

A Secret of State

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VER at the executive mansion, Governor Chatham and his private secretary were at dinner when the telegram came. The governor took the yellow envelope from the butler's tray and tore it open. When he had read the message he passed it over without a word to Gilman. The private secretary's eyes widened as he read it, and he exclaimed:

"Jim Lockhart dead!"

"Yes, poor Jim."

The governor sank into a deep leather chair. He supported his head in his hand and gazed into the fire. Gilman followed, and seating himself, likewise fell into a melancholy reverie. The silence within, and the wind sweeping the rain back and forth like a broom without, oppressed him. He was a young man. Once or twice he looked at the governor, and then the silence, the wind and the rain forced him to speak.

"He seemed to be in perfect health when he went away Wednesday," he said.

The silence deepened. The wind thrashed the trees and the rain drenched the windows anew. Gilman spoke again. He said:

"The party's lost a good man."

"And I have lost another friend," said the governor. He was growing old.

Without moving, still gazing deeply into the coals, after a little minute, he added:

"He was the most generous man I ever knew."

"Yes; and I believe, after all, when the time came, he would have been with you for the renomination." The governor stretched out his hand to stay Gilman's speech.

"I was not thinking of that, Leonard."

The governor did this gently, as he did all things. Gilman's face reddened—for the fire was growing hot—and silence fell again between them. Gilman felt the silence. He flung his cigarette into the fire. Then he rose.

"Guess I'll go over to the Leland," he said. "Some of the boys may have particulars."

The governor nodded acquiescence, but as Gilman reached the door that leads into the northwest drawing-room, he spoke:

"Before you go hand me the statutes, if you please. I suppose I have some duty to perform in an event like this."

Gilman, who longed only for action, bore with alacrity the three big calf-skin volumes to the library table, and turned to the index.

"I'll find the section for you," Gilman examined the second volume for an instant, and then said: "Here it is."

"Read it, please," said the governor. And Gilman read: "Section sixteen. In case of the death of the treasurer, it shall be the duty of the governor to take possession of the office of such treasurer, and cause the vaults thereof to be closed and securely locked, and so remain until a successor is appointed and qualified; and at the time such successor takes possession of the office, he, together with the auditor of public accounts and any of the bondsmen of the deceased treasurer who shall be present, shall proceed to take an account of all moneys, papers, books, records and other property coming into his possession; and the auditor shall take of such succeeding treasurer his receipt therefor and keep the same on file in his office." There, concluded Gilman, closing the book, and then immediately reopening it, "that's it—it's chapter one hundred and thirty, section sixteen of the act of eighteen seventy-three, page twenty-three twenty-seven."

"Now turn," said the governor, "to the chapter on elections, chapter forty-six. I think it is, and see what it says about the appointment of a successor."

Gilman tilted up the first volume, and inspected the red and black labels on its back; then he turned to chapter forty-six, and, running his finger down the pages until he found the section, read hurriedly, mumbling his words until he came to the vital sentence:

"When a vacancy shall occur in the office of secretary of state, auditor of public accounts, yes, here it is" (he accentuated the word) "treasurer, attorney-general, superintendent of public instruction" (he was reading rapidly now and running words together) "or member of the state board of equalization, the governor" (and now he raised his voice and read more slowly and distinctly) "the governor shall fill the same by appointment, and the appointee shall hold his office during the remainder of the term, and until his successor is elected and qualified." That's section hundred and twenty-eight."

"Well," said the governor, "I'll name Hillman to fill the vacancy." Hillman was the treasurer-elect, chosen by the people in November to succeed Lockhart. He was not of the party, however, to which the governor belonged in Illinois. It will be remembered, treasurers are elected not quadrennially, as are the other state officials, but

biennially, and a treasurer cannot succeed himself.

"M-m-yes," said Gilman, "the boys won't like it—but it's only for a couple of months."

"And as to sealing the treasury," continued the governor, "I presume that the morning will be time enough for that."

"Yes, it's a bad night outside, anyway," responded Gilman. The governor was lost again in thought. Gilman went on and out.

The clock in the hall tolled eleven. The governor rose, and went slowly up the staircase that winds gracefully from the great hall to the floor above, and thence to his chamber and his bed.

In a room on the parlor floor of the Leland, the windows of which looked down on Sixth street, a short, fat man was pacing the floor.

"Hell," he would say, "why the devil doesn't he come!"

