



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, a "king of the river," and town bully, in a log-birthing 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. The judge hires him to run the one lumber camp, the Hoot Owl, that Brandon has not been able to grab. This belongs to Dawn McManus, daughter of Brandon's old partner, who has disappeared with a murder charge hanging over his head. Brandon sends his bully, Duval, to beat up Ben, and Ben works him in a flat fight and throws him out of camp. Old Don Stuart dies, leaving a letter for Elliott, "to be used when the going becomes too tough."

CHAPTER III—Continued

Elliott smiled. "Maybe it's only a sick man's dream, Bird-Eye. And again maybe it's an . . . an ace in the hole. I've never yet looked at my hole card until I'm beaten on the board. I'm not beaten yet, by a long way."

Bird-Eye scratched his head. "No, not yet. 'Nd may th' saints kape ye evr as far from a lickin' as ye are now, Ben Elliott! But . . . I'd loike to bet my noble tounr' car that owld Donny wrote some th'nt' to do with th' killin' av Sam Faxson, I would!"

"Well, you can't get any takers here, Bird-Eye. Not tonight. Into the hay, now, and let me sleep."

And about the time Ben Elliott burrowed into his pillow and shed responsibility and perplexing problems, Nicholas Brandon turned in the pacing of his cold and other wise deserted office and cocked his head alertly. It was not unusual for him to be late in his office. But those drawn shades and this quick, restless, hurried march to and fro around and about, and that perspiration which beaded his forehead, and the sudden stoppings and listenings at the slightest sound . . . Those were not usual for a man so thoroughly established in his community that he dictated every phase of its life and activity.

He stopped after a time and opening a drawer of his big desk took from it a bottle of whisky, shook himself and muttered softly. For a time he held it in his hands, debating. Then, with finality, muttered: "No. . . . A clear head now!" He shut the liquor in its place and resumed his pacing.

Nicholas Brandon may have ruled Tincup and the surrounding country with an iron absolutism. But tonight, alone in his office, remembering the words and looks and gestures of Bird-Eye Blaine, a lowly employee of an insolvent venture, seeing again the flash of that letter waved before his eyes, he was no commanding figure. He was a frightened man, a hunted man, battling to retain a hold on himself.

CHAPTER IV

BEN ELLIOTT had been on the job at Hoot Owl just two weeks. Able Armitage was with him for the night. Ben was tireless, it seemed. Since the beginning he had labored daytimes, schemed until late at night, and now he spent another hour with Able, trying, as he said, to make every dime look like a dollar.

"Now, say!" His face took on a curious smile as they finally folded their papers. "I haven't had much time to think about anything but patching up this outfit and getting it to function, but through it all one thing's kept bobbing up so often it's got my curiosity on its hind legs.

"Who was McManus? What about Sam Faxson? Where does the little girl you're guardian for come in?"

"Little girl!" Able said, startled and then smiled. "Why, Dawn is—"

"I keep hearing about these men McManus and Faxson and how Brandon is trying to beat you down so he can cheat the orphan child. How about it all?"

Able's smile died out. He shoved up his spectacles and rubbed his sleepy eyes.

"I'll have to make a long story short; just hit the high spots. First, Nicholas Brandon and Denny McManus came into this country when they weren't much more than boys. They were the first hardwood operators in this country. They'd had some experience and a little money but they hit at the right time, picked up a raft of timber for a song and started turning it into a fortune.

"McManus was married and had the daughter, Dawn. Brandon never married. Just when they were

swinging nicely, everything running smooth as butter, McManus' wife died. He was as deeply in love as any man I've ever seen and it sent him completely to pot. He took to heavy drinking and got himself in a bad way.

