THE CAMPAIGN GRAFTER

Arthur Benjamin Reeve (1880–1936)

1912

"What a relief it will be when this election is over and the newspapers print news again," I growled as I turned the first page of the *Star* with a mere glance at the headlines.

"Yes," observed Kennedy, who was puzzling over a note which he had received in the morning mail. "This is the bitterest campaign in years. Now, do you suppose that they are after me in a professional way or are they trying to round me up as an independent voter?"

The letter which had called forth this remark was headed, "The Travis Campaign Committee of the Reform League," and, as Kennedy evidently intended me to pass an opinion on it, I picked it up. It was only a few lines, requesting him to call during the morning, if convenient, on Wesley Travis, the candidate for governor and the treasurer of his campaign committee, Dean Bennett. It had evidently been written in great haste in longhand the night before.

"Professional," I hazarded. "There must be some scandal in the campaign for which they require your services."

"I suppose so," agreed Craig. "Well, if it is business instead of politics it has at least this merit—it is current business. I suppose you have no objection to going with me?"

Thus it came about that not very much later in the morning we found ourselves at the campaign headquarters, in the presence of two nervous and high-keyed gentlemen in frock coats and silk hats. It would have taken no great astuteness, even without seeing the surroundings, to deduce instantly that they were engaged in the annual struggle of seeking the votes of their fellow-citizens for something or other, and were nearly worn out by the arduous nature of that process.

Their headquarters were in a tower of a skyscraper, whence poured forth a torrent of appeal to the moral sense of the electorate, both in printed and oral form. Yet there was a different tone to the place from that which I had ordinarily associated with political headquarters in previous campaigns. There was an absence of the old-fashioned politicians and of the air of intrigue laden with tobacco. Rather, there was an air of earnestness and efficiency which was decidedly prepossessing. Maps of the state were hanging on the walls, some stuck full of various coloured pins denoting the condition of the canvass. A map of the city in colours, divided into all sorts of districts, told how fared the battle in the stronghold of the boss, Billy McLoughlin. Huge systems of card indexes, loose leaf devices, labour-saving appliances for getting out a vast mass of campaign "literature" in a hurry, in short a perfect system, such as a great, well-managed business might have been proud of, were in evidence everywhere.

Wesley Travis was a comparatively young man, a lawyer who had early made a mark in politics and had been astute enough to shake off the thraldom of the bosses before the popular uprising against them. Now he was the candidate of the Reform League for governor and a good stiff campaign he was putting up.

His campaign manager, Dean Bennett, was a businessman whose financial interests were opposed to those usually understood to be behind Billy McLoughlin, of the regular party to which both Travis and Bennett might naturally have been supposed to belong in the old days. Indeed the Reform League owed its existence to a fortunate conjunction of both moral and economic conditions demanding progress.

"Things have been going our way up to the present," began Travis confidentially, when we were seated democratically with our campaign cigars lighted. "Of course we haven't such a big 'barrel' as our opponents, for we are not frying the fat out of the corporations. But the people have supported us nobly, and I think the

opposition of the vested interests has been a great help. We seem to be winning, and I say 'seem' only because one can never be certain how anything is going in this political game nowadays."

"You recall, Mr. Kennedy, reading in the papers that my country house out on Long Island was robbed the other day? Some of the reporters made much of it. To tell the truth, I think they had become so satiated with sensations that they were sure that the thing was put up by some muckrakers and that there would be an expose of some kind. For the thief, whoever he was, seems to have taken nothing from my library but a sort of scrap-book or album of photographs. It was a peculiar robbery, but as I had nothing to conceal it didn't worry me. Well, I had all but forgotten it when a fellow came into Bennett's office here yesterday and demanded—tell us what it was, Bennett. You saw him."

Bennett cleared his throat. "You see, it was this way. He gave his name as Harris Hanford and described himself as a photographer. I think he has done work for Billy McLoughlin. At any rate, his offer was to sell us several photographs, and his story about them was very circumstantial. He hinted that they had been evidently among those stolen from Mr. Travis and that in a roundabout way they had come into the possession of a friend of his without his knowing who the thief was. He said that he had not made the photographs himself, but had an idea by whom they were made, that the original plates had been destroyed, but that the person who made them was ready to swear that the pictures were taken after the nominating convention this fall which had named Travis. At any rate the photographs were out and the price for hem was $25,000."

"What are they that he should set such a price on them?" asked Kennedy, keenly looking from Bennett quickly to Travis.

Travis met his look without flinching. "They are supposed to be photographs of myself," he replied slowly. "One purports to represent me in a group on McLoughlin's porch at his farm on the south shore of the island, about twenty miles from my place. As Hanford described it, I am standing between McLoughlin and J. Cadwalader Brown, the trust promoter who is backing McLoughlin to save his investments. Brown's hand is on my shoulder and we are talking familiarly. Another is a picture of Brown, McLoughlin, and myself riding in Brown's car, and in it Brown and I are evidently on the best of terms. Oh, there are several of them, all in the same vein. Now," he added, and his voice rose with emotion as if he were addressing a cart-tail meeting which must be convinced that there was nothing criminal in riding in a motor-car, "I don't hesitate to admit that a year or so ago I was not on terms of intimacy with these men, but at least acquainted with them. At various times, even as late as last spring, I was present at conferences over the presidential outlook in this state, and once I think I did ride back to the city with them. But I know that there were no pictures taken, and even if there had been I would not care if they told the truth about them. I have frankly admitted in my speeches that I knew these men, that my knowledge of them and breaking from them is my chief qualification for waging an effective war on them if I am elected. They hate me cordially. You know that. What I do care about is the sworn allegation that now accompanies these—these fakes. They were not, could not have been taken after the independent convention that nominated me. If the photographs were true I would be a fine traitor. But I haven't even seen McLoughlin or Brown since last spring. The whole thing is a…"

"Lie from start to finish," put in Bennett emphatically. "Yes, Travis, we all know that. I'd quit right now if I didn't believe in you. But let us face the facts. Here is this story, sworn to as Hanford says and apparently acquiesced in by Billy McLoughlin and Cad Brown. What do they care anyhow as long as it is against you? And there too, are the pictures themselves—at least they will be in print or suppressed, according as we act. Now, you know that nothing could hurt the reform ticket worse than to have an issue like this raised at this time. We were supposed at least to be on the level, with nothing to explain away. There may be just enough people to believe that there is some basis for this suspicion to turn the tide against us. If it were earlier in the campaign I'd say accept the issue, fight it out to a finish, and in the turn of events we should really have the best campaign material. But it is too late now to expose such a knavish trick of theirs on the Friday before election. Frankly, I

believe discretion is the better part of valour in this case and without abating a jot of my faith in you, Travis, well, I'd pay first and expose the fraud afterward, after the election, at leisure."