The little man was William Grigsby, and he was the attorney-general of the state of Illinois. He had come down from the Jo Daviess hills, to serve a term in the house, and been nominated for the office he now held by the governor, John Chatham. John Chatham was his political creator, and the two men had once been friends. The administration had begun harmoniously enough, but before two of the four years of its political life had expired there was a split, and factions had formed. There had been a fierce fight for the control of the state central committee that year, and the struggle had been carried into the state convention, which nominated a state treasurer, a superintendent of public instruction, and trustees of the university of Illinois. In one faction were the governor, the auditor of public accounts, and, of course, his appointees, the adjutant-general, the railroad and warehouse commissioners and the trustees of the state institutions. In the other were the attorney-general and the secretary of state, Jennings, Lockhart, the state treasurer, had been neutral. He was everybody's friend.

And now Grigsby was an avowed candidate for governor, in opposition to his old friend, John Chatham, the man who had made him.

The attorney-general continued to smoke and pace the floor, and swear. After a while he consulted his watch again, and then gave the old-fashioned brass bell-pull a vigorous jerk. Presently a negro boy came bearing a presumptive pitcher of water, the tinkling of the ice heralding his approach. The attorney-general would have welcomed ice water in the morning, but now he seized it from the black boy's hand, set it down with a splash on his washstand, and shouted:

"Go and tell Jim to mix me a commadore."

Just as the boy reached the door, it opened, and a tall man entered. The tall man seeing the boy, looked at Grigsby.

"What'll you have, Hank?" said the attorney-general.

"A little whisky."

"Bring Mr. Jennings some whisky," ordered the attorney-general.

"Bourbon, boy," added Mr. Jennings. The boy withdrew.

The attorney-general paused before the fire, and looked up into the face of the secretary of state.

"Well, Hank," he said, "I began to fear you hadn't got my message. Heard the news?"

"What news?"

"Why," replied the attorney-general, "haven't you heard? Jim Lockhart's dead."

"The hell he is!" responded Jennings. "I hadn't heard ary word. When'd he die?"

"This afternoon."

"Sudden?"

"Rather."

"What was aillin' of him?"

The attorney-general smiled, a peculiar, mirthless smile.

The secretary of state ceased to rock.

"You don't reckon now—"

"That's it, exactly."

"I didn't know it'd got that bad. What'd they give out fer the cause?"

"Oh, heart failure, I suppose."

"Beans hell, don't it?"

The secretary of state was silent. Presently he spoke again in an abstracted way:

"Well, Jim 'as a devil of a good feller; as good as you'd meet up 'ith in a coon's age. An' I reckon when it come to a show-down, he 'as our friend. If the boys 'p'int an investigatin' committee—Jim 'as al'ays a leader too free 'ith the stuff."

"Hank, I didn't send for you to-night to hold memorial services over Jim Lockhart. There's something more important than that—there's something damned important, and it concerns me."

"You?"

"Yes, me. I'm in this thing just twenty thousand dollars."

"The hell you are!"

"Just—twenty—thousand—dollars." Grigsby sank into a chair.

"Borrowed?" asked Jennings.

"Yes."

"Public funds?"

"Well—I don't know. Course—"

"Jim Lockhart didn't have no private fortune—'thout it 'as the in-trust."

"Well, suppose it was."

"An'thin' to show fer it?"

"I gave him three notes—one for ten, two for five thousand each."

"Well, you're a bigger damn fool than I gave you credit fer bein'."

The Egyptian knitted the brows over his long, narrow nose.

"Hev you got any money?" he asked "I!" exclaimed Grigsby, with a sardonic grunt.

"Any property?"

"Only my house up home."

"Hain't you any friends up there, any bankers that'll take care o' this thing fer you?"

Grigsby laughed ironically.

"Cain't you lay down on somebody fer it?"

Grigsby shook his head.

"How's your quo 'arranto proceedin's 'gainst the Chicago Consolidated?"

"It isn't ripe yet," said Grigsby, "and, anyhow, there isn't time. Damn it, man," he said, raising his voice, and striking his knee with his fist, "it's got to be done now, to-night, or I'm lost. The governor, under the law, must seal the treasury at once, and you know just how long John Chatham 'll wait. We've got to take care of this thing to-night, to-night, I tell you. This's why I sent for you."

"Say, Bill, you and the governor used to be friends, and he hain't a bad feller, no-way. He got you your nomination, you know—why don't you go to him—"

"Go to the governor?" cried Grigsby, "and tell him—tell him!"