"Of the two, Denny was the more popular. He was friendly, charitable, had a heart as big as a camp stove and as soft as a sponge. He'd go the route for anybody. Why—probably you've never even heard this—when old Don Stuart rimmed the company it was McManus who stood in the way of prosecution. Don had cruised and bought a lot of stuff for them. He always had been a drinker himself and on one spree got into some sort of mess and crooked the company out of three or four hundred dollars. Enough, anyhow, to let himself in for a long term in the penitentiary if they'd pushed it. Brandon wanted to prosecute, all right, but McManus stood up for Don. That was typical of the man: friendly, forgiving, a real human being, if you understand.

"But Mac went to pieces himself. He would be off on a bender for weeks at a time and scarcely get over the shakes before he'd start on another. Finally he got so bad that Brandon sent him out to a hunting camp on the river with a fine old trapper named Sam Faxson. Great old character, Sam. Brandon figured—and it seemed reasonable—that Sam could keep Mac away from the booze, you see. He was there a week or so, tapering off gradually, seeing nobody but Sam. Brandon was working away like a naller, buying up a lot of stuff for himself, probably figuring that if McManus didn't straighten up he'd operate on his own hook. McManus

had this Hoot Owl stuff clinched in his own name before he went bad.

"Well, one night we were in the middle of a three-day blizzard and Sam Faxson stumbled into Don Stuart's shanty on the edge of town, shot through the arm and frozen so badly that he died the next afternoon. Don's story—voice slowing and a finger raised for emphasis—"was that Faxson told him McManus had gotten out of booze and turned ugly and that when he—Sam—tried to prevent him from starting for town after more whisky he went wild at Sam and shot him. He was hit in the arm, had to have help and in trying to get it suffered more exposure than any man could stand.

"Well, that caused a great stir! A party hit straight out for the camp and couldn't find hide nor hair nor sign of Mac. A couple of old trappers agreed that somebody had gone down to the river below the camp the night that Faxson was shot. The Mad Woman is swift at that bend and never freezes. The trail seemed to go right to the edge of the stream and the accepted theory was that McManus, realizing what he had done, had drowned himself. The fact that nothing has ever been seen or heard of him since lends strength to that supposition.

"An inquest was held, on Don's story a warrant was issued for McManus and so it stands, after all these years."

He rubbed his face.

"Now, that's that. The thing that's stuck in the minds of some of us is this: that McManus, under no circumstances, ever showed a quarrelsome streak, let alone giving evidence of being a killer. However,"—with a shrug—"he'd been on a long, long drunk."

He paused and shook his head. Then went on:

"Brandon carried on the partner-



"No. . . . A Clear Head Now!"

ship and his own interests, buying his own logs in the name of the firm and sawing them in the mill. He bought right and left, left and right. As soon as another man would plan to operate here Brandon would try to buy him out. If he couldn't buy at his own figure things commenced to happen to that man. . . . Duval has figured in a good many failures!"—nodding profoundly. "The man seemed to be obsessed by the idea that he must own all the timber in the locality.

"Finally it came down to this one piece, owned by McManus, which was the last which Brandon wanted and that he didn't have. He commenced to jockey so he could get title to it. Homer Campbell was judge of probate then. Nick went to Homer with a petition to have McManus declared legally dead so the estate could be probated and this timber disposed of. Mac had been gone seven years and such an arrangement could be brought about according to law, you see.

"However, Homer got the notion that Brandon was a mite too anxious, satisfied himself that while Brandon was getting rich personally the partnership was in a bad way, and decided that he wouldn't be a party to any scheme to rob an estate.

"That ended Homer politically. Nick put up another candidate and trimmed us properly and we knew that when the new judge came in he'd take orders from Brandon. So Homer surprised Brandon by reopening the McManus matter, declaring him legally dead and appointed me administrator for the estate and guardian for Dawn.

"Nick was pretty mad, all right! I commenced to pry into things, found that the partnership books certainly did look bad and decided to take a licking there and sold out the McManus interest. We were stung, all right, but there was no use squealing. I took the money, paid up the mortgage on the Hoot Owl, sent Dawn off to school in the East where she wouldn't be known as the daughter of a murderer—a cloud which was misshaping her whole life—and tried to make some money for her.

