

Lewis Alfred Henry

The Boss, and How He Came to Rule New York



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Alfred Henry Lewis

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THE WORD OF PREFACE

It should be said in the beginning that these memoirs will not be written by my own hand. I have no skill of pen and ink, and any relation of length would be beyond my genius. The phrasing would fall to be disreputable, and the story itself turn involved and to step on its own toes, and mayhap with the last of it to fall flat on its face, unable to proceed at all. Wherefore, as much for folk who are to read as for my own credit, I shall have one who makes print his trade to write these pages for me.

Nor shall I advance apology in this. If I plan for the construction of a house, I call to my aid architects and artisans in wood and stone and iron. I am not disgraced for that out of my own hands and head I do not throw up the walls and lay on the roof of the edifice. Why, then, when now I am about the paper-telling of my life, should I blush because I am driven to seek the aid of him who makes an inkpot his profession? I am like a lumber-yard or a stone-quarry, and full of the raw material for this work; but I require one drilled of saw and chisel to carry off the business of my housebuilding.

It would be the thing natural, should you who open these leaves put the question of motive and ask why, when now I am retired, and should be cautious with my threescore years, I come forth with confidences which, aside from the mere sorrow of them, are like to prove less for my honor than I might wish. Why is it that I who have removed my loneliness and my millions to scenes of peace at least, may not leave well enough alone? Why should I return with disclosures touching Tammany and the inner history of that organization, when the dullest must apprehend only trouble and pain as the foolish fruits of such garrulity?

To the cheer of ones still on the firing lines of Tammany effort, let me promise to say no more of them than belongs of necessity to the story of my own career. I aim towards the painting of no man's picture save my own. Also from first to last I will hold before the face of each old friend the shield of an alias and never for a moment in name or feature uncover him to the general eye.

As to why it pleases me to give the public my Tammany evolution, and whether I hope for good or ill therefrom, I am not able to set forth. There is that within my bosom to urge me to this work, that much I know; the thing uncertain being – is it vanity, or is it remorse or a hunger for sympathy to so ride me and force my frankness to top-speed? There comes one thought: however black that robe of reputation which the truth weaves for me, it will seem milk-white when laid side by side with what Mendacity has invented and Malice sworn to as the story of my career.

Before I lift the latch of narration, I would have you pardon me a first defensive word. Conceiving that, in the theory of politics, whatever the practice may discover, there is such a commodity as morals and such a ware as truth, and, remembering how much as the Chief of Tammany Hall I have been condemned by purists and folk voluble for reform as a fashion of City Satan, striving for all that was ebon in local conditions and control, I would remind the reader – hoping his mind to be unbiased and that he will hold fairly the scales for me – that both morals and truth as questions will ever depend for their answer on environment and point of view. The morality of one man is the sin of another, and the truth in this mouth is the serpent lie in that. Having said this much, let me now go forward without more of flourish or time to be eaten up with words.

CHAPTER I – HOW THE BOSS CAME TO NEW YORK

MY father was a blacksmith, and he and my mother came out of Clonmel, where I myself was born. There were four to our family, for besides my father and mother, I owned a sister named Anne, she being my better in age by a couple of years. Anne is dead now, with all those others I have loved, and under the grass roots; but while she lived – and she did not pass until after I had reached the size and manners of a man – she abode a sort of second mother to me, and the littlest of my interests was her chief concern.

That Anne was thus tenderly about my destinies, worked doubtless a deal of fortunate good to me. By nature, while nothing vicious, I was as lawless as a savage; and being resentful of boundaries and as set for liberty as water down hill, I needed her influence to hold me in some quiet order. That I have the least of letters is due wholly to Anne, for school stood to me, child and boy, as hateful as a rainy day, and it was only by her going with me to sit by my side and show me my blurred way across the page that I would mind my book at all.

It was upon a day rearward more than fifty years when my father, gathering together our slight belongings, took us aboard ship for America. We were six weeks between Queenstown and New York; the ship my father chose used sails, and there arose unfriendly seas and winds to baffle us and set us back. For myself, I hold no clear memory of that voyage, since I was but seven at the time. Nor could I have been called good company; I wept every foot of the way, being sick from shore to shore, having no more stomach to put to sea with then than I have now.

It was eight of the clock on a certain July night that my father, having about him my mother and Anne and myself, came ashore at Castle Garden. It being dark, and none to meet us nor place for us to seek, we slept that night, with our coats to be a bed to us, on the Castle Garden flags. If there were hardship to lurk in thus making a couch of the stone floors, I missed the notice of it; I was as sound asleep as a tree at midnight when we came out of the ship and for eight hours thereafter, never once opening my eyes to that new world till the sun was up.

Indeed, one may call it in all candor a new world! The more since, by the grace of accident, that first day fell upon the fourth of the month, and it was the near, persistent roar of cannon all about us, beginning with the break of day, to frighten away our sleep. My father and mother were as simple as was I, myself, on questions of Western story, and the fact of the Fourth of July told no news to them. Guns boomed; flags flaunted; bands of music brayed; gay troops went marching hither and yon; crackers sputtered and snapped; orators with iron throats swept down on spellbound crowds in gales of red-faced eloquence; flaming rockets when the sun went down streaked the night with fire! To these manifestations my father and the balance of us gave admiring ear and eye; although we were a trifle awed by the vehemence of an existence in which we planned to have our part, for we took what we heard and witnessed to be the everyday life of the place.

My father was by trade a blacksmith, and one fair of his craft. Neither he nor my mother had much learning; but they were peaceful, sober folk with a bent for work; and being sure, rain or shine, to go to church, and strict in all their duties, they were ones to have a standing with the clergy and the neighbors. It tells well for my father that within the forty-eight hours to follow our landing at Castle Garden, he had a roof above our heads, and an anvil to hammer upon; this latter at a wage double the best that Clonmel might offer even in a dream. And so we began to settle to our surroundings, and to match with them, and fit them to ourselves; with each day Clonmel to gather a dimness, and we to seem less strange and more at home, and in the last to feel as naturally of America as though we had been born upon the soil.

It has found prior intimation that my earlier years ran as wild as a colt, with no strong power save Anne's to tempt me in a right direction. My father, so far as his mood might promise, would have led me in paths I should go; but he was never sharp to a condition, and with nothing to him alert

or quick he was one easily fooled, and I dealt with him as I would. Moreover, he had his hands filled with the task of the family's support; for while he took more in wage for his day's work than had ever come to him before, the cost to live had equal promotion, and it is to be doubted if any New York Monday discovered him with riches in his pocket beyond what would have dwelt there had he stayed in Clonmel. But whether he lacked temper or time, and whatever the argument, he cracked no thong of authority over me; I worked out my days by patterns to please myself, with never a word from him to check or guide me.

And my mother was the same. She had her house to care for; and in a wash-tub day, and one when sewing machines were yet to find their birth, a woman with a family to be a cook to, and she of a taste besides to see them clothed and clean, would find her every waking hour engaged. She was a housekeeper of celebration, was my mother, and a star for neighboring wives to steer by; with floor and walls and everything about her as spick and span as scouring soap and lye might make them. Pale, work-worn, I still carry her on the skyline of my memory; and I recall how her eye would light and her gray cheek show a flush when the priest did us the credit of supper at our board, my father pulling down his sleeves over his great hairy arms in deference to the exalted station of the guest. It comes to this, however, that both my father and my mother, in their narrow simplicities and time taken up with the merest arts of living, had neither care nor commands for me. I came and I went by my own clock, and if I gave the business thought, it was a thought of gratitude to find myself so free.

To be sure I went now and then to my lessons. Anne had been brisk to seek forth a school; for she refused to grow up in ignorance, and even cherished a plan to one day teach classes from a book herself. Being established, she drew me after her, using both persuasion and force to that end, and to keep me in a way of enlightenment, invented a system of rewards and punishments, mainly the former, by which according to my merit I was to suffer or gain.

This temple of learning to which Anne lured me was nothing vast, being no bigger than one room. In lieu of a blackboard there was a box of clean white sand wherewith to teach dullards of my age and sort their alphabet. That feat of education the pedagogue in charge – a somber personage, he, and full of bitter muscularities – accomplished by tracing the letter in the sand. This he did with the point of a hickory ruler, which weapon was never out of his hand, and served in moments of thickness as a wand of inspiration, being laid across the dull one's back by way of brightening his wits. More than once I was made wiser in this fashion; and I found such stimulus to go much against the grain and to grievously rub wrong-wise the fur of my fancy.

These hickory drubbings to make me quicker, falling as thickly as October's leaves, went short of their purpose. On the heels of one of them I would run from my lessons for a week on end. To be brief with these matters of schools and books and alphabets and hickory beatings, I went to my classes for a day, only to hide from them for a week; as might be guessed, the system collected but a scanty erudition.

It is a pity, too: that question of education cannot too much invite an emphasis. It is only when one is young that one may be book-taught, just as the time of spring is the time for seed. There goes a byword of an old dog and a new trick, and I should say it meant a man when he is thirty or forty with a book; for, though driven by all the power of shame, I in vain strove with.

What was utmost in me to repair in middle years the loss of those schooldays wasted away. I could come by no advance; the currents of habitual ignorance were too strong and I made no head against them. You think I pause a deal over my want of letters? I tell you it is the thing I have most mourned in all my life.

When a fugitive from lessons, I would stay away from my home. This was because I must manage an escape from Anne; should she find me I was lost, and nothing for it save to be dragged again to school. The look of grief in her brown eyes meant ever defeat for me. My only safety was to turn myself out of doors and play the exile.

This vagabondage was pleasant enough, since it served to feed my native vagrancy of temper. And I fared well, too; for I grew into a kind of cateran, and was out of my sleeping lair with the sun to follow the milkman and baker on their rounds. Coming betimes to the doors of customers who still snored between their sheets, these merchants left their wares in areas. That was all my worst need asked; by what time they doubled the nearest corner I had made my swoop and was fed for the whole of a day.

Moreover, I knew a way to pick up coppers. On a nearby corner in the Bowery a great auction of horses was going. Being light and little, and having besides a lively inclination for horses, I was thrown upon the backs of ones put up for sale to show their paces. For each of these mounts I came the better off by five cents, and on lucky days have made as much as the half of a dollar at that trade. As for a bed, if it were summer time, what should be finer than the docks? Or if winter, then the fire-rooms of the tugs, with the engineers and stokers whereof I made it my care to be friendly? I was always ready to throw off a line, or polish a lantern, or, when a tug was at the wharf, run to the nearest tap-room and fetch a pail of beer; for which good deeds the East River went thickly dotted of my allies before ever I touched the age of ten.

These meager etchings give some picture of what was my earlier life, the major share of which I ran wild about the streets. Neither my father nor my mother lived in any command of me, and the parish priest failed as dismally as did they when he sought to confine my conduct to a rule. That hickory-wielding dominie, with his sandbox and alphabet, was a priest; and he gave me such a distaste of the clergy that I rolled away from their touch like quicksilver. Anne's tears and the soft voice of her were what I feared, and so I kept as much as possible beyond their spell.

Coming now to a day when I began first to consider existence as a problem serious, I must tell you how my lone sole claim to eminence abode in the fact that, lung and limb, I was as strong and tireless as any bison or any bear. It was my capital, my one virtue, the mark that set me above my fellows. This story of vast strength sounds the more strange, since I was under rather than above the common height, and never, until when in later life I took on a thickness of fat, scaled heavier than one hundred and forty pounds. Thus it stood, however, that my muscle strength, even as a youth, went so far beyond what might be called legitimate that it became as a proverb in the mouths of people. The gift was a kind of genius; I tell of it particularly because it turned to be the ladder whereby I climbed into the first of my fortunes. Without it, sure, I never would have lifted myself above the gutter levels of my mates, nor fingered a splinter of those millions that now lie banked and waiting to my name and hand.

CHAPTER II – THE BOSS MEETS WITH POLITICS

IT was when I was in my fifteenth year that face to face I first met politics. Or to fit the phrase more nearly with the fact, I should say it was then when politics met me. Nor was that meeting in its incident one soon to slip from memory. It carried for a darkling element the locking of me in a graceless cell, and that is an adventure sure to leave its impress. The more if one be young, since the trail of events is ever deepest where the ground is soft. It is no wonder the business lies in my mind like a black cameo. It was my first captivity, and there will come on one no greater horror than seizes him when for the earliest time he hears bars and bolts grate home behind him.

On that day, had one found and measured me he would not have called me a child of thoughts or books or alcoves. My nature was as unkempt as the streets. Still, in a turbid way and to broadest banks, the currents of my sentiment were running for honesty and truth. Also, while I wasted no space over the question, I took it as I took the skies above me that law was for folk guilty of wrong, while justice even against odds of power would never fail the weak and right. My eyes were to be opened; I was to be shown the lesson of Tammany, and how law would bend and judges bow before the mighty breath of the machine.

It was in the long shadows of an August afternoon when the Southhampton boat was docked – a clipper of the Black Ball line. I stood looking on; my leisure was spent about the river front, for I was as fond of the water as a petrel. The passengers came thronging down the gang-plank; once ashore, many of the poorer steerage sort stood about in misty bewilderment, not knowing the way to turn or where to go.

In that far day a special trade had grown up among the piers; the men to follow it were called hotel runners. These birds of prey met the ships to swoop on newcomers with lie and cheat, and carry them away to hostelryes whose mean interests they served. These latter were the poorest in town, besides being often dens of wickedness.

