

The RAGGED EDGE

by Harold MacGrath

"All I want is to be happy!" she said aloud as if she were asking for something of such ordinary value that God would readily accord it to her because there was so little demand for the commodity.

Thrilling, she began to dance, swirled, glided, and dipped. Whenever ecstasy—any kind of ecstasy—filled her heart to bursting, these physical expressions eased the pressure.

Fate has two methods of procedure—the sudden and the long-drawn-out. In some instances she tantalizes the victim for years and mocks him in the end. In others, she acts with the speed and surety of the loosed arrow. In the present instance she did not want any interference; she did not want the doctor's wisdom to edge in between these two young fools and spoil the drama. So she brought upon the stage the Reverend Henry Dolby, a preacher of means, worldly-wise and kindly, cheery and rotund, who, with his wife and daughter, had arrived at the Victoria that morning. Ruth met him in the hall as he was following his family into the dining room. She recognized the cloth at once, way-laid him, and with that directness of speech particularly hers she explained what she wanted.

"To be sur I will, my child. I will be up with my wife and daughter after lunch."

"We'll be waiting for you. You are very kind." Ruth turned back toward the stairs.

Later, when the Reverend Henry Dolby entered the Spurlock room, his wife and daughter trailing amusedly behind him, and beheld the strained eagerness on the two young faces, he smiled inwardly and indulgently. Here were the passionate lovers! What their past had been he neither cared nor craved to know. Their future would be glorious; he saw it in their eyes; he saw it in the beauty of their young heads. Of course, at home there would have been questions. Were the parents agreeable? Were they of age? Had the license been procured? But here, in a far country, only the velvet manacles of wedlock were necessary.

So, forthwith, without any preliminaries beyond introductions, he began the ceremony; and shortly Ruth Enschede became Ruth Spurlock, for better or for worse. Spurlock gave his full name and tremblingly inscribed it upon the certificate of marriage. The customary gold band was missing; but a soft gold Chinese ring Spurlock had picked up in Singapore—the characters representing good luck and prosperity—was slipped over Ruth's third finger.

"There is no fee," said Dolby. "I am very happy to be of service to you. And I wish you all the happiness in the world."

Mrs. Dolby was portly and handsome. There were lines in her face that age had not put there. Guiding this man of hers over the troubled sea of life had engraved these lines. He was the true optimist; and that he should proceed, serenely unconscious of reefs and storms, she accepted the double buffets.

This double buffeting had sharpened her shrewdness and insight. Where her husband saw only two youngsters in the mating mood, she felt that tragedy in some phase lurked in this room—only in the loneliness of these two, without kith or kin apparently, thousands of miles from home. Not once during the ceremony did the two look at each other, but riveted their gaze upon the lips of the man who was forging the bands: gazed intently, as if they feared the world might vanish before the last word of the ceremony was spoken.

Spurlock relaxed, suddenly, and sank deeply into his pillows. Ruth felt his hand grow cold as it slipped from hers. She bent down.

"You are all right?"—anxiously.

"Yes . . . but dreadfully tired."

Mrs. Dolby smiled. It was the moment for smiles. She approached Ruth with open arms,

and something in the way the child came into that kindly embrace hurt the older woman to the point of tears.

These passers-by who touch us but lightly and are gone, leaving the eternal imprint! So long as she lived, Ruth would always remember that embrace. It was warm, shielding, comforting, and what was more, full of understanding. It was in fact the first embrace of motherhood she had ever known. Even after this woman had gone, it seemed to Ruth that the room was kinder than it had ever been.

Inexplicably there flashed into vision the Chinese wedding procession in the narrow, twisted streets of the city, that first day; the gorgeous palanquin, the tom-toms, the weird music, the ribald, jeering mob that trailed along behind. It was surely odd that her thought should pick up that picture and recast it so vividly.

At half after five that afternoon the doctor and his friend McClintock entered the office of the Victoria.

"It's a great world," was the manager's greeting.

"So it is," the doctor agreed.

"But what, may I ask, arouses the thought?"

The doctor was in high good humour. Within forty-eight hours the girl would be on her way east and the boy see-sawing the South China Sea, for ever moving at absolute angles.

"Then you haven't heard!"

"Of what?"

"Well, well!" cried the manager, delighted at the idea of surprising the doctor. "Miss Enschede and Mr. Spurlock—our that's his real name—were married at high noon."