"That's how it stands to date. I've failed. We're on the ragged edge; the estate right now, considering the location of this timber in Brandon's territory as a liability, is insolvent. Dawn's had to come back here to live where she's unhappy and what's ahead of us depends on you."

Ben gave a wry smile.

"This killing thing, now. . . . Did anybody ever suspect Brandon?"

Able shook his head.

"Faxson and McManus were alone. And McManus disappeared. I know what's in your mind, Ben. But there was nothing to support the suspicion."

He sat silent a moment and then asked drily:

"Haven't read old Don's letter yet?"

"Not yet. I'm superstitious. I don't like to use all I've got until I have to; don't even like to look at my hole card."

"Well, it's your message, that letter; your property," Able said. "And the nut's going to get tougher fast. I hate to think what'd happen if we had to stop sawing for two or three days right now. A shutdown certainly would put temper into the shell of the nut, Ben, and—"

He stopped short. Into the stillness of the room came a muffled shout, Ben started to his feet and Able turned a bewildered face in the direction of the sound.

"Fire!" a walling voice cried. "Th' mill's on fire!"

Buller could be heard bounding from his bed in the next room. Able lurched to the door to see Ben Elliott flying toward the mill-yard, silhouetted against the dull glow of angry flame which showed through cracks in the mill.

The wide doorways to the ground floor were rectangles of dull orange. The fire was in there, beneath the deck, under the carriage, eating into the very vitals of the mill.

A water barrel stood beneath the slide, its bucket dangling from a stick laid across the top, but the barrel was empty. Ben seized the bucket, smashed the thin ice that had formed over the hot pond, filled his pail and rushed through the open doorways into the smoke. He had a clear sense of Buller's voice crying the alarm and of answering shouts as the men began turning out of their blankets.

Ben soused his bucket of water into the heart of the burning area and it scattered the blaze with a wooshing sound. The flame did not go out; it only scattered. His eyes and his reason told him, then, what his nostrils had failed to register in his first excitement.

"Gasoline!" he panted as he ran out, colliding with Buller in the doorway. "Somebody touched her off. . . . Soaked with gasoline in there. . . . Look, it's spreading fast!"

Men were coming, shouting as they ran through the darkness. In all stages of partial dress they came, crowding close to Elliott and Buller.

"Stand still, you, and keep still!" Ben snapped. "You, McFee, and you and you,"—pointing to individuals. "Roll that barrel of salt up from the siding. Now! Snap into it!"

"You and you and you,"—indicating other men—"get every bucket in the place. Water buckets from the barrels in the yard and along the tramways, pails from houses,

kettles, anything that'll hold and carry water.

"You, there; get me an ax and a shovel. Snappy, now!"

His voice had bite to it and as he tolled the men off for these explicit errands, they went on the run.

"Buller! Get upstairs and knock a hole in the floor, to the left of the saw. Couple of boards wide. So long,"—measuring with his spread hands. "We've got to get that flame down drawing straight up instead of mawrooming all over the floor bottom. Form the rest of your men into a bucket brigade and pass water up the slide. . . . Fast as you can! Don't anybody think about anything but sending up full buckets and taking down empty ones. You stand by the hole, Buller, and knock her down as she comes through. Not so fast, now, that you spill water and drop pails. Hold your heads and your feet. It's our only chance to lick it. . . . Hike, now!"

Grunting and cursing, four huskies came lugging the barrel of salt and Ben, trying to still his excited breathing, snapped his fingers as he waited for their arrival.

"Gasoline!" he shouted to Able, seeing him for the first time. "Water won't touch it! We've got to smother it and we can't get sand handily and salt should do, if Buller can hold her when she sticks her head through the floor!"