"No, I won't," persisted Travis, shutting his square jaw doggedly. "I won't be held up."

The door had opened and a young lady in a very stunning street dress, with a huge hat and a tantalizing veil, stood in it for a moment, hesitated, and then was about to shut it with an apology for intruding on a conference.

"I'll fight it if it takes my last dollar," declared Travis "but I won't be blackmailed out of a cent. Good morning, Miss Ashton. I'll be free in a moment. I'll see you in your office directly."

The girl, with a portfolio of papers in her hand, smiled, and Travis quickly crossed the room and held the door deferentially open as he whispered a word or two. When she had disappeared he returned and remarked, "I suppose you have heard of Miss Margaret Ashton, the suffragette leader, Mr. Kennedy? She is the head of our press bureau." Then a heightened look of determination set his fine face in hard lines, and he brought his fist down on the desk. "No, not a cent," he thundered.

Bennett shrugged his shoulders hopelessly and looked at Kennedy in mock resignation as if to say, "What can you do with such a fellow?" Travis was excitedly pacing the floor and waving his arms as if he were addressing a meeting in the enemy's country. "Hanford comes at us in this way," he continued, growing more excited as he paced up and down. "He says plainly that the pictures will of course be accepted as among those stolen from me, and in that, I suppose, he is right. The public will swallow it. When Bennett told him I would prosecute he laughed and said, 'Go ahead. I didn't steal the pictures. That would be a great joke for Travis to seek redress from the courts he is criticizing. I guess he'd want to recall the decision if it went against him—hey?' Hanford says that a hundred copies have been made of each of the photographs and that this person, whom we do not know, has them ready to drop into the mail to the one hundred leading papers of the state in time for them to appear in the Monday editions just before Election Day. He says no amount of denying on our part can destroy the effect—or at least he went further and said 'shake their validity.'"

"But I repeat. They are false. For all I know, it is a plot of McLoughlin's, the last fight of a boss for his life, driven into a corner. And it is meaner than if he had attempted to forge a letter. Pictures appeal to the eye and mind much more than letters. That's what makes the thing so dangerous. Billy McLoughlin knows how to make the best use of such a roor-back on the eve of an election, and even if I not only deny but prove that they are a fake, I'm afraid the harm will be done. I can't reach all the voters in time. Ten see such a charge to one who sees the denial."

"Just so," persisted Bennett coolly. "You admit that we are practically helpless. That's what I have been saying all along. Get control of the prints first, Travis, for God's sake. Then raise any kind of a howl you want—before election or after. As I say, if we had a week or two it might be all right to fight. But we can make no move without making fools of ourselves until they are published Monday as the last big thing of the campaign. The rest of Monday and the Tuesday morning papers do not give us time to reply. Even if they were published today we should hardly have time to expose the plot, hammer it in, and make the issue an asset instead of a liability. No, you must admit it yourself. There isn't time. We must carry out the work we have so carefully planned to cap the campaign, and if we are diverted by this it means a let-up in our final efforts, and that is as good as McLoughlin wants anyhow. Now, Kennedy, don't you agree with me? Squelch the pictures now at any cost, then follow the thing up and, if we can, prosecute after election?"

Kennedy and I, who had been so far little more than interested spectators, had not presumed to interrupt. Finally Craig asked, "You have copies of the pictures?"

"No," replied Bennett. "This Hanford is a brazen fellow, but he was too astute to leave them. I saw them for an instant. They look bad. And the affidavits with them look worse."

"H'm," considered Kennedy, turning the crisis over in his mind. "We've had alleged stolen and forged letters before, but alleged stolen and forged photographs are new. I'm not surprised that you are alarmed, Bennett—nor that you want to fight, Travis."

"Then you will take up the case?" urged the latter eagerly, forgetting both his campaign manager and his campaign manners, and leaning forward almost like a prisoner in the dock to catch the words of the foreman of the jury. "You will trace down the forger of those pictures before it is too late?"

"I haven't said I'll do that—yet," answered Craig measuredly. "I haven't even said I'd take up the case. Politics is a new game to me, Mr. Travis. If I go into this thing I want to go into it and stay in it—well, you know how you lawyers put it, with clean hands. On one condition I'll take the matter up, and on only one."

"Name it," cried Travis anxiously.

"Of course, having been retained by you," continued Craig with provoking slowness, "it is not reasonable to suppose that if I find—how shall I put it—bluntly, yes?—if I find that the story of Hanford has some—er—foundation, it is not reasonable to suppose that I should desert you and go over to the other side. Neither is it to be supposed that I will continue and carry such a thing through for you regardless of truth. What I ask is to have a free hand, to be able to drop the case the moment I cannot proceed further in justice to myself, drop it, and keep my mouth shut. You understand? These are my conditions and no less."

"And you think you can make good?" questioned Bennett rather sceptically. "You are willing to risk it? You don't think it would be better to wait until after the election is won?"

"You have heard my conditions," re-iterated Craig.

"Done," broke in Travis. "I'm going to fight it out, Bennett. If we get in wrong by dickering with them at the start it may be worse for us in the end. Paying amounts to confession."