Emptiness; that was the doctor's initial sensation; his vitals had been whisked out of him and the earth from under his feet. All his interest in Ruth, all his care and solicitude, could now be translated into a single word—love. Wanted her out of the way because he had been afraid of her, afraid of himself! He, at fifty-four! Then into this void poured a flaming anger, a blind and unreasoning anger. He took the first step toward the stairs, and met the restraining hand of McClintock.

"Steady, old top! What are you going to do?"

"The damned scoundrel!"

"I told you that child was opal."

"She? My God, the pity of it! She knows nothing of life. She no more realizes what she has done than a child of eight. Marriage! . . . without the least conception of the physical and moral responsibilities! It's a crime, Mac!"

"But what can you do?" McClintock turned to the manager.

"It was all perfectly legal!"

"My word for it. The Reverend Henry Dolby performed the ceremony, and his wife and daughter were witnesses."

"When you heard what was going on, why didn't you send for me?"

"I didn't know it was going on. I heard only after it was all over."

"If he could stand on two feet, I'd break every bone in his worthless body!"

McClintock said soothingly: "But that wouldn't nullify the marriage, old boy. I know. Things' upset you a bit. Go easy."

"But, Mac . . .!"

"I understand," interrupted McClintock. Then, in a whisper: "But there's no reason why the whole hotel should."

The doctor relaxed. "I've got to see him; but I'll be reasonable. I've got to know why. And what will they do, and where will they go?"

"With me—the both of them. So far as I'm concerned, nothing could please me more. A married man!—the kind I've never been able to lure down there! But keep your temper in check. Don't lay it all to the boy. The girl is in it as deeply as he is. I'll wait for you down here."

When the doctor entered the bedroom and looked into the faces of the culprits, he laughed

brokenly. Two children, who had been caught in the jam-closet: ingratiating smiles, back of which lay doubt and fear.

Ruth came to him directly. "You are angry?"

"Very. You don't realize what you have done."

"My courage gave out. The thought of going back!—the thought of the unknown out there" with a tragic gesture toward the east. "I couldn't go on!"

"You'll need something more than courage now. But no more of that. What is done cannot be undone. I want to talk to Mr. Spurlock. Will you leave us for a few minutes?"

"You are not going to be harsh?"

"I wish to talk about the future."

"Very well."

She departed reluctantly. The doctor walked over to the bed, folded his arms across his chest and stared down into the unabashed eyes of his patient.

"Do you realize that you are several kinds of a damned scoundrel?" he began. This did not affect Spurlock. "Your name is Spurlock?"

"It is."

"Why did you use the name of Taber?"

"To keep my real name out of the mess I expected to make of myself over here."

"That's frank enough," the doctor admitted astonishedly. So far the boy's mind was clear.

"But to drag this innocent child into the muck! With her head full of book nonsense—love stories and fairy stories! Have you any idea of the tragedy she is bound to stumble upon some world is known to you. I can see that you were somebody, in . . . It's a damnable business!"

"I don't care about you. The another day. But this child! that which had happened—the probability older than her!"

"I shall defend her and protect her with every drop of blood in my body!" replied the flagellant.

The intensity of the eyes and the defiant tone bewildered the doctor, who found his well-constructed jeremiad without a platform. So he was forced to shift and proceed at another angle, forgetting his promise to McClintock to be temperate.

"When I went through your trunk that first night, I discovered an envelope filled with manuscripts. Later, at the bottom of that envelope I found a letter."

"To be opened in case of my death," added Spurlock. From under his pillow he dragged forth the key to the trunk.

"Here, take this and get the letter and open and read it. Would you tell her . . . now?"

his eyes flaming with mockery.

CHAPTER XVIII

The doctor reached for the key and studied it sombrely. The act was mechanical, a bit of sparring for time: his anger was searching about for a new vent. He was to start any thunder which was to start any thunder which was not based upon fairness. He had no wish to go foraging in Spurlock's trunk. He had already shown the covering envelope and its instructions to Ruth, and she had ignored or misunderstood the warning. The boy was right. Ruth could not be told now. There would be ultimate misery, but it would be needless cruelty to give her a push toward it. But all these hours, trying to teach the child wariness toward life, and the moment his back was turned, this!