"Up here, boys! Close, now!" Ben heaved on the heavy barrel of salt himself, rolling it in to the doorway which led directly into the fire. "All right. . . . Jake! Into the bucket line, all of you!" He swung his ax on a wire hoop and the barrel popped open. He struck again to clear away staves and drove a dozen quick blows into the lumpy salt that spilled out, to pulverize it.

Next he grabbed up his shovel, scooped it full and disappeared into the smoke.

His eyes smarted but he took his time, blinked and surveyed the fire. Then he swung his shovel upward and slanders and sent its burden in a plastery, spattering smear at the center of a particularly hot spot. The blue-green-orange combination of living fire gave up at once to a saffron smudge.

Ben leaped into the open again, breathed deeply, filled his shovel and doing his best to hold his breath, edged back into the smoke. He drove that shovel of salt hard upon flame, too, and retreated at once. A dozen trips, and he had the flame down in an area the size of a blanket. He worked to the right, then, going further into the mill, coughing and reeling, and when he emerged that time he retched painfully. He stood over his salt pile a moment, gulping fresh air while nausea shook him. He breathed quickly, forcing his lungs to pump deep and fast, sending clearing life through his arteries. His head steeled, he scooped up more salt and compressing his lips against the shaking coughs, ducked into the mill.

Faster and faster the buckets came up, some big, some small, now and then one that leaked away its precious contents. Fire found hold on the edges of the hole Buller had made in the floor. Little tongues of flame ate into the dry wood and curled upward. To Buller's right a finger of fire crept up between two boards; beyond it another appeared. In a dozen places fire was coming through the floor and Buller, swaying on his feet as he coughed, turned to the next man in dismay.

"He said . . ." he choked. "Got to have air! Move up!"

The line moved up. The man who had taken Buller's place soused a bucket of water across the floor, knocking down those tendrils that wormed through from below. Then he attacked the uprushing column of flame again.

Down below Ben Elliott had the heart of the burning litter a writhing mass of saffron smoke. He started out, fell and crawled to the entry, got his knees beneath him and retched again and again. His eyes smarted madly and streamed tears; he coughed as he vomited and it seemed as though he never would find strength to rise. But, he did after a moment and renewed his attack.

"Here, you! Three men. . . . Two buckets each!" Ben croaked as he ran out to the foot of the slide.

"Throw it high, and hard. So!" he cried hoarsely and flung the first water himself with a wide, sweeping, overhead swing. It knocked fire off the nigger, blotted out an orange panel on a heavy sill. "Now, you!" he cried to the next man.

They filled their own buckets and that duty took them into the fresh air, cleared their lungs, kept the nausea down, steeled both legs and heads. With hissing splashes the water from their pails went sloshing against the overhead woodwork and gradually the glare through the thick smoke subsided.

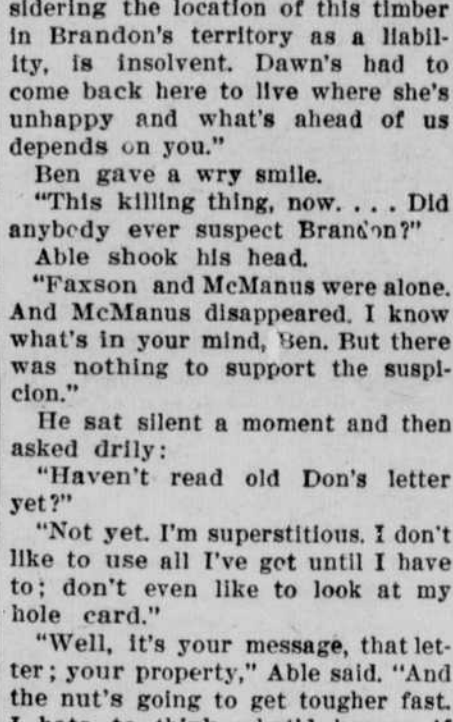
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Cock-Crower's Job Ended

From 1041 to 1840, the kings of England maintained an official "Cock-crower," a man who appeared in the king's apartment at midnight on Ash Wednesday and crowed, to remind the monarch of Christ's betrayal. On this night in 1840, the new Prince Consort, who had never heard of the crower, was quietly reading when his door flew open and a voice cried, "Cock-a-doodle-doo." The shock was terrible. Thus ended the 799-year-old job.—Culler's Weekly.

