

THE REAL MAN

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

Stanton was still wrestling with his problem when the "handsome couple" returned from the play. The trust field captain saw them as they crossed the lobby to the elevator and again marked the little evidences of familiarity. "That settles it," he mused, with an outburst of the pugnacious jaw. "She knows more about Smith than anybody else in this neck of woods—and she's got it to tell!"

Stanton began his inquisition for better information the following day, with the bejeweled lady for his ally. Miss Richlander was alone and unfriended in the hotel—and also a little bored. Hence she was easy of approach; so that by luncheon time the sham promoter's wife was able to introduce her husband. Stanton lost no moment investigative. For the inquiring purpose, Smith was made to figure as a business acquaintance, and Stanton was generous in his praises of the young man's astounding financial ability.

"He's simply a wonder, Miss Richlander!" he confided over the luncheon table. "Coming here a few weeks ago, absolutely unknown, he has already become a prominent man of affairs in Brewster. And so discreetly reticent! To this good day nobody knows where he comes from, or anything about him."

"No?" said Miss Verda. "How singular!" But she did not volunteer to supply any of the missing biographical facts.

"Absolutely nothing," Stanton went on smoothly. "And, of course, his silence about himself has been grossly misinterpreted. I have even heard it said that he is an escaped convict."

"How perfectly absurd!" was the smiling comment.

"Isn't it? But you know how people will talk. They are saying now that his name isn't Smith; that he has merely taken the commonest name in the category as an alias."

"I can contradict that, anyway," Miss Richlander offered. "His name is really and truly John Smith."

"You have known him a long time, haven't you?" inquired the lady with the headlight diamonds.

"Oh, yes; for quite a long time, indeed."

"That was back in New York state?" Stanton slipped in.

"In the East, yes. He comes of an excellent family. His father's people were well-to-do farmers, and one of his great-uncles on his mother's side was on the supreme bench in our state; he was chief justice during the later years of his life."

"What state did you say?" queried Stanton craftily. But Miss Verda was far too wide-awake to let him surprise her.

"Our home state, of course. I don't believe any member of Mr. Smith's immediate family on either side has ever moved out of it."

Stanton gave it up for the time being, and was convinced upon two points, Smith might have business reasons for secrecy—he might have backers who wished to remain completely unknown in their fight against the big land trust; but if he had no backers the

other hypothesis clinched itself instantly—he was in hiding; he had done something from which he had run away.

It was not until after office hours that Stanton was able to reduce his equation to its simplest terms, and it was Shaw, dropping in to make his report after his first day's work as clerk and stenographer in the High Line headquarters, who cleared the air of at least one fog bank of doubts.

"I've been through the records and the stock-books," said the spy, when, in obedience to orders, he had locked the office door. "Smith is playing a lone hand. He flimflamed Kinzie for his first chunk of money, and after that it was easy. Every dollar invested in High Line has been dug up right here in the Timanyoni. Here's the list of stockholders."

Stanton ran his eye down the string of names and swore when he saw Maxwell's subscription of \$25,000. "Damn

it!" he rasped; "and he's Fairbairn's own son-in-law!"

"So is Starbuck, for that matter; and he's in for twenty thousand," said Shaw. "And, by the way, Bill is a man who will bear watching. He's hand-in-glove with Smith, and he's onto all of our little crooks and turns. I heard him telling Smith today that he owed it to the company to carry a gun."

Stanton's smile showed his teeth. "I wish he would; carry one and kill somebody with it. Then we'd know what to do with him."

The spy was rolling a cigarette and his half-closed eyes had a murderous glint in them.

"Me, for instance?" he inquired cynically.

"Anybody," said Stanton absently. He was going over the list of stockholders again and had scarcely heard what Shaw had said.

"That brings us down to business, Mr. Stanton," said the ex-railroad clerk slowly. "I'm not getting money enough out of this to cover the risk—my risk."

The man at the desk looked up quickly.

"What's that you say? By heavens, Shaw, I've spoken once, and I'll do it just this one time more; you sing small if you want to keep out of jail!" Shaw had lighted his cigarette and was edging toward the door.

