

THE MAN FROM YONDER

By Harold Titus
W.M.U. SERVICE

Ben Elliott — from "Yonder" — makes his entry into the lumbering town of Tincup, bringing an old man, Don Stuart, who had been eager to reach Tincup. 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. Judge Able Armitage hires Ben 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 throws him out of camp. Old Don Stuart dies, leaving a letter for Elliott, "to be used when the going becomes too tough." Ben refuses to read it at this time, believing he can win the fight by his own efforts. Fire, subdued, is found to have been started with gasoline. The Hoot Owl gets an offer of spot cash for timber, that will provide money to tide it over. But there is a definite time limit on the offer. Ben discovers Dawn McManus is not a child, as he had supposed, but a beautiful young woman. The railroad bridge over which the Hoot Owl lumber must pass, is blown up.

CHAPTER VII—Continued
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Ben threw more coal into the fire box, looked at his water gauge, shoved the reverse lever down into the corner and opened the throttle. The little old locomotive gave a sharp, an almost startled, bark as valves released their power, sending from its stack a great puff of cumulous vapor into the still morning air. The drivers spun and she let go a rapid series of exhaust coughs. He shut off; opened again, and this time the tires found purchase. The slack came out, the cars moved and, journals squealing, belching and stuttering, they broke over to the down grade.

Elliott had her wide open, now, and the loads, on that grade, ran easily despite the binding cold in their journals. The rock and pitch of the engine were beyond belief. It seemed as though its weight must carry the light steel from its spikes as the careening threw tons of strain first one way and then the other.

The curve at the trestle's approach rushed up the valley toward him and through Elliott's mind swam all manner of misgivings. It seemed at the moment that if by any freak chance the wheels should stay on the rails, then those rails must surely give before the strain that the train's flight would exert as it took that curve. He threw one quick glance backward to see Tim Jeffers crouched on his high perch as a circus rider might stand on his boldly galloping steed. The old man chewed briskly and, as he caught a flash of Ben's face, spat and made one impressive gesture with a mittened hand, bidding the younger man get outside.

Ben had done all that he could do in the cab. Nothing within his power would be of avail if they left the track and, inside, he would have no chance at all should the wild run come to its end in the smoking waters of the river.

And so he backed into the gangway between tank and engine and slid down to the step, clinging to the hand rails, starting ahead, ready to let go if the worst, and the highly probable, happened.

The curve was there, the length of their locomotive ahead. . . . The trucks took it with a screech and a bounce and a grind. She turned sharply and Ben thought he felt her tipping, tilting, the step beneath his feet rising as the force that strove them off at a tangent asserted itself. . . . He swung far out, to give her that much more balance, and they were straightening out with the loads thundering and clanking and leaping behind and he breathed deeply, realizing that for the interval his lungs had not functioned.

Elliott, curling about him, shutting off his view. They were slowing, now. The roaring drum of the exhaust had dropped now to a sharp panting.

They were half-way up before he touched the reserve lever. He let it down slowly, a notch at a time, using every last inch of the momentum he had gained. Up, now, three-quarters of the way. Ben could see the rails on the bit of level going at the top. Up another train's length, slowing with each foot gained. Afar off, across the snow-blanketed country, a plume of white vapor trailed a break in the forests. That was the local, crossing the river, swinging in toward his siding.



Half a Mile Down the Track the Local Pulled in Toward Him.

Half a mile down the track the local pulled in toward him. Ben dropped his heavy, wormed along the logs and fopped down to the brake wheel as Ben shut her off, set the brakes and with a boyish swing of one arm yanked on the whistle cord to set her voice screaming.

Back on the last car Tim clubbed brake wheels. Out on the first, Ben Elliott drove the shoe home. The ancient locomotive dug her heels in and settled back. Down and down they went on the frost slick steel, gathering speed that was as alarming as the slowing of their pace had been a moment before. But with every train length traveled Tim Jeffers was setting more brakes against the humming wheels.

She slid, she slipped, she squealed and complained and clattered her way down that final mile. They had her under control at last and slowly they edged around the curve at the millpond, out onto the siding and to a full stop.

bearded man sat near the stove in a small hotel and heard the story of what was happening in distant Tincup.

"Know him?" another listener asked the narrator.

"Not the kid. I know Brandon, 'nd I know Tim Jeffers. Top loaded for him three winters. If Tim's back there's a hot scrap on and . . . gosh! but I like scraps."

"The other closed the blade of his pocket knife and pulled at the lobe of his left ear with his hand.

"And with the Milwaukee people standing ready to finance us it looks as if you might, maybe, perhaps be getting ready to find it all down hill and shady, Ben. I think that interesting this particular bank is the best piece of work you've done yet."

