



THE MAN FROM YONDER

By Harold Titus
W.A.U. SERVICE

SYNOPSIS

Ben Elliott—from "Yonder"—makes his entry into the lumbering town of Tincup, bringing along an old man, Don Stuart, who had been eager to reach Tincup. Elliott defeats Bull Duval, "king of the river," and town bully, in a log-birching contest. Nicholas Brandon, the town's leading citizen, resents Stuart's presence, trying to force him to leave town and Elliott, resenting the act, knocks him down. Elliott is arrested, but finds a friend in Judge Able Armitage.

CHAPTER II—Continued

"And what makes you think," Elliott asked, "that I've got a chance to put it over when other men have failed?"

Able did not hesitate. "Because you have youth and a liking for tough nuts! You've had experience in timber operations and aren't afraid of Nick Brandon, and, last and most important of all, you came to Tincup hunting trouble."

"Son"—putting a hand on his shoulder—"I'd take Bridger's word on men quicker than I'd take the word of any man. He says you can do it if you will. I'm asking you, now, as an old man with his back to the wall, will you help me on this?"

Ben Elliott did not reply at once. He was staring at the floor as one will when debating with himself and preparing for argument with another. He twisted his head gravely and smiled. Then he looked into Able's face.

"When do we start?" he asked. The justice swallowed.

"You ready now? Without knowing any more about it?"

"I know enough. It's good timber and it's Brandon who's messing up the detail. . . . Let's go, Judge!"

It was just before whistle time next morning at the Hoot Owl mill. "Who's th' young feller with Able?" the trimmerman asked the flier.

"New boss." "Him?" The trimmerman spat and leaned further forward for a better look at Ben Elliott as he stood talking to the sawyer in the gloom of early day. "Say . . . Ain't he the lad that ducked th' bull? 'Nd took a poke at Brandon?"

"Th' same." "Well I'll be d—d! Only a kid. He may be a good hand on a birlin' log but won't Nick Brandon find him sweet pickin'! He likes 'em young, Nick does . . . and specially after this one took such pains to make himself unpopular with Mister Nick!"

"Yup. He'll be duck soup for Brandon all right!"

The hand of the millwright's watch approached the hour. The sawyer pulled the signal cord. The big shaft commenced to turn and from machine to machine went Buller while Able and Ben watched, examining belts, grease cups, seeing that live rollers ran steadily and true. The pulleys turned slowly for a full five minutes and then as the cracked whistle atop the boiler house cackled its message that another working day had begun, the carriage swept forward and the saw snarled its way into a good maple log.

Elliott stirred on his feet. It was the way a mill should start, anyhow.

But after that beginning the procedure was not so good. The sawyer was not quick in making decisions. Twice in a half dozen logs his slabs were thick to the point of waste; he did not turn one particularly good piece as soon as he should to grade his lumber to the highest point.

The setter, too, was mediocre. The deck man loafed and let the bull chain fill up and stop even when his deck was half empty.

The mill crew was not happy. They appeared to be men working for a cause they felt was lost.

Ben went with Buller, then, from man to man and watched each do his work.

In the yard they passed logs rolled to one side. "Much veneer stuff good as that?" Ben asked, eyeing them.

"Not much coming in now, but there's a lot of it standing," Buller answered. "Buyer in here ten days ago looking up bird's-eye maple and veneer birch. Harrington was saving it as it came in; some of it. He had too many things to think about, Harrington did. The buyer's due back any day, though. Market's up, I guess. He'll probably pay a fancy figure for what we have to offer him."

Then he went to the particular problem confronting them. With the locomotive laid up the steady

supply of logs from camp to mill would be cut off. Snow was falling lightly, now, but sleighing might be days distant. To log the mill by trucks was impractical, he declared, and unless the railroad equipment could be put in working condition they might be forced to shut down. Fortunately a reserve log supply of a sort was on hand, decked high beside the pond.

"We'll have to break out this one deck now," Buller said. "Pond's about empty."

