

THE REAL MAN

By FRANCIS LYNDE

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SMITH FINDS A LOVE AFFAIR BREWING AND IT MAKES HIM UNCOMFORTABLE—HE IS WARNED TO PROTECT HIMSELF FROM VIOLENCE

Synopsis.—J. Montague Smith, cashier of Lawrenceville Bank and Trust company, society bachelor engaged to marry Verda Richlander, heiress, knocks his employer, Watrous Dunham, senseless, leaves him for dead and flees the state when Dunham accuses Smith of dishonesty and wants him to take the blame for embezzlement actually committed by Dunham. Several weeks later, Smith appears as a tramp at a town in the Rocky mountains and gets a laboring job in an irrigation ditch construction camp. His intelligence draws the attention of Williams, the superintendent, who thinks he can use the tramp, John Smith, in a more important place. The ditch company is in hard lines financially because Eastern financial interests are working to undermine the local crowd headed by Colonel Baldwin and take over valuable property. Smith finally accepts appointment as financial secretary of Baldwin's company. He has already struck up a pleasant acquaintance with Corona Baldwin, the colonel's winsome daughter. As plans for financing the new company materialize, Smith makes good at his new job, but his past history bobs up to trouble him.

CHAPTER XI—Continued.

It had been a day of nagging distractions. A rumor had been sent afoot—by Stanton, as Smith made no doubt—hinting that the new dam would be unsafe when it should be completed; that its breaking, with the reservoir behind it, would carry death and destruction to the lowlands and even to the city. Timid stockholders, seeing colossal damage suits in the bare possibility, had taken the alarm, and Smith had spent the greater part of the day in trying to calm their fears. For this cause, and some others, he was on the ragged edge when Baldwin dropped in on his way home from the dam and protested.

"Look here, John; you're overdoing this thing without end! You break it off short, right now, and go home with me and get your dinner and a good night's rest. Get your coat and hat and come along, or I'll rope you down and hog-tie you."

For once in a way, Smith found that there was no fight left in him, and he yielded, telling himself that another acceptance of the Baldwin hospitality,



"You Broken-Down Samson!"

more or less, could make no difference. But no sooner was the colonel's gray roadster headed for the bridge across the Timanyoni than the exhilarating reaction set in. In a twinkling the business cares, and the deeper worries as well, fled away, and in their place heart-hunger was loosed.

After dinner, a meal at which he ate little and was well content to satisfy the hunger of his soul by the road of the eye, Smith went out to the portico to smoke. The most gorgeous of mountain sunsets was painting itself upon the sky over the western Timanyoni, but he had no eyes for natural grandeur, and no ears for any sound save one—the footstep he was listening for. It came at length, and he tried to look as tired as he had been when the colonel made him close his desk and leave the office; tried and apparently succeeded.

"You poor, broken-down Samson, carrying all the brazen gates of the money-Philistines on your shoulders! You had to come to us at last, didn't you? Let me be your Delilah and fix that chair so that it will be really comfortable." She said it only half mockingly, and she forgave the sarcasm when she arranged some of the hammock pillows in the easiest of the porch chairs and made him bury himself luxuriously in them.

Still holding the idea, brought over from that afternoon of the name questioning, that she had in some way discovered his true identity, Smith was watching narrowly for danger-signals when he thanked her and said:

"You say it just as it is. I had to come. But you could never be anybody's Delilah, could you? She was a betrayer, if you recollect."

He made the suggestion purposely, but it was wholly ignored, and there was no guile in the slate-gray eyes.

"You mean that you didn't want to come?"

"No; not that. I have wanted to come every time your father has asked me. But there are reasons—good reasons—why I shouldn't be here."

If she knew any of the reasons she made no sign. She was sitting in the

hammock and touching one slipped toe to the flagstones for the swinging push. From Smith's point of view she had for a background the gorgeous sunset, but he could not see the more distant glories.

"We owe you much, and we are going to owe you more," she said. "You mustn't think that we don't appreciate you at your full value. Colonel-daddy thinks you are the most wonderful somebody that ever lived, and so do a lot of the others."

"And you?" he couldn't resist saying. "I'm just plain ashamed—for the way I treated you when you were here before. I've been eating humble-pie ever since."

Smith breathed freer. Nobody but a most consummate actress could have simulated her frank sincerity. He had jumped too quickly to the small sum-in-addition conclusion. She did not know the story of the absconding bank cashier.

"I don't know why you should feel that way," he said, eager, now, to run where he had before been afraid to walk.

"I do. And I believe you wanted to shame me. I believe you gave up your place at the dam and took hold with daddy more to show me what an inconsequent little idiot I was than for any other reason. Didn't you, really?"

He laughed in quiet ecstasy at this newest and most adorable of the moods.

"Honest confession is good for the soul," he said, "Now beat that for frankness, if you can."

"I can't," she admitted, laughing back at him. "But now you've accomplished your purpose, I hope you are not going to give up. That would be a little hard on colonel-daddy."

"Oh, no; I'm not going to give up—until I have to."

"Does that mean more than it says?"

"Yes, I'm afraid it does."

