



By Harold Titus

CHAPTER XII—Continued

He went into his sleeping chamber and took down a rifle from its rack on a pair of antlers. He threw open the chamber but it was empty. He jerked open a dresser drawer and pawed through it in a fruitless search for cartridges, frantically because he found none. His breath was ragged as he threw the rifle on the bed and rumbled his hair wildly.

"Bring Elliott out!" "Show us Ben!" "Get a rail!" These and other terrifying cries stood out above the constant mutter of the mob. Brandon rushed back to the front office and waved his arms for silence as he stood in the shattered glass of his window, but the sight of him only provoked hoots and jeers which were forerunners of a great billow of savage, snarling rage.

The men were having trouble with the sign post. He heard the stair door tried and a voice called: "Hustle with that post!"



He Could Not Satisfy Them.

Coming! They were coming in to get him!

He could not satisfy them! He did not know where Elliott was. Last night Delaney had promised to try again but he had not come to report, though Brandon had waited late. And now the crowd was howling for Elliott; lacking Elliott, they would take him.

He covered his face with his hands, tried to stifle his ears. In those menacing cries he heard the knell of his reign. For years he had ruled by the force of his will and now that force was not enough. Bit by bit, Ben Elliott had caught the fancy of the country and now, with that group of stout men as a rallying point, the entire town was setting up a demand for the missing Elliott. They wanted Ben Elliott.

"Go home!" he screamed and waved his arms, standing close to a broken window. "Clear out, you! . . . Fair warning, I'm giving!"

But his words were drowned in a great yell. Men came lugging that post across the street while Tim Jeffers hastened toward them with gestures of protest.

"Hold your heads, now! Give us Hoot Owl boys a chance. We'll get what we come for or we'll take Tincup apart. But no destruction of property until everything else fails!"

His will prevailed a moment. He lifted his face to Brandon.

"We mean business. Will you come out and show us Ben or must we come and get you? We won't wait much longer."

An opening, there, a chance to delay.

"Coming!" Brandon croaked. "I'm coming!"

A gratified mutter went up from the crowd and burst into shrill words.

Coming? Like the devil, he would go? He was ransacking drawers, now, dumping their contents on the floor in his frantic search for rifle cartridges that should be there.

He sought a key for a locked trunk and could not find it. He tried several but his hands shook so that he might have failed to make the proper one operate, even had he found it.

Again Jeffers' voice, demanding his presence, came out of a strange silence.

"Coming!" he shouted thickly and seized a hammer and attacked the trunk lock. Ammunition must be in there.

hand at this delay. Two or three aided Tim in his plea for at least temporary moderation but the others rebelled and fought to get the post which would batter down the stair door.

And then came a hush, a quick, spreading hush which swept the crowd like a shadow. And then rose a quick popping of excited voices.

"Elliott!" "Here he is!" "Look!" "He's hurt!"

Bundled to the ears in a great overcoat, cap drawn low, supported on the one side by John Martin and on the other side by Able Armitage, he came slowly, painfully out of the side street. He scarcely seemed to be aware of that throng; did not look either to the right or the left. All his energy was bent on moving forward.

He gained the middle of the street in an impressive hush. Then he murmured a word to Able and they halted.

He looked about at his men and smiled a trifle weakly, but in his look was a quality which clearly indicated that love which strong men have for their kind.

"Its all right, boys," he said, "and only those in the first ranks could hear, his voice was that light. "They didn't get me . . . badly. I appreciate this . . . but want you to . . . get back to . . . camp."

He panted for breath and lifted his face to the broken windows above. Far back in that room he caught a glimpse of a face watching him—cocked as though striving to hear.

"It's my fight," he went on. "Not yours. . . I don't want any . . . of you hurt. Go back. . . Will you go . . . back?"

The crowd stirred.

"You bet we will, Ben!" a man called. "Now that you're located; if you ask it, we will!"

Tim Jeffers worked his way to Ben's side and put a hand on his shoulder, listening to what Able told him.