As I moved boy-like in and out among the waiting groups of immigrants, a girl called to me. This girl was English, with yellow hair, and cheeks red as apples. I remember I thought her beautiful, and was the more to notice it since she seemed no older than myself. She was stark alone and a trifle frightened.

“Boy,” said Apple Cheek, “boy, where can I go for to-night? I have money, though not much, so it must not be a dear place.”

Before I could set my tongue to a reply, a runner known as Sheeny Joe had Apple Cheek by the arm and was for leading her away.

“Come with me,” said Sheeny Joe to Apple Cheek; “I will show you to a house, as neat as pins, and quiet as a church; kept it is by a Christian lady as wears out her eyes with searching of the scriptures. You can stay there as long as ever you likes for two shillin’ a day.”

This was reeled off by Sheeny Joe with a suave softness like the flow of treacle. He was cunning enough to give the charge in shillings so as to match the British ear and education of poor Apple Cheek.

“Where is this place?” asked Apple Cheek. I could see how she shrunk from Sheeny Joe, with his eyes greedy and black, and small and shiny like the eyes of a rat.

“You wouldn’t know the place, young lady,” returned Sheeny Joe; “but it’s all right, with prayers and that sort of thing, both night and mornin’. It’s in Water Street, the place is. Number blank, Water Street,” repeated Sheeny Joe, giving a resort known as the Dead Rabbit. “Come; which ones is your bundles? I’ll help you carry them.”

Now by general word, the Dead Rabbit was not unknown to me. It was neither tavern nor boarding house, but a mill of vice, with blood on its doorstep and worse inside. If ever prayers were

said there they must have been parcel of some Black Sanctus; and if ever a Christian went there it was to be robbed and beaten, and then mayhap to have his throat cut for a lesson in silence.

“You don’t want to go to that house,” said I, finding my voice and turning to Apple Cheek. “You come to my mother’s; my sister will find you a place to stay. The house he’s talkin’ about” – here I indicated Sheeny Joe – “aint no tavern. It’s a boozin’ ken for crimps and thieves.”

Without a word, Sheeny Joe aimed a swinging blow at my head: Apple Cheek gave a low scream. While somewhat unprepared for Sheeny Joe’s attack, it falling so sharply sudden, I was not to be found asleep; nor would I prove a simple conquest even to a grown man. My sinister strength, almost the strength of a gorilla, would stand my friend.

Quick as a goat on my feet, and as soon to see a storm coming up as any sailor, I leaped backward from the blow; and next, before Sheeny Joe recovered himself, I was upon him with a wrestler’s twitch and trip that tossed him high in the air like a rag. He struck on his head and shoulders, the chimb of a cask against which he rolled cutting a fine gash in his scalp.

With a whirl of oaths, Sheeny Joe tried to scramble to his feet; he was shaken with rage and wonder to be thus outfaced and worsted by a boy. As he gained his knees, and before he might straighten to his ignoble feet, I dealt him a crashing blow between the eyes, or rather, on the bridge of the nose, which latter feature for Sheeny Joe grew curved and beaky. The blow was of the sort that boxers style a “hook,” and one nothing good to stop. Over Sheeny Joe went with the kicking force of it, and lay against the tier of casks, bleeding like tragedy, beaten, and yelling “murder!”

Sheeny Joe, bleeding and roaring, and I by no means glutted, but still hungry for his harm, were instantly the center of a gaping crowd that came about us like a whirlpool. With the others arrived an officer of the police.

“W’at’s the row here?” demanded the officer.

“Take him to the station!” cried Sheeny Joe, picking himself up, a dripping picture of blood; “he struck me with a knuckle duster.”

“Not so fast, officer,” put in a reputable old gentleman. “Hear the lad’s story first. The fellow was saying something to this girl. Nor does he look as though it could have been for her benefit.”

“Tell me about it, youngster,” said the officer, not unkindly. My age and weight, as against those of Sheeny Joe, told with this agent of the peace, who at heart was a fair man. “Tell me what there is to this shindy.”

“Why don’t you take him in?” screamed Sheeny Joe. “W’at have you to do with his story?”

“Well, there’s two ends to an alley,” retorted the officer warmly. “I’ll hear what the boy has to say. Do you think you’re goin’ to do all the talkin’?”

“The first thing you’ll know,” cried Sheeny Joe fiercely, “I’ll have them pewter buttons off your coat.”

“Oh, you will!” retorted the officer with a scowl. “Now just for that I’ll take you in. A night in the jug will put the soft pedal on that mouth of yours.” With that, the bluecoat seized Sheeny Joe, and there we were, one in each of his hands.

For myself, I had not uttered a syllable. I was ever slow of speech, and far better with my hands than my tongue. Apple Cheek, the cause of the war, stood weeping not a yard away; perhaps she was thinking, if her confusion allowed her thought, of the savageries of this new land to which she was come. Apple Cheek might have taken herself from out the hubbub by merely merging with the crowd; I think she had the coolness to do this, but was too loyal. She owned the spirit, as it stood, to come forward when I would not say a word to tell the officer the story. Apple Cheek was encouraged to this steadiness by the reputable old gentleman.

Before, however, Apple Cheek could win to the end of the first sentence, a burly figure of a man, red of face and broad as a door across the shoulders, pushed his way through the crowd.

“What is it?” he asked, coming in front of the officer. “Turn that man loose,” he continued, pointing to Sheeny Joe.

The red-faced man spoke in a low tone, but one of cool command. The officer, however, was not to be readily driven from his ground; he was new to the place and by nature an honest soul. Still, he felt an atmosphere of power about the red-faced personage; wherefore, while he kept strictest hold on both Sheeny Joe and myself, he was not wanting of respect in his response.

“These two coves are under arrest,” said the officer, shaking Sheeny Joe and myself like rugs by way of identification.

“I know,” said the other, still in the low cool tone. “All the same, you turn this one loose.”

The officer still hesitated with a look of half-defiance. With that the red-faced man lost temper.

“Take your hands off him, I tell you!” cried the redfaced man, a spark of anger showing in his small gray eyes. “Do you know me? I’m Big Kennedy. Did you never hear of Big John Kennedy of Tammany Hall? You do what I say, or I’ll have you out in Harlem with the goats before to-morrow night.”

With that, he of the red face took Sheeny Joe from between the officer’s fingers; nor did the latter seek to detain him. The frown of authority left his brow, and his whole face became overcast with a look of surly submission.

“You should have said so at the jump,” remarked the officer sullenly. “How was I to know who you are?”

“You’re all right,” returned the red-faced one, lapsing into an easy smile. “You’re new to this stroll; you’ll be wiser by an’ by.”

“What’ll I do with the boy?” asked the officer.

“Officer,” broke in the reputable old gentleman, who was purple to the point apoplectic; “officer, do you mean that you will take your orders from this man?”

“Come, my old codger,” interrupted the red-faced one loftily, “stow that. You had better sherry for Fift’ Avenue where you belong. If you don’t, th’ gang down here may get tired, d’ye see, an’ put you in the river.” Then to the officer: “Take the boy in; I’ll look him over later.”

“An’ the girl!” screamed Sheeny Joe. “I want her lagged too.”

“An’ the girl, officer,” commanded the red-faced one. “Take her along with the boy.”

Thus was the procession made up; the officer led Apple Cheek and myself to the station, with Sheeny Joe, still bleeding, and the red-faced man to be his backer, bringing up the rear.

At the station it was like the whirl and roar of some storm to me. It was my first captivity – my first collision with the police, and my wits were upside down. I recall that a crowd of people followed us, and were made to stand outside the door.

The reputable old gentleman came also, and tried to interfere in behalf of Apple Cheek and myself. At a sign from the red-faced man, who stood leaning on the captain’s desk with all the confidence of life, that potentate gave his sharp command.

“Screw out!” cried he, to the reputable old gentleman. “We don’t want any of your talk!” Then to an officer in the station: “Put him out!”

“I’m a taxpayer!” shouted the reputable old gentleman furiously.

“You’ll pay a fine,” responded the captain with a laugh, “if you kick up a row ‘round my station. Now screw out, or I’ll put you the wrong side of the grate.”

The reputable old gentleman was thrust into the street with about as much ceremony as might attend the delivery of a bale of goods at one’s door. He disappeared, declaring he would have justice; at which a smile widened the faces of the sophisticated officers, several of whom were lounging about the room.

“He’ll have justice!” repeated the captain with a chuckle. “Say! he ought to put that in the Joe Miller Joke-book.” Then to the red-faced man, who still leaned against the desk, the image of autocracy sure of itself: “What is it to be, Mr. Kennedy?”

“Why,” quoth the red-faced one, “you must lock this boy up. Yes, an’ the girl, too; she had better go in for the night. I’ll take a look into th’ business, an’ let the judge know in the mornin’.”

“I don’t think, captain,” interposed the officer who brought us from the docks, “there’s any use locking up these people. It was nothin’ but a cheap muss on the pier.”

“Say! I don’t stand that!” broke in Sheeny Joe. “This party smashed me with a bar of iron. The girl was in the play; an’ I say they’re both to go in.”

“You ‘say,’” mocked the captain, in high scorn. “An’ who are you? Who is this fellow?” he demanded, looking about him.

“He’s one of my people,” said the red-faced man, still coolly by the desk.

“No more out of you!” snarled the captain to the kindly officer, as the latter again tried to speak; “you get back to your beat!”

“An’ say!” cried the red-faced man, slowly rousing from his position by the desk; “before you go, let me give you a word. You’re a sight too gabby; you had better think more and say less, or you won’t last long enough as a copper to wear out that new uniform. An’ if anybody asks, tell him it was Big Kennedy that told you.”

They led me to a cell, while poor Apple Cheek, almost fainting, was carried to another. As I was being taken away, Anne came rushing in. Bad news is a creature of wings, and Anne had been told my adventures by a small urchin who ran himself nearly to death in defeating two fellow urchins for the privilege before I had reached the station.

Anne did not observe me as she came in, for I stood somewhat to the rear, with several turnkeys and officers between. I could see the white face of her, and how the lamps of a great alarm were lighted in her eyes. Her voice was so low with terror I could not hear her words. Evidently she was pleading, girl-fashion, for my liberty. The tones of the captain, however, rose clear and high.

“That’ll do ye now,” said he in a manner of lordly insolence, looking up from the desk to which he had returned. “If we put a prisoner on the pavement every time a good-looking girl rushed in with a yarn about bein’ his sister, we wouldn’t need no cells at all. This boy stays till the judge takes a look at him in the mornin’. Meanwhile, you had better get back to your window, or all the men will have left the street.”

At this, a mighty anger flamed up in my heart. I tore away from the officer who had me by the shoulders, and, save that three others as practiced in the sleight of it as football players instantly seized me, I should have gone straight at the captain’s neck like a bulldog.

“I’ll have his life!” I foamed.

The next moment I was thrown into a cell. The door slammed; the lock shot home; with that, my heart seemed to turn to water in my bosom and I sank upon the stone floor of my cage.

CHAPTER III – THE BOSS SEES THE POWER OF TAMMANY

THAT night under lock and key was a night of laughed and screamed like bedlam. Once I heard the low click of sobs, and thought it might be poor unhappy Apple Cheek. The surmise went wide, for she was held in another part of the prison.

It was in the first streaks of the morning before I slept. My slumbers did not last long; it seemed as though I had but shut my eyes when a loud rap of iron on iron brought me up, and there stood one armed of a key so large it might have done for the gate of a giant's castle. It was this man hammering with his weapon on the grate of my cell that roused me.

“Now then, young gallows-bird,” said the functionary, “be you ready for court?”

The man, while rough, gave me no hard impression, for he wore a tolerant grin and had eyes of friendly brown. These amiable signs endowed me with courage to ask a question.

“What will they do with me?” I queried. I was long delirium. Drunken men babbled and cursed and shouted; while a lunatic creature anxious, for I had no experience to be my guide. “What will they do? Will they let me go?”

“Sure! they'll let you go.” My hopes gained their feet. “To Blackwell's.” My hopes lay prone again.

The turnkey, for such was the man's station, had but humored me with one of the stock jokes of the place. On seeing my distress, and perhaps remembering that I should be something tender if years were to count, and no frequent tenant of the cells with sensibilities trained to the safe consistency of leather, he made me further reply.

“No, I'll tell you the truth, youngster. If you plead guilty, an' there's no one there but the cop, it'll be about ten dollars or twenty days on the Island. But if Sheeny Joe comes 'round to exhibit his nose, or Big Kennedy shows up to stall ag'inst you, why I should say you might take six months and call yourself in luck.”

There was nothing to brighten the eye in the story, and my ribs seemed to inclose a heart of wood.

With a vile dozen to be my companions, frowsy, bleary creatures, some shaking with the dumb ague of drink whose fires had died out, I was driven along a narrow corridor, up a pair of stairs, and into a room of respectable size! Its dimensions, however, would be its only claim to respectability, for the walls and ceiling were smoke-blackened, while the floor might have come the better off for a pailful of soap and water.

Once within the room I found myself in a railed pen. Against the wall, with a desk before him and raised above the herd by a platform, sat the magistrate. There was a fence which divided the big room, and beyond and leaning on it lolled the public, leering and listening, as hard an array as one might wish to see. One might have sentenced the entire roomful to the workhouse and made few mistakes.

