

THE MAN HIGHER UP

The Story of a True American

BY HENRY RUSSELL MILLER

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Book Three.

IN THE MOULD.

CHAPTER VI.

The Beginning of the End.

It was long before sleep came to any in the house of death that night. To Eleanor it did not come until the first streak of gray showed in the east. Then she fell into a light, dreamful slumber that lasted only until broad daylight had come. She was awakened by the sun shining into her eyes; through the window she could see the glorious sky of a clear spring morning. The drifting fragrance of the season, gathered up by the breeze in its wanderings over a hundred leagues of budding life, came to her. It was mating time; from without came the blithe call of bird to mate. She stirred contentedly. It was the first night she and Bob McAdoo had passed under the same roof. The thought was like a caress. She arose and went to her bath, to emerge fresh and glowing. Slowly she set about dressing herself. There was death in that house, death with its sadness if without its bitterness. Yet she could not repress a feeling of buoyancy, of life.

She went down-stairs to find the hall deserted by all save the sleepy manservant.

"Is no one down?" she asked him.

"Mr. McAdoo, madam," he answered, struggling manfully to stifle a yawn. "Hog pardon, madam. He's been out these two hours. Went to send a telegram, he said."

She passed on out to the wide, vine-covered veranda. There she stood, drawing a deep breath of the pure spring air. The cool breeze played upon her up-lifted face. Once more the mingled odors of spring were borne to her grateful senses. The physical delight of the healthy in a clear new day pervaded her. It was easy to forget death for the moment; there was no unhappiness, nothing but beauty and life, in the spirit of the morning.

Suddenly she caught herself, breathing a little prayer.

"Let me not be too happy! Let me not forget that there is a tomorrow!"

From down the street came the clang of swift footsteps. Her heart beat time to the stride; she knew who the pedestrian was.

He halted close to her. Once again he caught her in that grip of the eyes from which she could not free herself. Both knew that no longer might they deny words of love burning in their hearts and from their eyes.

"You are like no other woman I have known," he said slowly.

"Yet you have known none but good women."

He shook his head proudly. "That is not the difference."

"I have given you little reason to think me good," she said sadly.

"You are good; I know that! But were you the wickedest woman in the world, still you would be the one woman to me. Eleanor! Eleanor!" he breathed.

"Ah!" she cried. "You must not! We dare not!"

"How I love you!"

"Ah!" She drew a long, shuddering breath. Then her head went back proudly. "Why not? Why may our lips not say what our hearts and eyes have said—since we ask nothing? I love you. I always shall. I can't help it."

"Do you want to help it?"

"Yes!"

She stepped down one stair, where her face was on a level with his. Fully and freely she gave him of her eyes; that through them he might see into her heart, afire with the love surpassing, that asked nothing, that was content with loving.

"Eleanor! Eleanor!" he breathed again.

"Yes!" She met his eyes steadily, fearlessly. "Even though we may never know the happiness of sharing one life, I shall always be—yours—and you mine. Life can't take that from us."

He turned away in the anguish of temptation. His big body trembled. His voice was hoarse, as he spoke.

"I know now why men give up honor for a woman. Do you know how easy it would be for me to throw everything else overboard and seek happiness with just you—in spite of everything—even now?"

"Look at me!" Slowly he turned once more to meet her eyes. "You will not tempt me, will you? You are stronger than I, you mustn't let me be weak. Do you think I don't know? How often during the last two years I have prayed that you might be weak enough to come to me, and I might be weak enough to yield. But we must not. We cannot. It wouldn't be as easy as it seems now. It would be a cowardly happiness. It wouldn't be clean. Until he is found and we know he is reclaimed, we could never be really happy, there would be a selfishness brings. We know what belongs to the people of this state, our false happiness would cripple you, because you would always have the knowledge that you hadn't been true to yourself, how can you be true to your trust? I want it—I need it—more than you do. But I—I care for you too much ever to let you."

to be untrue to the best in you on my account. You won't tempt me, will you?" she pleaded, her voice growing more and more unsteady. "Because I—I am so happy in just being near you—when I am with you something keeps pulling, pulling me to you—I am almost past the resisting point. Don't tempt me—yet I want you to tempt me—you must be strong for both of us."

"And remember," she went on, "trying to be strong, remember that it is harder for me than for you. Tomorrow, after the funeral, I go back to my little work, which, after all, is only a scanty refuge. While you go on to your great task that often will shut me out of your mind and heart. It will always be that—your work always first, I always second."

"No!" he said roughly. "It will never be that. You are first—you always shall be."