Bennett shook his head dubiously. "I'm afraid this will suit McLoughlin's purpose just as well. Photographs are like statistics. They don't lie unless the people who make them do. But it's hard to tell what a liar can accomplish with either in an election."

"Say, Dean, you're not going to desert me?" reproached Travis. "You're not offended at my kicking over the traces, are you?"

Bennett rose, placed a hand on Travis's shoulder, and grasped his other. "Wesley," he said earnestly. "I wouldn't desert you even if the pictures were true."

"I knew it," responded Travis heartily. "Then let Mr. Kennedy have one day to see what he can do. Then if we make no progress we'll take your advice, Dean. We'll pay, I suppose, and ask Mr. Kennedy to continue the case after next Tuesday."

"With the proviso," put in Craig.

"With the proviso, Kennedy," repeated Travis. "Your hand on that. Say, I think I've shaken hands with half the male population of this state since I was nominated, but this means more to me than any of them. Call on us, either Bennett or myself, the moment you need aid. Spare no reasonable expense, and—and get the goods, no matter whom it hits higher up, even if it is Cadwalader Brown himself. Good-bye, and a thousand thanks—oh, by the way, wait. Let me take you around and introduce you to Miss Ashton. She may be able to help you."

The office of Bennett and Travis was in the centre of the suite. On one side were the cashier and clerical force as well as the speakers' bureau, where spellbinders of all degrees were getting instruction, tours were being laid out, and reports received from meetings already held.

On the other side was the press bureau with a large and active force in charge of Miss Ashton, who was supporting Travis because he had most emphatically declared for "Votes for Women" and had insisted that his party put this plank in its platform. Miss Ashton was a clever girl, a graduate of a famous woman's college, and had had several years of newspaper experience before she became a leader in the suffrage cause. I recalled having read and heard a great deal about her, though I had never met her. The Ashtons were well known in New York society, and it was a sore trial to some of her conservative friends that she should reject what they considered the proper "sphere" for women. Among those friends, I understood, was Cadwalader Brown himself.

Travis had scarcely more than introduced us, yet already I scented a romance behind the ordinarily prosaic conduct of a campaign press bureau. It is far from my intention to minimise the work or the ability of the head of the press bureau, but it struck me, both then and later, that the candidate had an extraordinary interest in the newspaper campaign, much more than in the speakers' bureau, and I am sure that it was not solely accounted for by the fact that publicity is playing a more and more important part in political campaigning.

Nevertheless such innovations as her card index system by election districts all over the state, showing the attitude of the various newspaper editors, of local political leaders, and changes of sentiment, were very full and valuable. Kennedy, who had a regular pigeon-hole mind for facts, was visibly impressed by this huge mechanical memory built up by Miss Ashton. Though he said nothing to me I knew he had also observed the state of affairs between the reform candidate and the suffrage leader.

It was at a moment when Travis had been called back to his office that Kennedy, who had been eyeing Miss Ashton with marked approval, leaned over and said in a low voice, "Miss Ashton, I think I can trust you. Do you want to do a great favour for Mr. Travis?"

She did not betray even by a fleeting look on her face what the true state of her feelings was, although I fancied that the readiness of her assent had perhaps more meaning than she would have placed in a simple "Yes" otherwise.

"I suppose you know that an attempt is being made to blackmail Mr. Travis?" added Kennedy quickly.

"I know something about it," she replied in a tone which left it for granted that Travis had told her before even we were called in. I felt that not unlikely Travis's set determination to fight might be traceable to her advice or at least to her opinion of him.

"I suppose in a large force like this it is not impossible that your political enemies may have a spy or two," observed Kennedy, glancing about at the score or more clerks busily engaged in getting out "literature".

"I have sometimes thought that myself," she agreed. "But of course I don't know. Still, I have to be pretty careful. Someone is always over here by my desk or looking over here. There isn't much secrecy in a big room like this. I never leave important stuff lying about where any of them could see it."

"Yes," mused Kennedy. "What time does the office close?"

"We shall finish tonight about nine, I think. Tomorrow it may be later."

"Well, then, if I should call here tonight at, say, half-past nine, could you be here? I need hardly say that your doing so may be of inestimable value to—to the campaign."

"I shall be here," she promised, giving her hand with a peculiar straight arm shake and looking him frankly in the face with those eyes which even the old guard in the legislature admitted were vote-winners.

Kennedy was not quite ready to leave yet, but sought out Travis and obtained permission to glance over the financial end of the campaign. There were few large contributors to Travis's fund, but a host of small sums ranging from ten and twenty-five dollars down to dimes and nickels. Truly it showed the depth of the popular uprising. Kennedy also glanced hastily over the items of expense—rent, salaries, stenographer and office force,

advertising, printing and stationery, postage, telephone, telegraph, automobile and travelling expenses, and miscellaneous matters.

As Kennedy expressed it afterwards, as against the small driblets of money coming in, large sums were going out for expenses in lumps. Campaigning in these days costs money even when done honestly. The miscellaneous account showed some large indefinite items, and after a hasty calculation Kennedy made out that if all the obligations had to be met immediately the committee would be in the hole for several thousand dollars.

"In short," I argued as we were leaving, "this will either break Travis privately or put his fund in hopeless shape. Or does it mean that he foresees defeat and is taking this way to recoup himself under cover of being held up?"

Kennedy said nothing in response to my suspicions, though I could see that in his mind he was leaving no possible clue unnoted.

It was only a few blocks to the studio of Harris Hanford, whom Kennedy was now bent on seeing. We found him in an old building on one of the side streets in the thirties which business had captured. His was a little place on the top floor, up three flights of stairs, and I noticed as we climbed up that the room next to his was vacant.

Our interview with Hanford was short and unsatisfactory. He either was or at least posed as representing a third party in the affair, and absolutely refused to permit us to have even a glance at the photographs.

