed, with a laugh that was half a groan, "and you must both promise not to betray my secret. It won't be much longer now, thank God! But you'll both promise, won't you?"

"Sure!" assented Phelan.

"And you, too, Cynthia?" pleaded her brother. "You can trust me, can't you?"

"Of course I can. If you insist, I won't tell any one. I—"

"I'm happier this minute than I've ever been in all my whole life!" smiled the secretary, again clasping his sister in his arms. "If you only knew, little girl, how I've longed for this!"

"Here's the fan!" announced Perry, hurrying around the corner of the doorway. "Found it under a—"

He stopped short, open mouthed, dumb and motionless. Thompson and his sister stood in close embrace before him, with Phelan looking on like some obese caricature of a benevolent fairy.

The fan slipped from young Wainwright's nerveless grip and fell with a clatter to the polished floor, its ivory sticks snapping like icicles.

TO BE CONTINUED

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