"Go home, boys!" Tim Jeffers called. "They killed Ben last night but he's well took care of. You teamsters, get out your horses; we've found what we come for. To camp, every last Hoot Owl hand!"

Men relaxed. The post that was to have shattered in Brandon's door was dropped. The mob was satisfied.

Slowly Ben Elliott made his way back to Dawn's home.

As Tim Jeffers took his place beside the sick man, Able Armitage drew into the post office entry to watch the mob disperse. Emory Sweet was standing there.

"The king is dead!" Able muttered solemnly, staring at those broken windows.

"Long live the king!" said Emory. Pause.

"Dead men tell no tales."

"No, but sometimes a corpse will kick back!"

CHAPTER XIII

FURIOUSLY, Nicholas Brandon saw as the days passed the wreckage of his power pile up on a floor of public resentment, of loosened expressions of distrust and contempt and hatred which had grown and festered unobserved for years.

As he walked along the street he saw faces leering at him from windows, and men he passed averted their glances in a gleeful sort of embarrassment, or looked at him with surlily, defiant glares.

In yard and mill he was conscious that his employees were thinking only of his fall. He discharged one man for loafing and the fellow only laughed at him. . . . Laughed!

"There's plenty of room at Hoot Owl for good hands," he said and laughed again.

That mob had not wrecked the town as they had threatened but the ruin they left was of far more consequence. Their coming had stripped Brandon of everything but his material possessions and now these only mocked him in survival.

Back in the office he paced the place like a caged animal.

Mall arrived. He took the packet of letters and drank deeply from his bottle again.

He thumbed the letters absently, until the script on one caught his eye. The envelope contained a single sheet of note paper and he unfolded it with trembling fingers. On the sheet was written:

"I never want to see you again. I know now what the whole country has known and been afraid to admit for years. I have thought you were my friend, but now I know you are my worst enemy, as you are the sworn enemy of those I love most."

"DAWN."

He stood for a time staring at the paragraph; then read it again and drained his whisky bottle. Such a note, now, was to have been expected by an ordered mind, of course, but his fevered brain had not foreseen any necessity for abandoning this, the most precious of his hopes.

A meticulous office man was Nicholas Brandon, and though he had suffered the severest blow of his experience just now he mechanically went about his habitual procedure. He had received and read a letter. It required no reply. The next step in orderly procedure was to file it.

In the great safe to which only he had combination and keys reposed two files side by side. He took both out and placed them on the desk. He opened one and a cruel smile twitched his lips. It contained letters on paper of varying size, color and quality. He rifled through these, stopping now and again to read a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph. . . . Pleas, these were; a writing . . . for help . . . and he smiled again.

In the other file were more letters, some yellowed by age and these older ones had been written in the "unfaded script of the old. . . . "Dear Uncle Nick," they all began. Always that, though the handwriting grew formed and mature until it was identical with that on the single sheet he had just read. These were Dawn McManus' letters to him, saved since her childhood.

He ran through them almost idly, his senses dulled by whisky and the calamity which had befallen him. A narrow slip of tablet paper fell out. He looked at the penciled note on one side.

"Meet us at Antler Lodge this afternoon.—Dawn."

Happier memories, that brought; of the time Dawn had brought girls home with her from school for Thanksgiving and had taken them to the hunting camp for a week-end.

Brandon had gone with the party and it was there that he had first remarked Dawn's emerging womanhood, that the desire for her had been kindled in his blood; there in the camp where her father, as the whole country knew, had been with Sam Faxon on the night when Faxon died to his death. But Dawn had never known that. She had laughed and been happy at Antler lodge.

"Meet us at Antler Lodge this afternoon.—Dawn."

He read it again. It bore no date; it was unsold; it betrayed no indication of the time that had passed since its inscription. The note had been left on his desk for him three years before. . . . He leaned forward sharply and his eyes narrowed. . . . After a moment he straightened and smiled oddly. A look like relief, almost like happiness spread over his face.

Fine strength of body healed Ben Elliott's wound rapidly. By mid-week he was dressed and sitting before the fire with Dawn, talking of his return to Hoot Owl on the morrow.

