

THE QUICKENING

BY FRANCIS LYNDE

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CHAPTER XXIII.—(Continued.)

The Dabney buggy was waiting for him when, after what seemed like a pilgrimage of endless miles, he had crept down to the gate. But it was Miss Dabney, and not Mammy Juliet's Pete, who was holding the reins.

"I couldn't find Pete, and Japheth has gone to town," she explained. "Can you get in by yourself?"

He was holding on by the cut wheel, and the death-lock was creeping over his face again.

"I can't let you," he panted; and she thought he was thinking of the disgrace for her.

"I am my own mistress," she said, coldly. "If I choose to drive you when you are too sick to hold the reins, it is my own affair."

"I wasn't thinking of that; but you must first know just what you're doing. My father stands to lose all he has got to—the Farleys. That's what the meeting is for. Do you understand?"

She bit her lip and a far-away look came into her eyes. Then she turned on him with a little frown of determination gathering between her straight eyebrows—a frown that reminded him of the Major in his militant moods.

"I must take your word for it," she said, and the words seemed to cut the air like edged things. "Tell me the truth: is your cause entirely just? Your motive is not revenge?"

"It is my father's cause, and none of mine; more than that, it is your grandfather's cause—and yours."

She pushed the buggy hood back with a quick arm sweep and gave him her free hand. "Step carefully," she cautioned; and a minute later they were speeding swiftly down the pike in a white dust cloud of their own making.

There was a sharp crisis to the fore in the old log-house office at the furnace. Caleb Gordon, haggard and tremulous, sat at one end of the trestle-board which served as a table, with Norman at his elbow; and flanking him on either side were the two Farleys, Dyckman, Trewhitt, acting general counsel for the company in the Farley interest, and Hanchett, representing the Gordons.

Having arranged the preliminaries to his entire satisfaction, Colonel Duxbury had struck true and hard. The pipe foundry might be taken into the parent company at a certain nominal figure payable in a new issue of Chiawasse Limited stock, or three several things were due to happen simultaneously: the furnace would be shut down indefinitely "for repairs," thus cutting off the iron supply and making a ruinous forfeiture of pipe contracts inevitable; suit would be brought to recover damages for the alleged mismanagement of Chiawasse Consolidated during the absence of the majority stockholders; and the validity of the pipe-pit patents would be contested in the courts. This was the ultimatum.

The one-sided battle had been fought to a finish. Hanchett, heaving away in the dark, had made every double and turn that keen legal acumen and a sharp wit could suggest to gain time. But Mr. Farley was inexorable. The business must be concluded at the present sitting; otherwise the papers in the two suits, which were already prepared, would be filed before noon. Hanchett took his principal into the laboratory for a private word.

"It's for you to decide, Mr. Gordon," he said. "If you want to follow them into the court, we'll do the best we can. But as a friend I can't advise you to take that course."

"If we would only make out to find out what Tom's holding over 'em!" groaned Caleb, helplessly.

"Yes; but we can't," said the lawyer. "And whatever it may be, they are evidently not afraid of it."

"We'll never see a dollar's dividend out of the stock, Cap'n Hanchett. I might as well give 'em the foundry free and clear."

"That's the chance you take, of course. But on the other hand, they can force you to the wall in a month and make you lose everything you have. I've been over the books with Norman: if you can't fill your pipe contracts, the forfeitures will ruin you. And you can't fill them unless you can have Chiawasse iron, and at the present price."

The old iron-master led the way back to the room of doom and took his place at the end of the trestle-board table.

"Give me the papers," he said, gloomily; and the Farley's attorney passed them across, with his fountain-pen.

There was a purring of wheels in the air and the staccato clatter of a horse's hoofs on the hard metal of the pike. Vincent Farley rose quietly in his place and tiptoed to the door. He was in the act of snapping the catch of the spring-latch, when the door flew inward and he fell back with a smothered exclamation. Thereupon they all looked up, Caleb, the tremulous, with the pen still suspended over the signatures upon which the ink was still wet. Tom was standing in the doorway, feebly sick and clinging to the jamb

for support. In putting on his hat he had slipped the bandages, and the wound was bleeding afresh. Dyckman yelped like a stricken dog, overturning his chair as he leaped up and backed away into a corner. Only Mr. Duxbury Farley and his attorney were wholly unmoved. The lawyer had taken his fountain-pen from Caleb's shaking fingers and was carefully recapping it; and Mr. Farley was pocketing the agreement, by the terms of which the firm of Gordon & Gordon had ceased to exist.

Tom lurched into the room and threw himself feebly on the promoter, and Vincent made as if he would come between. But there was no need for intervention. Duxbury Farley had only to step aside, and Tom fell heavily, clutching the air as he went down.