Inside this fence, and gathered for the most part about the magistrate, were those who had business with the court; officers, witnesses, friends and enemies of the accused, with last although not least a collection of the talent of the bar. Many of these latter were brisk Jews, and all of them were marked by soiled linen, frayed elbows, greasy collars, and an evident carelessness as to the state of their hands and faces. There were boys to wait on these folk of law, a boy to each I should say. None of these urchins was older than was I, and some no more than twelve. They carried baize bags, chatted gravely while waiting the call of their masters, and gave themselves strutting airs and brows of consequence. These engaging children, in a spirit of loyalty, doubtless, showed themselves as untainted of water as were their betters.

While I rehearse these sordid appearances as developed in the dim lights which through the grimy windows fell across the scene, you are not to suppose the notice of them preyed upon me. I was, in that hour, neither so squeamish nor so observant as to make particular note of them, nor was I to that degree the slave of soap in my own roving person, as to justify the risk of strictures which might provoke retort. Besides, I was thinking dolefully on that trip to Blackwell's Island whereof the future seemed so full, and my eyes scanned the judge on the bench rather than lesser folk who were not so important in my affairs.

While in the mills of great misery, still I was steady enough. I turned my gaze upon the magistrate, and sought in his looks and words, as he went about the sorry destinies of other delinquents, some slant of what I might look forward to for myself. The dignitary in question showed lean and sallow and bald, with a sly face and an eye whereof the great expression was one of sleepless self-interest. He did not come upon you as either brave or good, but he had nothing brutal or vindictive, and his timid mealy voice was shaken by a quaver that seemed a perpetual apology for what judgments he from time to time would pass. His sentences were invariably light, except in instances where some strong influence from the outside, generally a politician or the agent of a big company, arose to demand severity.

While within the railed pen with those other unfortunates whom the dragnets of the police had brought to these mean shores, and in an interval when my fascinated eyes were off the magistrate, I caught sight of Anne and my father. They had seats inside the fence. The latter's face was clouded with simple trouble; he wore his Sunday coat, and his hands, hard and showing the stains of his forge, roved in uneasy alternation from his pockets to his lapels and back again. Anne's young eyes were worn and tired, for she had slept as little as had I and wept much more the night before. I could not discover Apple Cheek, although I looked about the room for her more than once. I had it in my hopes that they had given Apple Cheek her freedom, and the thought was a half-relief. Nothing of such decent sort had come to pass, however; Apple Cheek was waiting with two or three harridans, her comrades of the cells, in an adjoining room.

When my name was called, an officer of the court opened a gate in the prisoner's pen and motioned me to come forth.

"Hurry up!" said the officer, who was for expedition. "W'at's the trouble with your heels? You aint got no ball an' chain on yet, you know."

Then he gave me a chair in front of the magistrate, where the man of power might run me up and down with his shifty deprecatory eye.

"There was a girl brought in with him, your honor," remarked the officer at the gate.

"Have her out, then," said the magistrate; whereupon Apple Cheek, a bit disheveled and cheeks redder than ever with the tears she had shed, was produced and given a seat by my side.

"Who complains of these defendants?" asked the magistrate in a mild non-committal voice, glancing about the room.

"I do, your honor."

It was Sheeny Joe who came pushing to the fore from a far corner. His head had received the benefit of several bandages, and it gave me a dullish joy to think it was I to furnish the reason of them.

The magistrate appeared to know Sheeny Joe, and to hold him in regard at that. The moment my enemy declared himself as the complainant, and no one springing up to take my part, the magistrate bent upon me a stony glance that spoke plainly of those six months concerning which the turnkey told. I gave up everything, myself and Apple Cheek, as surely lost.

"Tell your story," said the magistrate to Sheeny Joe. His manner was full of commiseration for that unworthy. "What did he assault you with?"

"With a blackjack, your honor, or a piece of lead pipe," replied Sheeny Joe. "He struck me when I wasn't lookin'. I'm busy trying to tell the girl there w'at hotel she wants. He gives it to me over the head from behind; then as I wheels, he smashes me across the nose. I couldn't see with w'at, but

it was a bar of some kind, mebbly iron, mebbly lead. As I goes down, I hears the sketch – the girl, I mean – sing out, ‘Kill him!’ The girl was eggin’ him on, your honor.”

Sheeny Joe unwound this string of lies without hitch or pause, and withal so rapidly it fair stole my breath away. I felt the eyes of the magistrate upon me; I knew my danger and yet could come by no words for my own defense. I make no doubt, had it not been for a diversion as unlooked-for as it was welcome, I would have been marked for prison where I stood.

“I demand to be heard,” came suddenly, in a high angry voice. “What that rogue has just uttered is all a pack of lies together!”

It was the reputable old gentleman of the evening before who thus threw himself in the way of events. Being escorted through the press of onlookers by an officer, the reputable old gentleman stood squarely in front of the magistrate.

“I demand justice for that boy,” fumed the reputable old gentleman, glaring at the magistrate, and growing crimson in the face; “I demand a jury. As for the girl, she wasn’t ten minutes off the boat; her only part in the offense would seem to be that this scoundrel,” pointing to Sheeny Joe, “was striving to lure her to a low resort.”

“The Dead Rabbit a low resort!” cried Sheeny

Joe indignantly. “The place is as straight as a gun.”

“Will you please tell me who you are?” asked the magistrate of the reputable old gentleman. He had resumed his non-committal look. The confident vigor of the reputable old gentleman disconcerted him and made him wary.

“I am a taxpayer,” said the reputable old gentleman; “yes,” donning an air as though the thunders and lightnings of politics dwelt in the word, “yes, your honor, a taxpayer. I do not know this boy, but here are his father and sister to speak for him.” Then, as he caught sight of the captain who had ordered him out of the station: “There is a man, your honor, who by the hands of his minions drove me from a public police office – me, a taxpayer!”

The captain grinned easily to find himself thus distinguished. The grin irritated the reputable old gentleman, who was even more peppery than reputable.

“Smile, sir!” cried the reputable old gentleman, shaking his wrathful finger at the captain. “I shall have you before your superiors on charges before I’m done!”

“That’s what they all say,” remarked the captain, stifling a yawn.

“One thing at a time, sir,” said the magistrate to the reputable old gentleman. His attitude was wheedling and propitiatory. “Did I understand you to say that the gentleman and the lady at your back are the father and sister of this boy?”

My father and Anne had taken their stations to the rear of the reputable old gentleman. The latter, looking around as if to identify them, replied:

“If the court please, I’m told so.”

“Your honor,” broke in Sheeny Joe with a front of injury, “w’at’s that got to do with his sandbaggin’ me? Am I to be murdered w’en peacefully about me business, just ‘cause a guy’s got a father?”

“What were you saying to this girl?” asked the magistrate mildly of Sheeny Joe, and indicating Apple Cheek with his eye where she sat tearful and frightened by my side. “This gentleman” – the reputable old gentleman snorted fiercely – “declares that you were about to lure her to a low resort.”

“Your honor, it was the Dead Rabbit,” said Sheeny Joe.

“Is the Dead Rabbit,” observed the magistrate, to the captain, who was still lounging about, “is the Dead Rabbit a place of good repute?”

“It aint no Astor House,” replied the captain, “but no one expects an Astor House in Water Street.”

“Is it a resort for thieves?”

The magistrate still advanced his queries in a fashion apologetic and subdued. The reputable old gentleman impressed him as one he would not like to offend. Then, too, there was my father – an honest working-man by plain testimony of his face. On the other hand stood Sheeny Joe, broken of nose, bandaged, implacable. Here were three forces of politics, according to our magistrate, who was thinking on a re-election; he would prefer to please them all. Obviously, he in no sort delighted in his present position, since whichever way he turned it might be a turn toward future disaster for himself.

“Is the Dead Rabbit a resort for thieves?” again asked the magistrate.

“Well,” replied the captain judgmentally, “even a crook has got to go somewhere. That is,” he added, “when he aint in hock.”

Where this criss-cross colloquy of justice or injustice might have left me, and whether free or captive, I may only guess. The proceedings were to gain another and a final interruption. This time it was the red-faced man, he who had called himself “Big Kennedy,” to come panting into the presence of the court. The red-faced man had hurried up the stairs, three steps at a time, and it told upon his breathing.

The magistrate made a most profound bow to the red-faced man. Remembering the somber prophecy of him with the big key, should “Big Kennedy show up to Stall ag’instant me,” my hope, which had revived with the stand taken by the reputable old gentleman, sunk now to lowest marks.

“What will you have, Mr. Kennedy?” purred the magistrate obsequiously.

“Is the court going to dispose of the cases of this boy and this girl?” interrupted the reputable old gentleman warmly. “I demand a jury trial for both of them. I am a taxpayer and propose to have justice.”

“Hold up, old sport, hold up!” exclaimed the redfaced man in cheerful tones. He was addressing the reputable old gentleman. “Let me get to work. I’ll settle this thing like throwin’ dice.”

“What do you mean, sir, by calling me an old sport?” demanded the reputable old gentleman.

The red-faced man did not heed the question, but wheeled briskly on the magistrate.

“Your honor,” said the red-faced man, “there’s nothin’ to this. Sheeny Joe there has made a misdeal, that’s all. I’ve looked the case over, your honor; there’s nothin’ in it; you can let the girl an’ the boy go.”

“But he said the Dead Rabbit was a drum for crooks!” protested Sheeny Joe, speaking to the redfaced man.

“S’ppose he did,” retorted the other, “that don’t take a dollar out of the drawer.”

“An’ he’s to break my nose an’ get away?” complained Sheeny Joe.

“Well, you oughter to take care of your nose,” said the red-faced man, “an’ not go leavin’ it lyin’ around where a kid can break it.”

Sheeny Joe was not to be shaken off; he engaged in violent argument with the red-faced man. Their tones, however, were now more guarded, and no one might hear their words beyond themselves. While this went forward, the magistrate, to save his dignity, perhaps, and not to have it look as though he were waiting for orders, pretended to be writing in his book of cases which lay open on his desk.

It was Sheeny Joe to bring the discussion between himself and the red-faced man to an end. Throughout the whispered differences between them, differences as to what should be my fate, Sheeny Joe showed hot with fury, while the red-faced man was cool and conciliatory; his voice when one caught some sound of it was coaxing.

“There’s been enough said!” cried Sheeny Joe, suddenly walking away from the red-faced man. “No duck is goin’ to break my nose for fun.”

“The boy’s goin’ loose,” observed the red-faced man in placid contradiction. “An’ the girl goes to her friends, wherever they be, an’ they aint at the Dead Rabbit.” Then in a blink the countenance of the redfaced man went from calm to rage. He whirled Sheeny Joe by the shoulder. “See here!” he growled, “one more roar out of you, an’ I’ll stand you up right now, an’ it’s you who will take sixty

days, or my name aint Big John Kennedy. If you think that's a bluff, call it. Another yeeep, an' the boat's waitin' for you! You've been due at the Island for some time."

"That's all right, Mr. Kennedy!" replied Sheeny Joe, his crest falling, and the sharpest terror in his face, "that's all right! You know me? Of course it goes as you say! Did you ever know me to buck ag'inst you?"

The red-faced man smiled ferociously. The anger faded from his brow, and leaving Sheeny Joe without further word, he again spoke to the magistrate.

"The charges ag'inst these two children, your honor, are withdrawn." He spoke in his old cool tones. "Captain," he continued, addressing that dignitary, "send one of your plain-clothes people with this girl to find her friends for her. Tell him he mustn't make any mistakes."

"The cases are dismissed," said the magistrate, making an entry in his book. He appeared relieved with the change in the situation; almost as much, if that were possible, as myself. "The cases are dismissed; no costs to be taxed. I think that is what you desire, Mr. Kennedy?"

"Yes, your honor." Then coming over to where I sat, the red-faced man continued: "You hunt me up to-morrow – Big John Kennedy – that's my name. Any cop can tell you where to find me."

"Yes, sir," I answered faintly.

"There's two things about you," said the red-faced man, rubbing my stubble of hair with his big paw, "that's great in a boy. You can hit like the kick of a pony; an' you can keep your mouth shut. I aint heard a yelp out of you, mor'n if you was a Boston terrier." This, admiringly.

As we left the magistrate's office – the red-faced man, the reputable old gentleman, my father, Apple Cheek, and myself, with Anne holding my hand as though I were some treasure lost and regained – the reputable old gentleman spoke up pompously to the red-faced man.

"I commend what you have done, sir; but in that connection, and as a taxpayer, let me tell you that I resent your attitude towards the magistrate. You issued your orders, sir, and conducted yourself toward that officer of justice as though you owned him."

"Well, what of it?" returned the red-faced man composedly. "I put him there. What do you think I put him there for? To give me the worst of it?"

"Sir, I do not understand your expressions!" said the reputable old gentleman. "And I resent them! Yes, sir, I resent them as a taxpayer of this town!"

"Say," observed the red-faced man benignantly, "there's nothin' wrong about you but your head. You had better take a term or two at night school an' get it put on straight. You say you're a taxpayer; you've already fired the fact at me about five times. An' now I ask you: Suppose you be?"

"Taxpayer; yes, sir, taxpayer!" repeated the reputable old gentleman, in a mighty fume. "Do you intend to tell me there's no meaning to the word?"

