

THE REAL MAN

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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CHAPTER XIX—Continued.

Smith did his various errands quickly. When he reached the fourth-floor suite again, Jibbey was out of the bath; was sitting on the edge of the bed wrapped in blankets, with the steaming pot of coffee sent up on Smith's hurry order beside him on a tray.

"It's your turn at the tub," he bubbled cheerfully. "I didn't have any glad rags to put on, so I wiped some of your bedclothes. Go to it, old man, before you catch cold."

Smith was already pointing for the bath. "Your trunk will be up in a few minutes, and I've told them to send it here," he said. "When you want to quit me, you'll find your rooms five doors to the right in this same corridor: suite number four-sixteen."

It was a long half-hour before Smith emerged from his bathroom once more clothed and in his right mind. In the interval the reclaimed trunk had been sent up, and Jibbey was also clothed. He had found one of Smith's pipes and some tobacco and was smoking with the luxurious enjoyment of one who had suffered the pangs imposed by two days of total abstinence. "Just hangin' around to say good-night," he began, when Smith showed himself in the sitting room. Then he returned the borrowed pipe to its place on the mantel and said his small say to the definite end. "After all that's happened to us two tonight, Monty, I hope you're going to forget my crazy yappings and not lose any sleep about that Lawrenceville business. I'm seventeen different kinds of a rotten failure; there's no manner of doubt about that; and once in a while—just once in a while—I've got sense enough to know it. You saved my life when it would have been all to the good for you to let me go. I guess the world wouldn't have been much of a loser if I had gone, and you know that, too. Will you—er—would you shake hands with me, Monty?"

CHAPTER XX.

The Pace-Setter.

Smith made an early breakfast on the morning following the auto drive to the abandoned mine, hoping thereby to avoid meeting both Miss Richlander and Jibbey. The Hophra cafe was practically empty when he went in and took his accustomed place at one of the alcove tables, but he had barely given his order when Starbuck appeared and came to join him.

"You're looking a whole lot better this morning, John," said the mine owner quizzically, as he held up a finger for the waiter. "How's the grouch?"

Smith's answering grin had something of its former good-nature in it. "Today's the day, Billy," he said. "Tomorrow at midnight we must have the water running in the ditches or lose our franchise. It's chasing around in the back part of my mind that Stanton will make his grandstand play today. I'm not harboring any grouches on the edge of the battle. They are a handicap, anyway, and always."

"That's good medicine talk," said the older man, eying him keenly. And then: "You had us all guessing, yesterday and the day before, John. You sure was acting as if you'd gone plumb locoed."

"I was locoed," was the quiet admission.

"What cured you?"

"It's too long a story to tell over the breakfast table. What do you hear from Williams?"

"All quiet during the night; but the weather reports are scaring him up a good bit this morning."

"Storms on the range?"

"Yes. The river gained four feet last night, and there is flood water and drift coming down to beat the band. Just the same, Bartley says he is going to make good."

Smith nodded. "Bartley is all right; the right man in the right place. Have you seen the colonel since he left the offices last evening?"

"Yes. I drove him and Corona out to the ranch in my new car. He said he'd lost his roadster; somebody had sneaked in and borrowed it."

"I suppose he told you about the latest move—our move—in the stock-selling game?"

"No, he didn't; but Stillings did. You played it pretty fine, John; only I hope to gracious we won't have to redeem those options. It would bust our little inside crowd wide open to have to buy in all that stock at par."

Smith laughed. "Sufficient unto the day, Billy. It was the only way to block Stanton. It's neck or nothing with him now, and he has only one more string that he can pull."

"The railroad right-of-way deal?"

"Yes; he has been holding that in reserve—that, and one other thing."

"What was the other thing?" Starbuck was absentmindedly fishing for a second lump of sugar in the sugar bowl.

"Has it got anything to do with the bunch of news that you won't tell us—about yourself, John?"

"It has. Two days ago, Stanton had me fairly, but a friend of mine stepped

in. Last night, again, he stood to win out. But a man fell into the river, and Stanton lost out once more. "You're talking in riddles now, John. I don't sabs."

"It isn't necessary for you to sabs. Results are what counts. Barring accidents, you Timanyoni High Line people can reasonably count on having me with you for the next few critical days; and, I may add, you never needed me more pointedly."

Starbuck's smile was face-wide. "I hope I don't feel sorry," he remarked. "Some day, when you can take an hour or so off, I'm going to get you to show me around in your little mu-seeum of self-conceit, John. Maybe I can learn how to gather me up one."

Smith matched the mine owner's good-natured smile. For some unexplainable reason the world, his particular world, seemed to have lost its malignance. He could even think of Stanton without bitterness; and the weapon which had been weighing his hip pocket for the past few days had been carefully buried in the bottom of the lower dressing-case drawer before he came down to breakfast.

"You may laugh, Billy, but you'll have to admit that I've been outgunning the whole bunch of you, right from the start," he retorted brazenly. "But let's get down to business. This is practically Stanton's last day of grace. If he can't get some legal hold upon us before midnight tomorrow night, or work some scheme to make us lose our franchise, his job is gone."

