

The RAGGED EDGE

by Harold MacGrath

CHAPTER XX

To Spurlock it seemed as if a great iron door had swung in behind him, shutting out the old world. He was safe, out of the beaten track, at last really comparable to the needle in the haystack. The terrific mental tension of the past few months—that had held his bodily nourishment in a kind of stragulation—became as a dream; and now his vitals responded rapidly to food and air. On the second day out he was helped to a steamer chair on deck; on the third day, his arm across Ruth's shoulder, he walked from his chair to the foremast and back. The will to live had returned.

For five days The Tigress chugged her way across the burnished South China, grumpily, as if she resented this meddling with her destiny. She had been built for canvas and oil-lamps, and this new thingumajig that kept her nose snoring at eight knots when normally she was able to, boil along at ten, and these unblinking things they called lamps (that neither smoked nor smelled), irked and threatened to ruin her temper.

On the sixth day, however, they made the strong southwest trade, and broke out the canvas, stout if dirty; and The Tigress answered as a bird released. Taking the wind was her business in life. She creaked, groaned, and rattled; but that was only her way of yawning when she awoke.

The sun-canvas was stowed; and Spurlock's chair was set forward the foremast, where the bulging jib cast a sliding blue shadow over him. Rather a hazardous spot for a convalescent, and McClintock had been doubtful at first; but Spurlock declared that he was a good sailor, which was true. He loved the sea, and could give a good account of himself in any weather. And this was an adventure of which he had dreamed from boyhood; aboard a windjammer on the South Seas.

There were mysterious sounds, all of them musical. There were swift actions, too: a Kanaka crawled out upon the bowsprit to make taut a slack stay, while two others with pulley-blocks swarmed aloft. Occasionally the canvas snapped as the wind veered slightly. The sea was no longer rolling brass; it was bluer than anything he had ever seen. Every so often a wall of water, thin and jade-colored, would rise up over the port bow, hesitate, and fall smacking amidships. Once the ship faltered, and the tip of this jade wall broke into a million gems and splashed him liberally. Ruth, standing by heard his true laughter for the first time.

This laughter released something that had been striving for expression—her own natural buoyancy. She came as The Tigress, a free thing. She dropped beside the chair, sat cross-legged, and laughed at the futile jade-colored wall. There was no past, no future, only this exhilarating present. Yesterday! who cared? To-morrow!—who knew?

"Porpoise," she said, touching his hand.

"Fox-terriers of the sea; friends with every ship that comes along. Funny codgers, aren't they?" he said.

"When you are stronger we'll go up to the cutwater and watch them from there."

"I have . . . from many ships."

A shadow, which was not cast by the jib, fell upon them both. His voice had changed, the joy gone out of it; and she understood that something from the past had rolled up to spoil this hour. But she did not know what he knew, that it would always be rolling up, enlivened by suggestion, no matter how trifling.

What had actually beaten him was not to have known if someone had picked up his trail. The acid of this uncertainty had disintegrated his nerve; and in Canton had come the smash. But that was all over. Nobody could possibly find him now.

The doctor would never betray him. He might spend the rest of his days at McClintock's in perfect security.

McClintock, coming from below, saw them and went forward. "Well, how goes it?" he asked.

"Thank you, sir," said Spurlock, holding out his hand.

McClintock, without comment, accepted the hand. He rather liked the "sir"; it signified both gratefulness and the chastened spirit.

"And I want to thank you, too," supplemented Ruth.

"Tut, tut! Don't exaggerate. I needed a man the worst kind of way—a man I could keep for at least six months. What do you think of the old tub?"

"She's wonderful!" cried Ruth. "I love her already. I had no idea she could go so fast."

"Know anything about ships?"

"This kind. I have seen many of them. Once a sick sailor drew three pictures for me and set down every stay and brace and sail—square-rigger, schooner and sloop. But this is the first time I've ever sailed on any one of the three. And I find I can't tell one stay from another!"

McClintock laughed. "You can't go to sea with a book of rules. The Tigress is second-hand, built for coast-trade. There used to be an after-deckhouse and a shallow well for the wheel; but I changed that. Wanted a clean sweep for elbow-room. Of course I ought to have some lights over the saloon; but by leaving all the cabin doors open in the daytime, there's plenty of daylight. She's not for pleasure, but work. Some day I'm going to paint her; but that will be when I've retired."

Ruth laughed. "The doctor said something about that."

"I'll tell you really why I keep her in pealed paint. Natives are queer. I have established a fine trade. She is known everywhere within the radius of five hundred miles. But if I painted her as I'd like to, the natives would instantly distrust me; and I'd have to build up confidence all over again. I did not know you spoke Kanaka," he broke off.

"So the watchman told you? I've always spoken it, though I can neither read nor write it."

"I never heard of anybody who could," declared McClintock. "I have had Kanakas who could read and write in Dutch, and English, and though the Kanaka—which means man—is a Sandwich Islander, with a Malay base. He's the only native I trust in these parts. My boys are all Sandwich Island born. I wouldn't trust a Malay, not if he were reared in the Vatican."

Spurlock, who was absorbing this talk thirstily, laughed.

"What's that?" demanded McClintock.

"The idea of a Malay, born Mahometan, being reared in the Vatican, hit me as funny."