"It means," said the red-faced man in the slow manner of one who gives instruction; "it means that if you're nothin' but a taxpayer – an' I don't think you be or you'd have told us – you might as well sit down. You're a taxpayer, eh? All right; I'm a ward-leader of Tammany Hall. You're a taxpayer; good! I'm the man that settles how much you pay, d'ye see!" Then, as though sympathy and disgust were blended: "Old man, you go home and take a hard look at the map, and locate yourself. You don't know it, but all the same you're in New York."

CHAPTER IV – THE BOSS ENTERS THE PRIMARY GRADE OF POLITICS

PERHAPS you will say I waste space and lay too much of foolish stress upon my quarrel with Sheeny Joe and its police-cell consequences. And yet you should be mindful of the incident's importance to me as the starting point of my career. For I read in what took place the power of the machine as you will read this printed page. I went behind the bars by the word of Big John Kennedy; and it was by his word that I emerged and took my liberty again. And yet who was Big John Kennedy? He was the machine; the fragment of its power which molded history in the little region where I lived. As mere John Kennedy he would be nothing. Or at the most no more than other men about him. But as "Big John Kennedy," an underchief of Tammany Hall, I myself stood witness while a captain of police accepted his commands without a question, and a magistrate found folk guilty or innocent at the lifting of his finger. Also, that sweat of terror to sprinkle the forehead of Sheeny Joe, when in his moment of rebellion he found himself beneath the wrathful shadow of the machine, was not the least impressive element of my experience; and the tolerant smile, that was half pity, half amusement, as Big Kennedy set forth to the reputable old gentleman – who was only "a taxpayer" – the little limits of his insignificance, deepened the effect upon my mind of what had gone before.

True, I indulged in no such analysis as the above, and made no study of the picture in its detail; but I could receive an impression just as I might receive a blow, and in the innocence of my ignorance began instantly to model myself upon the proven fact of a power that was above law, above justice, and which must be consulted and agreed with, even in its caprice, before existence could be profitable or even safe. From that moment the machine to me was as obviously and indomitably abroad as the pavement under foot, and must have its account in every equation of life to the solution whereof I was set. To hold otherwise, and particularly to act otherwise, would be to play the fool, with failure or something worse for a reward.

Big Kennedy owned a drinking place. His barroom was his headquarters; although he himself never served among his casks and bottles, having barmen for that work. He poured no whisky, tapped no beer, donned no apron, but sat at tables with his customers and laid out his campaigns of politics or jubilated over victory, and seemed rather the visitor than the proprietor in his own saloon. He owned shrewdness, force, courage, enterprise, and was one of those who carry a pleasant atmosphere that is like hypnotism, and which makes men like them. His manner was one of rude frankness, and folk held him for a bluff, blunt, genial soul, who made up in generosity what he lacked of truth.

And yet I have thought folk mistaken in Big Kennedy. For all his loud openness and friendly roar, which would seem to tell his every thought, the man could be the soul of cunning and turn secret as a mole. He was for his own interest; he came and went a cold calculating trader of politics; he never wasted his favors, but must get as much as he gave, and indulged in no revenges except when revenge was needed for a lesson. He did what men call good, too, and spent money and lost sleep in its accomplishment. To the ill he sent doctors and drugs; he found work and wages for idle men; he paid landlords and kept the roofs above the heads of the penniless; where folk were hungry he sent food, and where they were cold came fuel.

For all that, it was neither humanity nor any milk of kindness which put him to these labors of grace; it was but his method of politics and meant to bind men to him. They must do his word; they must carry out his will; then it was he took them beneath the wing of his power and would spare neither time nor money to protect and prosper them.

And on the other side, he who raised his head in opposition to Big Kennedy was crushed; not in anger, but in caution. He weeded out rebellion, and the very seed of it, with as little scruple and for the same reason a farmer weeds a field.

It took me years to collect these truths of Big Kennedy. Nor was their arrival when they did come one by one, to make a shade of change in my regard for him. I liked him in the beginning; I liked him in the end; he became that headland on the coasts of politics by which I steered my course. I studied Big Kennedy as one might study a science; by the lines of his conduct I laid down lines for my own; in all things I was his disciple and his imitator.

Big Kennedy is dead now; and I will say no worse nor better of him than this: He was a natural captain of men. Had he been born to a higher station, he might have lighted a wick in history that would require those ten thicknesses of darkness which belong with ten centuries, to obscure. But no such thing could come in the instance of Big Kennedy; his possibilities of eminence, like my own, were confined to Tammany and its politics, since he had no more of education than have I. The time has gone by in the world at large, and had in Big Kennedy's day, when the ignorant man can be the first man.

Upon the day following my release, as he had bid me.

I sought Big Kennedy. He was in his barroom, and the hour being mid-morning I was so far lucky as to find him quite alone. He was quick to see me, too, and seemed as full of a pleasant interest in me as though my simple looks were of themselves good news. He did most of the talking, for I sat backward and bashful, the more since I could feel his sharp eyes upon me, taking my measure. Never was I so looked over and so questioned, and not many minutes had come and gone before Big Kennedy knew as much of me and my belongings as did I myself. Mayhap more; for he weighed me in the scales of his experience with all the care of gold, considering meanwhile to what uses I should be put, and how far I might be expected to advance his ends.

One of his words I recall, for it gave me a glow of relief at the time; at that it was no true word. It was when he heard how slightly I had been taught of books.

"Never mind," said he, "books as often as not get between a party's legs and trip him up. Better know men than books. There's my library." Here he pointed to a group about a beer table. "I can learn more by studyin' them than was ever found between the covers of a book, and make more out of it."

Big Kennedy told me I must go to work.

"You've got to work, d'ye see," said he, "if it's only to have an excuse for livin'."

Then he asked me what I could do. On making nothing clear by my replies – for I knew of nothing – he descended to particulars.

"What do you know of horses? Can you drive one?"

My eye brightened; I might be trusted to handle a horse.

"An' I'll gamble you know your way about the East Side," said he confidently; "I'll answer for that." Then getting up he started for the door, for no grass grew between decision and action with Big Kennedy. "Come with me," he said.

We had made no mighty journey when we stopped before a grocery. It was a two-store front, and of a prosperous look, with a wealth of vegetables and fruits in crates, and baskets, and barrels, covering half the sidewalk. The proprietor was a rubicund German, who bustled forth at sight of my companion.

"How is Mr. Kennedy?" This with exuberance. "It makes me prout that you pay me a wisit."

"Yes?" said the other dryly. Then, going directly to the point: "Here's a boy I've brought you, Nick. Let him drive one of your wagons. Give him six dollars a week."

"But, Mr. Kennedy," replied the grocer dubiously, looking me over with the tail of his eye, "I haf yet no wacancy. My wagons is all full."

"I'm goin' to get him new duds," said Big Kennedy, "if that's what you're thinkin' about."

Still, the grocer, though not without some show of respectful alarm, insisted on a first position.

"If he was so well dressed even as you, Mr. Kennedy, yet I haf no wacancy," said he.

"Then make one," responded Big Kennedy coolly. "Dismiss one of the boys you have, d'ye see? At least two who work for you don't belong in my ward." As the other continued doubtful Big

Kennedy became sharp. “Come, come, come!” he cried in a manner peremptory rather than fierce; “I can’t wait all day. Don’t you feed your horses in the street? Don’t you obstruct the sidewalks with your stuff? Don’t you sell liquor in your rear room without a license? Don’t you violate a dozen ordinances? Don’t the police stand it an’ pass you up? An’ yet you hold me here fiddlin’ and foolin’ away time!”

“Yes, yes, Mr. Kennedy,” cried the grocer, who from the first had sought to stem the torrent of the other’s eloquence, “I was only try in’ to think up w’ich horse I will let him drive alreatty. That’s honest! sure as my name is Nick Fogel!”

Clothed in what was to me the splendors of a king, being indeed a full new suit bought with Big Kennedy’s money, I began rattling about the streets with a delivery wagon the very next day. As well as I could, I tried to tell my thanks for the clothes.

“That’s all right,” said Big Kennedy. “I owe you that much for havin’ you chucked into a cell.”

While Grocer Fogel might have been a trifle slow in hiring me, once I was engaged he proved amiable enough. I did my work well too, missing few of the customers and losing none of the baskets and sacks. Grocer Fogel was free with his praise and conceded my value. Still, since he instantly built a platform in the street on the strength of my being employed, and so violated a new and further ordinance upon which he for long had had an eye, I have sometimes thought that in forming his opinion of my worth he included this misdemeanor in his calculations. However, I worked with my worthy German four years; laying down the reins of that delivery wagon of my own will at the age of nineteen.

Nor was I without a profit in this trade of delivering potatoes and cabbages and kindred grocery forage. It broadened the frontiers of my acquaintance, and made known to me many of a solvent middle class, and of rather a higher respectability than I might otherwise have met. It served to clean up my manners, if nothing more, and before I was done, that acquaintance became with me an asset of politics.

While I drove wagon for Grocer Fogel, my work of the day was over with six o’clock. I had nothing to do with the care of the horses; I threw the reins to a stable hand when at evening I went to the barn, and left for my home without pausing to see the animals out of the straps or their noses into the corn. Now, had I been formed with a genius for it, I might have put in a deal of time at study. But nothing could have been more distant from my taste or habit; neither then nor later did I engage myself in any traffic with books, and throughout my life never opened a half-dozen.

Still, considering those plans I had laid down for myself, and that future of politics to which my ambition began to consider, I cannot say I threw away my leisure. If my nose were not between the pages of a book, my hands were within a pair of boxing gloves, and I, engaged against this or that opponent, was leading or guarding, hitting or stopping, rushing or getting away, and fitting to an utmost hand and foot and eye and muscle for the task of beating a foeman black and blue should the accidents or duties of life place one before me.

And I prospered with my boxing. I think I owned much native stomach for the business, since in my sullen fashion I was as near the touch of true happiness when in the midst of a mill as ever I hope to stand. My heart, and with that word I mean courage, was of fighting sort. While I was exceedingly cautious, my caution was based on courage. Men of this stamp stay until the last and either conquer or fall. There be ones who have courage, but their construction is the other way about. Their courage is based on caution; such if hard bested run away. Should you seek the man who will stand to the work of battle to the dour end, pick him whose caution, coming first in the procession of his nature, is followed by his courage, rather than that one whose caution follows his courage to tap it on the shoulder, preach to it of peril, and counsel flight.

You are not to assume that I went about these boxing gymnastics because of any savageries or blood-hunger dominant in my breast, or was moved solely of that instinct by which the game-cock fights. I went to my fist-studies as the result of thought and calculation. In my slow way I had noted how those henchmen of the inner circle who surrounded Big Kennedy – those who were near

to him, and upon whom he most relied, were wholly valued by him for the two matters of force of fist and that fidelity which asks no question. Even a thicker intellect than mine would have seen that to succeed as I proposed, I must be the gladiator. Wherefore, I boxed and wrestled and perfected my muscles; also as corollary I avoided drink and tobacco as I would two poisons.

And Big Kennedy, who had a little of his eye on me most of the time, was so good as to approve. He applauded my refusal of alcohol and tobacco. And he indorsed my determination to be a boxer.

“A man who can take care of himself with his hands,” said he, “an’ who never lets whisky fool him or steal his head, can go far in this game of politics. An’ it’s a pretty good game at that, is politics, and can be brought to pay like a bank.”

It chanced that I met with an adventure which added to my celebration in a way I could have wished. I was set upon by a drunken fellow – a stranger. He was an invader, bent upon mischief and came from an adjacent and a rival ward. I had offered no provocation; why he selected me to be his victim and whether it were accident or design I cannot say. Possibly I was pointed out to this drinking Hotspur as one from whose conquest honor would flow; perhaps some enemy of the pattern of Sheeny Joe had set him to it. All I know is that without challenge given, or the least offer of warning, the creature bore down upon me, whirling his fists like flails.

“You’re the party I’m lookin’ for!” was all he said.

In the mix-up to follow, and which I had neither time to consider nor avoid, the visitor from that other ward was fully and indubitably beaten. This was so evident that he himself admitted it when at the finish of hostilities certain Samaritans gave him strong drink as a restorative. It developed also that my assailant, in a shadowy subdued way, was a kind of prizefighter, and by his own tribe deemed invincible. My victory, therefore, made a noise in immediate circles; and I should say it saved me from a deal of trouble and later strife, since it served to place me in a class above the common. There came few so drunk or so bold as to ask for trouble with me, and I found that this casual battle – safe, too, because my prizefighter was too drunk to be dangerous – had brought me a wealth of peace.

There dawned a day when Big Kennedy gave me a decisive mark of his esteem. He presented me to his father. The elder Kennedy, white-haired and furrowed of age, was known as “Old Mike.” He was a personage of gravity and power, since his was the only voice in that region to which Big Kennedy would yield. Wherefore to be of “Old Mike’s” acquaintance shone in one’s favor like a title of knighthood.

Big Kennedy’s presentation speech, when he led me before his father, was characteristic and peculiar. Old Mike was in the shadow of his front porch, while three or four oldsters of the neighborhood, like a council or a little court about a monarch, and all smoking short clay pipes, were sitting about him.

“Here’s a pup,” cried Big Kennedy, with his hand on my shoulder, “I want you to look over. He’s a great pup and ought to make a great dog.”

Old Mike glanced at me out of his twinkling gray eyes. After a moment he said, addressing me: “Come ag’in.”

That was all I had from Old Mike that journey.