The dusty office which had once been his mother's sitting-room was cleared of all save his father when Tom recovered consciousness and sat up, with Caleb's arm to help.

"There, now, Buddy; you can't try to get up and come down here," said the father, soothingly. But Tom's blood was on fire.

"Tell me!" he raved; "have they got the foundry away from you?"

Caleb nodded gravely. "But don't you mind none about that, son. What I'm sweatin' about now is the fix you're in."

Tom struggled to his feet, tottering. "I'll cut the heart out of these demons that have robbed you. Give me the pistol from that drawer, and drive me down to the station before their train comes. I'll do it now!"

But when old Longfellow, jiggling vertically between the buggy shafts, picked his way out of the furnace yard, he was permitted to turn of his own accord in the homeward direction; and an hour later the sick man was back in bed, with insistent calls for Ardea. And this time Miss Dabney did not come.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Riding up the pike one sun-shot afternoon in the golden September, Tom saw Ardea, entering the open door of the Morwenstow church-copy, drew rein, flung himself out of the saddle and followed her. She saw him and stopped in the vestibule, quaking a little as she felt she must always quake until the impassable chasm of weldlock with another should be safely opened between them.

"Just a moment," he said, abruptly. "There was a time when I said I would spare Vincent Farley and his kin for your sake. That was a year ago. Things have changed since then; I have changed. When my father is buried, I shall do my best to fill the mourners' carriages with those who have killed him."

"How is your father to-day?" she asked, not daring to trust speech otherwise.

"He is the same as he was yesterday and the day before; the same as he will always be from this on—a broken man."

"You will strike back?" She said it with infinite sadness in her voice and an upcasting of eyes that were swimming. "I don't question your right—but I pity you. The blow may be just. I don't know—yet it will fall hardest on you in the end, Tom."

His smile was almost boyish in its frank anger. But there was a man's sneer in his words.

"Excuse me; I forgot for the moment that we are in a church. But I am taking consequences, these days."

She looked out from the cool, dark refuge of the vestibule when he mounted and rode on, and her heart was full. It was madness, vindictive madness and fell anger. But it was a generous wrath, large and man-like. It was not to be a blow in the dark or in the back, as some men struck; and he would not strike without first giving her warning. Ardea had been cross-questioning Japheth about the assault at the Woodlawn gates—to her own hurt. Japheth had evaded as he could, but she had guessed what he was keeping back—the identity of the two foot-pads blackened to look like negroes. It was a weary world, and life had lost much that had made it worth living.

Tom was deep in an inventive trance, with vengeance for the prize to be won, and for the means to the end, iron-works and pipe plants and forgings—especially the forging of one particular thunderbolt which should shatter the Farley fortunes beyond repair. When this bolt was finally hammered into shape he had an hour's interview with Major Dabney, and took a train for New York.

A telegram from Norman, begging him to come back to South Tredegar at speed, overtook him. For three days a gentleman with shrewd eyes and a hard-bitted jaw, registering at the Marlboro as "A. Dracott, New York," had been shut up with Mr. Duxbury Farley in the most private of the company's offices in the Coosa Building, and on the fourth day Norman had made shift to find out this gentleman's business. Whereupon the wire to Tom. He caught a slow train back, and was

met at a station ten miles out of town by his energetic ex-lieutenant.

"Of course, I didn't dare to do anything more than give him a hint," was the conclusion of Norman's exciting report. "I didn't know but he might give us away to Colonel Duxbury. So, without telling him much of anything, I got him to agree to meet you at his rooms in the Marlboro to-night after dinner. Then I was scared for fear my wire to you would miss."

"You are a white man, Fred, and a friend to tie to," said Tom; which was more than he had ever said to Norman by way of praise in the days of master and man. Then, as the train was slowing into the South Tredegar station: "If this thing wins out, you'll come in for something bigger than you had with Gordon & Gordon; you can bet on that."

It was ordained that Gordon should anticipate his appointment by meeting his man at the dinner-table in the Marlboro cafe; and it was accident or design, as you like to believe, that Dyckman should be sitting two tables away, choking over his food and listening only by the road of the eye, since he was unhappily out of ear range. When the two passed out to the elevator, the lookkeeper rose hastily and made for the nearest telephone. This, at least, was not accidental.

The conference in Suite 32 lasted until nearly midnight, with Dyckman painfully shadowing the corridor and sweating like a furnace laborer, though the night was more than autumn cool.

"You have let in a flood of light on Mr. Farley's proposition, Mr. Gordon," said the representative of American Aqueduct, when the ground had been thoroughly gone over. "I don't mind telling you now that he made his first overtures to us on his arrival from Europe, giving us to understand that he owned or controlled the pipe-making plants absolutely."