"Not this trip, Mr. Stanton," he said coolly. "If you've got me, I've got you. I can find two men who will go into court and swear that you paid Pete Simms money to have Smith sandbagged, that day out at Simms' place at the dam! I may have to go to jail, as you say; but I'll bet you five to one that you'll beat me to it!" And with that he snapped the catch on the locked door and went away.

Some three hours after this rather hostile clash with the least trustworthy but by far the most able of his henchmen, Crawford Stanton left his wife chatting comfortably with Miss Richlander in the hotel parlors and went reluctantly to keep an appointment which he had been dreading ever since the early afternoon hour when a wire had come from Copah directing him to meet the "Nevada Flyer" upon its arrival at Brewster. The public knew the name signed to the telegram as that of a millionaire statesman; but Stanton knew it best as the name of a hard and not over-scrupulous master.

The train was whistling for the station when Stanton descended from his cab and hurried down the long platform. A white-jacketed porter was waiting to admit him to the presence when the train came to a stand, and as he climbed into the vestibule of the luxurious private car, Stanton got what comfort he could out of the thought that the interview would necessarily be limited by the ten minutes' engine-changing stop of the fast train.

Stanton, ten minutes later, made a flying leap from the moving train. At the cab rank he found the motor cab which he had hired for the drive down from the hotel. Climbing in, he gave a brittle order to the chauffeur. Simultaneously a man wearing the softest of hats lounged away from his post of observation under a nearby electric pole and ran across the railroad plaza to unhitch and mount a wiry little cow pony. Once in the saddle, however, the mounted man did not hurry his horse. Having overheard Stanton's order giving, there was no need to keep the motor cab in sight as it spluttered through the streets and out upon the backgrounding mesa, its ill-smelling course ending at a lonely roadhouse in the mesa hills on the Topaz trail.

When the hired vehicle came to a stand in front of the lighted barroom of the roadhouse, Stanton gave a waiting order to the driver and went in. Of the dog-faced barkeeper he asked an abrupt question, and at the man's jerk of a thumb toward the rear, the promoter passed on and entered the private room at the back.

The private room had but one occupant—the man Lanterby, who was sitting behind a round card table and vainly endeavoring to make one of the pair of empty whisky glasses spin in a complete circuit about a black bottle standing on the table.

The hired car was still waiting when Stanton went out through the barroom and gave the driver his return orders. And, because the night was dark, neither of the two at the car saw the man in the soft hat straighten himself up from his crouching place under the backroom window and vanish silently in the gloom.

CHAPTER XV.

A Night of Fiascos.

Smith had seen nothing of Miss Richlander during the day, partly because there was a forenoon meeting of the High Line stockholders called for the purpose of electing him secretary and treasurer in fact of the company, and partly because the major portion of the afternoon was spent in conference with Williams at the dam.

Returning from the dam site quite late in the evening, Smith spent a hard-

working hour or more at his desk in the Kinzie building offices; and it was here that Starbuck found him.

"What?" said the new secretary, looking up from his work when Starbuck's wiry figure loomed in the doorway. "I thought you were once more a family man, and had cut out the night prowling."

Starbuck jackknifed himself comfortably in a chair.

"I was. But the little girl's run away again; gone with her sister—Maxwell's wife, you know—to Denver to get her teeth fixed; and I'm foot-loose. Been butting in a little on your game, this evening, just to be doing. How's tricks with you, now?"

"We're strictly in the fight," declared Smith enthusiastically. "We closed the deal today for the last half-mile of the main ditch right of way, which puts us up on the mesa slope above the Escalante grant. If they knock us out now, they'll have to do it with dynamite."

"Yes," said the ex-cowman, thoughtfully; "with dynamite." Then: "How is Williams getting along?"

"Fine! The water is crawling up on him a little every night, but with no accidents, he'll be able to hold the flood rise when it comes. The only thing that worries me now is the time limit."

"The time limit?" echoed Starbuck.