Big Kennedy it should be said was a model for all sons. He kept his father in ease and comfort in a house of his own. He was prone to have Old Mike’s advice, particularly if what he proposed were a step novel or one dangerous in its policy, and he never went to anything in the face of Old Mike’s word. It wasn’t deference, it was faith; Big Kennedy believed in the wisdom of Old Mike and relied upon it with a confidence that was implicit. I shall have more to tell of Old Mike as my story unrolls to the eye. If Big Kennedy were my example, Old Mike should be called my mentor. Taking the cue from Big Kennedy, I came to own for Old Mike that veneration which the youths of Ancient Greece felt for their oracles, and as utterly accepted either his argument or conclusion. It stood no wonder that I was impressed and played upon by this honor of an introduction to Old Mike. To bring you before Old Mike and name you for his consideration was the extremest proof of Big Kennedy’s

regard. As I've said, it glittered on one like the chain and spurs of knighthood, and the fact of it gave me a pedestal among my fellows.

After my bout with that erring one who came out of his own ward to sup grief at my hands, there began to collect about me a coterie of halfway bruisers. This circle – and our enemies were quick to bestow upon it the epithet of “gang” – never had formal organization. And while the members were of the rougher sort, and each a man of his hands, the argument of its coming together was not so much aggression as protection.

The town forty years ago was not a theater of peace and lambs'-wool safety. One's hand must keep one's head, and a stout arm, backed by a stout heart, traveled far. To leave one's own ward, or even the neighborhood where one lived, was to invite attack. In an alien ward, one would be set upon and beaten to rags before one traveled a mile. If one of the enemy were not equal to the business, others would lend a hand. Whether it required one or two or three or twenty, the interloper was fated to heir a drubbing. If his bones were not broken, he was looked upon as fortunate, while those who had undertaken to correct his wanderings went despised as bunglers who had slighted a task.

Now and then a war-party would make a sortie from their own region to break windows and heads in the country of an enemy. Such hands often descended upon the domain of Big Kennedy, and it was a notion of defense against these Goths which brought the militant spirits I have mentioned to my shoulder. It was we who must meet them, when they would make desolate our territory. The police were of no use; they either walked the other way in a spirit of cautious neutrality, or were driven into hiding with a shower of stones.

By the common tongue, this coterie to collect at my back was named the “Tin Whistle Gang.” Each member carried a whistle as part of his pocket furniture. These were made of uniform pattern, and the same keen note, like the screech of a hawk, was common to all.

The screaming fife-like song would bring out the Tin Whistles as hotly bent for action as a colony of wasps. In those days, when might was right, the sound of these whistles was a storm signal. Quiet people shut their doors and drew their bolts, while apothecaries made ready to sell lint and plasters.

It is required that I speak of the Tin Whistles in this place. I was now for the first time to be called into political activity by Big Kennedy. I was eighteen, and of a sober, steady, confident cast, and trustworthy in a wordless way. Because I was sober of face and one not given to talk or to laughter, men looked on me as five years better than my age; I think these characteristics even imposed on Big Kennedy himself, for he dealt with me as though I were a man full grown.

It was in the height of a campaign. Two days before the balloting, Big Kennedy sent for me. There was a room to the rear of his bar. This room was a holy of holies; no one entered there who was not established in the confidence of Big Kennedy. It was a greater distinction even than the acquaintance of Old Mike. Knowing these things, my brow flushed when Big Kennedy led me into this sanctum of his policies.

“Now, if I didn't trust you,” said Big Kennedy, looking me hard in the eye, “if I didn't trust you, you'd be t'other side of that door.” I said nothing; I had found that silence pleased Big Kennedy, and I learned early to keep my tongue between my teeth. Big Kennedy went on: “On election day the polls will close at six o'clock. Half an hour before they close, take that Bible Class of yours, the Tin Whistles, and drive every one of the opposition workers an' ticket peddlers away from the polling place. You'll know them by their badges. I don't want anyone hurt mor'n you have to. The less blood, the better. Blood's news; it gets into the papers. Now remember: half an hour before six, blow your whistle an' sail in. When you've got the other fellows on the run, keep'em goin'. And don't let'em come back, d'ye see.”

CHAPTER V – THE BATTLE OF THE BALLOTS

BIG KENNEDY'S commands concerning the Tin Whistles taught me that lurking somewhere in the election situation he smelled peril to himself. Commonly, while his methods might be a wide shot to the left of the lawful, they were never violent. He must feel himself hard pressed to call for fist and club. He lived at present cross-purposes with sundry high spirits of the general organization; perhaps a word was abroad for his disaster and he had heard some sigh of it. This would be nothing wonderful; coarse as he seemed fibered, Big Kennedy had spun his web throughout the ward as close-meshed as any spider, and any fluttering proof of treason was certain to be caught in it.

The election, while the office at local bay came to be no weightier than that of Alderman, was of moment to Big Kennedy. Defeat would mean his eclipse, and might even spell his death of politics. To lose the Alderman was to let fall the reins of ward direction. The Alderman and his turtle-devouring fellows cracked the whip over the police whom they appointed or dismissed, and the police were a ballot-engine not to be resisted. He who held the Alderman, held the police; and he who had the police, carried victory between his hands.

Doubtless it was some inner-circle treachery which Big Kennedy apprehended. The regular opposition, while numerous and carrying on its muster rolls the best respectability of the ward, lacked of that organization which was the ridgepole of Big Kennedy's supremacies. It straggled, and was mob-like in its movements; and while, as I've written, it showed strong in numbers, it was no more to be collected or fashioned into any telling force for political effort than a flock of grazing sheep. If there were to come nothing before him more formidable than the regular opposition, Big Kennedy would go over it like a train of cars and ask no aid of shoulder-hitters. Such innocent ones might stand three deep about a ballot-box, and yet Big Kennedy would take from it what count of votes he chose and they be none the wiser. It would come to no more than cheating a child at cards.

The open opposition to Big Kennedy was made up of divers misfit elements. At its head, as a sort of captain by courtesy, flourished that reputable peppery old gentleman who aforetime took my part against Sheeny Joe. A bit in love with his own eloquence, and eager for a forum wherein to exercise it, the reputable old gentleman had named himself for Alderman against Big Kennedy's candidate. As a campaign scheme of vote-getting – for he believed he had but to be heard to convince a listener – the reputable old gentleman engaged himself upon what he termed a house-to-house canvass.

It was the evening of that day whereon Big Kennedy gave me those orders touching the Tin Whistles when the reputable old gentleman paid a visit to Old Mike, that Nestor being as usual on his porch and comforting himself with a pipe. I chanced to be present at the conversation, although I had no word therein; I was much at Old Mike's knee during those callow days, having an appetite for his counsel.

“Good-evening, sir,” said the reputable old gentleman, taking a chair which Old Mike's politeness provided, “good-evening, sir. My name is Morton – Mr. Morton of the Morton Bank. I live in Lafayette Place. Incidentally, I am a candidate for the office of Alderman, and I thought I'd take the freedom of a neighbor and a taxpayer and talk with you on that topic of general interest.”

“Why then,” returned Old Mike, with a cynical grin, “I'm th' daddy of Big Jawn Kennedy, an' for ye to talk to me would be loike throwin' away your toime.”

The reputable old gentleman was set aback by the news. Next he took heart of grace.

“For,” he said, turning upon Old Alike a pleasant eye, although just a dash of the patronizing showed in the curve of his brow, “if I should be so fortunate as to explain to you your whole duty of politics, it might influence your son. Your son, I understand, listens greatly to your word.”

“He would be a ba-ad son who didn't moind his own father,” returned Old Mike. “As to me jooty av politics – it's th' same as every other man's. It's the jooty av lookin' out for meself.”

This open-air selfishness as declared by Old Mike rather served to shock the reputable old gentleman.

“And in politics do you think first of yourself?” he asked.

“Not only first, but lasht,” replied Old Mike. “An’ so do you; an’ so does every man.”

“I cannot understand the narrowness of your view,” retorted the reputable old gentleman, somewhat austere and distant. “You are a respectable man; you call yourself a good citizen?”

“Why,” responded Old Mike, for the other’s remark concluded with a rising inflection like a question, “I get along with th’ p’lice; an’ I get along with th’ priests – what more should a man say!”

“Are you a taxpayer?”

“I have th’ house,” responded Old Mike, with a smile.

The reputable old gentleman considered the other dubiously. Evidently he didn’t regard Old Mike’s one-story cottage as all that might be desired in the way of credentials. Still he pushed on.

“Have you given much attention to political economy?” This with an erudite cough. “Have you made politics a study?”

“From me cradle,” returned Old Mike. “Every Irishman does. I knew so much about politics before I was twinty-one, th’ British Government would have transhported me av I’d stayed in Dublin.”

“I should think,” said the reputable old gentleman, with a look of one who had found something to stand on, “that if you ran from tyranny in Ireland, you would refuse here to submit to the tyranny of Tammany Hall. If you couldn’t abide a Queen, how can you now put up with a Boss?”

“I didn’t run from th’ Queen, I ran from th’ laws,” said Old Mike. “As for the Boss – everything that succeeds has a Boss. The President’s a boss; the Pope’s a boss; Stewart’s a boss in his store down in City Hall Park. That’s right; everything that succeeds has a boss. Nothing is strong enough to stand the mishtakes av more than one man. Ireland would have been free th’ long cinturies ago if she’d only had a boss.”

“But do you call it good citizenship,” demanded the reputable old gentleman, not a trifle nettled by Old Mike’s hard-shell philosophy of state; “do you call it good citizenship to take your orders from a boss? You are loyal to Tammany before you are loyal to the City?”

“Shure!” returned Old Mike, puffing the puffs of him who is undisturbed. “Do ye ever pick up a hand in a game av ca-ards?” The reputable old gentleman seemed properly disgusted. “There you be then! City Government is but a game; so’s all government, Shure, it’s as if you an’ me were playin’ a game av ca-ards, this politics; your party is your hand, an’ Tammany is my hand. In a game of ca-ards, which are ye loyal to, is it your hand or the game? Man, it’s your hand av coorse! By the same token! I am loyal to Tammany Hall.”

That closed the discussion; the reputable old gentleman went his way, and one might tell by his face that the question to assail him was whether he had been in a verbal encounter with a Bedlamite or an Anarchist. He did not recognize me, nor was I sorry. I liked the reputable old gentleman because of that other day, and would not have had him discover me in what he so plainly felt to be dangerous company.

“He’s a mighty ignorant man,” said Old Mike, pointing after the reputable old gentleman with the stem of his pipe. “What this country has mosht to fear is th’ ignorance av th’ rich.”

It stood perhaps ten of the clock on the morning of election day when, on word sent me, I waited on Big Kennedy in his barroom. When he had drawn me into his sanctum at the rear, he, as was his custom, came pointedly to the purpose.

“There’s a fight bein’ made on me,” he said. “They’ve put out a lot of money on the quiet among my own people, an’ think to sneak th’ play on me.” While Big Kennedy talked, his eyes never left mine, and I could feel he was searching me for any flickering sign that the enemy had been tampering with my fealty. I stared back at him like a statue. “An’,” went on Big Kennedy, “not to put a feather-edge on it, I thought I’d run you over, an’ see if they’d been fixin’ you. I guess you’re all right; you look on the level.” Then swinging abruptly to the business of the day; “Have you got your gang ready?”

“Yes,” I nodded.

“Remember my orders. Five-thirty is the time. Go for the blokes with badges – th’ ticket peddlers. An’ mind! don’t pound’em, chase’em. Unless they stop to slug with you, don’t put a hand on’em.”

Being thus re-instructed and about to depart, I made bold to ask Big Kennedy if there were any danger of his man’s defeat. He shook his head.

“Not a glimmer,” he replied. “But we’ve got to keep movin’. They’ve put out stacks of money. They’ve settled it to help elect the opposition candidate – this old gent, Morton. They don’t care to win; they’re only out to make me lose. If they could take the Alderman an’ the police away from me, they would go in next trip an’ kill me too dead to skin. But it’s no go; they can’t make th’ dock. They’ve put in their money; but I’ll show’em a trick that beats money to a standstill.”

It was as I had surmised; Big Kennedy feared treachery and the underhand support of the enemy by men whom he called his friends. For myself, I would stand by him. Big Kennedy was the only captain I knew.

To the commands of Big Kennedy, and their execution, I turned with as ready a heart as ever sent duck to drink. No impulse to disobey or desert so much as crossed my slope of thought. Tammany Hall has ever been military in its spirit. Big Kennedy was my superior officer, I but a subaltern; it was my province to accept his commands and carry them forward without argument or pause.

In full and proper season, I had my Tin Whistles in hand. I did not march them to the polling place in a body, since I was not one to obstreperously vaunt or flaunt an enterprise in advance. Also, I was too much the instinctive soldier to disclose either my force or my purpose, and I knew the value of surprise.

There were a round twenty of my Tin Whistles, each a shoulder-hitter and warm to shine in the graces of Big Kennedy. I might have recruited a double strength, but there was no need. I had counted the foe; the poll-tenders of the opposition numbered but ten; my twenty, and each a berserk of his fists, ought to scatter them like a flock of sparrows. My instructions given to my fellows were precisely Big Kennedy’s orders as given to me; no blows, no blood unless made necessary by resistance.