"At that time he controlled nothing, as I have explained," said Tom. "Not even his majority stock in Chiawasse Consolidated. Of course, he resumed control as soon as he reached home, and his next move was to have me quietly sandbagged while he froze my father out. But father did not transfer the patents, for the simple reason that he couldn't. They are my personal property, made over to me before the firm of Gordon & Gordon came into existence."

"You are the man we'll have to do business with, Mr. Gordon. Are you quite sure of your legal status in the case?"

"I have good advice. Hanchett, Goodloe and Tryson, Richmond Building, are my attorneys. They will put you in the way of finding out anything you'd like to know."

"As I have said, I'm here to do business. We don't need the plant. Will you sell us your patents?"

"Yes; on one condition. That you first put us out of business. You'll have to smash Chiawasse Limited painstakingly and permanently before you can buy my holdings."

The shrewd-eyed gentleman who had unified practically all of the pipe foundries in the United States smiled a gentle negative.

"That would be rather out of our line. If Mr. Farley owned the patents, and was disposed to fight us—as, indeed, he is not—we might try to convince him. But we are not out for vengeance—another man's vengeance, at that."

"Very well, then; you won't get what you've come after. The patents go with the plant. You can't have one without the other," said Tom, eying his opponent through half-closed lids.

"But we can buy the plant to-morrow, at a very reasonable figure. Farley is anxious enough to come in out of the wet."

"Excuse me, Mr. Dracott, but you can't buy the plant at any price."

"Eh? Why can't we?"

"Because the majority of the stock will vote to fight you to a standstill."

"But, my dear sir! Mr. Farley controls 65 per cent of the stock!"

"That is where you were led to one more time," said Tom, with great coolness. "The capital stock of Chiawasse Limited is divided into one thousand shares, all distributed. My father holds three hundred and fifty shares; Mr. Farley and his son together own four hundred and fifty; and the remaining two hundred are held in trust for Miss Ardea Dabney, to become her property in fee simple when she marries. Pending her marriage, which is currently supposed to be near at hand, the voting power of these two hundred shares resides in Miss Dabney's grandfather, and my father holds his proxy."

This was the thunderbolt Tom had been forging during those quiet days spent on the mountain side; and there was another pause while one might count ten. After which the man from New York spoke his mind freely.

"Your row with these people must be pretty bitter, Mr. Gordon. Are you willing to see your father and these Dabneys go by the board for the sake of breaking the president and his son?"

"I know what I am doing," was the quiet reply. "Neither my father nor Miss Dabney will lose anything that is worth keeping."

"Have you figured that out, too? The field is too small for you down here, Mr. Gordon—much too small. You should come to New York."

"You will fight us?" he asked.

The short-circuiter of corporations laughed. "We'll put you out of business, if you insist on it. Anything to oblige."

"You have it to do, Mr. Dracott. On the day you have hammered Chiawasse Limited down to a dead proposition, you can have my pipe patents. If you will meet me at the office of Hanchett, Goodloe & Tryson to-morrow morning at 10 o'clock, we will put it in writing." Good-night.

(To be continued.)

GOVERNESS AND GUEST

By JULIA R. WELLS

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The Mortons secured a governess for their children as the crowning achievement of the influx of gold that was pouring into their coffers. When Mrs. Morton engaged a lady's maid and Mrs. Morton procured for himself a valet they thought, with a butler and footman and maid servants galore, that their adjuncts were complete. But, as they progressed further into the charmed circle of society, they discovered their mistake, and the two daughters of the house soon acquired sufficient knowledge of the habits of their little world to demand release from the ministrations of nurse-maids and to request the substitution of a governess.

Mrs. Morton was somewhat at a loss to supply this lack of her household, though she readily perceived that it was a lack. However, the wants of the very rich are not long left ungratified, and when the time arrived for the annual migration to Newport, she was justified in the complacency with which she viewed the present complete and correct establishment over which she reigned.

There were still some lingering doubts in her mind as to Miss Challoner's status in the household. She was paid a salary, yet she could not be regarded as a servant. It was of course impossible to consider her an equal. So she had breakfast and luncheon with the family and ate a simple meal at six o'clock with her two charges, all traces of which were obliterated before Mr. and Mrs. Morton dined in state, two hours later.



She was beginning to find her position well nigh intolerable. She was alone many hours of each day; the children were too young to be companionable, and she lived through the dreary hours with a fretting of spirit that threatened to crush her youth and health. She had entered into her new role without dreaming of the petty indignities to which she would be subjected. She soon learned to avoid the guests who came and went, for they, too, belonged to the newly rich, and after first mistaking the distinguished looking governess for some member of the family they rectified the blunder by ignoring, or patronizing, her.

Miss Challoner checked off the days on her calendar and prayed that the return to New York might not be delayed beyond the original date. There, she had a few old friends who gladly claimed her leisure hours, who petted her and made much of her.