"What's that?"

"It's the handicap we inherit from the original company. Certain state rights to the water were conveyed in the old charter, on condition that the project should be completed, or at least be far enough along to turn water into the ditches, by a given date. This time limit, which carries over from Timanyoni Ditch to Timanyoni High Line, expires next week. We're petitioning for an extension, but if we don't get it we shall still be able to back the water up so that it will flow into the lower level of ditches by next Thursday; that is, barring accidents."

"Yes; with no accidents," mused Starbuck. "Can't get shut of the 'if,' no way nor shape, can we? So that's why the Stanton people have been fighting so wolfishly for delay, is it? John, this is a wicked, wicked world." Then he switched abruptly. "Where did you corral all those good looks you took to the opera house last night, John?"

Smith's laugh was strictly perfumatory.

"That was Miss Vera Richlander, an old friend of mine from back home. She is out here with her father, and the father has gone up into the Topaz country to buy him a gold brick."

"Not in the Topaz," Starbuck struck in loyally. "We don't make the bricks up there—not the phony kind. But let that go and tell me something else. A while back, when you were giving me a little song and dance about the colonel's daughter, you mentioned another woman—though not by name, if you happen to recollect. I was just wondering if this Miss Rich-people, or whatever her name is, might be the other one."

Again the new secretary laughed—this time without embarrassment.

"You've called the turn, Billy. She is the other one."

"H'm; chasing you up?"

"Oh, no; it was just one of the near-miracles. She didn't know I was here, and I had no hint that she was coming."

"All right; it's your roast; not mine. But I'm going to pull one chestnut out of the fire for you, even if I do get my fingers burned. This Miss Rich-folks has had only one day here in Brewster, but she's used it in getting mighty chummy with the Stantons. Does that figure as news to you?"

"It does," said Smith simply; and he added: "I don't understand it."

"Funny," remarked the ex-cowman. "It didn't ball me up for more than a minute or two. Stanton fixed it some way—because he needed to. Tell me something, John: could this Miss Rich-garden help Stanton out in any of his little schemes, if she took a notion?"

Smith turned away and stared at the blackened square of outer darkness lying beyond the office window.

"She could, Billy—but she won't," he answered.

"You can dig up your last dollar and bet on that, can you?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"H'm; that's just what I was most afraid of."

"Don't be an ass, Billy."

"I'm trying mighty hard not to be, John, but sometimes the ears will grow on the bast of us—in spite of the devil. What I mean is this: I saw you two when you came out of the Hoprah dining room together last night, and I saw the look in that girl's eyes. Do you know what I said to myself right then, John? I said: 'Oh, you little girl out at the Hillcrest ranch—good-by, you!'"

Smith's grin was half antagonistic. "You are an ass, Billy," he asserted. "I never was in love with Verda Richlander, nor she with me."

"Speak for yourself and let it hang whatever, John. You can't speak for the woman—no man ever can. What I'm hoping now is that she doesn't know

anything about you that Stanton could make use of."

Again the High Line's new secretary turned to stare at the black backgrounded window.

"You mean that she might hear—of Miss Corona?" he suggested.

"You've roped it down, at least," said the friendly enemy. "Stanton'll tell her—he'll tell her anything and everything that might make her turn loose any little bit of information she may have about you. As I said a minute ago, I'm hoping she hasn't got anything on you, John."

Smith was still facing the window when he replied. "I'm sorry to have to disappoint you, Starbuck. What Miss Richlander could do to me, if she chooses, would be good and plenty."

The ex-cowboy mine owner drew a long breath and felt for his tobacco sack and rice paper.

"All of which opens up more talk trails," he said thoughtfully. "Since you wouldn't try to take care of yourself, and since your neck happens to be the most valuable asset Timanyoni



"Stanton Fixed It Some Way."

High Line has, just at present, I've been butting in, as I told you. Listen to my tale of woe, if you haven't anything better to do. Besides the Miss Rich-ranches episode there are a couple of others. Want to hear about 'em?"

Smith nodded.