As the time drew down for action, my Tin Whistles were scattered about, sticking close to the elbows of the enemy, and waiting the signal. The polling booth was a small frame construction, not much larger than a Saratoga trunk. On other occasions it served as the office of a wood and coal concern. The table, with the ballot-box thereon, stood squarely in the door; behind it were the five or six officers – judges and tally clerks – of election. There was a crush and crowd of Big Kennedy’s clansmen to entirely surround the little building, and they so choked up the path that ones who had still to vote couldn’t push through. There arose, too, a deal of shoving and jostling, and all to a running uproar of profanity; affairs appeared to be drifting towards the disorderly.

The reputable old gentleman, his face red with indignation, was moving to and fro on the outskirts of the crowd, looking for a police officer. He would have him cut a way through the press for those who still owned votes. No officer was visible; the reputable old gentleman, even though he searched with that zeal common of candidates anxious for success, would have no aid from the constabulary.

“And this is the protection,” cried the reputable old gentleman, striding up to Big Kennedy, and shaking a wrathful finger in his face, “that citizens and taxpayers receive from the authorities! Here are scores of voters who are being blocked from the polls and robbed of their franchise. It’s an outrage!”

Big Kennedy smiled upon the reputable old gentleman, but made no other reply.

“It’s an outrage!” repeated the reputable old gentleman in a towering fury. “Do you hear? It’s an outrage on the taxpaying citizens of this town!”

“Look out, old man!” observed a young fellow who stood at Big Kennedy’s side, and who from his blackened hands and greasy blue shirt seemed to be the engineer of some tug. “Don’t get too hot. You’ll blow a cylinder head.”

“How dare you!” fumed the reputable old gentleman; “you, a mere boy by comparison! how dare you address me in such terms! I’m old enough, sir, to be your father! You should understand, sir, that I’ve voted for a president eight times in my life.”

“That’s nothin’,” returned the other gayly; “I have voted for a president eighty times before ten o’clock.”

In the midst of the laugh that followed this piece of characteristic wit, Big Kennedy crossed to where I stood.

“Send your boys along!” said he. “Let’s see how good you are.”

My whistle screamed the signal. At the first sharp note, a cry went up:

“The Tin Whistles! The Tin Whistles!”

It was done in a moment; a pair to a man, my Tin Whistles were sending their quarry down the streets as fast as feet might follow. And they obeyed directions; not a blow was struck, no blood was drawn; there was a hustling flurry, and the others took to their heels. The hard repute of the Tin Whistles was such that no ten were wild enough to face them or meet their charge.

As the Tin Whistles fell upon their victims, the press of men that surged about the polling place began to shout, and strain, and tug. Suddenly, the small building commenced to heave and lift suspiciously. It was as though an earthquake were busy at its base. The mob about the structure seemed to be rolling it over on its side. That would be no feat, with men enough to set hand upon it and carry it off like a parcel.

With the first heave there came shouts and oaths from those within. Then arose a crashing of glass, and the table was cast aside, as the threatened clerks and judges fought to escape through door and window. In the rush and scamper of it, a sharp hand seized the ballot-box.

Ten minutes the riot raged. It was calmed by Big Kennedy, who forced himself into the middle of the tumult, hurling men right and left with his powerful hands as though they were sacks of bran, while he commanded the peace in a voice like the roar of a lion.

Peace fell; the little building, which had not been overthrown, but only rocked and tipped, settled again to a decorous safe solidity; the judges and the clerks returned; the restored ballot-box again occupied the table.

As that active one, who had saved the ballot-box when the downfall of the building seemed threatened came edgewise through the throng, he passed close to Big Kennedy. The latter gave him a sharp glance of inquiry.

“I stuffed it full to the cover,” whispered the active one. “We win four to one, an’ you can put down your money on that!”

Big Kennedy nodded, and the zealot who saved the ballot-box passed on and disappeared.

When the Tin Whistles fell upon their prey, I started to go with them. But in a moment I saw there was no call; the foe went off at top flight, and my twenty would keep them moving. Thus reasoning, I turned again to see what was going forward about the booth.

My interest was immediately engaged by the words and actions of the reputable old gentleman, who, driven to frenzy, was denouncing. Big Kennedy and all who wore his colors as scoundrels without measure or mate.

“I defy both you and your plug-uglies,” he was shouting, flourishing his fist in the face of Big Kennedy, who, busy with his own plans, did not heed him. “This is a plot to stuff the ballot-box.”

The reputable old gentleman had gone thus far, when a hulking creature of a rough struck him from behind with a sandbag. I sprang forward, and fended away a second blow with my left arm. As I did so, I struck the rough on the jaw with such vengeful force that, not only did he drop like some pole-axed ox, but my right hand was fairly wrecked thereby. Without pausing to discover my

own condition or that of the sandbag-wielding ruffian, I picked up the reputable old gentleman and bore him out of the crowd.

The reputable old gentleman had come by no serious harm; he was stunned a trifle, and his hat broken. With me to hold him up, he could stand on his feet, though still dazed and addled from the dull power of the blow. I beckoned a carriage which Big Kennedy had employed to bring the old and infirm to the polling place. It came at my signal, and I placed the reputable old gentleman inside, and told the driver to take him to his home. The reputable old gentleman was murmuring and shaking his head as he drove away. As I closed the carriage door, he muttered: "This is barbarous! That citizens and taxpayers should receive such treatment – " The balance was lost in the gride of the wheels.

The hurly-burly had now ceased; all was as calm and equal as a goose pond.

"So you saved the old gentleman," said Big Kennedy, as he came towards me. "Gratitude, I s'pose, because he stood pal to you ag'inst Sheeny Joe that time. Gratitude! You'll get over that in time," and Big Kennedy wore a pitying look as one who dwells upon another's weakness. "That was Jimmy the Blacksmith you smashed. You'd better look out for him after this." My dander was still on end, and I intimated a readiness to look out for Jimmy the Blacksmith at once.

"Mind your back now!" cautioned Big Kennedy, "and don't take to gettin' it up. Let things go as they lay. Never fight till you have to, d'ye see! an' never fight for fun. Don't go lookin' for th' Blacksmith until you hear he's out lookin' for you." Then, as shifting the subject: "It's been a great day, an' everything to run off as smooth an' true as sayin' mass. Now let's go back and watch'em count the votes."

"Did we beat them?" I asked.

"Snowed'em under!" said Big Kennedy.

CHAPTER VI – THE RED JACKET ASSOCIATION

BIG KENNEDY'S success at the election served to tighten the rivets of his rule. It was now I looked to see him ferret forth and punish those renegades who had wrought against him in the dark. To my amazement he engaged himself in no such retaliatory labor. On the contrary he smiled on all about him like the sun at noon. Was it folly or want of heart that tied his hands? Assuredly it was error, and this I submitted to Old Mike. That veteran of policy disagreed with this, meanwhile beaming upon me in a way of fatherly cunning.

"Jawn knows his business," said Old Mike. "Thim people didn't rebel, they sold out. That's over with an' gone by. Everybody'll sell ye out if he gets enough; that's a risk ye have to take. There's that Limerick man, Gaffney, however; ye'll see something happen to Gaffney. He's one of thim patent-leather Micks an' puts on airs. He's schemin' to tur-urn Jawn down an' take th' wa-ard. Ye'll see something happen to that Limerick man, Gaffney."

Gaffney made his money with flour and horse feed and hay and similar goods. Also, as Old Mike said, Gaffney was ambitious. It was within the week, when a midnight shower of stones smashed sash and glass and laid waste that offensive merchant's place of business. Gaffney restored his sash and glass only to invite a second midnight storm of stones. Three times were Gaffney's windows smashed by hands unknown; and no police officer would go within two blocks of Gaffney's. In the end, Gaffney came to Big Kennedy. The latter met him with a hectoring laugh.

"Why do you come to me?" asked Big Kennedy. "Somebody's been trying to smash the windows of my leadership for over a year, but I never went howling about it to you."

Gaffney showed not a little shaken. He asked, in a manner sullen yet beaten, what he should do.

"I'd get out of th' ward," replied Big Kennedy as cool as ice. "Somebody's got it in for you. Now a man that'll throw a brick will light a match, d'ye see, an' a feed store would burn like a tar barrel."

"If I could sell out, I'd quit," said Gaffney.

"Well," responded Big Kennedy, "I always like to help a friend."

Grocer Fogel bought Gaffney's store, making a bargain.

This iron-bound lesson in practical politics I dwell on in full. I drew from it some notion of the stern character of that science. Old Mike, from the pinnacles of his hard experience, looked down to justify it.

"Gaffney would do th' same," said Old Mike, "if his ar-rm was long enough. Politics is a game where losers lose all; it's like war, shure, only no one's kilt – at any rate, not so many."

As the days drew on, I grew in favor with Big Kennedy, and the blossom thereof took this color.

"Why don't you start a club?" he asked one afternoon, as we sat in his sanctum. "You could bring two hundred young fellows together, couldn't you?"

"Yes," I replied. I spoke doubtfully; the suggestion was of the sharpest, and gave me no space to think. It was one, too, which asked questions of the kind that don't answer themselves. "But where would they meet?" I put this after a pause.

"There's the big lodgeroom over my saloon," and Big Kennedy tossed his stubby thumb towards the ceiling. "You could meet there. There's a dumb waiter from the bar to send up beer and smokes."

"How about the Tin Whistles?" I hinted. "Would they do to build on?"

"Leave the Tin Whistles out. They're all right as shoulder-hitters, an' a swifter gang to help at the polls, or break up the opposition's meetin's, never walked the streets. But for a play of this kind, they're a little off color. Your Tin Whistles can join, man by man, but if they do they must sing low. They mustn't try to give the show; it's the back seat for them. What you're out for now is the respectable young workin'-man racket; that's the lay."

"But where's the money?" said I. "These people I have in mind haven't much money."

“Of course not,” retorted Big Kennedy confidently, “an’ what little they have they want for beer. But listen: You get the room free. Then once a year your club gives an excursion on the river; it ought to sell hundreds of tickets because there’ll be hundreds of officeholders, an’ breweries, an’ saloon keepers, an’ that sort who’ll be crazy to buy’em. If they aint crazy to start with, you ought to be able to make’em crazy th’ first election that comes ‘round. The excursion should bring three thousand dollars over an’ above expenses, d’ye see. Then you can give balls in the winter an’ sell tickets. Then there’s subscriptions an’ hon’ry memberships. You’ll ketch on; there’s lots of ways to skin th’ cat. You can keep th’ club in clover an’ have some of the long green left. That’s settled then; you organize a young men’s club. You be president an’ treasurer; see to that. An’ now,” here Big Kennedy took me by the shoulder and looked me instructively in the eye, “it’s time for you to be clinchin’ onto some stuff for yourself. This club’s goin’ to take a lot of your time. It’ll make you do plenty of work. You’re no treetoad; you can’t live on air an’ scenery.” Big Kennedy’s look deepened, and he shook me as one who demands attention. “You’ll be president and treasurer, particularly treasurer; and I’ll chip you in this piece of advice. A good cook always licks his fingers.” Here he winked deeply.

This long speech was not thrown away. Big Kennedy, having delivered himself, lapsed into silence, while I sat ruminating ways and means and what initiatory steps I should take.

“What shall we call it?” I asked, as I arose to go.

“Give it an Indian name,” said Big Kennedy. “S’p-pose you call it the Red Jacket Association.”

Within the fortnight the Red Jackets held their maiden meeting. It was an hour rife of jubilation, fellowship, and cheer. While abstinence from drink was my guiding phrase, I made no point of that kind in the conduct of others, and a nearby brewery having contributed unlimited beer those whom it pleased lacked no reason for a light heart.

As Big Kennedy had advised, I was chosen for the double responsibilities of president and treasurer. I may say in my own compliment, however, that these honors came drifting to my feet. There were reasons for this aside from any stiffness of heart or fist-virtues which might be mine. I have said that I was by disposition as taciturn as a tree, and this wondrous gift of silence earned me the name of wisdom, I was looked upon as one whose depth was rival to the ocean’s. Stronger still, as the argument by which I rose, was my sobriety. The man who drinks, and whether it be little or much, never fails to save his great respect for him who sets whisky aside.

“An’ now,” remarked Big Kennedy, when the club had found fortunate birth, “with these Red Jackets to make the decent front, th’ Tin Whistles to fall back on for the rough work, and Gaffney out of th’ way, I call th’ ward cleaned up. I’ll tell you this, my son: after th’ next election you shall have an office, or there’s no such man as Big John Kennedy.” He smote the table with his heavy hand until the glasses danced.

“But I won’t be of age,” I suggested.

“What’s the difference?” said Big Kennedy. “We’ll play that you are, d’ye see. There’ll be no one fool enough to talk about your age if I’m at your side. We’ll make it a place in the dock department; that’ll be about your size. S’ppose we say a perch where there’s twelve hundred dollars a year, an’ nothin’ to do but draw th’ scads an’ help your friends.”

Jimmy the Blacksmith was an under-captain of Big Kennedy’s and prevailed as vote-master in the northern end of the ward. Within certain fixed frontiers, which ran on one side within a block of my home, it was the business of Jimmy the Blacksmith to have watch and ward. He had charge of what meetings were held, and under the thumb of Big Kennedy carried forward the campaign, and on election day got out the vote.

Having given the question its share of thought, I determined for myself on a forward, upward step. My determination – heart and soul – became agate-hard to drive Jimmy the Blacksmith from his place, and set up my own rule over that slender kingdom.