August arrived and found her still at her post, rebellious in spirit, but outwardly calm.

As she entered the breakfast room one morning, she became aware of an excitement in the usually rather heavy atmosphere. One of the children forgot the morning salutation in her keenness to impart the interesting news.

"Miss Challoner," she cried, "we are going to have a real baron visit us."

"Are you, Kitty?" said the amused Miss Challoner, thinking of the barons and sons of barons, all barons themselves, that she had known in the happy years she had spent in Germany.

"But aren't you excited, Miss Challoner?" urged Marion.

Mr. Morton frowned at his daughter. "You speak German, do you not, Miss Challoner?" he interposed.

"Yes," answered the governess, "you know I was in school in Germany for several years."

"Did you have a governess, like us?" asked Kitty.

"Be still, Kitty," said her father.

"But, didn't you?" asked Marion.

"No, never," replied Miss Challoner, conscious that the statement would cause her to lose caste in the Mortons estimation, and wholly indifferent.

"We are going to have a young German gentleman with us for a few days. He speaks English, but no doubt he will be glad to hear his own language again," said Mr. Morton.

"I shall be glad to offer him the opportunity," said the governess, thinking that she would be willing to talk to anyone for the sake of hearing the tongue she loved so well.

During the day there was an unusual stir and bustle in the house, and the lonely governess decided that the baron was to be received with much pomp and circumstance. The six o'clock supper was served somewhat hastily, and Jenkins apologized for this and the fact that he could not be in attendance himself, though Miss Challoner well knew that it was a duty he had assumed and which he could have relegated to one of the footmen.

After she had retired to her room she heard the guest arrive and the effusive greeting he received and his cordial thanks, expressed in the crisp English the German acquired. The voice had a familiar note and recalled the days when she had believed happiness to be her heritage.

"I am growing fanciful," she thought. "All Germans speak English in the same way," and she turned her attention resolutely to her book.

Descending the stairs the next morning, she saw that the family had already congregated in the hall and was passing into the breakfast room. But their guest had caught sight of the governess and stood motionless at the foot of the stairs. Miss Challoner did not glance at him until she reached the last step, and then she raised her eyes to see why her progress was barred.

"Herr von Lutzen," she exclaimed, turning white.

"Miss Challoner, ah, have I found you at last," cried the baron, in a rapturous voice. He seized her hands and lifted first one and then the other to his lips, while the assembled Mortons stood transfixed with astonishment.

"It is very good to see you again, baron," said Miss Challoner, then, turning toward the amazed family she said quietly, "Breakfast is waiting for us. Afterward, you will tell me about Minna and all the dear friends."

Herr von Lutzen turned toward his hostess. "Is it not wonderful," he said, "to find this gracious young lady under your roof? Ah, we have tried so hard to find her, my sister and I, but no one would tell us, and she would not write." He turned to Miss Challoner. "Minna has so grieved for you, and the second baby—"

"Is there a second?" asked Miss Challoner, eagerly.

"Named for you, ah, yes, and no way to tell you."

"And Johann permitted Minna to name her baby for me?" the governess said, happily.

"But yes, he was always so pleased with your friendship for his Minna."

After the meal was over Miss Challoner withdrew with her charges, saying that she would see Herr von Lutzen again.

"I do not understand," said Herr von Lutzen, turning to Mrs. Morton. "Miss Challoner, she teaches your children?" he inquired.

"Yes, baron, she is their governess," answered his hostess.

"But again I do not understand. It is not of necessity?"

"I really do not know, baron, but I have no reason to think otherwise," replied the surprised Mrs. Morton.

"Then that explains everything," exclaimed Herr von Lutzen, joyously; "that is why she disappeared. Gracious lady, I must see her—forgive me, will you not? You see, you understand? I loved her so dearly, and then she vanished."

It would never have occurred to Mrs. Morton to deny anything to a baron, so she led the way to the schoolroom, and then withdrew with the children.

"Margaret," said the impetuous lover, rushing toward her and seizing her hands. "It was the money, the wretched money, was it not, you had not ceased to care? Don't tell me you ran away because the love had fled."

Miss Challoner shook her head. "I couldn't stay; all our money was gone. I could not come to you without a dowry."

"You can come to me without anything but love, if you care for me, that is all I ask," and he looked anxiously in her eyes.

"Fritz," she said softly, "do you really want to marry a poor American girl?"

"I want to marry you," said the baron, and clasped Mrs. Morton's governess in his arms.

Sure Sign.

Mrs. Nurich—My husband thinks our position in society is now assured.

Mrs. Uppson—Indeed!

Mrs. Nurich—Yes. He has quit hiring a dress suit and is having one made to order.