"Unless Brandon finds a way. "You've got to watch every loophole, Benny. And you've got too much for one man to do."

"Oh, it's not that bad. Things are straightening out. Tim's a wonder; Buller isn't missing a bet. We ought to keep right on stepping."

"How can anyone help saying nice things to nice people?" She made a playful mouth at him and Ben watching her as she advanced to Able's desk, thought again that he never had supposed women grew to such loveliness.

"Don't you tell a soul, Aunt Em, but we are going to have tea! If his shanty boys ever heard about it they might think he was too much civilized for them."

"Pshaw! As if what other folks think counts!" She looked narrowly at Dawn and Ben saw the girl's face change.

In the half hour that elapsed before the older woman returned Ben learned much about Dawn McManus. This was her house, her home. Aunt Em, then a young woman, had been housekeeper, there after Dawn's mother died. She had stayed on, keeping the place up through the years that Dawn was away at school, making a living for herself by baking, and now that Dawn was home again she was the girl's closest friend and only confidant.

"Naturally, you would." They talked, after that, of personal tastes, of the glories of big country, of the limited recreations offered by little towns.

"Just the movies! Now and then there's a dance," the girl said, "but none of the boys seem to want to take me. . . . It is my fault, likely."

"Yes, he's been awfully kind to me, always. Of course, I know that Able and a lot of people think he's after the Hoot Owl and is quite ruthless about it, but they can prove nothing. He was so good to me when I was little and talks so reasonably to me now that I can't believe their suspicions are well founded. Still . . . Things do seem to happen at Hoot Owl. Mr. Brandon's explanation of the fire and dynamiting is that you made an enemy of Bull Duval and his friends, and that they are striking back for spite. That sounds reasonable, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Ben, unwilling to argue any such point with her. At this juncture Aunt Em came in with food that was surprisingly fine and for an hour they sat and talked while darkness fell.

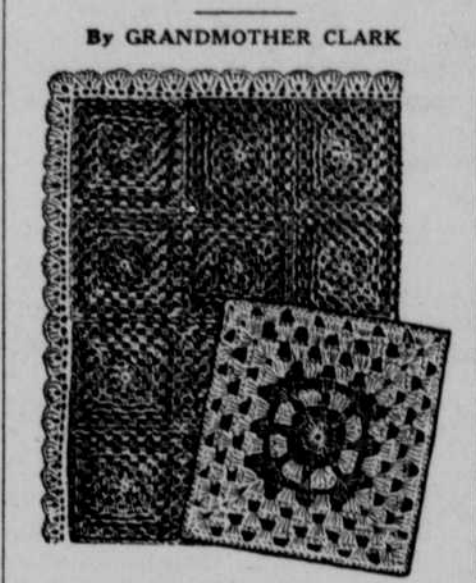
"Mr. Elliott, I think you must know Mr. Brandon." Ben bowed, a bit stiffly.

Then Nicholas Brandon did an amazing thing, which went far in explaining Dawn's skepticism of the town's attitude toward him to Elliott. He laughed. He laughed easily, naturally, and in the laughter was an admission of embarrassment which rang true.

"The other bowed slightly, but his eyes did not meet Elliott's." "I'm glad you are so generous," he said, and probably only Ben caught the mockery in the tone.

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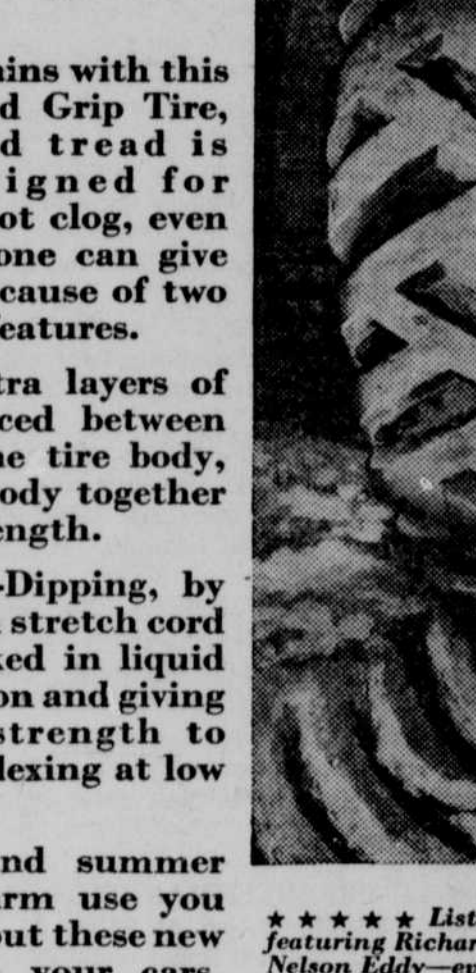
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