He was, perhaps, still dazed by the inner revelation—his own interest in Ruth. The haste to send her upon her way now had but one interpretation—the recognition of his own immediate danger, the fear that if this tender association continued, he would end in offering her a calamity quite as impossible as love of a man who was in all father! The hurt was no less intensive because it was so ridiculous.

He would talk to Spurlock, but from the bench; as a judge, not as a chagrined lover. He dropped the key on the counterpane.

"If I could only make you realize what you have done," he said, lamely.

"I know exactly what I have done," replied Spurlock. "She is my lawful wife."

"I should have opened that letter in the beginning," said the doctor. "But I happen to be an honest man myself. Had

you died, I should have fully obeyed the instructions on that envelope. You will make her suffer."

"For every hurt she has, I shall have two. I did not lay any traps for her. I asked her to marry me, and she consented."

"Ah, yes; that's all very well. But when she learns that you are a fugitive from justice."

"What proof have you that I am?"—was the return bolt.

"A knowledge of the ways of men. I don't know what you have done; I don't want to know now. But God will punish you for what you have done this day."

"As for that I don't say. But I shall take care of Ruth, work for her and fight for her." A prophecy which was to be fulfilled in a singular way. "Given a chance, I can make bread and butter. I'm no mollycoddle. I have only one question to ask you."

"And what might that be?"

"Will McClintock take us both?"

"You took that chance. There has never been a white woman at McClintock's."

He paused, and not without malice. He was human. The pause lengthened, and he had the satisfaction of seeing despair melt the set mockery of Spurlock's mouth.

"You begin to have doubts, eh? A handful of money between you, and nothing else. There are only a few jobs over here for a man of your type; and even these are more or less hopeless if you haven't trained mechanical ability." Then he became merciful.

"But McClintock agrees to take you both—because he's as big a fool as I am. But I give you this warning, and let it sink in. You will be under the eye of the best friend I have; and if you do not treat that child for what she is—an innocent angel—I promise to hunt you across the wide world and kill you with bare hands."

Spurlock's glance shot up, flaming again. "And on my part, I shall not lift a hand to defend myself."

"I wish I could have foreseen."

"That is to say, you wish you had let me die?"

"That was the thought."

This frankness rather subdued Spurlock. His shoulders relaxed and his gaze wavered. "Perhaps that would have been best."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

GIANT AIRSHIPS MAY BE BUILT

Britain Considering Scheme Of Trans-Empire Passenger Air Service

London.—An official announcement concerning the establishment of a state subsidized commercially-run trans-empire airship service will be made shortly, it is understood.

It is unlikely that Commander Dennis Burney's scheme, which was drawn up by him and presented for Government consideration nearly two years ago, will be accepted in full.

A compromise will be effected—at least during the experimental phase of the investigations.

This will include the building and testing of two giant airship liners, one of 5,000,000 cubic feet capacity, to represent the commercial interests involved by Commander Burney's scheme and the other to be purely a government craft.

This, when built by the air ministry, will be handed over to the admiralty for experimental purposes.

The commercial craft, to be built on luxurious lines, with sleeping berths, bathrooms, and dining cars, will be designed to carry not less than 200 passengers. In a "ship" of this nature it should be possible to reach India three days after leaving London.

The government craft, it is stated, will have an effective radius of 20,000 miles, and be able to transport fighting planes, together with the personnel necessary for their operation.

Both airships will be constructed at Cardington.

The date of the formation of this empire air service depends upon the speed and the success with which the experimental work is carried out. Commander Burney declined to discuss his scheme or its reception by the special committee appointed by the cabinet to consider.

"My attendance at the special committee meetings makes it impossible for me to speak," he said.

"No doubt if and when the cabinet come to a decision they will issue an official communique. So far as I am concerned I put my views officially on record in a speech I made in the House of Commons March 29."

BABY PUZZLES N. Y. DOCTORS

Must Decide Question of Life or Death For Abnormal Children

BY EARL L. SHAUB, Universal Service Correspondent. New York, Sept. 29.—The question of what shall be done with the weak old baby of Mrs. Walter Friedmann is being pondered by physicians and authorities.

The baby was born a week ago and is said to be doomed to idleness if it lives. It is of the Mongol type, without brains and with no provision in the back of its head for essential glandular growth.

