



By Harold Titus

W.N.U. SERVICE

SYNOPSIS

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 Armistage 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. By superhuman efforts Ben builds a new bridge overnight.

CHAPTER VII—Continued

Her face lighted. "Mind! I'd love it!" she said and the honest enthusiasm in her voice caused Nicholas Brandon to look at her sharply.

"Saturday night, then. Good-by, Mr. Brandon,"—with that challenging smile. He turned to the woman in the doorway. "Good-by. I guess I'll have to call you Aunt Em. That's the only name I know you by!"

As Ben passed out beneath the hemlocks and turned into the street, amazed at Brandon's manner, he brushed against a man who, he thought afterwards, must have been standing there. In the twilight he could not be certain but he believed that he had never seen that heavily bearded face before. He looked over his shoulder later to see the man, who had started on in the opposite direction, return and pass slowly before Dawn McManus' home again.

CHAPTER VIII

NICHOLAS BRANDON was a man of forty-five. He was rich, he was powerful, he had achieved much of what he held to be desirable.

But his experience had been empty of things that most men crave above all else. He had not seen Dawn McManus in three years until she came back to Tincup that November. He had known her always. He had watched her grow from infant to child; from child to a wistful, shy girl, living under the cloud of her father's tragic disappearance; but the transition from girlhood to womanhood had been made during her longest absence from the town that had been her only home. And so when he saw her, after her arrival, instead of the young girl he remembered, toward whom he had always been gentle and kind while he sought to pilfer her heritage, he encountered a lovely, compelling young woman. She charmed him, stirred in his heart long neglected and now twisted and distorted wants which, given liberty in his youth, might have been fine and open and clean. He wanted Dawn McManus as he never had wanted anything before.

He saw her frequently, dropping in to visit briefly in passing, taking her in his cutter on a drive to a camp once, casually asking her to do this or that with him. But he could not interest her despite his persistent efforts, and now another element was injected into the situation. When he encountered Ben Elliott that afternoon in friendly conversation with Dawn it required all his resourcefulness to retain a show of self-control. Inwardly he seethed with a hatred which now had the element of jealousy for an embittering ally. He hated Ben Elliott with all his soul and mingled with his passion for Dawn McManus was a species of hate as well. He hated her for her cleanliness, for her sweetness, for her power to attract young men to her.

A double motive impelled him, thereafter, to plot and scheme and strive to possess the Hoot Owl. Without timber and the tidy fortune it might some day represent Dawn would be without resources. And a girl without property, he believed, would be easy prey.

But complications rose to stir his ire and chagrin. And so this night—it was very late—he sat in his office, with Lydia on the other side of his flat-topped desk.

Lydia. Just that. She needed no

other name for identification in Tincup. The women who, with her, occupied that short and bleak and isolated row of houses across the tracks—Section Thirty-Seven, it was called by the town—needed none but a given name. He had summoned her and she had come according to instructions, furtively and alone, long after the rest of the town slept.

She sat, a bit tight-lipped, her button eyes on Brandon's face, and listened to him talk, crisply and incisively. But after he had stopped the woman leaned just a bit further forward.

"It's a rotten deal!" she said in a quick, nervous manner. "Why, she's only a girl, Brandon; and the boy, he's as clean as a hound's tooth. It's rotten!"

Brandon shrugged and looked away. "I don't care to be mixed up in this," she went on. "I don't fancy playing any such game."

Defiance was there, and it struck the man's temper. His dark eyes swung back to focus on her face and about his lips was the beginning of a malicious smile.

"You refuse?" "If I do, what?" He leaned quickly against the desk edge.

"One word to the immigration people and you go back to Canada. Do you think they forget . . . the Canadians?"

Lydia blinked rapidly and bit her lips. "You wouldn't turn me up!" she said sharply.

Brandon leaned back, laughing comfortably. "Wouldn't I, though! Wouldn't I? If you refuse . . . Try it, my friend, and then try Canada's memory. You've been safe from their law for three years. In twelve hours I could and would toss you to them and have the satisfaction of a duty done."

For a moment they sat in silence. Then Lydia spoke with a bitter shake of her head. "I know when I'm licked," she said crisply. "It's rotten; a foul blow . . . but I'll have to go through with it, it seems!" She rose, and her breath was somewhat quick.

"But some day, Nick Brandon, you'll slip! For years, as I get it, you've had others carry your dirt for you. Remember, the time will come when this power you feel so sure about will crumble! The time will come when you'll have no one to turn to, no one to threaten into fighting your fights for you! I wonder . . . what'll you do then?"

"That," he said easily, "is distinctly my own affair."