"Ah! I wanted you to say that. But you mustn't. And it mustn't be true. That is the selfish part of my love I must always fight to keep down—even if—even if we must not always be apart. You mustn't let me be selfish if you place me first, if you don't sacrifice me when it is right, you can't be true to yourself, you won't be—my man. . . . You are so strong. . . . You mustn't come to weakness through me."

"Yet you say you are not good!" he cried.

The vine-wreathed veranda hid them from the world. She went to her chair, fell into and buried her face in her hands. Harsh, dry sobs shook her.

Bob was helpless to comfort her. Awkwardly, as one unused to caress, he put out his hand and let it rest upon her hair. The unaccustomed touch sent fire racing through his veins.

"Eleanor!" he murmured hoarsely. She caught his big hand and pressed it to her cheek. "I am not good. I am only weak and shameless. You must be strong. . . . or take me."

He sat down beside her and took both her hands in his firm, strong grasp.

"Dear! How strangely the word dwelt upon his lips! 'Dear, look at me. Two years ago I found myself. The people of any city trusted me, when they would have been justified in crushing me.'"

"But you weren't guilty. Katherine has told me."

"I wasn't directly responsible for the crime that was done. But I don't hide behind that. It was done for me—and I accepted the benefit. But my people didn't know it. Nevertheless, they trusted me. They will give help to me to grow stronger, at home and over the state. The good people here, they have trusted me and strengthened me. In a few weeks I am to be nominated for governor. I can be elected. I think. Great power has been placed in my hands. I am under the most sacred obligations to the people of this state, to John Dunneade, to him who is dead. I can do much. These two years I have tried to atone. I have tried to kill the ugly self that ruled me. I thought I had succeeded. And now I find I have failed. . . . I am ready, at your word, to forget everything but myself. . . . but you!"

"Listen! You must know what that means. . . . We must start a new life together. The wealth that Murchell has left me will give to Dunneade. All the knowledge I have gained, all the power I have won, all the power that has been given to me, for a purpose not my own, must be thrown aside. All Murchell's work will have gone for nothing. John Dunneade, left alone, will be beaten. The people who have trusted me will be helpless. I must give these things up because the responsibility of my weakness in power. . . . I would be easy. Every nerve in me aches to do it. If you say the word, I will give up these things for you. . . . And I will never reproach you, never blame you. . . ."

He paused questioningly. While he was speaking, her eyes had not left his. She was very white.

"My answer is—I love you!"

"And that means—No?"

"And that means—No!"

Their eyes fell away. She leaned back in her chair and looked out into space. Half unconsciously, she freed one hand from his clasp and with it caressed the backs of his hands. He watched the gesture sadly.

After a while, "We need each other. To be strong, don't we?" she said softly. He gave no answer.

"I am afraid," she went on later, in dreamy, detached phrases, "I am afraid to hope. . . . I have always felt that he would return and thought that with his coming everything would be right. . . . Now I dare not hope. . . . All at once it is clear—ah! I can't bear to think of it. . . . We are not our own."

Suddenly he caught her hands to his lips and covered them with rough, passionate kisses. She let him.

"We are not our own. . . . And it is something, O, everything! I know that we have had this hour of sweetness. . . . And to know that we will have it again. . . . And always shall be."

"Eleanor! Eleanor!"

"And we shall always be together. . . . For always you will know that"

I am praying for you . . . and loving you . . . as you will be loving me. . . .

The temptation flew away from them, if not at peace, with a new courage.

Once he turned to her and cried, "I would not be without this love, even though it means heartache!"

"Nor would I. And somehow—now—this happiness is so real, so wonderful . . . the heartache so far away—so impossible. . . . I have faith!"

CHAPTER VII.

The Triumph of the Force.

Sometimes the two on the veranda spoke, in low, hushed tones they had not used even at Murchell's bedside; broken, detached sentences—of what they could not have told. They came very near to each other in that hour.

Up the street tramped a figure, still powerful if a bit too large of girth, with the rolling, swaggering gait that misfortune never tangles. He puffed as he walked, his wind not being what it had been when he peddled the great Donnelly to a draw. Diamond in ring and stud cast back the morning's sunshine jubilantly, his red face beamed with good will, if not peace, to all; and why not? The night had brought him no sense of personal loss and he dreamed dreams of great power and lively "scrapping."

The power was to be another's diminished the primitive ardor of his gloating soul no whit. And if the struggle was to be in a great cause—why, though a reformer by his chief's conviction, he still loved fighting for fighting's sake.

Bob saw him. With a keen pang Eleanor saw Bob come forth from his dreaming into reality.

"It's Haggin. Something's wrong." The husked, gentle tone had given place to the crisp, curt voice of the man of affairs.