"And all the time I've been wondering, Dawn, why you wouldn't let me come. . . . You've been so kind, so generous, so . . . so friendly. And yet, only a few days ago, you

"I'm sorry!" she exclaimed a bit mystified. "Did I frighten you?"

"No. Not frightened. . . . My thoughts were . . . far from here."

"Haven't seen him since dinner. Don't know where he went."

"Where's Ben at?" he asked Martin.

"I don't know. Miss McManus, here, was just asking."

Martin moved to the old table Ben used for a desk.

"Sometimes he leaves a note for me when he's going away." He bent over the table, looking at the litter of papers on it. "No, he left no word. . . . Hum. . . . What's this?"

He picked up a slip of paper, read the single line inscribed on it and looked at Dawn.

"I didn't mean to pry. . . . Probably he's gone to meet you, though. This is a note for you."

"A note! Why, I. . . ." Frowning, she took the paper and read: "Meet us at Antler Lodge this afternoon.—Dawn."

"Why!" she cried. "I didn't. . . . But I must have!" looking from one to the other. "That's my writing."

"Oh!" She let the paper flutter to the floor.

"I wrote that! I wrote that years ago!" she cried, struggling to speak distinctly. "I wrote that note for Mr. Brandon. . . . Years ago. . . . How did it get here? Who is calling Ben to the lodge?"

"Don't you see?" Martin cried and his voice was thick. "Dawn wrote it, all right. But he's sent it to Ben. . . . It's a decoy! Tim, the lad's on his way to the lodge alone and Brandon's planned it!"

No need for more words, then! On went Martin's jacket. From a corner he snatched snowshoes and a pair for Tim.

"We'll go," he said to Dawn. "You tell Buller—"

"But I'm going, too!" the girl cried sharply. "I'm going. Oh, hurry, Tim! We may be too late, now!"

They crossed the railroad tracks at a run, put on their snowshoes and with Jeffers breaking trail, entered the timber. Another had gone that way today, a man whose heart burned and sang. Dawn had sent for him; Dawn wanted him!

Entering the office while Martin was in the mill his eyes had encountered Dawn's note. No thought of how it came to be there presented itself. The quick conclusion at which he arrived was that Dawn and others had gone to Antler Lodge; that was where the shot had been fired which sent Sam Faxon to his death. Perhaps Able had taken Dawn there. Hastily, he took his snowshoes and departed.

The distance was a good five miles, however, and part of the going was in soft footing. So it was nearly two hours after his start that he came in sight of the building on the high bank of the Mad Woman.

"That's foolish! . . . It's terrible I know for you to bear. But let

me help, dear girl; let me stand by your side and help!"

"No, no! I can't bear it! I couldn't take a cloud to you and to your children. . . . And it's all a mistake, all a lie! My father was no killer!" Her voice rose in sharp conviction on that. "He was kind and gentle; he never would hurt another. All these years I've known it and others know it, but just being sure in our own minds isn't enough. The whole world must know! Something tells me my father is alive somewhere, waiting, watching, suffering. . . . But until we can prove that or something else comes up to banish this cloud. . . . No, don't kiss me again! I can't stand it, I tell you! I can't stand it, Ben!"

Sobbing, she fled from the room.

He made no further moves toward love making after that but far into the night he talked with Dawn of her father. She had not heard all of the story, he realized. She did not know, for instance, that the tragedy which preceded McManus' disappearance took place in Antler lodge; she did not know how far her father had gone in his attempts to drown sorrow of his wife's death by drinking. But she did know that Faxon was dead, that her father was blamed and that a dusty warrant for his arrest on a charge of homicide still reposed in the county records.

Next day he declared that he felt fit to drive back to camp and for an hour argued with Dawn, trying to win her promise that he might come again, but she begged him to stay away for a time, at least.

CHAPTER XIV

ABLE told Dawn of Ben's activity, watching her face narrowly because he understood the obstacle that was between these two. He saw hope come, followed by misgiving and trouble.

It was on Friday that Dawn left Tincup, striking across country far from the road toward Hoot Owl.

