

Colonel TODHUNTER of Missouri

By RIPLEY D. SAUNDERS

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CHAPTER XV.

Colonel Todhunter Confronts Defeat.

DURING a lull in the excited jubilation that followed Tom Strickland's acquittal, and having first congratulated Tom himself, Mrs. Todhunter turned to Colonel Strickland, who stood with her husband a few feet away. Colonel Todhunter having by this time joined the group.

"I feel sure you know how rejoiced I am that Tom has been acquitted," she said, her frank eyes testifying to the truth. "I have always loved him as if he was my own son. But I had to do what I did after that dreadful night of the party at the hotel. The accusation made against him by that girl, Lottie-May Deggert, left me no alternative but to forbid him seeing Mary unless he could clear himself of the sin with which the girl herself charged him."

"I know just how you felt, Mrs. Todhunter," replied Colonel Strickland. "It was a terrible situation. Naturally, it hurt us all that Tom was made to appear guilty, but there was the cold fact that Lottie-May Deggert publicly declared him guilty, and it seemed incredible that she would do this if he was innocent. And I know now that you are sincerely glad because the truth has come out. You don't have to tell me anything about it, ma'am."

At this moment Mary herself, a great happiness shining in her face, although her eyes were wet with tears, joined the group. Colonel Strickland turned to her with a smile.

"I delivered that message of yours to Tom, Miss Mary," he said. "The message you gave me when he was in the jail. I just wish you could have seen how proud and happy it made him! He needed it mighty bad that day."

Mary blushed rose red. "Please don't remind Tom of my message, Colonel Strickland," she cried in a pretty confusion. "I'll be ashamed to look him in the face again if you do!"

"I don't see why you should be," laughed Colonel Strickland. "It just simply proved to Tom that a mighty welcome time that the young lady he loved so dearly loved him in return, so you ought to be proud of it instead of ashamed."

And at this juncture Colonel Todhunter intervened. "Don't you let that Mary Todhunter fool you, Bill Strickland," he chuckled. "She's as proud of that love sick message to her sweetheart as if it was all in a sentimental story and she was the heroine of the story. And when she and Tom have gone and got married—well, between you and me and the gatepost I'll bet poor Tom never hears the last of it!"

Mary blushed furiously as the others laughed.

"When she and Tom are married!" repeated Colonel Strickland, his eyes resting fondly on Mary's face. "Doesn't that sound good, though?"

Then he turned pointblank to Mrs. Todhunter. "When shall it be, Mrs. Todhunter?" he asked. "You and Miss Mary have got to be good now and name an early day. When shall it be?"

But at this alarming question Mary herself gave a little cry of maidenly protest, frankly clutching her mother's arm and fairly dragged Mrs. Todhunter out of range, yet not with entire success, for the latter turned a laughing face back to Colonel Strickland as she was thus conveyed away.

"Never you mind, Colonel Strickland," she made fleeing answer. "I'm going to work hard for Tom. I ought to do it, and I will!"

That same evening Colonel Todhunter went to confer with the Hon. William J. Strickland at his home concerning the latter's campaign prospects. The outlook was not encouraging.

"Bill," said Colonel Todhunter, "there's just one chance for us. Tom's acquittal may bring about a reaction of public sentiment in your favor if two days is time enough for the news to sink in and create the natural effect. They'll all know of it. The St. Louis and Kansas City papers are full of the exciting story of his sudden acquittal, and every other newspaper in the state will have a lot about it. Where it may prove a boomerang for the Yancey gang. They worked up public interest in the case, thinking it would ruin you body and soul."

Colonel Strickland shook his head. "It's too late, Thurs," he replied. "I reckon I'll have to stay beat. But I ain't worrying about that. I want to hear now that my campaign fund has been raised, so as to put you out of danger of any loss."

The light of battle was in Colonel Todhunter's eyes.