NURSERY BLOCKS CROCHETED RUG

By GRANDMOTHER CLARK



This crocheted rug called "Nursery Blocks" is made up of small blocks in different color combinations, assembled and then a border crocheted all around. Each block measures about 8 inches and outer border 4 inches, making a finished size 33 by 30 inches, and requires about 5 lbs. of rag strip material.

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FOR JOINT WAR TO CURB PESTS

Matter Vitaly Affecting All Nations.

The control of many insect pests is essentially a problem of the North American continent, not of Canada, or of Mexico, or of the United States alone, according to Lee A. Strong, chief of the bureau of entomology and plant quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture. National boundary lines mean nothing to these insects, Mr. Strong says. So why, he asks, should each nation undertake to deal individually with pests that attack the forests, fields, orchards and gardens of more than one of the North American countries?

Through internationally co-ordinated programs, Mr. Strong points out, definite results have already been obtained in the face of apparently insuperable difficulties. Co-operative grasshopper surveys and control operations in the northwestern states and in the southwestern provinces of Canada, for example, proved effective in suppressing recent grasshopper outbreaks on both sides of the border. Moreover, Canada and the United States have profited alike from joint action on European corn borer control and on gypsy moth eradication in adjacent areas.

Notable also, Mr. Strong continues, have been the results of entomological co-operation with countries to the south. With the aid of the Mexican authorities, the United States Department of Agriculture has succeeded in keeping the Mexican fruit fly from becoming generally established in the Rio Grande valley of Texas. By this co-operative effort, Mexican fruit growers were also helped in the control of the fruit fly in its native home below the Rio Grande.

Co-operative work on the citrus black fly in Cuba has reduced the numbers of that fly until it is no longer a serious pest in Cuban orchards and the likelihood of spread into Florida is materially lessened. The black fly was controlled within a few years by a parasite from Asia. Entomologists of the United States Department of Agriculture found that

LIFE IN THE U. S. A.

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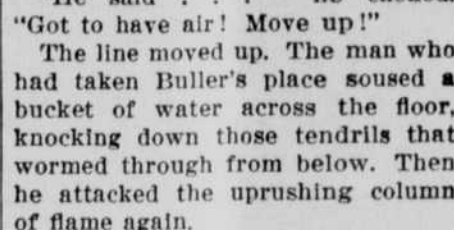
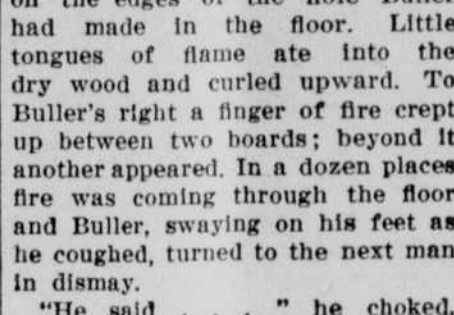
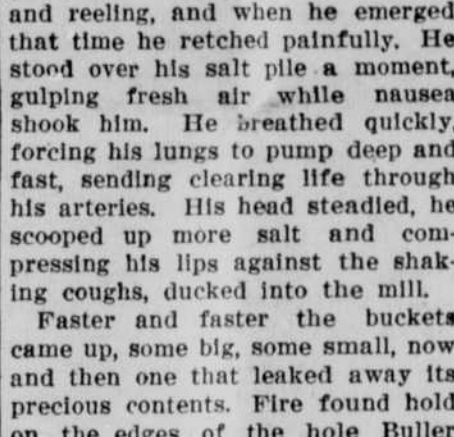
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