He whistled and waved to the pond man. Picking up a peavey he led the way toward that high bank of maple, beech and birch logs. Ben followed.

"Try the big birch first," Buller said to the pond man.

They engaged the hooks of their peaveys; they heaved. The log rolled away easily and lumbered down the incline to the water. Another . . . and still another, each coming away separately and starting no movement of others above them.

Buller spat. "That d—n beech butt's in tight," he said, tapping the log with his peavey pick. "Try her, Jim; now be careful. When she comes, the whole deck'll move in a hurry."

They heaved to no result. With a sharp "Now!" they heaved again, but the beech, nestling in the face of the deck at the height of a man's hip, refused to budge.

"Hold on! Give you a hand," Ben picked up a peavey and approached. "Here, take this end, Elliott," the foreman said, moving in toward the center which was under the towering facade of the deck.

"No, go on back. I'll do the risk-taking for this lay-out for a while," Buller made no reply but grinned. The pond man looked at Ben approvingly and spat on his hands. Peavey hooks bit the log's ends again; a peavey point, with all Ben Elliott's strength bearing on it, pried beneath the center of the reluctant beech. . . . "Now. . . To-gether!"

He lifted his weight from the ground. His peavey handle bent. "Look out!" Buller's voice was shrill on the warning as movement sent Ben Elliott swinging to the right. The key stuck popped out, all but upon Ben. The logs above settled with a heavy mutter and then with that thunderous, ringing, booming sound of hardwood in motion, they rolled upon him.

Elliott had dropped his peavey, leaped nimbly over the beech as it struck the ground and bounced on its way to the water. He hopped to the first log and spurred it with his one foot, landed on the following with both, hesitated a split instant and stepped to yet another. Arms spread, balancing carefully, watching those logs as a boxer watches his opponent's blows, he went up that zooming, booming avalanche as it came down. He dived to the left as the end of one stick swung out to clout him to a pulp. He ran rapidly over three that lumbered down beneath him and paused.

Two came riding together, one atop the other, a moving barrier as high as his waist. Buller opened his lips in a cry of warning but thrusting out one hand, touching the topmost of the pair ever so lightly, Ben vaulted over, landing on another that rolled and grumbled behind the two. Crevasse between logs opened and closed before him. Sticks popped out of the tremendous pressure and rolled down slantwise, imperiling him. He did not run rapidly. At times he seemed to move with painful, dangerous deliberation. But he was watching the logs and his chances and did not make a move until he was certain of where he was going.

Slowly the deck settled. Half of what had been piled logs now bobbed and swayed and rolled in the pond. The rest, reduced from the height to which it had towered a few seconds before, came to rest. And Ben Elliott, on its lowered crest, stood still a moment until certain the movement was ended and then came slowly down, looking not at the men who gaped at him but at the logs over which he walked with a critical, appraising eye.

"Atta boy!" an unidentified voice yelled above the roar of the carriage exhaust, but if Elliott heard this he gave no indication.

"New, if Buller can't get that locomotive going by noon," he said to the pale and visibly shaken Able, "we'll telegraph for a new spider. No use taking more chances. Come on, Buller, let's look at the stuff you've got piled."

Blinking, the millwright followed him.

"Y G—d!" muttered the pond

man. "Slick shod, he went over that face! Slick shod! 'Y G—d!' In the crepe rubber soles of his pacs, Ben Elliott had done what would have been a feat for an agile veteran in caked river boots. . . . And immediately gone on about another phase of his job as though such spectacular activity were all in a day's work.

An hour later the mill stood silent for five minutes while a broken conveyor chain was repaired. In that interval every man on the job had heard the story.

When they started the head sawyer was grinning and it seemed as though the saw stayed in the log more constantly than it had before, as if the mill functioned with greater smoothness, as if something in the nature of enthusiasm went into the labor along with brawn and experience.

CHAPTER III

NOT so in the camp where men and horses toiled to make decks of logs by night out of what at dawn had been standing trees. Nearly half the crew were Finns, stolid, uncommunicative fellows, good enough workmen but difficult to speed up.