"I'm thinking of about your gettin' that there nomination, Bill Strickland," he exclaimed. "Not about the money. Now that we got 'em beat in Tom's case, I'd like to whip 'em straight down the line, sub."



ing of crooked work if they did—and on that basis I'd need something like 25,000 plurality in the state. Where am I going to get it?"

Colonel Todhunter looked dubious. "That certainly is siddin' a mighty big contract on Mizoorah, to offset the crooked count in St. Louis. But I'll just be double whipsawed if we won't fight 'em to the last ditch, sub. No man's licked till he says so himself. Why, right on that point, sub, I knew an old fellow over yonder in Callaway that never got licked in his whole life; he died fightin' to his last breath, like a regular old Davy Crockett, sub!"

The Hon. William J. Strickland smiled. "I'm not throwing up the sponge either," he responded, "but the wisest way is to look facts straight in the face. If you don't you simply build a fool's paradise that'll make you feel all the worse if things don't turn out right."

Colonel Todhunter chuckled. "All the same," he commented, "I'm agoin' to use my bricks right down to the last one buildin' a house that suits me, not one that suits the other fellow. 'Hope on, hope ever,' that's my motto, and the devil take the hindmost."

"Here you are, folks," called out Dick Cantrill. "The bulletins are beginning to come in."

"Incomplete returns from fifty counties, including Kansas City and St. Joe, give Yancey 38,730, Strickland 18,248, Hudson 17,416 and Sanford 10,355."

"Hooraay for our side!" exclaimed Colonel Todhunter.

The others laughed.

"What are you hooraayin' about, Thurs?" drawled Colonel Strickland, amused. "Trying to keep your courage up?"

"No, sub; not by a blamed sight," retorted Colonel Todhunter. "First news, bad news, that's what I'm hooraayin' about. It's always meant good luck, and it means good luck now as sure as shootin'!"

A ripple of reassured laughter greeted this reply.

"Here we are again!" announced Dick Cantrill. "Jackson, Yancey's home county, gives him 5,000 votes, according to early returns, with less than a hundred for his opponents."

"That isn't so bad," commented Colonel Strickland, "if the later returns don't increase it."

"Green, Buchanan and Vernon counties," read Dick Cantrill, "go for Yancey; also Andrew, Cass, Cole, Davis, Dunklin, Henry, Johnson, Lexington, Platte, Sullivan and Wright."

"Shucks!" scoffed Colonel Todhunter. "They've been conceded all along. The figgers—the figgers is what we'd like to get."

Cantrill waved a new bulletin jubilantly.

"Strickland's heavy lead," he read, "is in Jasper, Callaway, Pike, Marion, Audrain and Laclede counties. The following counties also go for Strickland: Berry, Barton, Bates, Butler, Camden, Clark, Franklin, Lewis, Lincoln, Macon, Monticue, Phelps, Pulaski, Polk, Ripley, St. Francis, Ste. Genevieve, Saline, Shelby, Stoddard, Wayne and Webster."

"Yeow-wow!" yelled Sim Birdsong. "We've got 'em on the run!"

"Figgers is still what's needed, Sim," said Colonel Todhunter. "We've known that was our counties all the time—but by how much? That's the question."

"Later returns," read Dick Cantrill, "show Yancey leading in Kansas City, St. Joseph and in thirty-three counties by 18,337."

"Now we're gettin' down to it," spoke Colonel Strickland grimly. "Let's see—thirty-three counties—um-hum—and St. Joe—say, Thurs, according to these figgers they're countin' up an all-fired heavy Yancey vote in Kansas City."

"St. Louis," read Editor Cantrill. "Many disturbances reported at the polls. Reliable return on vote will be late. Police have made numerous arrests."

Colonel Strickland looked worried. "Todhunter," he said, "the St. Louis gang's getting in its work for Yancey all right."

But Colonel Todhunter dismissed this view. "I ain't so almighty sure. Who knows but what that's a good sign for us?"

"The police can't reach crooked work done by judges and clerks of election," pointed out Colonel Strickland.

"Well," replied Colonel Todhunter, "they can prevent intimidation at the polls, anyway."

