

THE REAL MAN

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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CHAPTER XXVI—Continued.

"No; you didn't say too much," was the low-toned reply. And then: "Billy, a few months ago I was jerked out of my place in life and set down in another place where practically everything I had learned as a boy and man had to be forgotten. I don't know that I'm making it understandable to you, but—"

"Yes, you are," broke in the man at the wheel. "I've had to turn two or three little double somersaults myself in the years that are gone."

"They used to call me 'Monty-Boy,' back there in Lawrenceville, and I fitted the name," Smith went on. "I've just had to do the best I could out here. I found that I had a body that could stand man-sized hardship, and a kind of savage nerve that could give



"They Used to Call Me Monty-Boy."

and take punishment, and a soul that could drive both body and nerve to the limit. Also, I've found out what it means to love a woman."

Starbuck checked the car's speed a little more to keep it well in the rear of the ambling cavalcade.

"That's your one best bet, John," he said soberly.

"It is. I've cleaned out another room since you called me down back yonder in the Little Creek road, Starbuck. I can't trust my own leadings any more; they are altogether too primitive and brutal; so I'm going to take hers. She's send me into this fight that is just ahead of us, and all the other fights that are coming, with a heart big enough to take in the whole world. She said I'd understand, some day; that I'd know that the only great man is one who is too big to be little; who can fight without hating; who can die to make good, if that is the only way that offers."

"That's Corry Baldwin, every day in the week, John. They don't make 'em any finer than she is," was Starbuck's comment. And then: "I'm beginning to kick myself for not letting you go and have one more round-up with her. She's doing you good, right along."

"You didn't stop me," Smith affirmed; "you merely gave me a chance to stop myself. It's all over now, Billy, and my little race is about run. But whatever happens to me, either this night, or beyond it, I shall be a free man. You can't put handcuffs on a soul and send it to prison, you know. That is what Corona was trying to make me understand; and I couldn't—or wouldn't."

Over a low hill just ahead the pole-bracketed lights at the dam were staring themselves against the sky, and the group of horsemen halted at the head of the railroad trestle which marked the location of the north side unloading station. Harding had sent two of his men forward and they reported that there were no guards on the north bank, and that the stagings, on the down-stream face of the dam, were also unguarded. Thereupon Harding made his dispositions. Half of the posse was to go up the northern bank, dismounted, and rush the camp by way of the stagings. The remaining half, also on foot, was to cross at once on the railroad trestle, and to make its approach by way of the wagon road skirting the mesa foot.

At an agreed-upon signal, the two detachments were to close in upon the company buildings in the construction camp, trusting to the surprise and the attack from opposite directions to overcome any disparity in numbers.

At Smith's urgings, Starbuck went with the party which crossed by way of the railroad trestle, Smith himself accompanying the sheriff's detachment. With the horses left behind under guard at the trestle head, the up-river approach was made by both parties simultaneously, though in the darkness, and with the breadth of the river intervening, neither could see the movements of the other. Smith kept his place beside Harding, and to the sheriff's query he answered that he was unarmed.

"You've got a nerve," was all the comment Harding made, and at that they topped the slight elevation and came among the stone debris in the north-side quarries.

From the quarry cutting the view struck out by the camp mastheads was unobstructed. The dam and the uncompleted power house, still figuring to the eye as skeleton masses of form timbering, lay just below them, and on the hither side the flooding torrent thundered through the spillway gates, which had been opened to their fullest capacity. Between the quarry and the northern dam-head ran the smooth concreted channel of the main ditch canal, with the water in the reservoir lake still lapping several feet below the level of its entrance to give assurance that, until the spillways should be closed, the charter-saving stream would never pour through the canal.

On the opposite side of the river the dam-head and the camp street were deserted, but there were lights in the commissary, in the office shack, and in Blue Pete Simms' canteen dogery. From the latter quarter sounds of revelry rose above the spillway thunderings, and now and again a drunken figure lurched through the open door to make its way uncertainly toward the rank of bunk houses.

Harding was staring into the farther ambus of the electric rays, trying to pick up some sign of the other half of his posse, when Smith made a suggestion.

"Both of your parties will have the workmen's bunk houses in range, Mr. Harding, and we mustn't forget that Colonel Baldwin and Williams are prisoners in the timekeeper's shack. If the guns have to be used—"

"There won't be any wild shooting, of the kind you're thinking of," returned the sheriff grimly. "There ain't a single man in this posse that can't hit what he aims at, nine times out of ten. But here's hopin' we can gather 'em in without the guns. If they ain't lookin' for us—"

The interruption was the whining song of a jacketed bullet passing overhead, followed by the crack of a rifle. "Down, boys!" said the sheriff softly, setting the example by sliding into the ready-made trench afforded by the dry ditch of the outlet canal; and as he said it a sharp fusillade broke out, with fire spurtings from the commissary building and others from the mesa beyond to show that the surprise was balked in both directions.