"My dealings," he asserted airily, "must all be with Mr. Bennett, or with Mr. Travis, direct, not with emissaries. I don't make any secret about it. The prints are not here. They are safe and ready to be produced at the right time, either to be handed over for the money or to be published in the newspapers. We have found out all about them; we are satisfied, although the negatives have been destroyed. As for their having been stolen from Travis, you can put two and two together. They are out and copies have been made of them, good copies. If Mr. Travis wishes to repudiate them, let him start proceedings. I told Bennett all about that. Tomorrow is the last day, and I must have Bennett's answer then, without any interlopers coming into it. If it is yes, well and good; if not, then they know what to expect. Good-bye."

It was still early in the forenoon, and Kennedy's next move was to go out on Long Island to examine the library at Travis's from which the pictures were said to have been stolen. At the laboratory Kennedy and I loaded ourselves with a large oblong black case containing a camera and a tripod.

His examination of the looted library was minute, taking in the window through which the thief had apparently entered, the cabinet he had forced, and the situation in general. Finally Craig set up his camera with most particular care and took several photographs of the window, the cabinet, the doors, including the room from every angle. Outside he snapped the two sides of corner of the house in which the library was situated. Partly by trolley and partly by carriage we crossed the island to the south shore, and finally found McLouglin's farm, where we had no trouble in getting half a dozen photographs of the porch and house. Altogether the proceedings seemed tame to me, yet I knew from previous experience that Kennedy had a deep-laid purpose.

We parted in the city, to meet just before it was time to visit Miss Ashton. Kennedy had evidently employed the interval in developing his plates, for he now had ten or a dozen prints, all of exactly the same size, mounted on stiff cardboard in a space with scales and figures on all four sides. He saw me puzzling over them.

"Those are metric photographs such as Bertillon of Paris takes," he explained. "By means of the scales and tables and other methods that have been worked out we can determine from those pictures distances and many other things almost as well as if we were on the spot itself. Bertillon has cleared up many crimes with this help, such as the mystery of the shooting in the Hotel Quai d'Orsay and other cases. The metric photograph, I believe, will rank in time with the portrait parle, finger prints, and the rest.

"For instance, in order to solve the riddle of a crime the detective's first task is to study the scene topographically. Plans and elevations of a room or house are made. The position of each object is painstakingly noted. In addition, the all-seeing eye of the camera is called into requisition. The plundered room is photographed, as in this case. I might have done it by placing a foot rule on a table and taking that in the picture, but a more scientific and accurate method has been devised by Bertillon. His camera lens is always used at a fixed height from the ground and forms its image on the plate at an exact focus. The print made from the negative is mounted on a card in a space of definite size, along the edges of which a metric scale is printed. In the way he has worked it out the distance between any two points in the picture can be determined. With a topographical plan and a metric photograph one can study a crime as a general studies the map of a strange country. There were several peculiar things that I observed today, and I have here an indelible record of the scene of the crime. Preserved in this way it cannot be questioned."

"Now the photographs were in this cabinet. There are other cabinets, but none of them has been disturbed. Therefore the thief must have known just what he was after. The marks made in breaking the lock were not those of a jimmy but of a screwdriver. No amazing command of the resources of science is needed so far. All that is necessary is a little scientific common sense, Walter."

"Now, how did the robber get in? All the windows and doors were supposedly locked. It is alleged that a pane was cut from this window at the side. It was, and the pieces were there to show it. But take a glance at this outside photograph. To reach that window even a tall man must have stood on a ladder or something. There are no marks of a ladder or of any person in the soft soil under the window. What is more, that window was cut from the inside. The marks of the diamond which cut it plainly show that. Scientific common sense again."

"Then it must have been someone in the house, or at least someone familiar with it?" I exclaimed.

Kennedy nodded. "One thing we have which the police greatly neglect," he pursued, "a record. We have made some progress in reconstructing the crime, as Bertillon calls it. If we only had those Hanford pictures we should be all right."

We were now on our way to see Miss Ashton at headquarters and as we rode downtown I tried to reason out the case. Had it really been a put-up job? Was Travis himself faking, and was the robbery a "plant" by which he might forestall exposure of what had become public property in the hands of another, no longer disposed to conceal it? Or was it after all the last desperate blow of the Boss?

The whole thing began to assume a suspicious look in my mind. Although Kennedy seemed to have made little real progress, I felt that, far from aiding Travis, it made things darker. There was nothing but his unsupported word that he had not visited the Boss subsequent to the nominating convention. He admitted having done so before the Reform League came into existence. Besides it seemed tacitly understood that both the Boss and Cadwalader Brown acquiesced in the sworn statement of the man who said he had made the pictures. Added to that the mere existence of the actual pictures themselves was a graphic clincher to the story. Personally, if I had been in Kennedy's place I think I should have taken advantage of the proviso in the compact with Travis to back out gracefully. Kennedy, however, now started on the case, hung to it tenaciously.

Miss Ashton was waiting for us at the press bureau. Her desk was at the middle of one end of the room in which, if she could keep an eye on her office force, the office force also could keep an eye on her.

Kennedy had apparently taken in the arrangement during our morning visit, for he set to work immediately. The side of the room toward the office of Travis and Bennett presented an expanse of blank wall. With a mallet he quickly knocked a hole in the rough plaster, just above the baseboard about the room. The hole did not penetrate quite through to the other side. In it he placed a round disc of vulcanized rubber, with insulated wires leading down back of the baseboard, then out underneath it, and under the carpet. Some plaster quickly closed up the cavity in the wall, and he left it to dry.

Next he led the wires under the carpet to Miss Ashton's desk. There they ended, under the carpet and a rug, eighteen or twenty huge coils several feet in diameter disposed in such a way as to attract no attention by a curious foot on the carpet which covered them.

"That is all, Miss Ashton," he said as we watched for his next move. "I shall want to see you early tomorrow, and—might I ask you to be sure to wear that hat which you have on?"

It was a very becoming hat, but Kennedy's tone clearly indicated that it was not his taste in inverted basket millinery that prompted the request. She promised, smiling, for even a suffragette may like pretty hats.