She was going to see Ben Elliott and tell him that she must see him now, that her heart could have no peace without him; that he must come to her and let her stand beside him while he tried into the past and attempted to make it give up truth.

Martin was alone in the office when she entered and started up so sharply at sight of her that the girl, in turn, was startled.

"I'm sorry!" she exclaimed a bit mystified. "Did I frighten you?"

"No. Not frightened. . . . My thoughts were . . . far from here."

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TO BE CONTINUED.

CONFESSIONS

By R. H. WILKINSON

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RUBELLA HAMPSTEAD is a famous writer.

Her name is featured in all the leading magazines of the country.

She has three novels to her credit, and it has been announced that a fourth is to be brought out next fall.

Rubella cannot attribute her achievements to any mysterious or inherited gift.

Her fame is the result of hard word and study, of constant, tireless plugging, of the triumph of determination and the will to write over heart-rendering discouragement, of a love for her work, grimness, perseverance and a sense of humor.

In short, Rubella is no natural born genius, no worker of miracles; her rewards are just and well earned.

Some few months ago the good people of Rubella's home town held a reception in honor of their distinguished townsman.

Among those present was one Lena Norman, a newcomer to Maplewood, a woman of some social prominence—and also a writer.

Unfortunately, however, Lena is an "unknown" writer. She has acquired no fame, has had little success with her literary efforts. And she is inclined to be somewhat bitter about her fate.

Despite the recognized fame of the guest of honor, Lena's regard for Rubella was somewhat skeptical (a skepticism, doubtless, born of envy).

She was, in fact, heard to remark that Rubella had doubtless won her reputation through some sort of drag and was now trading upon the selling power of her name. She even went so far as to suggest that Rubella's "stuff" wasn't so good, when you compared it with real literature, and she probably wouldn't know a good story if she saw one.

Of course Lena in no way betrayed this skepticism when Rubella was within earshot.

In fact she was, on the contrary, quite gushy and complimentary.

However, as the evening progressed and honor after honor was heaped on the smiling Rubella, one watching Lena's face would have noticed that skepticism and bitterness were becoming more and more in evidence.

It was toward the end of the evening that Lena succeeded in getting Rubella alone in a secluded part of the hall.

Said Lena: "My dear, I think your work is wonderful! Really! Every word of it. And I do believe I've read about everything you've had published. And now, my dear, would it be asking too much if I requested a favor?"

Rubella, though certain of the nature of the request, could do naught but smile and nod her head and hope that Lena was about to request a favor somewhat different from the usual run of favors requested of famous authors.

But she was doomed to disappointment.

"My dear, I know you wouldn't refuse. So sweet of you. The favor is really nothing much. It concerns a story I have just completed. A short story. It occurs to me that the yarn has some merit, yet I really would appreciate your professional advice before submitting it. Would you mind?"

Ordinarily Rubella would have refused, despite the fact that Lena would doubtless have thought her rude and selfish.

But the situation was a little different from ordinary.

In the first place, Lena was a fellow-townswoman, her hostess, in a manner of speaking. And in the second place, Rubella saw in Lena's eyes a look that was slightly baffling.

The look somehow resembled a challenge.

And so Rubella agreed to read Lena's script, though she regretted her decision a moment after it was made. However, the word was spoken and there was no alternative.

The script came to Rubella's hand on the day following, neatly typed, with Lena's name on the by-line.

Rubella glanced over the first few pages with casual indifference.

But as she delved into page No. 2 she suddenly sat upright in her chair and read on with renewed interest.

At the conclusion of the story Rubella found herself amazed and somewhat puzzled.

The story was—actually—a well done piece of work. It merited publication. It was, in fact, not the assortment of jargon that she had expected.

Rubella carefully folded the script, tucked it in her handbag, caught up a hat and headed for the house of Lena. At least she would be honest about her report.

Lena received her guest graciously. They sat down together in Lena's neat little sitting room and looked at each other curiously.

Said Rubella: "My dear, I have a confession to make. When I agreed to read your script I ex-

pected to find trash. I—I almost hoped I would. Believe me, I was tremendously surprised. It wasn't the sort of thing I expected to find at all."