"All right. A little while past dinner this evening, Stanton had a hasty call to meet the 'Nevada Flyer.' Tailed onto the train there was a private luxury car, and in the private car sat a gentleman whose face you've seen plenty of times in the political cartoons, usually with cuss-words under it. He is one of Stanton's bosses; and Stanton was in for a wigging—and got it. I couldn't hear, but I could see through the car window. He had Stanton standing on one foot before the train pulled out and let Crawford make his get-away. You guess, and I'll guess, and we'll both say it was about this Escalante snap which is aiming to be known as the Escalante fizzle. Ain't it the truth?"

Again Smith nodded, and said, "Go on."

"After number five had gone Stanton broke for his autocab, looking like he could bite a nail in two. I happened to hear the order he gave the shover, and I had my cayuse hitched over at Bob Sharkey's joint. Naturally, I ambled along after Crawford, and while I didn't beat him to it, I got there soon enough. It was out at Jeff Barton's roadhouse on the Topaz trail, and Stanton was shut up in the back room with a sort of tin-horn 'bad man' named Lanterby."

"You listened?" said Smith still without eagerness.

"Right you are. And they fooled me. Two schemes were on tap: one pointing at Williams and the dam, and the other at you. These were both 'last resorts'; Stanton said he had one more string to pull first. If that broke—well, I've said it half a dozen times already, John: you'll either have to hire a bodyguard or go heeled. I'm telling you right here and now, that bunch is going to get you, even if it costs money!"

"You say Stanton said he had one more string to pull: he didn't give it a name, did he?"

"No, but I've got a notion of my own," was the ready answer. "He's trying to get next to you through the women, with the Miss Rich-pasture for his can opener. But when everything else fails, he is to send a password to Lanterby, one of two passwords. 'Williams' means dynamite and the dam; 'Jake' means the removal from the map of a fellow named Smith. Nice prospect, isn't it?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Sad News.

"The expectant heir to his uncle's millions, anxiously asked the doctor when his uncle was taken ill, if there was no hope."

"What did the doctor say?"

"He told him there was no hope whatever. The chances were his uncle would get well enough to marry his housekeeper."

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON
 (By REV. P. B. FITZWATER, D. D., Teacher of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.)
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LESSON FOR AUGUST 26.

THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH.

LESSON TEXT—II Kings 24:1-21.
 GOLDEN TEXT—As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.—Ezekiel 33:11.

Many years after the kingdom of Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, Judah was carried away to Babylon. Judah's captivity was in three stages, covering about twenty years. The first deportation was while Jehoiakim was king. Daniel and his friends went into captivity at this time (Dan. 1:1-6). The seventy years captivity dates from this time. The second deportation was while Jehoiakim reigned. Most likely Ezekiel was carried away with this second company (Ezekiel 1:1-2). The third deportation, some twelve years after the second, is the one described in our lesson. At this time the greater part of the nation was removed to Babylon. Only the poor and unimportant were left. Jerusalem itself was destroyed at this time.

I. Jerusalem Besieged (vv. 1-3). Zedekiah owed his kingship to the king of Babylon (chapter 24:17), who appointed him to the throne after the removal of Jehoiakim. His name was changed from Mattaniah to Zedekiah. He was not a good man (24:19). Though having his position by the will of the king of Babylon, he rebelled against that king. He thought that by the aid of the surrounding nations, especially Egypt, he could throw off the yoke of Babylon. Jeremiah counseled submission, but the king refused. Nebuchadnezzar came in person with all his host and laid siege to Jerusalem, even building forts against it (v. 1). This siege lasted for about a year and a half. For a while during that period the Chaldean army withdrew because of the appearance of Pharaoh's army (Jer. 37:5). Shut off from help from without, the Jews soon were famishing for want of bread. The horrors of this famine were awful. For a description of it one should read the book of Lamentations. Mothers ate their own children (Lam. 4:10). The richest, even ladies in silken robes, wandered about searching for scraps in the dung heaps (Lam. 4:5-10). Their tongues clave to the roofs of their mouths, and their skins were dried up. Added to these horrors were murderous fights between parties among the Jews. Some wanted to surrender; others insisted upon holding out.