Two nurses told the authorities that Dr. Oscar Spier, the physician in attendance, had ordered them to let it starve to death. This they refused to do, they said, and when the physician said that his orders were being violated he took the child away in his instrument case.

A dozen detectives were sent to search for the baby, dead or alive, and to question the physician. Both were found, the child in another hospital, still alive.

"It should die," said the doctor. "But the police are wrong this time. I did not kill it. However, I took it away so the mother might not see it. Otherwise she would die from horror."

The father, who accompanied the physician when he took the child away, was not found, although detectives looked for him.

The case gave rise to the old question of whether a physician or anyone else has the power of life and death over an abnormal child.

DAVIS TO INVADE MIDWEST AGAIN

Plans More Than Score of Speeches Before Election Day

BY SEARS TAYLOR, Universal Service Correspondent. New York, Sept. 29.—John W. Davis will leave here Tuesday on a second whirlwind tour of the western states in his campaign for the presidency of the United States.

During the next month Davis will make more than a score of speeches in as many different cities, in addition to a large number of short addresses from the rear platform of his special train.

The candidate's party will leave New York at midnight Tuesday for Frederick, Md., where he will speak Wednesday afternoon. In the evening he will deliver an address at Baltimore and return to New York Thursday morning.

Thursday night he will speak before a mass meeting at Madison Square Garden. Governor Smith of New York will also address the meeting.

Madison Square Garden also will be the scene of the close of the Davis campaign. He will make his last appeal for the return of the democratic party to power in the Garden on the Saturday night before election day.

Davis is leaving this city confident of his success. He points to the demonstration accorded him in Bunceton, Mo., and other cities during his recent western tour as evidence of the fact that his campaign is attracting more than ordinary attention.

Man Given Five Years On Charge of Embezzlement

Five years in the state prison at Fort Madison, Ia., was the sentence imposed on George Pendergrast when he pled guilty last Monday, to an indictment charging embezzlement before District Judge Miles W. Newby. He was specifically charged with misuse of \$115 belonging to his employer, Byron E. Brown, piano dealer.

Another indictment, charging forgery, also brought on complaint by Brown, was quashed by the court on motion of O. D. Nickle, assistant county attorney.

Denies Exclusive Council Authority to Change Taxes

Des Moines, Ia., Sept. 29. (Special)—The state executive council has no power to change assessments, once certified, except to correct errors, and changes of valuation cannot be made, Attorney General Ben Gibson ruled in an opinion which had been requested by the executive council. On September 12, the council revised the assessments of the Fort Dodge Telephone company and of the Western Electric Telephone system, on condition that it had authority to make the changes. Attorney General Gibson held that the change should not be made.

Steal Auto From Detective Who Arrested Them Before

Waterloo, Ia., Sept. 29.—Because Emil Steffans, city detective here, arrested them on a previous occasion, Wilbur Brewster of Des Moines and Elliot of Waterloo, stole his light coupe and started for Chicago. They were arrested at Galent, Ill., charged with robbing a store there. Steffans is bringing the pair back to this city for trial in the auto stealing case.

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Whale of an Infant
According to Mr. Henry Nesbit, an American authority, the whale is a mammal, and the female bears one whale calf a year. Until the young fish is six months old it is nursed by the mother just as any land baby of the mammal type is. A mother whale has been seen to swim through the water with its young cradled in its flippers.

Love's blindness is not incurable. Otherwise there would be no breach-of-promise suits.

He who will not stoop for a pin shall never be worth a pint.

Weak and Miserable?

Are you dull, tired and achy—bothered with a bad back? Do you lack ambition, suffer headaches and dizziness—feel "all worn out"? Likely your kidneys are to blame. Lameless, sharp, stabbing pains, backache and annoying urinary disorders are all symptoms of weakened kidneys. Don't wait for more serious trouble. Get back your health and keep it! Use Doan's Pills, a stimulant diuretic to the kidneys. Thousands of folks tell their merit. Ask your neighbor!

An Iowa Case
Mrs. Albert Luck, Seventh Ave., and Fourteenth St., Eldora, Iowa, says: "My back ached and I couldn't do my work during the day and at night the pain was worse and I didn't know what it was to get the night's rest. My kidneys acted too frequently and I had headaches and dizzy spells. Doan's Pills drove away the trouble."

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