Said Lena: "You actually thought the story was good?"

"I thought it was fine! Splendid! There is no reason at all why you can't place it with one of the better magazines. In fact, if you are willing, I'll handle the placing of it for you."

Lena looked thoughtful. She gazed through the window. She studied the floor.

And at length her eyes came to dwell upon the kind, smiling and friendly countenance of Rubella.

Said Lena: "My dear, you have been honest and fair with me. I, too, have a confession to make. I feel guilty and ashamed. The story that I gave you to read was not written by me. I don't know who the author is. I clipped it haphazardly from a magazine and typed it off before coming to the reception. You see, heretofore I have misunderstood famous authors. I had made the remark that your stuff wasn't so good compared with that of real literary geniuses, and that you probably wouldn't know a good story if you saw one—and I wanted to prove that I was right."

Rubella smiled a gracious smile.

"Thank you for telling me. I'm so glad you decided it was the best thing for you to do. For, you see, I knew all the time that your story was a rewrite, and, I'm ashamed to admit, I led you on, hoping you'd let me try and place it for you. I'm so glad it turned out this way. Now I'm sure we can be the best of friends."

Lena was frankly aghast.

"You knew it all the time! How wonderful! Now I'm positive that I was wrong in remarking that you couldn't tell a good story from a bad one. My dear, I'm thrilled!"

"In a way," said Rubella, "I'm thrilled, too. For, you see, the story you clipped haphazardly from the magazine happened to be one of my stories!"

Famous Oregon Ranch Is

Now a Waterfowl Refuge

Another area, unprofitable for agriculture, is being restored to the uses of wildlife in this country. The bureau of biological survey has recently completed the acquisition of the famous P-Ranch in Harney county, Oregon. The 64,717-acre area, now known as the Blitzen River Migratory Bird refuge, not only will be important as a sanctuary, but will also be of strategic importance in insuring a water supply for the Lake Malheur Bird refuge, which adjoins it on the north.

Federal acquisition of these lands marks the return to public ownership of an historic area. Bounded on the east by the Steens mountains, on the west by the slopes rising to the Hart mountain, and on the south also by high land, the valley is traversed by the Donner and Blitzen rivers. This stream rises in the Steen mountains and flows west into the south end of the basin, then north into Lake Malheur. As the name suggests, the area is famous for thunderstorms, which are in fact the principal source of the rainfall.

In subsequent years it has been the scene, not only of the resounding storms of the atmosphere, but also has known a "Donner and Blitzen" created by the stormy early settlers. During the years about 1870 amidst gunfights and constant struggle among various exploiters of the public domain, Peter French, locally famous, established his claims to this valley with its Teutonic name and established the P-Ranch which he made the capital of a vast cattle empire. With all the daring and shrewdness that characterized the early land settlers, French not only acquired available public lands, but also consolidated his holdings by taking over those of his rivals. He continued the enlargement of his kingdom up until the time of his death, December 26, 1897, when he was shot by a rival land owner along a boundary fence.

Since the death of the founder of the empire, the P-Ranch has been owned and managed by live stock corporations. The Blitzen river has been dammed to water the vast bottom lands, giant dredges creating ditches for the purpose, and dams being erected at intervals to control the water supply. It has at times constituted one of the greatest hay ranches in the region, and until the recent long-continued drouth was considered a profitable agricultural enterprise. With the sudden decrease in rainfall, however, and with overgrazing, the agricultural usefulness of the area has almost disappeared and at the same time the wild life species dependent upon the Blitzen river's flow have been threatened with disaster. The results extended to Lake Malheur, where this once famous area—now a federal refuge—has been almost completely dried up and rendered useless for a time.

The marshy lands, stretching 35 miles back from Lake Malheur, have always been a favorite breeding ground of migratory waterfowl. Millions of ducks and geese have bred there, and a naturalist of the biological survey counted 120 species of birds nesting on the area. Among these were 100 pairs of the rare sandhill crane. Wildlife other than birds will also be benefited.

OLD SUPER