Craig had still to see Travis and report on his work. The candidate was waiting anxiously at his hotel after a big political mass meeting on the East Side, at which capitalism and the bosses had been hissed to the echo, if that is possible.

"What success?" inquired Travis eagerly.

"I'm afraid," replied Kennedy, and the candidate's face fell at the tone, "I'm afraid you will have to meet them, for the present. The time limit will expire tomorrow, and understand Hanford is coming up for a final answer. We must have copies of those photographs, even if we have to pay for them. There seems to be no other way."

Travis sank back in his chair and regarded Kennedy hopelessly. He was actually pale. "You—you don't mean to say that there is no other way, that I'll have to admit even before Bennett—and others that I'm in bad?"

"I wouldn't put it that way," said Kennedy mercilessly, I thought.

"It is that way," Travis asserted almost fiercely. "Why, we could have done that anyhow. No, no—I don't mean that. Pardon me. I'm upset by this. Go ahead," he sighed.

"You will direct Bennett to make the best terms he can with Hanford when he comes up tomorrow. Have him arrange the details of payment and then rush the best copies of the photographs to me."

Travis seemed crushed.

We met Miss Ashton the following morning entering her office. Kennedy handed her a package, and in a few words, which I did not hear explained what he wanted, promising to call again later.

When we called, the girls and other clerks had arrived, and the office was a hive of industry in the rush of winding up the campaign. Typewriters were clicking, clippings were being snipped out of a huge stack of newspapers and pasted into large scrap-books, circulars were being folded and made ready to mail for the final appeal. The room was indeed crowded, and I felt that there was no doubt, as Kennedy had said, that nothing much could go on there unobserved by any one to whose interest it was to see it.

Miss Ashton was sitting at her desk with her hat on directing the work. "It works," she remarked enigmatically to Kennedy.

"Good," he replied. "I merely dropped in to be sure. Now if anything of interest happens, Miss Ashton, I wish you would let me know immediately. I must not be seen up here, but I shall be waiting downstairs in the corridor of the building. My next move depends entirely on what you have to report."

Downstairs Craig waited with growing impatience. We stood in an angle in which we could see without being readily seen, and our impatience was not diminished by seeing Hanford enter the elevator.

I think that Miss Ashton would have made an excellent woman detective, that is, on a case in which her personal feelings were not involved as they were here. She was pale and agitated as she appeared in the corridor, and Kennedy hurried toward her.

"I can't believe it. I won't believe it," she managed to say.

"Tell me, what happened?" urged Kennedy soothingly.

"Oh, Mr. Kennedy, why did you ask me to do this?" she reproached. "I would almost rather not have known at all."

"Believe me, Miss Ashton," said Kennedy, "you ought to know. It is on you that I depend most. We saw Hanford go up. What occurred?"

She was still pale, and replied nervously, "Mr. Bennett came in about quarter to ten. He stopped to talk to me and looked about the room curiously. Do you know, I felt very uncomfortable for a time. Then he locked the door leading from the press bureau to his office, and left word that he was not to be disturbed. A few minutes later a man called."

"Yes, yes," prompted Kennedy. "Hanford, no doubt."

She was racing on breathlessly, scarcely giving one a chance to inquire how she had learned so much.

"Why," she cried with a sort of defiant ring in her tone, "Mr. Travis is going to buy those pictures after all. And the worst of it is that I met him in the hall coming in as I was coming down here, and he tried to act toward me in the same old way—and that after all I know now about him. They have fixed it all up, Mr. Bennett acting for Mr. Travis, and this Mr. Hanford. They are even going to ask me to carry the money in a sealed envelope to the studio of this fellow Hanford, to be given to a third person who will be there at two o'clock this afternoon."

"You, Miss Ashton?" inquired Kennedy, a light breaking on his face as if at last he saw something.

"Yes, I," she repeated. "Hanford insisted that it was part of the compact. They—they haven't asked me openly yet to be the means of carrying out their dirty deals, but when they do, I—I won't…"

"Miss Ashton," remonstrated Kennedy, "I beg you to be calm. I had no idea you would take it like this, no idea. Please, please. Walter, you will excuse us if we take a turn down the corridor and out in the air. This is most extraordinary."

For five or ten minutes Kennedy and Miss Ashton appeared to be discussing the new turn of events earnestly, while I waited impatiently. As they approached again she seemed calmer, but I heard her say, "I hope you're right. I'm all broken up by it. I'm ready to resign. My faith in human nature is shaken. No, I won't expose Wesley Travis for his sake. It cuts me to have to admit it, but Cadwalader used always to say that every man has his price. I am afraid this will do great harm to the cause of reform and through it to the woman suffrage cause which cast its lot with this party. I—I can hardly believe…"

Kennedy was still looking earnestly at her. "Miss Ashton," he implored, "believe nothing. Remember one of the first rules of politics is loyalty. Wait until…"

"Wait?" she echoed. "How can I? I hate Wesley Travis for giving in—more than I hate Cadwalader Brown for his cynical disregard of honesty in others."

She bit her lip at thus betraying her feelings, but what she had heard had evidently affected her deeply. It was as though the feet of her idol had turned to clay. Nevertheless it was evident that she was coming to look on it more as she would if she were an outsider.

"Just think it over," urged Kennedy. "They won't ask you right away. Don't do anything rash. Suspend judgment. You won't regret it."

Craig's next problem seemed to be to transfer the scene of his operations to Hanford's studio. He was apparently doing some rapid thinking as we walked uptown after leaving Miss Ashton, and I did not venture to question him on what had occurred when it was so evident that everything depended on being prepared for what was still to occur.

Hanford was out. That seemed to please Kennedy, for with a brightening face, which told more surely than words that he saw his way more and more clearly, he asked me to visit the agent and hire the vacant office next to the studio while he went uptown to complete his arrangements for the final step.