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS Saturday night and Tincup was dancing. In the Odd Fellows' hall a violin, a cornet and a piano made music for the scores who had paid their fee and danced in the glaring, barren room. And among them, a cynosure for all eyes, went Ben Elliott and Dawn McManus.

It was the first time many of the townspeople had had a real good look at Dawn since her return; it was Ben Elliott's initial encounter with a social function in Tincup; it was their first appearance in public together. Curiosity prompted much of the neck craning because Dawn, the daughter of Dawn McManus, always had been a conspicuous figure, but now her loveliness was heightened by a flush and both men and women forgot that she was known chiefly as the daughter of a murderer.

The two were apparently having the time of their lives. Ben talked. How he talked! He talked of this, that, the other thing constantly. He felt he must talk and keep talking of impersonal matters or he would find himself blurting words of love into Dawn's ear, there in a public dance hall. He felt that unless he kept talking of trivial things he would find himself shouting:

"You are the most lovely thing that ever breathed and I love you, love you, love you!"

So he seized upon every subject that came into his head eagerly, almost desperately.

Now he was telling her of the new bookkeeper he had hired the day before.

"Queer fellow, in a way. Seems to be capable of a much better job than keeping books for the Hoot Owl. At first I was a little leary of letting him into the office and had him in the mill a couple of days but, gee, you can't let a man who's certainly a high grade office hand do work like that!"

"I brought him in and told him I needed a bookkeeper but had just

had one experience with a man that made me a little jumpy. I had a boy out there who was a little light fingered. He didn't get away with anything, luckily."

"But I told Martin—John Martin, his name is—that I was going to put him on the books if he'd take the job with the understanding that I was going to suspect him of a lot of things for a long time. He gave me one of the funniest looks I've ever seen and said he wasn't afraid to be suspected."

"So there he is. We're in the new office, now. He and I each have a little room just big enough for a bed and I like him a lot."

The dance ended and they walked toward vacant chairs and were so occupied with one another that they did not notice the hush that had fallen over the place, nor the woman who had entered, until she had crossed the floor and stopped before them.

Lydia stopped just within the threshold and shook the light snow from her fur coat and that gesture was enough to cause words to die in the throats of those who saw. Lydia, here! Lydia, from Thirty-Seven, invading this place where decent people, where good men and women and little children, were assembled.

The woman did not hesitate. Head up, intently, she crossed the floor straight toward Ben Elliott who, eyes fast on Dawn to miss no change in her mobile face, still talked with animation, unaware of the hush about them.

He did not stop talking until the woman's shadow fell upon him. Then he looked up, saw her, and rose.

He rose, because a woman was standing there, evidently waiting to speak to him. He did not know her; had never seen her before. He had no time to observe and judge. He would have risen, anyhow, because he was naturally courteous to women. He did more than rise. He even bowed just a trifle when he saw that her eyes were so fast on him. He did not notice that Dawn started, that one hand lifted quickly to her cheek.

Lydia's voice sounded sharp and hard and rasping in the silence. "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!" she said.

Ben had started to smile, but this changed to a frown of perplexity.

"I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!" she said.

"Ashamed, ma'am?" he asked.

"Why, I—" "Yes; ashamed! There's that poor girl in my house, sick and crying for days! You brought her here, didn't you? You're the one who got her to come to Tincup. And now, when she needs you, you won't come near her!"

Ben looked at Dawn, who was shrinking back in her chair; at other people, whose faces reflected incredulity, or vicarious guilt or fright.

"Ma'am, I . . . That is, I don't understand you," he stammered.

His eyes were taking her in, now, from her costly fur coat to the emerald earrings, and as in a daze, he classified her, put her in the shameful niche which was hers. A great flush of bewilderment swept into his face.

"Don't understand! Maybe you think you can abuse a girl like that and get away with it in this town, but not while she's in my house, you can't!"

A wave of humiliation overwhelmed Ben. What could a man do in a situation like this? What could he say? He was fouled, out-matched. Nothing in his experience stood him in stead to meet such an emergency as this one.

"Why . . . Why, this is an outrage," he began weakly. But his fighting spirit surged upward, steadied him. "I've never seen you in my life! I don't even know what you're talking about! This is either a mistake or—"

"Mistake!" the woman cried shrilly. "Don't try to get away with that! I suppose it does surprise you to have me find you here! But you've kept out of sight, dodging me and—"

scurry down the stairs. But Elliott was unaware of all this.

"There's no stopping me now, Elliott! I've come to show you up—"

"You come to ma' trouble on a foundation of lies!" he said and stepped closer to her.

His face was drawn and pale, now, jaws set, and his eyes flared dangerously.