"Show me," said the mine owner succinctly.

"It's easy. With the dam completed and the water running in the ditches, we become at once a going concern, with assets a long way in advance of our liabilities. The day after tomorrow—if we pull through—you won't be able to buy a single share of Timanyoni High Line at any figure. As a natural consequence, public sentiment, which, we may say, is at present a little doubtful, will come over to our side in a landslide, and Stanton's outfit, if it wants to continue the fight, will have to fight the entire Timanyoni, with the city of Brewster thrown in for good measure. Am I making it plain?"

"Right you are, so far. Go on."

"Billy, I'll tell you something that I haven't dared to tell anybody, not even Colonel Baldwin. I've been spending the company's money like water to keep in touch. The minute we fail, and long before we could hope to reorganize a second time and apply for a new charter, Stanton's company will be in the field, with its charter already granted. From that to taking possession of our dam, either by means of an enabling act of the legislature, or by purchase from the paper railroad, will be only a step. And

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honest man. But he is well along in years, and has an exaggerated notion of his own importance. Stanton, or rather his figurehead railroad people, have asked him to intervene, and he has taken the case under advisement. That is where we stand this morning."

Starbuck was nodding slowly. "I see what you mean, now," he said. "If Lorching jumps the wrong way for us, you're looking to see a United States marshal walk up to Bartley Williams some time today and tell him to quit. That would put the final kibosh on us, wouldn't it?"

Smith was rising in his place. "I'm not dead yet, Billy," he rejoined cheerfully. "I haven't let it get this far without hammering out a few expedients for our side. If I can manage to stay in the fight today and tomorrow—"

A little new under clerk had come in from the hotel office and was trying to give Starbuck a note in a square envelope, and Starbuck was saying: "No, that's Mr. Smith, over there."

Smith took the note and opened it, and he scarcely heard the clerk's explanation that it had been put in his box the evening before, and that the day clerk had been afraid he would get away without finding it. It was from Verda Richlander, and it had neither superscription nor signature. This is what Smith read:

"My little ruse has failed miserably. Mr. K's messenger found my father in spite of it, and he—the messenger—returned this evening. I know, because he brought a note from father to me. Come to me as early tomorrow morning as you can, and we'll plan what can be done."

Smith crushed the note in his hand and thrust it into his pocket. Starbuck was making a cigarette, and was studiously refraining from breaking in. But Smith did not keep him waiting.

"That was my knockout, Billy," he said with a quietness that was almost overdone. "My time has suddenly been shortened to hours—perhaps to minutes. Get a car as quickly as you can and go to Judge Warner's house. I have an appointment with him at nine o'clock. Tell him I'll keep it, if I can, but that he needn't wait for me if I am not there on the minute."

CHAPTER XXI.

The Colonel's "Deft."

Though it was only eight o'clock, Smith sent his card to Miss Richlander's rooms at once and then had himself lifted to the mezzanine floor to wait for her. She came in a few minutes, a strikingly beautiful figure of a woman in the freshness of her morning gown, red-lipped, bright-eyed, and serenely conscious of her own resplendent gifts of face and figure. Smith went quickly to meet her and drew her aside into the music parlor. Already the need for caution was beginning to make itself felt.

"I have come," he said briefly.

"You got my note?" she asked.

"A few minutes ago—just as I was leaving the breakfast table."

"You will leave Brewster at once—while the way is still open?"

He shook his head. "I can't do that; in common justice to the men who have trusted me, and who are now needing me more than ever, I must stay through this one day, and possibly another."

"Mr. Kinzie will not be likely to lose any time," she prefaced thoughtfully. "He has probably telegraphed to Lawrenceville before this." Then, with a glance over her shoulder to make sure that there were no eavesdroppers: "But not one of these Brewsterites can identify you as John Montague Smith of Lawrenceville—the man who is wanted by Sheriff Macaulay. My father, in his letter, after telling me that he will be detained in the mountains several days longer, refers to Mr. Kinzie's request and suggests—"

The fugitive was smiling grimly. "He suggests that you might help Mr. Kinzie out."

"Not quite that," she rejoined. "He merely suggests that I am to be prudent, and—to quote him exactly—not get mixed up in the affair in any way so that it would make talk."

"I see," said Smith. And then: "You have a disagreeable duty ahead of you, and I'd relieve you of the necessity by running away, if I could. But that is impossible, as I have explained."

She was silent for a moment; then she said: "When I told you a few days ago that you were going to need my help, Montague, I didn't foresee anything like this. I shall breakfast with the Stantons in a few minutes; and after nine o'clock . . . if you could contrive to keep out of the way until I can get word to you; just so they won't be able to bring us face to face with each other—"

Smith saw what she meant; saw, also, whereabouts his wretched fate was dragging him. It was the newest of all the reincarnations, the one which had begun with Jibbey's silent hand-clasp the night before, which prompted him to say:

"If they should ask you about me,

you must tell them the truth, Verda." Her smile was mildly scornful. "Is that what the plain-faced little ranch person would do?" she asked. "I don't know; yes, I guess it is."