I had completed my part and was waiting in the empty room when he returned. He lost no time in getting to work, and it seemed to me as I watched him curiously in silence that he was repeating what he had already done at the Travis headquarters. He was boring into the wall, only this time he did it much more carefully, and it was evident that if he intended putting anything into this cavity it must be pretty large. The hole was square, and as I bent over I could see that he had cut through the plaster and laths all the way to the wallpaper on the other side, though he was careful to leave that intact. Then he set up a square black box in the cavity, carefully poising it and making measurements that told of the exact location of its centre with reference to the partitions and walls.

A skeleton key took us into Hanford's well-lighted but now empty studio. For Miss Ashton's sake I wished that the photographs had been there. I am sure Kennedy would have found slight compunction in a larceny of them, if they had been. It was something entirely different that he had in mind now, however, and he was working quickly for fear of discovery. By his measurements I guessed that he was calculating as nearly as possible the centre of the box which he had placed in the hole in the wall on the other side of the dark wallpaper. When he had quite satisfied himself he took a fine pencil from his pocket and made a light cross on the paper to indicate it. The dot fell to the left of a large calendar hanging on the wall.

Kennedy's appeal to Margaret Ashton had evidently had its effect, for when he saw her a few moments after these mysterious preparations she had overcome her emotion.

"They have asked me to carry a note to Mr. Hanford's studio," she said quietly, "and without letting them know that I know anything about it, I have agreed to do so."

"Miss Ashton," said Kennedy, greatly relieved, "you're a trump."

"No," she replied, smiling faintly, "I'm just feminine enough to be curious."

Craig shook his head, but did not dispute the point. "After you have handed the envelope to the person, whoever it may be, in Hanford's studio, wait until he does something—er—suspicious. Meanwhile look at the wall on the side toward the next vacant office. To the left of the big calendar you will see a light pencil mark, a cross. Somehow you must contrive to get near it, but don't stand in front of it. Then if anything happens stick this little number 10 needle in the wall right at the intersection of the cross. Withdraw it quickly, count fifteen, then put this little sticker over the cross, and get out as best you can, though we shan't be far away if you should need us. That's all."

We did not accompany her to the studio for fear of being observed, but waited impatiently in the next office. We could hear nothing of what was said, but when a door shut and it was evident that she had gone, Kennedy quickly removed something from the box in the wall covered with a black cloth.

As soon as it was safe Kennedy had sent me posting after her to secure copies of the incriminating photographs which were to be carried by her from the studio, while he remained to see who came out. I thought a change had come over her as she handed me the package with the request that I carry it to Mr. Bennett and get them from him.

The first inkling I had that Kennedy had at last been able to trace back something in the mysterious doings of the past two days came the following evening, when Craig remarked casually that he would like to have me call on Billy McLoughlin if I had no engagement. I replied that I had none—and managed to squirm out of the one I really had.

The Boss's office was full of politicians, for it was the eve of "dough day", when the purse strings were loosed and a flood of potent argument poured forth to turn the tide of election. Hanford was there with the other ward heelers.

"Mr. McLoughlin," began Kennedy quietly, when we were seated alone with Hanford in the little sanctum of the Boss, "you will pardon me if I seem a little slow in coming to the business that has brought me here tonight. First of all, I may say, and you, Hanford, being a photographer will appreciate it, that ever since the days of Daguerre photography has been regarded as the one infallible means of portraying faithfully any object, scene, or action. Indeed a photograph is admitted in court as irrefutable evidence. For when everything else fails, a picture made through the photographic lens almost invariably turns the tide. However, such a picture upon which the fate of an important case may rest should be subjected to critical examination for it is an established fact that a photograph may be made as untruthful as it may be reliable. Combination photographs change entirely the character of the initial negative and have been made for the past fifty years. The earliest, simplest, and most harmless photographic deception is the printing of clouds into a bare sky. But the re-toucher with his pencil and etching tool today is very skilful. A workman of ordinary skill can introduce a person taken in a studio into an open-air scene well blended and in complete harmony without a visible trace of falsity."

"I need say nothing of how one head can be put on another body in a picture, nor need I say what a double exposure will do. There is almost no limit to the changes that may be wrought in form and feature. It is possible to represent a person crossing Broadway or walking on Riverside Drive, places he may never have visited. Thus a person charged with an offence may be able to prove an alibi by the aid of a skilfully prepared combination photograph."

"Where, then, can photography be considered as irrefutable evidence? The realism may convince all, will convince all, except the expert and the initiated after careful study. A shrewd judge will insist that in every case the negative be submitted and examined for possible alterations by a clever manipulator."

Kennedy bent his gaze on McLoughlin. "Now, I do not accuse you, sir, of anything. But a photograph has come into the possession of Mr. Travis in which he is represented as standing on the steps of your house with yourself and Mr. Cadwalader Brown. He and Mr. Brown are in poses that show the utmost friendliness. I do not hesitate to say that that was originally a photograph of yourself, Mr. Brown, and your own candidate. It is a pretty raw deal, a fake in which Travis has been substituted by very excellent photographic forgery."

McLoughlin motioned to Hanford to reply. "A fake?" repeated the latter contemptuously. "How about the affidavits? There's no negative. You've got to prove that the original print stolen from Travis, we'll say, is a fake. You can't do it."

"19 September was the date alleged, I believe?" asked Kennedy quietly, laying down the bundle of metric photographs and the alleged photographs of Travis. He was pointing to a shadow of a gable on the house as it showed in the metric photographs and the others.

"You see that shadow of the gable? Perhaps you never heard of it, Hanford, but it is possible to tell the exact time at which a photograph was taken from a study of the shadows. It is possible in principle and practice and can be trusted. Almost any scientist may be called on to bear testimony in court nowadays, but you would say the astronomer is one of the least likely. Well, the shadow in this picture will prove an alibi for someone."

"Notice. It is seen very prominently to the right, and its exact location on the house is an easy matter. You could almost use the metric photograph for that. The identification of the gable casting the shadow is easy. To be exact it is 19.62 feet high. The shadow is 14.23 feet down, 13.10 feet east, and 3.43 feet north. You see I am exact. I have to be. In one minute it moved 0.080 feet upward, 0.053 feet to the right, and 0.096 feet in its apparent path. It passes the width of a weatherboard, 0.37 foot, in four minutes and thirty-seven seconds."