Nor would I say aught to Big Kennedy of this private war which I meditated. Not that he would have interfered either to thwart or aid me, but by the ethics of the situation, to give him such notice

was neither proper nor expected. To fight Jimmy the Blacksmith for his crown was not only right by every rule of ward justice, but it was the thing encouraged as a plan best likely to bring the strongest to the fore. Take what you may, keep what you can! was a Tammany statute; I would be right enough in that overthrow of Jimmy the Blacksmith, I was bent upon, if only I proved strong enough to bring it about. No, I was not to give word of my campaign to Big Kennedy, it was none of his affair, and he would prefer to be ignorant since he was bound to stand neutral. It is policy thus to let the younger cocks try beak and spur among themselves; it develops leadership, and is the one sure way of safety in picking out your captains.

There was one drawback; I didn't live within the region of which I would make prize. However, ambition edged my wits and I bethought me of a plan whereby I might plow around that stump.

It was my own good fortune that I had no love, but only hate, for Jimmy the Blacksmith. I was yet so softened of a want of years, that had we been friends I would have withheld myself from attacking him. Youth is generous, wherefore youth is weak. It is not until age has stopped these leaks in one's nature, and one ceases to give and only lives to take and keep, that one's estate begins to take on fat. Have the word, therefore, of him whose scars speak for his experience: that one will be wise who regards generosity as a malady, a mere disease, and sets to cure it with every sullen, cruel drug the case demands. I say it was my good luck to hate Jimmy the Blacksmith. He had never condoned that election-day blow, and I must confess there was reason for this hardness. His jaw had been broken, and, though mended, it was still all of one side and made of him a most forbidding spectacle. And he nursed a thought of revenge in his breast; there came a light to his eye when we met that belongs with none save him whose merest wish is murder. I would have had more than black looks, but his heart was of a pale and treacherous family that can strike no blow in front, and thus far the pathway of chance had not opened for him to come upon me unaware. For all of which, not alone my ambition, but my safety and my pleasure urged me about the destruction of Jimmy the Blacksmith.

That epithet of the Blacksmith was born of no labors of the forge. Jimmy the Blacksmith was no more a blacksmith than a bishop. If he ever did a day's work, then the fact was already so far astern upon the tides of time that no eye of memory might discern it. The title was won in a brawl wherein he slew a man. True to his nature, Jimmy slunk away from his adversary and would not face him. He returned, carrying a blacksmith's fore-hammer. Creeping behind the other, Jimmy suddenly cried, with an oath:

"I'll clink your anvil for you!"

With that word, the hammer descended and the victim fell, skull crushed like an eggshell. It required a deal of perjury to save the murderer from noose and trap. I should not say he was set backward by this bloodshed, since most men feared him for it and stepped out of his way, giving him what he asked for in the name of their own safety. It was for this work he was called the Blacksmith, and he carried the word as though it were a decoration.

Such was the man on whose downfall I stood resolved and whose place I meant to make my own. The thing was simple of performance too; all it asked were secrecy and a little wit. There was a Tammany club, one of regular sort and not like my Red Jacket Association, which was volunteer in its character. It met in that kingdom of the Blacksmith's as a little parliament of politics. This club was privileged each year to name for Big Kennedy's approval a man for that post of undercaptain. The annual selection was at hand. For four years the club had named Jimmy the Blacksmith; there came never the hint for believing he would not be pitched upon again.

Now be it known that scores of my Red Jackets were residents of the district over which Jimmy the Blacksmith held sway. Some there were who already belonged to his club. I gave those others word to join at once. Also I told them, as they regarded their standing as Red Jackets, to be present at that annual meeting.

The night arrived; the room was small and the attendance – except for my Red Jackets – being sparse, my people counted for three-quarters of those present. With the earliest move I took

possession of the meeting, and selected its chairman. Then, by resolution, I added the block in which I resided to the public domain of the club. That question of residence replied to, instead of Jimmy the Blacksmith, I was named ballot-captain for the year. It was no more complex as a transaction than counting ten. The fact was accomplished like scratching a match; I had set the foot of my climbing on Jimmy the Blacksmith's neck.

That unworthy was present; and to say he was made mad with the fury of it would be to write with snow the color of his feelings.

"It's a steal!" he cried, springing to his feet. The little bandbox of a hall rang with his roarings. Then, to me: "I'll fight you for it! You don't dare meet me in the Peach Orchard to-morrow at three!"

"Bring your sledge, Jimmy," shouted some humorist; "you'll need it."

The Peach Orchard might have been a peach orchard in the days of Peter Stuyvesant. All formal battles took place in the Peach Orchard. Wherefore, and because the challenge for its propriety was not without precedent, to the Peach Orchard at the hour named I repaired.

Jimmy the Blacksmith, however, came not. Someone brought the word that he was sick; whereat those present, being fifty gentlemen with a curiosity to look on carnage, and ones whose own robust health led them to regard the term "sickness" as a synonym for the preposterous, jeered the name of Jimmy the Blacksmith from their hearts.

"Jimmy the Cur! it ought to be," growled one, whose disappointment over a fight deferred was sore in the extreme.

Perhaps you will argue that it smacked of the underhand to thus steal upon Jimmy the Blacksmith and take his place from him without due warning given. I confess it would have been more like chivalry if I had sent him, so to say, a glove and told my intentions against him. Also it would have augmented labor and multiplied risk. The great thing is to win and win cheaply; a victory that costs more than it comes to is nothing but a mask for defeat.

"You're down and out," said Big Kennedy, when Jimmy the Blacksmith brought his injuries to that chieftain. "Your reputation is gone too; you were a fool to say 'Peach Orchard' when you lacked the nerve to make it good. You'll never hold up your head ag'in in th' ward, an' if I was you I'd line out after Gaffney. This is a bad ward for a mongrel, Jimmy, an' I'd skin out."

Jimmy the Blacksmith followed Gaffney and disappeared from the country of Big Kennedy. He was to occur again in my career, however, as he who reads on shall see, and under conditions which struck the color from my cheek and set my heart to a trot with the terrors they loosed at its heels.

CHAPTER VII – HOW THE BOSS WAS NAMED FOR ALDERMAN

NOW it was that in secret my ambition took a hearty start and would vine-like creep and clamber. My triumph over Jimmy the Blacksmith added vastly to my stature of politics. Moreover, the sly intrigue by which I conquered began to found for me a fame. I had been locally illustrious, if I may so set the term to work, for a granite fist and a courage as rooted as a tree. For these traits the roughs revered me, and I may say I found my uses and rewards. Following my conquest of that under-captaincy, however, certain upper circles began to take account of me; circles which, if no purer than those others of ruder feather, were wont to produce more bulging profits in the pockets of their membership. In brief, I came to be known for one capable and cunning of a plot, and who was not without a genius for the executive.

With Big Kennedy I took high position. His relations with Jimmy the Blacksmith never had been close; he had never unbuckled in any friendship and felt for him nothing nearer than distrust. But for me he held another pose. Big Kennedy, upon my elevation, fair made me his partner in the ward, a partnership wherein, to speak commercially, I might be said to have had an interest of one-fourth. This promotion brought me pleasure; and being only a boy when all was said, while I went outwardly quiet, my spirit in the privacy of my own bosom would on occasion spread moderately its tail and strut.

Now, as time passed, I became like the shadow of Big Kennedy's authority throughout the ward; my voice was listened to and my word obeyed. I should say, too, that I made it a first concern to carry the interest of Big Kennedy ever on the crest of my thought. This should be called the offspring neither of loyalty nor gratitude; I did it because it was demanded of my safety and to curry advantage for myself. For all that attitude of confident friendship, I was not put off my guard. Big Kennedy never let my conduct roam beyond his ken. A first sign of an interest outside his own would have meant my instant disappearance. He would have plucked me of my last plume. With a breath he could reduce me to be a beggarman where now I gave alms. Having, therefore, the measure of his fell abilities, I was not so blind as to draw their horns my way.

Still, while I went tamely to heel at a word from Big Kennedy, I had also resolved to advance. I meant before all was over to mount the last summit of Tammany Hall. I laid out my life as architects lay out a building; it would call for years, but I had years to give.

My work with Grocer Fogel had ended long ago. I now gave myself entirely to the party, and to deepen the foundations of its power. Inside our lines a mighty harmony prevailed. Big Kennedy and those headquarters enemies who once schemed for his defeat had healed their differences and the surface of events showed as serene as summer seas. About this time a great star was rising in the Tammany sky; a new chief was gaining evolution. Already, his name was first, and although he cloaked his dictatorship with prudence, the sophisticated knew how his will was even then as law and through his convenient glove of velvet felt his grip of steel.

For myself, I closely observed the unfolding of his genius. His methods as well as those of Big Kennedy were now my daily lesson. I had ever before me in that formative, plastic hour the examples of these past-masters of the art of domination.

It was well for me. A dictator is so much unlike a poet that he is made, not born. He must build himself; and when completed he must save himself from being torn to pieces. No one blunders into a dictatorship; one might as well look to blunder upon some mountain peak. Even blunders are amenable to natural law, and it can be taken as a truism that no one blunders up hill.

Wherefore, he who would be dictator and with his touch determine the day for pushing, struggling, rebelling thousands and mold their times for them, must study. And study hard I did.

My Red Jackets received my most jealous care. They deserved that much from me, since their existence offered measurably for my support. When the day arrived, I was given that twelve-hundred-dollar place with the docks, whereof Big Kennedy had spoken, and under his suggestion and to the limits of my strength made what employ of it I might for my own and my friends' behoof. But those twelve hundred dollars would not go far in the affairs of one who must for their franchises lead hither and yon divers scores of folk, all of whom had but the one notion of politics, that it was founded of free beer. There came, too, a procession of borrowers, and it was a dull day when, in sums from a dime to a dollar, I did not to these clients part with an aggregate that would have supported any family for any decent week. There existed no door of escape; these charges, and others of similar kidney, must be met and borne; it was the only way to keep one's hold of politics; and so Old Mike would tell me.

"But it's better," said that deep one, "to lind people money than give it to'em. You kape thim bechune your finger longer by lindin'."

It was on the Red Jackets I leaned most for personal revenue. They were my bread-winners. No Tammany organization, great or small, keeps books. No man may say what is received, or what is disbursed, or name him who gave or got; and that is as it should be. If it were otherwise, one's troubles would never earn an end. For the Red Jackets I was – to steal a title from the general organization – not alone the treasurer, but the wiskinskie. In this latter rôle I collected the money that came in. Thus the interests, financial, of the Red Jackets were wholly within my hands, and recalling what Big Kennedy had said anent a good cook, I failed not to lick my fingers.

Money was in no wise difficult to get. The Red Jackets were formidable both for numbers and influence, and their favor or resentment meant a round one thousand votes. Besides, there stood the memorable Tin Whistles, reckless, militant, ready for any midnight thing, and their dim outlines, like a challenge or a threat, filled up the cloudy background. Those with hopes or fears of office, and others who as merchants or saloonkeepers, or who gambled, or did worse, to say naught of builders who found the streets and pavements a convenient even though an illegal resting place for their materials of bricks and lime and lumber, never failed of response to a suggestion that the good Red Jackets stood in need of help. Every man of these contributing gentry, at their trades of dollar-getting, was violating law or ordinance, and I who had the police at my beck could instantly contract their liberties to a point that pinched. When such were the conditions, anyone with an imagination above a shoemaker's will see that to produce what funds my wants demanded would be the lightest of tasks. It was like grinding sugar canes, and as easily sure of steady sweet returns.

True, as an exception to a rule, one met now and again with him who for some native bull-necked obstinacy would refuse a contribution. In such event the secret of his frugality was certain to leak forth and spread itself among my followers. It would not be required that one offer even a hint. Soon as ever the tale of that parsimony reached the ear of a Tin Whistle, disasters like a flock of buzzards collected about the saving man. His windows were darkly broken like Gaffney's. Or if he were a grocer his wares would upset themselves about the pavements, his carts of delivery break down, his harnesses part and fall in pieces, and he beset to dine off sorrow in many a different dish.

And then and always there were the police to call his violative eye to this ordinance, or hale him before a magistrate for that one. And there were Health Boards, and Street Departments, who at a wink of Red Jacket disfavor would descend upon a recalcitrant and provide burdens for his life. With twenty methods of compulsion against him, and each according to law, there arose no man strong enough to refuse those duties of donation. He must support the fortunes of my Red Jackets or see his own decline, and no one with a heart for commerce was long to learn the lesson.

The great credit, however, in such coils was due the police. With them to be his allies, one might not only finance his policies, but control and count a vote; and no such name as failure.

"They're the foot-stones of politics," said Old Mike. "Kape th' p'lice, an' you kape yourself on top."

Nor was this the task complex. It was but to threaten them with the powers above on the one hand, or on the other toss them individually an occasional small bone of profit to gnaw, and they would stand to you like dogs. I soon had these ins and outs of money-getting at the tips of my tongue and my fingers, for I went to school to Big Kennedy and Old Mike in the accomplishment, and I may tell you it was a branch of learning they were qualified to teach.

Blackmail! cry you? Now there goes a word to that. These folk were violating the law. What would you have? – their arrest? Let me inform you that were the laws of the State and the town enforced to syllable and letter, it would drive into banishment one-half the population. They would do business at a loss; it would put up the shutters for over half the town. Wherefore, it would be against the common interest to arrest them.