"Aren't there any good men left loose around here?" Ben asked Able on his first trip to town.

"Few." The justice shook his head. "Good workers, lots of 'em. But Brandon keeps hold of them. He treats them well; he's nobody's fool. But if a good man crosses him . . . out of the region he goes!"

"Old Tim Jeffers is the only man who's stood out against Nick and he's the best logger these woods have ever seen but he doesn't like Brandon, can't work for him and is so disgusted that he's quit the timber and settled down on a farm. He hasn't set foot in a camp for three years and swears he never will again. Neither will he be run out of the country."

Ben thoughtfully watched the snow, which had been falling steadily for three days.

"We ought to have a new boss for camp. That crew needs riding. If they're going to produce, Ruppert means well but he doesn't know how." Ruppert was the camp foreman.

"That's part of the hard shell of this nut, Ben; lack of good men who've got the sand to stick here and work for anybody but Brandon."

The next morning—Sunday—Ben sat over a table in his tiny office working with paper and pencil when Bird-Eye Blaine burst in.

"The Bull's here!" the little Irishman exclaimed in a whisper, closing the door behind him hastily. "Th' Bull's here . . . 'nd wearin' his river boots!"

Ben shoved back his chair. "What's this?"

"Ah, it's Brandon that's sint him! He's Mister Brandon's pet bull 'nd he'll clane this camp av men loike he's done many a time before! He's wearin' river boots 'nd swillin' whisky!"

"Where?" Elliott got to his feet. "In th' men's camp,"—gesticulating with his thumb. "He's just now come in 'nd they're commencing to sift out 'nd dommed yellow bellies!"

Without stopping even for his cap Ben stepped out and crossed to the men's camp. He did not burst into the place, but opened the door casually and slipped inside.

In the center of the room, close by the heating stove above which seeks hung from drying racks, stood Bull Duval. His cap was tilted on his head, he leaned backward from his hips, in his uplifted right hand was a quart whisky bottle nearly full and his voice belled the words of a woods classic.

In the far end of the room a half dozen men were huddled. From several upper bunks concerned faces watched the Bull. The men were clearly afraid, certain that this hilarity was only a prelude to a melee in which heads would be broken and bodies bruised.

The swaying of Duval's body, as he moved to the measure of the ballad, brought him facing the doorway.

Ben Elliott stepped forward two or three paces and stood watching him. His gaze was steady, and in his eyes danced a warning flame. The Bull broke short his song.

"Good day, Mister Elliott!" he said heavily, in mock respect. "I heard you was th' new boss at Hoot Owl and likely you're lookin' fer

good men. Here's one, Elliott. Here's th' best man you'll get a chance to hire until th' next blue snow!"

Ben, heedless of the increased tension which showed on the faces of the onlookers, crossed the floor slowly.

"You want to work for me, Duval?" he asked.

"Think I come over to spark you?" the other countered insolently. "Have a drink!"

He extended the bottle, holding it in his great hand, grinning at Ben. "In the first place, I don't want to hire you," Elliott said. "In the second, there's no hooch allowed in this camp."

He snatched the bottle, swung and sent it crashing against the stove. For a brief moment the hiss of its contents against scorching metal had the place while the Bull's head thrust slowly forward and his small eyes grew red with rage. His lip drew back, exposing yellow teeth.

"Will you walk out, Duval?" Ben asked. "Or do you want me to throw you through the door?"

"Throw me out?" Duval cried thickly. "Throw me out? Why, kid, th' best day you ever seen you couldn't—"

He got just that far in his boast. His hands had knotted into great fists, his body swayed, but before he could strike that first blow or fall into that initial clinch or carry out whatever plan of attack had formed in his truculent mind, knuckles washed into his lips, driving the words back into his teeth.

It was a hard blow, with everything Ben Elliott had from knuckles to ankle put behind its drive. The savagery with which he struck threw Ben off his own balance, but hard as he had hit, quick as he had been, the blow was not enough to put Duval down.