"The governor?" (for a year Haggin, confident in his liege's invincibility, had called him nothing but "Governor.") "Special brand of day you've ordered, eh?" His eyes wandered uncomfortably toward Bob's companion.

"What are you doing here, Tom?" "Miss Flinn sent me."

"Kathleen! What's wrong? Is Patrick—"

"Naw! Nuthin's wrong. Everything's right. Pat's all right, too, except he's in a split stick whether to hang grape on his buzzum because he's dead, or fly a flag because you're the boss now."

Bob smiled sadly. "We may all be sorry, Tom."

"Right!" Haggin answered, sobering instantly. "He was a big man. But you're a bigger." "A big?" "A big!" Bob shook his head. He turned to Eleanor. "Mrs. Gilbert, I want to introduce one of my best friends. With a woman's quick eye for details, she noted his manner as he introduced Haggin to her, so simple, so frank, without a hint of the patronage many men affect in similar situations.

Haggin's hat came off awkwardly; his red face turned purple.

"Please to meet ye, ma'am," he managed to stammer.

She held out her hand, which Haggin first surveyed doubtfully, then took gingerly into his own big fist.

"I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Haggin. And I think, from what I've heard, you're a friend worth having."

Haggin released her hand and began to fan himself vigorously with his derby, although the morning was pleasant and cool.

"O, we're all glad enough to be his friends, down our way," Haggin grinned. "It pays. Though," still fanning vigorously, "that ain't the only reason. He's—he's on the square. There ain't many men I'd say that for—an' he knocked me out once, too." The grin returned.

"Knocked you out? I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Put me into the clear," Haggin defined, illustrating by punching himself lightly on the point of the jaw.

"Oh! He hit you? Hard?"

"Yes, ma'am," he answered soberly. "He hit me awful hard." He winked ponderously at Bob.

"But he was generous enough to forgive me," Bob smiled.

"I'm afraid I ain't ever been sorry for it, neither." Haggin returned to his awkward embarrassment. "He's been on the square with me always."

"Sit down, Tom," Bob commanded. "And tell us what you came for. Please don't go," he said to Eleanor. And his eyes added, "I can't bear to lose these minutes with you."

Haggin deposited himself in a chair and leaned back comfortably. "Pretty nice, ain't it?" He waved his hand toward the lawn. "You'll like it when you come here next term." Then he added casually, "Paul Remington come back last night."

"Paul Remington!" cried two voices. And Haggin suddenly became aware of two white, strained faces turned toward him.

"He has come home," Bob repeated slowly, dazedly. "How?"

Haggin shook his head. "On the bum. Too much—" He executed a gesture that was intended to indicate the act of taking a drink.

"I've been afraid of that," Bob muttered. "Tell us."

"Well, last night, Miss Flinn called me up an' told me to come up to the house quick. When I got there, I found him. Guess I was kind of rough with him. Asked him what he was doing there." Haggin grinned ruefully. Miss Flinn told me where to get off at. Said where should he go but to his friends. I guess you'll back that up?"

"Yes! Go on."

"I'm glad O that I always did like him—he was such a nerry, good-looking fellow. An' I always had a notion they got him foul on that convention business somehow." Bob heard Eleanor draw a quick, gasping breath. Impulsively he put out his hand and let it rest on hers for a moment. Haggin discreetly looked the other way.

"He had a kid with him—his sister's—a little girl that—ahm!—that oughtn't to be in a hen house. It seems as he's been hittin' it up gay, when he run into his sister. She was sick an' broke, an' he took care o' her till she died. Then he took care o' the kid a while. An' then, I guess, he couldn't stand it no longer, so he brought her over to Miss Flinn."

"Thank God!" breathed Eleanor. "Yes, ma'am," Haggin agreed politely. "I didn't know this till afterwards. It made me feel sort o' cheap. I don't know as I could a' come back, if I'd been in the same place an' constituted the same. He ain't all piker, Governor. You think so?"

"I know he isn't, man."

"Guess he intended to stay, if he could square things with that. But on the train he heard some feller say

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the river—and count the stars and wonder what they all mean, up there—and forget that there is any one in the world—except just we two—"

He caught her closely.

"I haven't kissed you yet—"

They had forgotten death.

After a time he remembered. She saw that his thoughts were afar off. She wondered what he was thinking.

He was looking into the years ahead, looking with the sure knowledge of the man who has seen the test applied. He saw the struggle, for he knew the enemy. He saw the temptations fought and overcome, for he knew himself at last. He saw the ultimate victory, for he knew his people. His heart filled with his longing and purpose. He, who had done so little, had received the reward of the faithful servant. Henceforth he would measure his services to the richness of the reward that was his.