Kennedy was talking rapidly of data which he had derived from his metric photograph, from plumb line, level, compass and tape, astronomical triangle, vertices, zenith, pole and sun, declination, azimuth, solar time, parallactic angles, refraction, and a dozen bewildering terms.

"In spherical trigonometry," he concluded, "to solve the problem three elements must be known. I knew four. Therefore I could take each of the known, treat it as unknown, and have four ways to check my result. I find that the time might have been either three o'clock, twenty-one minutes and twelve seconds, in the afternoon, or 3:21:31, or 3:21:29, or 3:21:33. The average is 3:21:26 and there can therefore be no appreciable error except for a few seconds. For that date must have been one of two days, either May 22 or July 23. Between these two dates we must decide on evidence other than the shadow. It must have been in May, as the immature condition of the foliage shows. But even if it had been in July, that is far from being September. The matter of the year I have also settled. Weather conditions, I find, were favourable on all these dates except that in September. I can really answer, with an assurance and accuracy superior to that of the photographer himself—even if he were honest—as to the real date. The real picture, aside from being doctored, was actually taken last May. Science is not fallible, but exact in this matter."

Kennedy had scored a palpable hit. McLoughlin and Hanford were speechless. Still Craig hurried on.

"But, you may ask, how about the automobile picture? That also is an unblushing fake. Of course I must prove that. In the first place, you know that the general public has come to recognize the distortion of a photograph as denoting speed. A picture of a car in a race that doesn't lean is rejected—people demand to see speed, speed, more speed even in pictures. Distortion does indeed show speed, but that, too, can be faked."

"Hanford knows that the image is projected upside down by the lens on the plate, and that the bottom of the picture is taken before the top. The camera mechanism admits light, which makes the picture, in the manner of a roller blind curtain. The slit travels from the top to the bottom and the image on the plate being projected upside down, the bottom of the object appears on the top of the plate. For instance, the wheels are taken before the head of the driver. If the car is moving quickly the image moves on the plate and each successive part is taken a little in advance of the last. The whole leans forward. By widening the slit and slowing the speed of the shutter, there is more distortion."

"Now, this is what happened. A picture was taken of Cadwalader Brown's automobile, probably at rest, with Brown in it. The matter of faking Travis or any one else by his side is simple. If with an enlarging lantern the image of this faked picture is thrown on the paper like a lantern slide, and if the right hand side is a little further away than the left, the top further away than the bottom, you can print a fraudulent high speed ahead picture. True, everything else in the picture, even if motionless, is distorted, and the difference between this faking and the distortion of the shutter can be seen by an expert. But it will pass. In this case, however, the faker was so sure of that that he was careless. Instead of getting the plate further from the paper on the right he did so on the left. It was further away on the bottom than on the top. He got distortion all right, enough still to satisfy the uninitiated. But it was distortion in the wrong way! The top of the wheel, which goes fastest and ought to be most indistinct, is, in the fake, as sharp as any other part. It is a small mistake, but fatal. That picture is really at high speed—backwards! It is too raw, too raw."

"You don't think people are going to swallow all that stuff, do you?" asked Hanford coolly, in spite of the exposures.

Kennedy paid no attention. He was looking at McLoughlin. The Boss was regarding him surlily. "Well," he said at length, "what of all this? I had nothing to do with it. Why do you come to me? Take it to the proper parties."

"Shall I?" asked Kennedy quietly.

He had uncovered another picture carefully. We could not see it, but as he looked at it McLoughlin fairly staggered.

"Wh—where did you get that?" he gasped.

"I got it where I got it, and it is no fake," replied Kennedy enigmatically. Then he appeared to think better of it. "This," he explained, "is what is known as a pinhole photograph. Three hundred years ago della Porta knew the camera obscura, and but for the lack of a sensitive plate would have made photographs. A box, thoroughly light-tight, slotted inside to receive plates, covered with black, and glued tight, a needle hole made by a number 10 needle in a thin sheet of paper—and you have the apparatus for lensless photography. It has a correctness such as no image-forming means by lenses can have. It is literally rectigraphic, rectilinear, it needs no focusing and it takes a wide angle with equal effect. Even pinhole snapshots are possible where the light is abundant, with a ten to fifteen second exposure."

"That picture, McLoughlin, was taken yesterday at Hanford's. After Miss Ashton left I saw who came out—but this picture shows what happened before. At a critical moment Miss Ashton stuck a needle in the wall of the studio, counted fifteen, closed the needle-hole, and there is the record. Walter, Hanford—leave us alone an instant."

When Kennedy passed out of the Boss's office there was a look of quiet satisfaction on his face which I could not fathom. Not a word could I extract from him either that night or on the following day, which was the last before the election.

I must say that I was keenly disappointed by the lack of developments, however. The whole thing seemed to me to be a mess. Everybody was involved. What had Miss Ashton overheard and what had Kennedy said to McLoughlin? Above all, what was his game? Was he playing to spare the girl's feelings by allowing the election to go on without a scandal for Travis?

At last election night arrived. We were all at the Travis headquarters, Kennedy, Travis, Bennett, and myself. Miss Ashton was not present, but the first returns had scarcely begun to trickle in when Craig whispered to me to go out and find her, either at her home or club. I found her at home. She had apparently lost interest in the election, and it was with difficulty that I persuaded her to accompany me.

The excitement of any other night in the year paled to insignificance before this. Distracted crowds everywhere were cheering and blowing horns. Now a series of wild shouts broke forth from the dense mass of people before a newspaper bulletin board. Now came sullen groans, hisses, and catcalls, or all together with cheers as the returns swung in another direction. Not even baseball could call out such a crowd as this. Lights blazed everywhere. Automobiles honked and ground their gears. The lobster palaces were thronged. Police were everywhere. People with horns and bells and all manner of noise-making devices pushed up one side of the thoroughfares and down the other. Hungrily, ravenously they were feeding on the meagre bulletins of news.