He closed with a roar, one great arm clamped about Elliott's waist, the other hand smearing across Elliott's face, shoving Ben's head backward as the fingers sought the eyes. Ben twisted away from that menace of gouging, strained against that crushing embrace and struck hastily with both hands. But the Bull's chin was safe against his own shoulder, his forehead burrowing into Elliott's chest for protection and not until Ben lifted his knee with a drive like that of a piston did Duval let go.

He reeled backward then, cursing inarticulately, panting and heaving forward again from his spiked stance on the rough floor as he struck with all his might. His blow went home, a stinging, crushing impact on Ben's cheek bone and Duval's great weight followed, beating the other to the floor, flat on his back. The Bull spread arms and legs in a smothering sprawl as he went down but before he could pin Ben close and helpless he was wriggling, threshing over, eluding a hand which clawed for his throat, grasping Duval's leg, lifting, straining, finally throwing him off, lunging to his knees and then got to his feet, pitching forward off balance as he ran, and coming to a halt against the bunks.

He faced about sharply to see Duval standing, blood on his mouth, bent forward, arms hooked and extended, like some great jungle creature stirred to killing fury.

Elliott did not try to elude him. With a grunt he charged, head down, one arm before his face, the other drawn back, and when he struck the sound was like that of a club on a quarter of beef. The blow spun Duval half about and the next rocked him. He grappled for Ben, but Ben sidestepped and struck Duval as he lurched past.

The Bull gave up trying to close. He struck out, now, with renewed savagery as they stood toe-to-toe for a moment. He dodged a brace of drives which, it seemed, would have felled a horse, so great was the effort behind them, and then, feinting, sent in a slashing uppercut.

The great fist landed squarely on the point of Ben's jaw, lifted him from his feet and sent him reeling, clawing the air, over on his back again.

Elliott was dazed by that blow. Bells clanged thunderously in his ears and lights flashed and flickered before his eyes but as he crashed down to the floor, Bird-Eye's voice, shrill and frantic, cut through the place that had folded over him:

"Th' boots! . . . Th' boots!"

Boots, yes. Bull Duval did not fling himself on his prostrate adversary, this time. Erect, he strode forward two measured paces . . . three, and on the fourth he bent backward from the hips, lifted his right foot and raked it out before him; raked those many spikes in the sole straight at the face of his fallen adversary.

But his river boot only swung across the place where a face had been. One lone spike ripped the skin over the cheek bone; a companion left a bright red trace. Ben had jerked his head sideways, moved it that quarter inch which left his face still a face and not a mass of raw flesh ribbons.

Duval teetered on his left foot, nopping for balance and cursing because he had missed, as Ben, reeling to his feet, shouted:

"Keep out! My fight!" He had seen, as he came erect, Bird-Eye Blaine leap for the wood box and grasp the heavy iron poker. "My fight!" he repeated and his hoarse voice was commanding.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Short Separation May Calm Matrimonial Sea

The difficulties that wreck domestic happiness and bring husbands and wives to divorce courts have been discussed by Hubert S. Howe, M. D., in Good Housekeeping. The sane way to save marriage, he says, is by thoroughly understanding the hazards that threaten it, and preventing as many as you can, by common sense.

"If an actual clash has occurred," he advises, "it may help you both to separate for a short time. Go to quiet spots where you can think things out. In the interim let each of you call up every fine trait of the man or woman you married, his or her difficulties, and the courage and patience with which they have been met. Let your thoughts dwell on the good times you have had together."

"Don't go where you will run into temptation—an unscrupulous man or woman who wants to create a triangle, or a mother who eggs on the conflict. Stay apart only long enough to regain poise. Then come back—to each other, to the home that belongs to you both, to the love that is there, if you will recognize it—always waiting."

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All Cogs in Machine No one is rich enough to do without his neighbor.



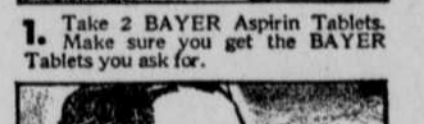
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