"Doesn't she care any more for you than that?"

Smith did not reply. He was standing where he could watch the comings and goings of the elevators. Time was precious and he was chafing at the delay, but Miss Richlander was not yet ready to let him go.

"Tell me honestly, Montague," she said; "is it anything more than a case of propinquity with this Baldwin girl?—on your part, I mean."

"It isn't anything," he returned soberly. "Corona Baldwin will never

marry any man who has so much to explain as I have."

"You didn't know this was her home, when you came out here?"

"No."

"But you had met her somewhere, before you came?"

"Once; yes. It was in Guthrieville, over a year ago. I met her there at a house where she was visiting."

"I see," she nodded, and then, without warning: "What was the matter with you last night—about dinner-time?"

"Why should you think there was anything the matter with me?"

"I was out driving with the Stantons. When I came back to the hotel I found Colonel Baldwin and another man—a lawyer, I think he was—waiting for me. They said you were needing a friend who could go and talk to you and—'calm you down,' was the phrase the lawyer used. I was good-natured enough to go with them, but when we reached your offices you had gone, and the ranch girl was there alone, waiting for her father."

"That was nonsense!" he commented; "their going after you as if I were a maniac or a drunken man, I mean."

This time Miss Richlander's smile was distinctly resentful. "I suppose the colonel's daughter answered the purpose better," she said. "There was an awkward little contretemps, and Miss Baldwin refused, rather rudely, I thought, to tell her father where you had gone."

Smith broke away from the unwelcome subject abruptly, saying: "There is something else you ought to know, Jibbey is here, at last."

"Does he know you are here?"

"He does."

"Why didn't you tell me before? That will complicate things dreadfully. Tucker will talk and tell all he knows; he can't help it."

"This is one time when he will not talk. Perhaps he will tell you why when you see him."

Miss Richlander glanced at the face of the small watch pinned on her shoulder.

"You must not stay here any longer," she protested. "The Stantons may come down any minute, now, and they mustn't find us together. I am still forgiving enough to want to help you, but you must do your part and let me know what is going on."

William Starbuck's new car was standing in front of Judge Warner's house in the southern suburb when Smith descended from the closed cab which he had taken at the Hophra House side entrance. The clock in the courthouse tower was striking the quarter of nine. The elevated mesa upon which the suburb was built commanded a broad view of the town and the outlying ranch lands, and in the distance beyond the river the Hillcrest cottowoods outlined themselves against a background of miniature buttes.

Smith's gaze took in the wide, sunlit prospect. He had paid and dismissed his cabman, and the thought came to him that in a few hours the wooded buttes, the bare plains, the mighty mountains, and the pictured city spreading maplike at his feet would probably exist for him only as a memory. While he halted on the terrace, Starbuck came out of the house.

"The judge is at breakfast," the owner announced. "You're to go in and wait. What do you want me to do next?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Not Like Home. The bright boy in khaki was dilating on the woes of army life. "Yes," he said to his old mother, "we don't get much in the way of fancy foods, or anything like that. Our camp cook's all right on stews and soup, but he can't go beyond them. The other day you know, when I went back, I took a cucumber with me that I was going to share with one or two of the boys. I gave it to the cook and asked him to get it ready for us, and what d'you think he did with it? Put it in the oven and baked it."

"Oh, poor boy!" said the fond mother. "A pity I couldn't have been there to look after you. I'd have bolted it lovely for you!"

Fifty-Fifty. Bernard was present at a dinner party, in which some of the guests brought their children. One little girl wanted to play with Bernard's toys, but he was selfish and wouldn't let her. "Now, Bernard," said mother, "you must be a little gentleman."

"Yes," said he, "but she must be a lady."

Chronic Indigestion. "You can't eat your cake and have it." "I have the consciousness of it longer than suits me," growled the dyspeptic.

The knocker's chief joy in life seems to be to see somebody else fall.

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"I was confined to bed and had convulsions several times a day. Despite the best of treatment, I grew worse and was taken to the hospital. I didn't improve, however, and was brought home again, barely holding onto life."

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—Mrs. O. M. RINZLE, Ridgway, Penn.

Mrs. Lindsey Now Keeps House For Seven.

Tennille, Ga. — "I want to tell you how much I have been benefited by Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. About eight years ago I got in such a low state of health I was unable to keep house for three in the family. I had dull, tired, dizzy feelings, cold feet and hands nearly all the time and could scarcely sleep at all. The doctor said I had a severe case of ulceration and without an operation I would always be an invalid, but I told him I wanted to wait awhile. Our druggist advised my husband to get Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound and it has entirely cured me. Now I keep house for seven and work in the garden some, too. I am so thankful I got this medicine. I feel as though it saved my life and have recommended it to others and they have been benefited."

—Mrs. W. E. LINDSEY, R. R. 3, Tennille, Ga.

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Help! They tell me that Perks was arrested today because he drowned his dog in the river," said Burns.

"How could they arrest him for drowning a dog in the river?" demanded Hunks.

"Why, they claimed that a sunken bark obstructed navigation."

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