"Bill," said the secretary of state, "you don't know the governor. He hain't no kind, ner I hain't, but I'll tell you one thing—he hain't the man to take advantage of a feller. You'd be as safe in his hands as you would in mine—safer, maybe." Jennings concluded, with a good-humored chuckle. Grigsby emphatically, doggedly, shook his head.

"It never would do in this world," he said, "never."

"Why, you could get him to hold off till you could take care of it. You and him used to be such friends—tell him you'll lay down fer the sake of old times—that's the thing—tell him an'thin' to get him to hold off fer a few days. Then you'll have time to turn 'round."

"Look here, Jennings," said Grigsby, straightening up and glaring at the secretary of state, "Chatham's got

small cheerfulness that had begun to adumbrate itself in his face faded quite away.

"That's so—I hadn't thought of that."

He pondered heavily and then said, the old note of fear in his tone:

"Has that vault a time lock?"

"I reckon."

They were silent.

"Well," said Grigsby presently, breaking the silence, "I'll have to get Mendenhall." Mendenhall was the assistant state treasurer, and was counted among the adherents of Grigsby.

"Better let me go," said Jennings, taking up his coat and hat.

When he had gone Grigsby again paced the floor.

Altogether, he passed a very bad two hours. And then Jennings returned. As the tall Egyptian entered the room, Grigsby demanded:

"Where you been?"

"Over to the St. Nick—met up 'ith some o' the boys, an' set into a little game fer a while."

"See Mendenhall?"

"Yep—he'll be 'long. Gosh! it's a regular Shawneetown flood outside!" And the big man waved his big hat in a wide arc, the spray from it spitting angrily as it sprinkled the fire in the grate.

"So 'it's all right, is it?"

"'Tup huh."

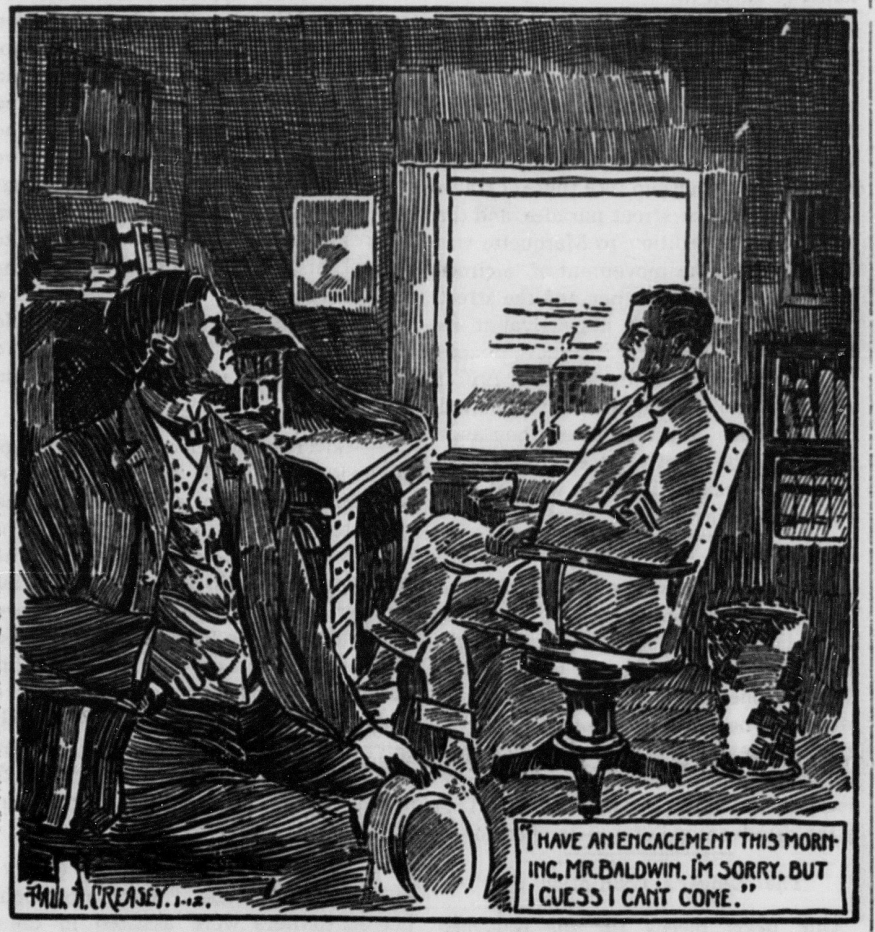
"How about the time lock?"