But even he had to join in the laugh that followed.

"Partial returns from thirty-six rural counties," read Dick Cantrill, "give Yancey plurality of 4,000."

Then the bulletins began to come in swift succession. The Blade's editor read them breathlessly.

Suddenly his voice, sounding a note of apprehension, rang out: "Kansas City gives Yancey a plurality of 12,063!"

Far down the street arose the sound of music and cheering.

Soon the strains of "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" were plainly distinguishable, brought nearer and nearer by a large marching band.

It was the Nineveh bugle and drum corps, heading the Stephen K. Yancey campaign club, starting out on a triumphal parade to celebrate the victory of the Hon. Stephen K. Yancey over the Hon. William J. Strickland for the Democratic nomination for governor of Missouri.

Colonel Bill Strickland smiled grimly. "Look pleasant, Thurston," he said. "Put on your sweetest expression. They'll be marching by here in a minute."

"I'll just be eternally condemned if I do!" retorted Colonel Todhunter. "I can take my medicine just as gracefully as the next man when I know it's comin' to me, but I'll be jimswiggled if it's comin' to me yet. The cards has all got to be laid down on the table before I let any man take the pot, sub!"

Colonel Strickland shook his head, smiling.

The next moment the vanguard of the approaching column came in sight. In another instant the Nineveh bugle and drum corps and the Stephen K. Yancey campaign club, followed by a crowd of cheering Yanceytes, were swinging proudly past the Blade office.

"Hooraay for Yancey!" the paraders shouted.

Colonel Todhunter, stiff as a grenadier, stood at the open door. His jaws were set hard as he confronted the triumphant foe. Suddenly a mocking voice sounded.

"We're sorry for poor old Bill Strickland," it cried, "but he never ought to ha' bucked up against Steve Yancey!"

Colonel Todhunter's fighting blood leaped in his veins. "Who are you that's so sorry for Bill Strickland?" he asked. There was an ill omen in his level tone.

No reply came. But Colonel Todhunter identified the speaker by following the glances of his fellows in the line.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Jeff Harris?" he said. "You, that didn't know at first whether you was for Colonel Strickland or old Steve Yancey. Couldn't make up your mind till you saw which way it was most profitable for you to jump. Well, Jeff, your man ain't nominated yet. And in the meanwhile I wouldn't like nothin' better, you white livered skunk, than to wipe up the ground with you!"

But at this critical moment Colonel Bill Strickland, laughing, pulled Colonel Todhunter back into the Blade office, and Jeff Harris passed on with the Yancey parade.

"You old frebrand, you!" the candidate sputtered, shaking with laughter. "What the blue blazes and Sam Hill do you want to let a thing like that ruffle you up for? I thought you had more sense."

"I've got sense enough, Bill," said Colonel Todhunter. "But all my life I've been ready to clinch with any man that tried to mock me or my friend, thinkin' he was down and out, and I'll just be shot full o' holes if I ain't still ready."

Dick Cantrill's voice interrupted. "Here's another bulletin," he cried.

Then he read: "Returns from St. Louis just beginning to come in. It is now claimed that Strickland has carried that city. Yancey's managers are charging Randolph Carter, the newly appointed chairman of the board of election commissioners, with unlawfully using his authority in Strickland's behalf. Last night Carter removed many judges and clerks of election, claiming to have proof that they had been appointed to insure Yancey's victory by fraud and appointed others in their places. The chief of police is supporting him by giving the new ap-

pointees ample police protection at the polls. Many disturbances at polling places have resulted."

Colonel Todhunter's jubilant hand came down heavily on Colonel Strickland's shoulder.

"What did I tell you about Randolph Carter and old Chief Stacey, Bill?" he cried. "Didn't I say that I made old Hat-fee ashamed of himself and that Chief Stacey was white clear through and would use his policemen in favor of an honest vote if he got half a chance? Yes, sub! I was a-castin' my bread on the waters when I had that

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there talk with them in St. Louis, and it's comin' back to us after these many days, you mark my words."