She saw his lips move, but no sound fell. She read the words.

"Let me serve! Let me serve!"

"Ah!" she cried. "You are forgetting me already!"

He looked down into her eyes and drew her more closely to his heart. She was content.

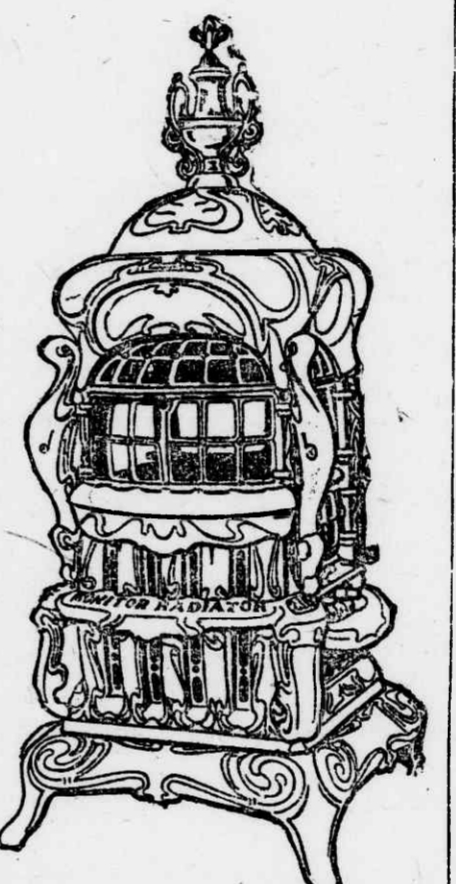
"Let us serve!"

The death of Murchell brought to the harassed interests no relief, neither did it bring fear to the people of that state. For both knew that, on guard, between them, stood Bob McAdoo.

THE END.

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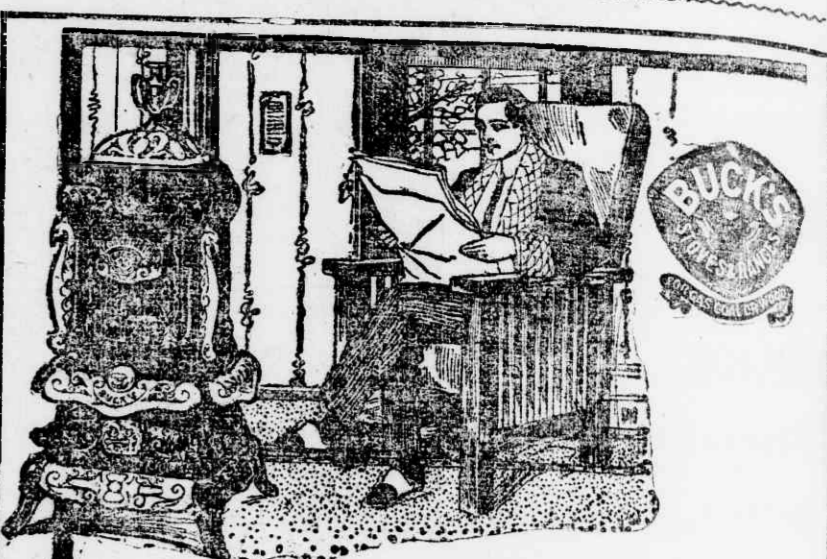
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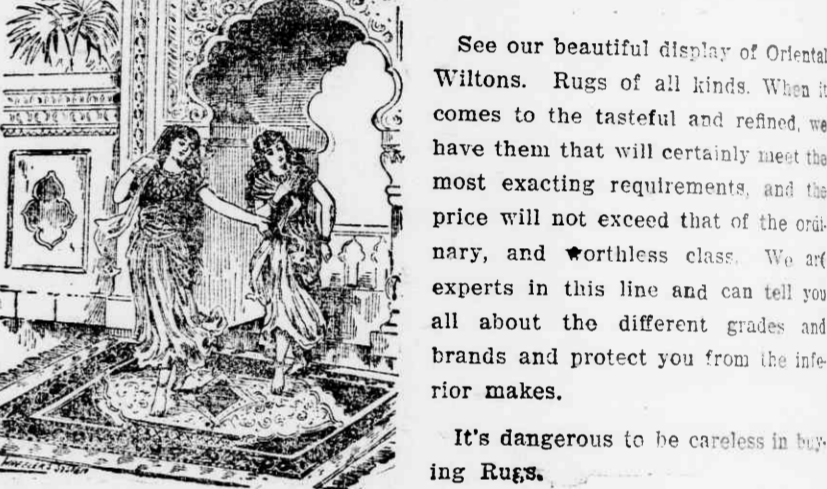
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