"Oh, George says they don't never use that—haven't sence the day the senate 'p'intet that committee to count the money in the treasury. 'Member? By gosh, didn't pore o' Jim hustle to get a special train an' haul that money down from Chicago, though?"

The secretary of state wagged his long head and chuckled.

Grigsby's heart lightened, and he became almost gay, ordering much drink. And for an hour the two men sat there, waiting and smoking, and drinking whisky—Jennings bourbon and Grigsby rye—and were content. Though every time the yowl of a locomotive was borne to him on the cold, wet night, Grigsby jerked out his watch. And once he started at a short knock on the door, but it was only Mendenhall.

After midnight Grigsby's anxiety deepened, and he ceased to pay attention to Jennings' stories of politics down in "southern Eellinoy," stories



all you fellows hypnotized. You think he's a little tin god, that he's incapable of doing a mean act, of throwing a friend down, or anything of that sort. I tell you I know him better than all of you do. He and I used to be close, thicker'n—

"You wasn't borrowin' money out o' the state treasury them days, though, was you, Bill?" interrupted Jennings. Grigsby colored.

Jennings' brow was gathered once more in wrinkles that indicated thought. His face rapidly assumed an expression of determination. Presently he rose.

"Bill," he said, "I'm goin' to do somethin' fer you I wouldn't do fer any other livin' man."

Grigsby raised an appealing, yearning face.

"Yes, day I deposited in Gregory's bank over at Decatur twenty-four thousand dollars. It's the fees received in my office durin' the last quarter. It's lucky fer you they was unusually large—"

"Yes," said Grigsby, and his expression, expectant and hopeful a moment before, clouded, "but it's in Decatur, and we're in Springfield and we've got to have it now, tonight, if it's goin' to do us any good."

Jennings looked at his watch. "It's now twenty-five till nine. A train goes out on the Wabash at nine-five. I'll send Hennessey over on that train with a note to Gregory, an' a check. He can get twenty thousand, an' ketch a train back 'bout eleven-twenty. I think, anyway—that train that gets here at twelve-forty. You can take the money, put it back in the treasury, 'fore the governor seals 'er up, an'—"

Grigsby sprang toward Jennings and seized his hand.

"Hank, you're the best friend I ever had," he cried, and his eyes glistened.

"Bill, where's them notes o' your'n?"

"Why, in the treasury, I suppose."

"Well, you'll have to get some one who can open the vaults fer you to-night."

Grigsby's brow darkened, and the

about Don Morrison and John A. Logan. At twelve-forty he rose and trod the floor, but Jennings' long form was stretched out before the fire, his whisky glass was at his elbow, and he said from time to time:

"Oh, fer God's sake, Bill, set down—they'll be 'long all right."

"Isn't that the Wabash?" said Grigsby, cocking his head at the night cry of a locomotive.

"I don't know," said Jennings, who was growing mellow, "ony whistles I could ever tell was them on the O. and M., 'ceptin' o' course, the toot of the Three States, which is now at Cairo, o' she hain't stuck on a mud bank over on the Missouri shore some'er's round Bird's Landin'."

Grigsby looked at his watch. It was ten minutes of one, and just as he dolefully announced the hour the door opened, and Hennessey entered, carrying a leather traveling bag. Grigsby leaped toward him, his itching fingers outstretched to seize the valise.

"Is it all there?" he exclaimed.

"Take me fer a thief?" replied Hennessey, swinging the bag behind him. Hennessey proffered the bag to his master, but Jennings said:

"Wait a minute." Then he ran his hand wrist-deep into his pocket and drew out a paper which he examined critically, squinting his eyes, partly to protect them from the smoke that curled up from a big domestic cigar, partly—as it seemed, to assist in the concentration of his thoughts.

"General," he said—by some strange confusion of ideas, down in Springfield they give the attorney general a military title, which custom that functionary fosters—"General, will you give me your signature to that, 'fore you start?"

Grigsby glowered at Jennings, read the paper, said somewhat petulantly: "Oh, o' course," and hesitatingly signed it.

"Now, Hennessey," said Jennings, carefully placing the paper in a long pocketbook he drew from the region of his left hip.