"They must have had scouts out," was Smith's word to the sheriff, who was cautiously reconnoitering the newly developed situation from the shelter of the canal trench. "They are evidently ready for us, and that knocks your plan in the head. Your men can't cross these stagings under fire."

"Your 'wops' are all right, anyway," said Harding. "They're pouring out of the bunk houses and that saloon over there and taking to the hills like a flock o' scared chickens." Then to his men: "Scatter out, boys, and get the range on that commissary shed. That's where most of the rustlers are cached."

Two days earlier, two hours earlier, perhaps, Smith would have begged a weapon and flung himself into the fray with blood lust blinding him to everything save the battle demands of the moment. But now the final milestone in the long road of his metamorphosis had been passed and the darksome valley of elemental passions was left behind.

"Hold up a minute, for God's sake!" he pleaded hastily. "We've got to give them a show, Harding! The chances are that every man in that commissary believes that McGraw has the law on his side—and we are not sure that he hasn't. Anyway, they don't know that they are trying to stand off a sheriff's posse!"

Harding's chuckle was sardonic. "You mean that we'd ought to go over yonder and read the riot act to 'em first? That might do back in the country where you came from. But the man that can get into that camp over there with the serving papers now'd have to be armor-plated, I reckon."

"Just the same, we've got to give them their chance!" Smith insisted doggedly. "We can't stand for any unnecessary bloodshed—I won't stand for it!"

Harding shrugged his heavy shoulders. "One round into that sheet-iron commissary shack'll bring 'em to time—and hotting else will. I hain't got any men to throw away on the dew-dabs and furbelows."

Smith sprang up and held out his hand.

"You have at least one man that you can spare, Mr. Harding," he snapped. "Give me those papers. I'll go over and serve them."

At this the big sheriff promptly lost his temper.

"You blamed fool!" he burst out. "You'd be dog-meat before you could get ten feet away from this ditch!"

"Never mind; give me those papers. I'm not going to stand by quietly and see a lot of men shot down on the chance of a misunderstanding!"

"Take 'em, then!" rasped Harding, meaning nothing more than the calling of a foolish theorist's bluff.

before anybody could stop him he was down upon the stagings, swinging himself from bent to bent through a storm of bullets coming, not from the commissary, but from the saloon shack on the opposite bank—a whistling shower of lead that made every man in the sheriff's party duck to cover.

How the volunteer process-server ever lived to get across the bridge of death no man might know. Thrice in the half-minute dash he was hit; yet there was life enough left to carry him stumbling across the last of the staging bents; to send him reeling up the runway at the end and across the working yard to the door of the commissary, waving the folded papers like an inadequate flag of truce as he fell on the doorstep.

After that, all things were curiously hazy and undefined for him. There was the tumult of a fierce battle being waged over him; a deafening rifle fire and the spat-spat of bullets puncturing the sheet-iron walls of the commissary. In the midst of it he lost his hold upon the realities, and when he got it again the warlike clamor was stilled and Starbuck was kneeling beside him, trying, apparently, to deprive him of his clothes with the reckless slashings of a knife.

Protesting feebly and trying to rise, he saw the working yard filled with armed men and the returning throng of laborers; saw Colonel Baldwin and Williams talking excitedly to the sheriff; then he caught the eye of the engineer and beckoned eagerly with his one available hand.

"Hold still, until I can find out how dead you are!" gritted the rough-and-ready surgeon who was playing the clothes-ripping knife. But when Williams came and bent down to listen, Smith found a voice, shrill and strident and so little like his own that he scarcely recognized it.

"Call 'em out—call the men out and start the gate machinery!" he panted in the queer, whistling voice which was, and was not, his own. "Possess—possession is nine points of the law—that's what Judge Warner said; the spillways, Bartley—shut 'em quick!"

"The men are on the job and the machinery is starting right now," said Williams gently. "Don't you hear it?" And then to Starbuck: "For Heaven's sake, do something for him, Billy—anything to keep him with us until a doctor can get here!"

Smith felt himself smiling foolishly. "I don't need any doctor, Bartley; what I need is a new ego; then I'd stand some sha—some chance of finding—" he looked up appealingly at Starbuck—"what is it that I'd stand some chance of finding, Billy? I—I can't seem to remember."

Williams turned his face away and Starbuck tightened his benumbing grip upon the severed artery in the bared arm from which he had cut the sleeve. Smith seemed to be going off again, but he suddenly opened his eyes and pointed frantically with a finger of the one serviceable hand. "Catch him! Catch him!" he shrielled. He's going to dynamite the dam!"

Clinging to consciousness with a grip that not even the blood loss could break, Smith saw Williams spring to his feet and give the alarm; saw three or four of the sheriff's men drop their weapons and hurl themselves upon another man who was trying to make his way unnoticed to the



Stagings with a box of dynamite on his shoulder. Then he felt the foolish smile coming again when he looked up at Starbuck.