And still you would have the law enforced? And if it were, what, let me ask, would be the immediate response? These delinquents would be fined. You would then be satisfied. What should be the corrective difference between a fine paid to a court, and a donation paid to my Red Jackets? The corrective influence in both should be the same, since in either instance it is but a taking of dollars from the purses of the lawless. And yet, you clamor, “One is blackmail and the other is justice!” The separation I should say was academic rather than practical; and as for a name: why then, I care nothing for a name.

I will, however, go this farther journey for my own defense. I have not been for over twoscore years with Tammany and sixteen years its head, without being driven to some intimate knowledge of my times, and those principles of individual as well as communal action which underlie them to make a motive. And now I say, that I have yet to meet that man, or that corporation, and though the latter were a church, who wouldn't follow interest across a prostrate law, and in the chase of dollars break through ordinance and statute as a cow walks through a cobweb. And each and all they come most willingly to pay the prices of their outlawry, and receivers are as bad as thieves – your price-payer as black as your price-taker. Practically, the New York definition of an honest man has ever gone that he is one who denounces any robbery in the proceeds whereof he is not personally interested, and with that definition my life has never failed to comply. If Tammany and Tammany men have been guilty of receiving money from violators of law, they had among their accomplices the town's most reputable names and influences. Why then should you pursue the one while you excuse the other? And are you not, when you do so, quite as much the criminal as either?

When I was in the first year of my majority we went into a campaign for the ownership of the town. Standing on the threshold of my earliest vote, I was strung like a bow to win. My fervor might have gained a more than common heat, because by decision of Big Kennedy I, myself, was put down to make the run for alderman. There was a world of money against us, since we had the respectable element, which means ever the rich, to be our enemies.

Big Kennedy and I, after a session in his sanctum, resolved that not one meeting should be held by our opponents within our boundaries. It was not that we feared for the vote; rather it swung on a point of pride; and then it would hearten our tribesmen should we suppress the least signal of the enemy's campaign.

Having limitless money, the foe decided for sundry gatherings. They also outlined processions, hired music by the band, and bought beer by the barrel. They would have their speakers to address the commons in halls and from trucks.

On each attempt they were encountered and dispersed. More than once the Red Jackets, backed by the faithful Tin Whistles, took possession of a meeting, put up their own orators and adopted their own resolutions. If the police were called, they invariably arrested our enemies, being sapient of their own safety and equal to the work of locating the butter on their personal bread. If the enemy through their henchmen or managers made physical resistance, the Tin Whistles put them outside the hall, and whether through door or window came to be no mighty matter.

At times the Red Jackets and their reserves of Tin Whistles would permit the opposition to open a meeting. When the first orator had been eloquent for perhaps five minutes, a phalanx of Tin Whistles would arise in their places, and a hailstorm of sponges, soaking wet and each the size of one's head, would descend upon the rostrum. It was a never-failing remedy; there lived never chairman nor orator who would face that fusillade. Sometimes the lights were turned out; and again, when it was an open-air meeting and the speakers to talk from a truck, a bunch of crackers would be exploded under the horses and a runaway occur. That simple device was sure to cut the meeting short by carrying off the orators. The foe arranged but one procession; that was disposed of on the fringe of our territory by an unerring, even if improper, volley of eggs and vegetables and similar trumpery. The artillery used would have beaten back a charge by cavalry.

Still the enemy had the money, and on that important point could overpower us like ten for one, and did. Here and there went their agents, sowing sly riches in the hope of a harvest of votes. To counteract this still-hunt where the argument was cash, I sent the word abroad that our people were to take the money and promise votes. Then they were to break the promise.

“Bunco the foe!” was the watchword; “take their money and ‘con’ them!”

This instruction was deemed necessary for our safety. I educated our men to the thought that the more money they got by these methods, the higher they would stand with Big Kennedy and me. If it were not for this, hundreds would have taken a price, and then, afraid to come back to us, might have gone with the banners of the enemy for that campaign at least. Now they would get what they could, and wear it for a feather in their caps. They exulted in such enterprise; it was spoiling the Egyptian; having filled their pockets they would return and make a brag of the fact. By these schemes we kept our strength. The enemy parted with money by the thousands, yet never the vote did they obtain. The goods failed of delivery.

Sheeny Joe was a handy man to Big Kennedy. He owned no rank; but voluble, active, well dressed, and ready with his money across a barroom counter, he grew to have a value. Not once in those years which fell in between our encounter on the dock and this time I have in memory, did Sheeny Joe express aught save friendship for me. His nose was queer of contour as the result of my handiwork, but he met the blemish in a spirit of philosophy and displayed no rancors against me as the author thereof. On the contrary, he was friendly to the verge of fulsome.

Sheeny Joe sold himself to the opposition, hoof and hide and horn. Nor was this a mock disposal of himself, although he gave Big Kennedy and myself to suppose he still held by us in his heart. No, it wasn't the money that changed him; rather I should say that for all his pretenses, his hankerings of revenge against me had never slept. It was now he believed his day to compass it had come. The business was no more no less than a sheer bald plot to take my life, with Sheeny Joe to lie behind it – the bug of evil under the dark chip.

It was in the early evening at my own home. Sheeny Joe came and called me to the door, and all in a hustle of hurry.

“Big Kennedy wants you to come at once to the Tub of Blood,” said Sheeny Joe.

The Tub of Blood was a hang-out for certain bludgeon-wielding thugs who lived by the coarser crimes of burglary and highway robbery. It was suspected by Big Kennedy and myself as a camping spot for “repeaters” whom the enemy had been at pains to import against us. We had it then in plan to set the Tin Whistles to the sacking of it three days before the vote.

On this word from Sheeny Joe, and thinking that some new programme was afoot, I set forth for the Tub of Blood. As I came through the door, a murderous creature known as Strong-Arm Dan was busy polishing glasses behind the bar. He looked up, and giving a nod toward a door in the rear, said:

“They want you inside.”

The moment I set foot within that rear door, I saw how it was a trap. There were a round dozen waiting, and each the flower of a desperate flock.

In the first surprise of it I did not speak, but instinctively got the wall to my back. As I faced them they moved uneasily, half rising from their chairs, growling, but speaking no word. Their purpose was to attack me; yet they hung upon the edge of the enterprise, apparently in want of a leader. I was not a yard from the door, and having advantage of their slowness began making my way in that direction. They saw that I would escape, and yet they couldn't spur their courage to the leap. It was my perilous repute as a hitter from the shoulder that stood my friend that night.

At last I reached the door. Opening it with my hand behind me, my eyes still on the glaring hesitating roughs, I stepped backward into the main room.

"Good-night, gentlemen," was all I said.

"You'll set up the gin, won't you?" cried one, finding his voice.

"Sure!" I returned, and I tossed Strong-Arm Dan a gold piece as I passed the bar. "Give'em what they want while it lasts," said I.

That demand for gin mashed into the teeth of my thoughts like the cogs of a wheel. It would hold that precious coterie for twenty minutes. When I got into the street, I caught the shadow of Sheeny Joe as he twisted around the corner.

It was a half-dozen blocks from the Tub of Blood that I blew the gathering call of the Tin Whistles. They came running like hounds to huntsman. Ten minutes later the Tub of Blood lay a pile of ruins, while Strong-Arm Dan and those others, surprised in the midst of that guzzling I had paid for, with heads and faces a hash of wounds and blood and the fear of death upon them, were running or staggering or crawling for shelter, according to what strength remained with them.

"It's plain," said Big Kennedy, when I told of the net that Sheeny Joe had spread for me, "it's plain that you haven't shed your milk-teeth yet. However, you'll be older by an' by, an' then you won't follow off every band of music that comes playin' down the street. No, I don't blame Sheeny Joe; politics is like draw-poker, an' everybody's got a right to fill his hand if he can. Still, while I don't blame him, it's up to us to get hunk an' even on th' play." Here Big Kennedy pondered for the space of a minute. Then he continued: "I think we'd better make it up-the-river – better railroad the duffer. Discipline's been gettin' slack of late, an' an example will work in hot an' handy. The next crook won't pass us out the double-cross when he sees what comes off in th' case of Sheeny Joe."

CHAPTER VIII – THE FATE OF SHEENY JOE

BIG KENNEDY'S suggestion of Sing Sing for Sheeny Joe did not fit with my fancy. Not that a cropped head and a suit of stripes would have been misplaced in the instance of Sheeny Joe, but I had my reputation to consider. It would never do for a first bruiser of his day to fall back on the law for protection. Such coward courses would shake my standing beyond recovery. It would have disgraced the Tin Whistles; thereafter, in that vigorous brotherhood, my commands would have earned naught save laughter. To arrest Sheeny Joe would be to fly in the face of the Tin Whistles and their dearest ethics. When to this I called Big Kennedy's attention, he laughed as one amused.

"You don't twig!" said he, recovering a partial gravity. "I'm goin' to send him over th' road for robbery."

"But he hasn't robbed anybody!"

Big Kennedy made a gesture of impatience, mixed with despair.

"Here!" said he at last, "I'll give you a flash of what I'm out to do an' why I'm out to do it. I'm goin' to put Sheeny Joe away to stiffen discipline. He's sold himself, an' th' whole ward knows it. Now I'm goin' to show'em what happens to a turncoat, as a hunch to keep their coats on right side out, d'ye see."

"But you spoke of a robbery!" I interjected; "Sheeny Joe has robbed no one."

"I'm gettin' to that," returned Big Kennedy, with a repressive wave of his broad palm, "an' I can see that you yourself have a lot to learn. Listen: If I knew of any robbery Sheeny Joe had pulled off, I wouldn't have him lagged for that; no, not if he'd taken a jimmy an' cracked a dozen bins. There'd be no lesson in sendin' a duck over th' road in that. Any old woman could have him pinched for a crime he's really pulled off. To leave an impression on these people, you must send a party up for what he hasn't done. Then they understand."

For all Big Kennedy's explanation, I still lived in the dark. I made no return, however, either of comment or question; I considered that I had only to look on, and Big Kennedy's purpose would elucidate itself. Big Kennedy and I were in the sanctum that opened off his barroom. He called one of his barmen.

"Billy, you know where to find the Rat?" Then, when the other nodded: "Go an' tell the Rat I want him."

"Who is the Rat?" I queried. I had never heard of the Rat.

"He's a pickpocket," responded Big Kennedy, "an' as fly a dip as ever nipped a watch or copped a leather."

The Rat belonged on the west side of the town, which accounted for my having failed of his acquaintance. Big Kennedy was sure his man would find him.

"For he grafts nights," said Big Kennedy, "an' at this time of day it's a cinch he's takin' a snooze. A pickpocket has to have plenty of sleep to keep his hooks from shakin'."

While we were waiting the coming of the Rat, one of the barmen entered to announce a caller. He whispered a word in Big Kennedy's ear.

"Sure!" said he. "Tell him to come along."

The gentleman whom the barman had announced, and who was a young clergyman, came into the room. Big Kennedy gave him a hearty handshake, while his red face radiated a welcome.

"What is it, Mr. Bronson?" asked Big Kennedy pleasantly; "what can I do for you?"

The young clergyman's purpose was to ask assistance for a mission which he proposed to start near the Five Points.

"Certainly," said Big Kennedy, "an' not a moment to wait!" With that he gave the young clergyman one hundred dollars.

When that gentleman, after expressing his thanks, had departed, Big Kennedy sighed.

“I’ve got no great use for a church,” he said. “I never bought a gold brick yet that wasn’t wrapped in a tract. But it’s no fun to get a preacher down on you. One of ’em can throw stones enough to smash every window in Tammany Hall. Your only show with the preachers is to flatter ’em; – pass ’em out the flowers. Most of ’em’s as pleased with flattery as a girl. Yes indeed,” he concluded, “I can paste bills on ’em so long as I do it with soft soap.”

The Rat was a slight, quiet individual and looked the young physician rather than the pickpocket. His hands were delicate, and he wore gloves the better to keep them in condition. His step and air were as quiet as those of a cat.

“I want a favor,” said Big Kennedy, addressing the Rat, “an’ I’ve got to go to one of the swell mob to get it. That’s why I sent for you, d’ye see! It takes someone finer than a bricklayer to do th’ work.”

The Rat was uneasily questioning my presence with his eye. Big Kennedy paused to reassure him.

“He’s th’ straight goods,” said Big Kennedy, speaking in a tone wherein were mingled resentment and reproach. “You don’t s’ppose I’d steer you ag’inst a brace?”

The Rat said never a word, but his glance left me and he gave entire heed to Big Kennedy.

“This is the proposition,” resumed Big Kennedy. “You know Sheeny Joe. Shadow him; swing and rattle with him no matter where he goes. The moment you see a chance, get a pocketbook an’ put it away in his clothes. When th’ roar goes up, tell th’ loser where to look. Are you on? Sheeny Joe must get th’ collar, an’ I want him caught with th’ goods, d’ye see.”

“I don’t have to go to court ag’inst him?” said the Rat interrogatively.

“No,” retorted Big Kennedy, a bit explosively. “You’d look about as well in th’ witness box as I would in a pulpit. No, you shift th’ leather. Then give th’ party who’s been touched th’ office to go after Sheeny Joe. After that you can screw out; that’s as far as you go.”

It was the next evening at the ferry. Suddenly a cry went up.

“Thief! Thief! My pocketbook is gone!”

The shouts found source in a broad man. He was top-heavy with too much beer, but clear enough to realize that his money had disappeared. The Rat, sly, small, clean, inconspicuous, was at his shoulder.

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