Hennessey held the bag out toward the secretary of state.

"No," said Jennings, who was pouring himself a drink, "give it to the general."

The attorney general took the bag and opened it. Inside were four big bundles of bank bills. He lifted them out. Each bundle was composed of ten smaller packages, held by rubber bands, and each package was bound with a pink paper strap neatly pinned and marked "five hundred." He counted and replaced the packages in the bag. Then taking his coat and hat, he turned to Jennings and said: "Well, let's be gone."

The secretary of state rolled his head toward the attorney general, waved his long arm and flapped his hand fin-like at him, and said:

"We'll wait here, Mike and me. You won't need us."

The clock in the hall of the executive mansion had struck the half-hour after midnight, and the governor was descending the stairs in a gray bath-robe and slippers. The old house was dark and still. Even the room occupied by Gilman, who should, at that hour, have been reading the magazine in bed, showed no light. The governor, softly treading, entered the library. The last embers of the fire were smoldering. The governor lighted the lamp, and in the circle of soft light it spread on the library table, he bent over a book, his glasses on his nose, their cord hanging down into his lap. It was not The Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius. It was the second volume of The Revised Statutes of Illinois, a stupid work which many men consult, laboriously, far into the night. He softly rustled over the leaves until he found chapter one hundred and thirty. He ran his finger down the pages till it stopped at section sixteen. And then he read very slowly:

"In case of the death of the treasurer, it shall be the duty of such governor to take possession of the office of such treasurer and cause the vaults thereof to be closed and securely locked, and so remain until—" He read the words again, and again a third time, and yet again.

He closed the book, put out the lamp and slowly felt his way back up the stairs.

Ten minutes later he descended again, and groping in the hall, drew a greatcoat over his broad shoulders, covered his head with the slouch that he wore when he went down into southern Illinois, and let himself out of the wide front door. The asphalt driveway that flings its long curve through the grounds of the gubernatorial residence from Fifth street to Fourth, gleamed like the surface of a river at night. The rain no longer fell, but the trees dripped dismally. Across the low night sky black clouds were flying. The governor walked down the driveway to the big iron gates at Fourth street, whose watered surface as far as he could see, wavered under the electric lights at the crossings. The governor turned at Jackson street and walked down the sleeping little avenue toward Second street. Below a low brown house trickling its eaves behind two sentinel cedars, he walked, and pulled the white bell-knob. The bell jangled harshly upon the sleeping stillness. The jangling trembled away. He rang again, saw it, and started, a faint ray of hope beaming in his eye. But the paper lay upon the governor's feet.

The governor closed the doors.

"You may lock them, Mr. Mendenhall," he said.

The assistant state treasurer drew a jingling bunch of keys from his pocket and locked the door. Grigsby's eyes were fastened on the paper at the governor's feet. His heart was swelling at his throat. His fingers were twitching, and he was sweating like a stoker. At Mendenhall's approach the governor placed his foot upon the paper. When Mendenhall had done, the governor picked it up. He smoothed it out in his fingers, and slowly adjusted his glasses. By the dim light that always burns at night just outside the door of the state treasury he read it. Then he placed it in the pocket of his overcoat. He kept his hand upon it. The blue of Grigsby's face deepened.

The three men went down the stairs, the governor standing aside at the top to let them precede him. They crossed the rotunda, past the slumbering janitor whose snores ascended and exploded in the east corridor and so out into the darkness. They walked together down the wide stone walk, the stone walk as wide as a street, that sweeps, with a strip of sward down its middle, across the state house lawns to Capitol avenue. The governor did not turn up Second street by the way he had come. He kept on with his two companions, and all three were silent. Not a word had any one of them spoken. They were drowned in thought. It matters not of what the assistant state treasurer was thinking. He held only an appointive office. He was a political villain, and had a collar on his neck.

The attorney general was thinking of the days that were to come. The governor was thinking of the days that were gone. Silent, thoughtful, thus they kept on up Capitol avenue. When they approached the shades that gathered under the ugly iron bridge which spans the ragged street that leads to the capitol of Illinois, the Alton's St. Louis Limited came plunging through the town, half an hour late. The three men halted. The great mysterious, vestibuled train, with its darkly curtained Pullmans, slid across the bridge. As they stood waiting for it to pass that they might go under, the governor withdrew his hand from his pocket, the paper still folded in it. He held the paper out toward Grigsby.

"William," he said, "I think you dropped something."