"Tell the little girl—tell her—you know what to tell her, Billy; about what I tried to do. Harding said I'd get killed, but I remembered what she said, and I didn't care. Tell her I said that that one minute was worth living for—worth all it cost."

The raucous blast of a freak auto horn ripped into the growling murmur of the gate machinery, and a dust-covered car pulled up in front of the commissary. Out of it sprang first the doctor with his instrument bag, and closely following him, two plain-

clothes men and a Brewster police captain in uniform. Smith looked up and understood.

"They're just a little—too late, Billy, don't you think?" he quavered weakly. "I guess—I guess I've fooled them, after all." And therewith he closed his eyes wearily upon all his troubles and triumphings.

CHAPTER XXVII.

In Sunrise Gulch.

William Starbuck drew the surgeon aside after the first aid had been rendered, and Smith, still unconscious, had been carried from the makeshift operating table in the commissary to Williams' cot in the office shack.

"How about it, Doc?" asked the mine owner bluntly.

The surgeon shook his head doubtfully.

"I can't say. He'll be rather lucky if he doesn't make it, won't he?"

Starbuck remembered that the doctor had come out in the auto with the police captain and the two plain-clothes men.

"Hackerman has been talking?" he queried.

The surgeon nodded. "He told me on the way out. If I were in Smith's place, I'd rather pass out with a bullet in my lung. Wouldn't you?"

Starbuck was frowning sourly. "Suppose you make it a case of suspended judgment, Doc," he suggested. "The few of us here who know anything about it are giving John the benefit of the doubt. They'll have to show me, and half a dozen of us, before they can send him over the road."

"He knew they were after him?"

"Sure thing; and he had all the chance he needed to make his getaway. He was shot while he was trying to get between and stop the war and keep others from getting killed."

"It's a pity," said the surgeon, glancing across at the police captain to whom Colonel Baldwin was appealing. "They'll put him in the hospital cell at the jail, and that will cost him whatever slender chance he might otherwise have to pull through."

Starbuck looked up quickly. "Tell 'em he can't be moved, Doc Dan," he urged suddenly. And then: "You're Dick Maxwell's family physician, and Colonel Dexter's, and mine. Surely you can do that much for us?"

"I can, and I will," said the surgeon promptly.

Three days after the wholesale arrest at the dam, Brewster gossip had fairly outworn itself telling and retelling the story of how the High Line charter had been saved; of how Crawford Stanton's bold ruse of hiring an ex-train-robber to impersonate a federal-court officer had fallen through leaving Stanton and his confederates, ruthlessly abandoned by the unnamed principals, languishing balliffs in jail; of how Smith, the hero of all these occasions, was still lying at the point of death in the office shack at the construction camp, and David Kinzie, once more in keen pursuit of the leaves and fishes, was combing the market for odd shares of the stock, which was now climbing swiftly out of reach. But at this climax of exhaustion—or satiety—came a distinctly new set of thrills, more titillating, if possible, than all the others combined.

It was on the morning of the third day that the Herald announced the return of Mr. Josiah Richlander from the Topaz; and in the marriage notices of the same issue the breakfast-table readers of the newspapers learned that the multimillionaire's daughter had been privately married the previous evening to Mr. Tucker Jibbey. Two mining speculators were chuckling over the news in the Hophra House grill when a third man came in to join them.

"What's the joke?" queried the newcomer; and when he was shown the marriage item, he nodded gravely. "That's all right; but the Herald man didn't get the full flavor of it. It was a sort of runaway match, it seems; the fond parent wasn't invited or consulted."

"I don't see that the fond parent has any kick coming," said the one who had sold Jibbey a promising prospect hole on Topaz mountain two days earlier. "The young fellow's got all kinds of money."

"I know," the land broker put in. "But they're whispering it around that Mr. Richlander had other plans for his daughter. They also say that Jibbey wouldn't stay to face the music; that he left on the midnight train last night a few hours after the wedding, so as not to be among those present when the old man should blow in."

"What?"—in a chorus of two—"left his wife?"

"That's what they say. But that's only one of the new and startling things that isn't in the morning papers. Have you heard about Smith?—or haven't you been up long enough yet?"

"I heard yesterday that he was beginning to mend," replied the break-faster on the left.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Spanked the Kitty. The little black kitten hid under the veranda and refused to come out and be friends again with Polly. Mamma found the little girl in tears, and asked the cause of the trouble. "Kittily scratched me, so I was 'bigned to spank her an' now she won't play with me," sobbed Polly. "If you spank kittily, she won't love you," explained mamma. "I didn't know 'bout that," replied the little one miserably. "'cause you spank me an' I love you just the same."

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A Question. "Anyhow, poverty is no crime." "And that's a good thing. Where would our poor folks get our technicalities from?"

Current Abbreviation. "That druggist's son is terrible ignorant," exclaimed the superior small boy. "How do you know?" "He thinks HCL stands for hydrochloric acid instead of 'high cost of living.'"

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