There was a joyous cheer from his hearers.

But Colonel Todhunter himself held up a warning hand. "Don't be too precious, boys. Leave that sort of foolishness to the Yancey crowd that just went around by here if anything of that sort's got to be done. Wait for the figgers before you do any hoollenin'."

But Dick Cantrill gave another whoop, notwithstanding. "Here's another bulletin!" he cried. "It is now said that Strickland has a heavy plurality in St. Louis as a result of the honest count of votes cast. Yancey's managers are claiming fraud."

And then the "figgers" began to roll in. The returns from St. Louis by precincts and wards, until now delayed, were at last well in hand. Dick Cantrill read bulletin after bulletin in unbroken succession. Colonel Strickland, with lips compressed, tabulated the vote by wards. Once or twice he nodded significantly to Colonel Todhunter.

At last there came a break in the steady stream of returns. Lycurgus Quivey grasped a bulletin from the hands of the Blade's "devil" as the latter rushed in breathless. He handed it to Cantrill.

The Blade's editor gave one swift, comprehensive glance at the bulletin and excitedly hurled his hat high in the air with an unrestrained yell of exaltation.

"It is now conceded by Yancey's managers," he read, "that Strickland has carried St. Louis by at least 11,000 plurality. With the returns now in from the state, this gives Strickland a total plurality of at least 3,000, with several Strickland counties still to hear from. A conservative estimate indicates that Strickland will be nominated by over 5,000 plurality."

Colonel Strickland laid down his pen and leaned back in his chair.

"That's reliable," he said. "We've set 'em beat, boys. Anybody that feels the hooraaying for Strickland now has got my full permission. It's perfectly safe."

At this moment the little "printer's devil" of the Blade delivered a personal telegram to Colonel Strickland. As the latter read it an expression of the deepest relief and satisfaction sprang into his face.

"Thank God!" he muttered. "I wanted that special piece of news more than anything else in all this world. Here, Thurs, just you read this, my friend!"

Colonel Todhunter took the bit of paper from Colonel Strickland's hand. The message was signed by Governor Leslie. It read:

Due to enthusiasm caused by Tom's acquittal and the public's realization of cowardly fight made on you through him, a popular movement to raise fund covering the deficit in Strickland campaign fund was begun today and successfully completed at our headquarters tonight. Every dollar needed has been subscribed and paid. Reliable election returns now all in show that you are nominated by nearly 6,000 plurality. Congratulations.

Colonel Strickland laughed as gleefully as a boy when Colonel Todhunter glanced up at him from the reading of the telegram.

"That settles it, Thurs," he cried. "And by the Lord Harry, I'm gladder to know you're safe on the money and of this fight than to know I've been nominated. It's given me more than one sleepless night of worrying, I can tell you."

"It hasn't made me lose a wink o' sleep," replied Colonel Todhunter calmly. "I know I ain't as religious a man as I ought to be, Bill Strickland, but I got an abidin' faith in the Good Master up above, all the same. I ain't never doubted he'd see me safe through on that there proposition. He knows the tricks o' that machine gang we're fightin' better'n we do, and he ain't agoin' to let 'em prevail over us!"

Saying which, Colonel Todhunter read aloud that sentence of the telegram authoritatively announcing Colonel Strickland's nomination.

Dick Cantrill's loyal voice led the mighty cheer with which this announcement was greeted. Sim Birdsong's was second only to his. Colonel Todhunter, gulping just once after having read the proclamation of victory, did not join in the cheering. But when Lycurgus Quivey came to him with outstretched hands, he took them in a close grip of his own, his dauntless old eyes showing just a hint of dauntlessness.

"Colonel Todhunter," spoke Lycurgus, "I'm going to write a poem describing this great triumph after seeming defeat—it's the finest thing I ever saw in all my life!"

"Bully for you, Lycurgus!" replied Colonel Todhunter. "And I bet it'll be a rip snortin' good poem, too—that one you wrote at the openin' of the campaign hit the target plumb center, sub!"

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