Yet back of all the noise and human energy I could only think of the silent, systematic gathering and editing of the news. High up in the League headquarters, when we returned, a corps of clerks was tabulating returns, comparing official and semi-official reports. As first the state swung one way, then another, our hopes rose and fell. Miss Ashton seemed cold and ill at ease, while Travis looked more worried and paid less attention to the returns than would have seemed natural. She avoided him and he seemed to hesitate to seek her out.

Would the up-state returns, I had wondered at first, be large enough to overcome the hostile city vote? I was amazed now to see how strongly the city was turning to Travis.

"McLoughlin has kept his word," ejaculated Kennedy as district after district showed that the Boss's pluralities were being seriously cut into.

"His word? What do you mean?" we asked almost together.

"I mean that he has kept his word given to me at a conference which Mr. Jameson saw but did not hear. I told him I would publish the whole thing, not caring whom or where or when it hit if he did not let up on Travis. I

advised him to read his Revised Statutes again about money in elections, and I ended up with the threat, 'There will be no dough day, McLoughlin, or this will be prosecuted to the limit.' There was no dough day. You see the effect in the returns."

"But how did you do it?" I asked, not comprehending. "The faked photographs did not move him, that I could see."

The words, "faked photographs" caused Miss Ashton to glance up quickly. I saw that Kennedy had not told her or anyone yet, until the Boss had made good. He had simply arranged one of his little dramas.

"Shall I tell, Miss Ashton?" he asked, adding. "Before I complete my part of the compact and blot out the whole affair?"

"I have no right to say no," she answered tremulously, but with a look of happiness that I had not seen since our first introduction.

Kennedy laid down a print on a table. It was the pinhole photograph, a little blurry, but quite convincing. On a desk in the picture was a pile of bills. McLoughlin was shoving them away from him toward Bennett. A man who was facing forward in the picture was talking earnestly to someone who did not appear. I felt intuitively, even before Kennedy said so, that the person was Miss Ashton herself as she stuck the needle into the wall. The man was Cadwalader Brown.

"Travis," demanded Kennedy, "bring the account books of your campaign. I want the miscellaneous account particularly."

The books were brought, and he continued, turning the leaves, "It seemed to me to show a shortage of nearly twenty thousand dollars the other day. Why, it has been made up. How was that, Bennett?"

Bennett was speechless. "I will tell you," Craig proceeded inexorably. "Bennett, you embezzled that money for your business. Rather than be found out, you went to Billy McLoughlin and offered to sell out the Reform campaign for money to replace it. With the aid of the crook, Hanford, McLoughlin's tool, you worked out the scheme to extort money from Travis by forged photographs. You knew enough about Travis's house and library to frame up a robbery one night when you were staying there with him. It was inside work, I found, at a glance. Travis, I am sorry to have to tell you that your confidence was misplaced. It was Bennett who robbed you—and worse."

"But Cadwalader Brown, always close to his creature, Billy McLoughlin, heard of it. To him it presented another idea. To him it offered a chance to overthrow a political enemy and a hated rival for Miss Ashton's hand. Perhaps into the bargain it would disgust her with politics, disillusion her, and shake her faith in what he believed to be some of her 'radical' notions. All could be gained at one blow. They say that a check-book knows no politics, but Bennett has learned some, I venture to say, and to save his reputation he will pay back what he has tried to graft."

Travis could scarcely believe it yet. "How did you get your first hint?" he gasped.

Kennedy was digging into the wall with a bill file at the place where he had buried the little vulcanized disc. I had already guessed that it was a dictograph, though I could not tell how it was used or who used it. There it was, set squarely in the plaster. There also were the wires running under the carpet. As he lifted the rug under Miss Ashton's desk there also lay the huge circles of wire. That was all.

At this moment Miss Ashton stepped forward.

"Last Friday," she said in a low tone, "I wore a belt which concealed a coil of wire about my waist. From a wire ran under my coat, connecting with a small dry battery in a pocket. Over my head I had an arrangement such as the telephone girls wear with a receiver at one ear connected with the battery. No one saw it, for I wore a

large hat which completely hid it. If anyone had known, and there were plenty of eyes watching, the whole thing would have fallen through. I could walk around; no one could suspect anything; but when I stood or sat at my desk I could hear everything that was said in Mr. Bennett's office."

"By induction," explained Kennedy. "The impulses set up in the concealed dictograph set up currents in the coils of wire concealed under the carpet. They were wirelessly duplicated by induction in the coil about Miss Ashton's waist and so affected the receiver under her very becoming hat. Tell the rest, Miss Ashton."

"I heard the deal arranged with this Hanford," she added, almost as if she were confessing something, "but not understanding it as Mr. Kennedy did, I very hastily condemned Mr. Travis. I heard talk of putting back twenty thousand into the campaign accounts, of five thousand given to Hanford for his photographic work, and of the way Mr. Travis was to be defeated whether he paid or not. I heard them say that one condition was that I should carry the purchase money. I heard much that must have confirmed Mr. Kennedy's suspicion in one way, and my own in an opposite way, which I know now was wrong. And then Cadwalader Brown in the studio taunted me cynically and—and it cut me, for he seemed right. I hope that Mr. Travis will forgive me for thinking that Mr. Bennett's treachery was his——"

A terrific cheer broke out among the clerks in the outer office. A boy rushed in with a still unblotted report. Kennedy seized it and read: "McLoughlin concedes the city by a small majority to Travis, fifteen election districts estimated. This clinches the Reform League victory in the state."

I turned to Travis. He was paying no attention except to the pretty apology of Margaret Ashton.

Kennedy drew me to the door. "We might as well concede Miss Ashton to Travis," he said, adding gaily, "by induction of an arm about the waist. Let's go out and watch the crowd."

Arthur B. Reeve, "The Campaign Grafter" *Hearst's Magazine* (November 1912).