She was silent for the length of time that it took the flaming crimson in the western sky to fade to salmon. The colonel had mounted the steps and was coming toward them. The young woman slipped from the hammock and stood up.

"Don't go," said Smith, feeling as if he were losing an opportunity and leaving much unsaid that ought to be said. But the answer was a quiet "good night" and she was gone.

Smith went back to town with the colonel the next morning physically rested, to be sure, but in a frame of mind bordering again upon the sardonic. One thing stood out clearly: he was most unmistakably in love with Corona Baldwin.

Hence there was another high resolve, not to go to Hillcrest again until he could go as a free man; a resolve which, it is perhaps needless to say, was broken thereafter as often as the colonel asked him to go. Why, in the last resort, Smith should have finally chosen a confidant in the person of William Starbuck, the reformed cowpuncher, he scarcely knew. But it was to Starbuck that he appealed for advice when the sentimental situation had grown fairly desperate.

"I've told you enough so that you can understand the vise-nip of it, Billy," he said to Starbuck one night when he had dragged the mine owner up to the bathroom suite in the Hophra House, and had told him just a little, enough to merely hint at his condition.

"You see how it stacks up. I'm in a fair way to come out of this the biggest scoundrel alive—the piker who takes advantage of the innocence of a good girl. I'm not the man she thinks I am. I am standing over a volcano pit every minute of the day. If it blows up, I'm gone, obliterated, wiped out."

"Is it aiming to blow up?" asked Starbuck sagely.

"I don't know any more about that than you do. It is the kind that usually does blow up sooner or later. I've prepared for it as well as I can. What Colonel Baldwin and the rest of you needed was a financial manager, and Timanyoni High Line has its fighting chance—which was more than Timanyoni Ditch had when I took hold. If I should drop out now, you and Maxwell and the colonel and Kinzie could go on

and make the fight; but that doesn't help out in this other matter."

Starbuck smoked in silence for a long minute or two before he said: "Is there another woman in it, John?"

"Yes; but not in the way you mean."

"Corry's a mighty fine little girl, John," said Starbuck slowly. "Any one of a dozen fellows I could name would give all their old shoes to swap chances with you."

"That isn't exactly the kind of advice I'm needing," was the sober rejoinder.

"No; but it was the kind you were wanting, when you tolled me off up here," laughed the ex-cowpuncher. "I know the symptoms. Had 'em myself for about two years so bad that I could wake up in the middle of the night and taste 'em. Go in and win. Maybe the great big stumbling-block you're worrying about wouldn't mean anything at all to an open-minded young woman like Corona; most likely it wouldn't."

"If she could know the whole truth—and believe it," said Smith musingly.

"You tell her the truth, and she'll take care of the believing part of it, all right. You needn't lose any sleep about that."

Smith drew a long breath and removed his pipe to say: "I haven't the nerve, Billy, and that's the plain fact. I have already told her a little of it. She knows that I—"

Starbuck broke in with a laugh. "Yes; it's a shouting pity about your nerve! You've been putting up such a blooming scary fight in this irrigation business that we all know you haven't any nerve. If I had your job in that, I'd be going around here totting two guns and wondering if I couldn't make room in the holster for another."

Smith shook his head.

"I was safe enough so long as Stanton thought I was the resident manager and promoter for a new bunch of big money in the background. But he has had me shadowed and tracked until now I guess he is pretty well convinced that I actually had the audacity to play a lone hand; and a bluffing hand, at that. That makes a difference, of course. Two days after I had climbed into the saddle here, he sent a couple of his strikers after me. I don't know just what their orders were, but they seemed to want to fight—and they got it. It was in Blue Pete's doghouse at the camp."

"Guns?" queried Starbuck.

"Theirs; not mine, because I didn't have any. I managed to get the Springfield-iron away from them before we had mixed very far."

"You're just about the biggest, long-eared, stiff-backed, stubborn wild man of the wallows that was ever let loose in a half-reformed gun country," grumbled the ex-cowman. "You're fitting to get yourself all killed up. Starbuck Haven't you sense enough to see that these rustlers will rub you out in a twitches of a dead lamb's tail if they made up their minds that you are the High Line main guy and the only one?"

"Of course," said the wild ass. "If they could lay me up for a month or two—"

"Lay up, nothing!" retorted Starbuck. "Lay you down, about six feet underground, is what I mean!"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the one whose fears ran in a far different channel from any that could be dug by mere corporation violence. "This is America, in the twentieth century. We don't kill our business competitors now days."

"Don't we?" snorted Starbuck. "That will be all right, too. We'll suppose just for the sake of argument, that my respected and respectable daddy-in-law, or whatever other silk-hatted money-bags happens to be paying Crawford Stanton's salary and commission, wouldn't send out an order to have you killed off. Maybe Stanton himself, wouldn't stand for it if you put it that barefaced. But daddy-in-law, and Stanton, and all the other hire blacklegs and sharpers and gunmen and thugs. And every once in a while somebody takes a wink for a nod—and bang! goes a gun."

"Well, what's the answer?" said Pete Simms.

"Tote an arsenal, yourself, and be ready to shoot first and ask questions afterward. That's the only way you can live peaceably with such men as Jake Boogerfield and Lanterby and Simms."