II. Zedekiah's Flight (vv. 4-7). At length the city was broken up, and the king and his warriors fled by night. His thought was to escape to the country beyond the Jordan. The Chaldean army overtook him, scattered his army, and carried Zedekiah to Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters. Here judgment was passed upon him. In his trial it was shown that his solemn oath of allegiance to the Chaldeans had been broken, thus showing himself a traitor (II Chron. 36:13). As a punishment for his treachery his own sons were slain before him, his eyes put out (v. 7), and he himself carried to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner till his death (Jer. 52:11). In this we have a marvelous fulfillment of prophecy (Ezekiel 12:3), which says that Zedekiah shall be taken to Babylon and die there and yet not see the city. He could not see it because his eyes were out. Let us learn from this that that which God says will surely come to pass, even though we cannot explain its details.

III. The Destruction of the City (vv. 8-10). Not only were the people taken captive, but the city itself was subjected to the utmost rigors of war. They plundered the house of the Lord, the palace and the houses of the rich, and then consigned them to the flames (v. 9). They even broke down the walls of Jerusalem (v. 10) and massacred many of the people (Lam. 2:3, 4).

IV. Disposition of the Inhabitants and the Contents of the Temple (vv. 11-21). 1. The inhabitants (vv. 11, 12). They were divided into two classes, those who had deserted to the Babylonians during the siege and those who were found inside of the city at the time it was taken. Many doubtless deserted to the Babylonians during this siege, as even Jeremiah was arrested on this charge (Jer. 38:13). The poor of the land were left to be vine dressers and husbandmen. The wealthy and influential were taken away, as they would be of value to the conquering nation; besides they would be a menace if left behind. The poor were left because pauper captives would be a burden.

Besides it was very undesirable for the land to lie in waste, as then they could not exact tribute from it. To that end encouragement was given by the Babylonians as "vineyards and fields" were given to the poor.

2. The contents of the temple (vv. 12-21). From the temple which had been twice plundered before (II Chron. 36:7, 10), such of gold, silver and bronze vessels as still remained were taken, even the great pillars of the molten sea. The captives and the treasure were delivered to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, where more than threescore of men were killed (vv. 19-21).

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 In a mining district where a great many soldiers are now quartered they are very kind to the Tommies and get up all sorts of entertainments, for their benefit. The other week-end the following notice was posted upon the door of the hall:
 "On Saturday evening a potato pie supper will be given to the soldiers in the district. Subject for Sunday evening, 'A Night of Agony.'"

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Slam on Mother.
 Phoebe was bored. In all the six long years of her life she had never spent such a miserable day. Circumstances at last grew too strong for her, and she cried. She was one of those who do not often cry, but who when they do make no secret of it. In short Phoebe nearly lifted the nursery ceiling off.

Upstairs came Phoebe's mother, already dressed in her smartest clothes ready to have tea with a friend.

"Why, what's the matter, Phoebe?" she asked.

Phoebe standing hopelessly in the middle of the nursery only howled the louder, and refused to see anything cheerful about life.

"Just look, Phoebe, at that ugly little face in the looking glass?" Phoebe immediately became interested and stopped crying.

"Which one, mamma?" she asked.—Pearson's Weekly.

He Was Scotch Sure.
 The Tommies were strolling idly along the street when they chanced to gaze into an attractive shop window. Being soldiers, they both had an eye for a pretty girl, and there within the shop was a real winner.

"Sandy," whispered Mike, "sure, she's just the fairest colleen my eyes hiv iver rested on. It's myself that'll go in and buy something, an' perhaps she will have a smile for me."

His companion came from "ayont the Tweed," as his answer proved.

"I'll gang wi' ye," he said. "But, hoots, mon, ye neednae spend a bawbee. A' ye hev ta' dae is ta' ask fur change o' a shillin'."

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—he is an Escaped Convict.

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