"This is some outrageous plot," he said evenly, and so low that only those nearest him could hear. "This is done deliberately to give me a black eye before these people here! You're a party to a filthy scheme, whoever you are!"

"Fine words, Elliott! Fine words! But this girl's tears and misery are on your head and if you won't help her, I will. She goes back where she came from tomorrow!"

With that, she turned and, self-composed, almost proud in her bearing, crossed the floor. Ben watched her go until she had disappeared down the stairway. Then he faced about, wondering what he could say to Dawn McManus, but she was not there.

His face went blank with amazement, bewilderment.

"She ducked out," a man whispered, and the sound carried through the room.

None! Fled because she believed this woman? His heart went cold, but he gathered himself and stalked out of the hall.

Brandon, alone in his office, drank deeply from a whisky bottle. Then, on a telegraph pad scrawled an Ontario address. The message itself contained but two words: "Send Red."

He signed his name and sat back, brows drawn and after a time nodded vindictively.

Out at the Hoot Owl Ben Elliott went through a week of unbroken dismay. It was a situation such as he had never dreamed of facing.

Dawn had heard and seen and . . . believed! She had fled the hall, convincing him of her belief in Lydia's accusation. Days had passed and he had heard nothing from her. He was impelled to go to her, but under such circumstances, a young man does not do that. There are some affairs so embarrassing that words fall flat.

He was walking, wondering grimly what Dawn was thinking then, what she was doing; he was hearing once again the biting voice of Lydia; hearing, in memory, the hush fall over that dance hall.

He was wholly alone. Far behind him loggers worked in the timber; down yonder the mill sent up its plume of smoke and he could hear the distant puffing of the exhaust in the stillness.

No wind blew; nothing stirred . . . that he could see. He could not observe that slight, cautious movement to his left, that figure which watched him some and edged out through young hemlocks to a point from which his view was unobscured but where he still had good cover.

The man up there stood still. Slowly he shook off his mittens and with a bare thumb released the safety on the rifle he carried, settled slowly to one knee, placing it on the tail of the other snowshoe. His breath was not just steady as he nudged his cheek against the rifle butt. No man's would be, shooting from ambush that way. Nor were his hands just steady.

He sighted carefully, trying to still the tremor of his arms. He let his breath slip out slowly, he squeezed.

The crack of the rifle echoed and re-echoed across the chopping. Ben Elliott lay still, as he had pitched on his face. One of his hands was outstretched, the other pinned beneath him. His face, one cheek in the snow, was turned toward the man who had fired but it was far away.

WHY SHOP-TALK IS SO POPULAR

Makes for Forgetfulness of One's Self.

One of the last arts to mature to a young society is the art of conversation. At its best, conversation is a kind of impromptu orchestra, each player improvising in perfect harmony, time and tune, tossing the theme from instrument to instrument, the themes developing and changing, discarded or resumed at the caprice of the players. This of course presupposes that the subject of the conversation be impersonal, that it be free to range pretty much over the whole field of human experience. Such conversation is first met with in the form of shop-talk and the reason shop-talk among people of the same interests or profession (in which is included school studies) is so popular may be that here, perhaps for the first time, we learn how delightful it can be to exercise our minds in company with others to the total exclusion and forgetfulness of our tiresome selves. That is why students talk so eagerly about their school tasks, why business and professional people so madden innocent by-standers with technical discussions of the minutiae of their trades; why artists, musicians and scholars persecute the public with their passionate dissertations. But there is a stage beyond this, where human interests are broad enough and deep enough to embrace everybody, where the whole of experience is the subject.

"Clever but indiscriminating." "undiscriminating because the past is not alive to them." "Highbrow? Anything rather than that!"—this is a good-natured appraisal of how our sophisticated New Yorkers make it appear to Europeans. The objection to them is that they do not know enough, either about the past or their own country. But the condition is temporary. A passion for

learning has sprung up in our land since the war which, given time, should turn out a crop of men and women able to interpret America to Europe as it really is, and not as a glorified Wisecrackiana. After the fire of the World War, after the whirlwind of the Jazz decade, after the earthquake of the economic depression cometh the still small voice of the spirit.—"Uncle Dudley," in the Boston Globe.

Relics of Dwarf Race

The government of Mexico is investigating the ruins of a town built by a race of dwarfs. They are 75 miles from Durango and were discovered recently by M. Gamiz of that city. The site is near El Salto waterfall in the well-known Cerro Blanco, or White Hill. Many remains of dwellings have been found, the highest of which is only six feet, and human skeletons brought to light do not exceed 40 inches in stature, but are otherwise perfectly normal, and are those of adults. It has not been possible to establish the epoch when this pygmy race flourished.

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IDEAL COMMUNITY

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