Smith got out of his chair and took a turn up and down the length of the room. When he came back to stand before Starbuck, he said: "I did that, Billy. I've been carrying a gun for a week and more; not for these ditch pirates, but for somebody else. The other night, when I was out at Hillcrest, Corona happened to see it. I'm not going to tell you what she said, but when I came back to town the next morning, I chucked the gun into a desk-drawer. And I hope I'm going to be man enough not to wear it again."

Starbuck dropped the subject abruptly and looked at his watch.

"You liked to have done it, pulling me off here," he remarked. "I'm due to be at the train to meet Mrs. Billie, and I've got just about three minutes. So long."

Smith changed his street clothes leisurely after Starbuck had gone, and when he went downstairs stopped at the desk to toss his room key to the clerk.

The hotel register was lying open on the counter, and from force of habit he ran his eye down the list of late arrivals. At the end of the list, in sprawling characters upon which the ink was yet fresh, he read his sentence, and for the first time in his life knew the meaning of panic fear. The newest entry was:

"Josiah Richlander and daughter, Chicago."

Smith was not misled by the placename. There was only one "Josiah Richlander" in the world for him, and he knew that the Lawrenceville magnate, in registering from Chicago, was only following the example of those who, for good reasons or no reason, use the name of their latest stopping place for a registry address.

CHAPTER XII.

A Reprieve.

Smith's blood ran cold and there was a momentary attack of shocked consternation, comparable to nothing that any past experience had to offer. But there was no time to waste in curious speculations as to the why and wherefore. Present safety was the prime consideration. With Josiah Richlander and his daughter in Brewster, and guests under the same roof with him, discovery, identification, disgrace were knocking at the door. He could harbor no doubt as to what Josiah Richlander would do if discovery came. For so long a time as should be consumed in telegraphing between Brewster and Lawrenceville, Smith might venture to call himself a free man. But that was the limit.

One minute later he had hailed a passing autocab at the hotel entrance, and the four miles between the city and Colonel Baldwin's ranch had been tossed to the rear before he remembered that he had expressly declined a dinner invitation for that same evening at Hillcrest, pleading business to Mrs. Baldwin in person when she had called at the office with her daughter.

Happily, the small social offense went unremarked, or at least unrebuked. Smith found his welcome at the ranch that of a man who has the privilege of dropping in unannounced. The colonel was jocosely hospitable, as he always was; Mrs. Baldwin was graciously lenient—was good enough, indeed, to thank the eleventh-hour guest for reconsidering at the last moment; and Corona—

Notwithstanding all that had come to pass; notwithstanding, also, that his footing in the Baldwin household had come to be that of a family friend, Smith could never be quite sure of the bewitchingly winsome young woman who called her father "colonel-daddy." Her pose, if it were a pose, was the attitude of the entirely unspooled child of nature and the wide horizons. When he was with her she made him think of all the words expressive of transparency and absolute and utter unconcernment. Yet there were moments when he fancied he could get passing glimpses of a subtler personality at the

back of the wide-open, frankly questioning eyes; a wise little soul lying in wait behind its defenses; prudent, all-knowing, deceived neither by its own prepossessions or prejudices, nor by any of the masqueradings of other souls.

Smith has three devils to plague him just now: His past in Lawrenceville; his growing fondness for Corona; and the enemies of the company for whose success he is working night and day. Important developments come in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Should Be Satisfied.

"Jenkins claimed that I insulted him," "Did you give any satisfaction?" "I guess so. He pounded me until he was tired."

"I'm Not the Man She Thinks I Am. I Am Standing Over a Volcano—"

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A FOOD

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Somewhat Hunched.
A marriage broker brought an assistant along to a conference about a bride. The assistant was to confirm his assertions.
"She is well made, like a pine tree," said the agent.
"Like a pine tree," repeated the assistant.
"She is cultured beyond words."
"Wonderfully cultured," came the echo.

Want Good Marksmen.
At the time of the Spanish-American war an expert rifle shot was refused enlistment as a sharpshooter on the ground that good marksmanship is of no advantage on the field of battle. There are still some military authorities who believe this to be the case. They point out that when the distance is not accurately known, the good rifleman will be sure to miss, while a volley from poor marksmen will cover a large area and score some hits. Nevertheless, the policy is now to encourage marksmanship by every possible means.

When Man is Caught.
Many a man has been caught at his own foolish game by people who let him think he was fooling them.

Poor Old Rich Man.
No one seems to sympathize with the poor, old rich man paying income tax.

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Concrete is Preferable.
Steel is going up, and concrete, as a result is coming into wider use. Railway bridges, for example, which used always to be of steel, are now often of concrete. A beautiful concrete railway bridge is being built across the James river at Richmond, Va., and it is much prettier than a steel bridge. For like reasons, concrete is replacing wood in mining structural works, where it has the great advantage of being waterproof.

A Good Word for Adam.
A Tommy, writing home from the Garden of Eden, says: "I think it's a rotten hole, and I don't blame Adam for getting thrown out."

No man is so poor that he cannot afford to pay somebody a compliment now and then.

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