"It would be funny—just as a trustworthy Malay would be funny. I have a hundred of them—mixed blood—on my island and they are always rooking me. But none ever puts his foot on this boat. To-morrow we'll raise our first island. And from then on we'll see them, port and starboard, to the end of the voyage. I've opened the case of books. They're on the forward lounge in the saloon. Take your pick, Mrs. Spurlock."

The shock of hearing this title pronounced was equally distributed between Ruth and her husband; but it aroused two absolutely different emotions. There came to Spurlock the recurrence of the grim resolution of what he had set out to do: that comradeship was all he might ever give this exquisite creature; for she was exquisite, and in a way she dominated this picture of sea and sky and sail. Ruth's emotion was a primitive joy; she was essential in this man's life, and she would always be happy because he would always be needing her.

"You will be wanting your broth, Hoddy," she said. "I'll fetch it."

She made the companion without touching stay or rail, which necessitated a fine sense of balance, for there was a growing vigor to the wind and a corresponding lift to the roll of the sea. The old-fashioned dress, with its series of ruffles and printed flowers, ballooned treacherously, revealing her well-turned leg in silk stockings as it snapped against her body as a maul.

Silk. In Singapore that had been her only dissipation: a dozen pairs of stockings. She did not question or analyze the craving, she took the plunge joyously. It was the first expression of the mother's blood. Woman's love of silk is not set by fashion; it is bred in the bone; and somewhere, somehow, a woman will have her bit of silk.

McClintock watched her interestedly until her golden head vanished below; then with tolerant pity, he looked down at Spurlock, who had closed his eyes. She would always be waiting upon his boy, he mused. Proper enough now, when he could not help himself, but the habit would be formed, and when he was strong again it would become the normal role, hers to give and his to receive. He wondered if the young fool had any idea of what he had drawn in this tragic lottery called marriage. Probably hadn't. As for that, what man ever had?

"That's a remarkable young woman," he offered, merely to note what effect it would have.

Spurlock looked up. "She's glorious!" He knew that he must hoodwink this keen-eyed Scot, even as he must hoodwink everybody: publicly, the devoted husband; privately, to celebrate. He was continually dramatizing the future, anticipating the singular role he had elected to play. He saw it in book-covers, on the stage. "Did you ever see the like of her?"

"No," answered McClintock, gravely. "I wonder how she picked up Kanaka! On her island they don't talk Kanaka lingo."

Her island! How well he knew it, thought Spurlock, for all he lacked the name and whereabouts! Suddenly a new thought arose and buffeted him. How little he knew about Ruth—the background from which she sprung! He knew that her father was a missionary, that her mother was dead, that she had been born on this island and that at the time of his collapse, she had been on the way to an aunt in the States. But what did he know beyond these facts? Nothing, clearly. Oh, yes; of Ruth herself he knew much; but the more he mulled over what he knew, the deeper grew his chagrin. The real Ruth was as completely hidden as though she stood behind the walls of Agra Fort. But after all, what did it matter whether she had secrets or not? To him she was not a woman but a symbol; and one did not investigate the antecedents of symbols.

"She tells me there was a Kanaka cook; been in the family as long as she can remember."

"I see. I deal with the Malay mostly; but twice a year I visit islands occupied by the true blacks, recently cured of their ancient taste for long-pig."

"What's that?"

"Think it over," said McClintock, grimly.

"Good Lord!—cannibals?"

"Aye. Someday I'll take you down there and have them rig up the cocoanut dance for you. The Malays have one, too, but it's a rank imitation, tom-toms and all. But what I want to get at is this. If your wife can coach you a bit in native lingo, it will help all around. I have two Malay clerks in the store; but I'm obliged to have a white man to watch over them, or they'd clean me out. Single pearls—Lord knows where they come from—are always turning up some of them of fine lustre; but I never set eyes on them. My boys buy them with beads or bolts of calico of mine. They steal over to Copley's at night and dispose of the pearl for cash. That's how I finally got wind of it. Primarily your job will be to balance the stores against the influx of cocorut and keep an eye on these boys. There'll be busy days and idle. Everything goes—the copra for oil, the fibre of the husk for rope, and the shell for car-

bon. If you fall upon a good pearl, buy it in barter and pay me out of your salary."

"Pearls!"

"Sounds romantic, eh? Well, forty years ago the pearl game hereabouts was romantic; but there's only one real pearl region left—the Persian Gulf. In these waters the shell has about given out. Still, they bob up occasionally. I need a white man if only to talk to; and it will be a god send to talk to someone of your intelligence. The doctor said you wrote."

"Trying to?"

"Well, you'll have lots of time down there."

Here Ruth returned with the broth; and McClintock strode aft, convinced that he was going to have something far more interesting than books to read.

Spurlock stared at Ruth across the rim of his bowl. He was vaguely uneasy; he knew not what about. Here was the same Ruth who had left him a few minutes since: the same outwardly; and yet . . . !

On the ninth day Spurlock was up and about; that is, he was strong enough to walk alone, from the companion to his chair, to lean upon the wall when the chair grew irksome, to join Ruth and his employer at lunch and dinner: strong enough to argue about books, music, paintings. He was, in fact, quite eager to go on living.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

CONSTRUCTION IN U. S. SHOWS GAIN

Contract Awards in First Six Months Exceed Those of First Half of 1923

New York, Aug. 15.—Construction operations in the United States for the first six months of this year increased 0.71 per cent over the same period in 1923, Engineering News-Record reports. Totals of contract awards for the period this year were \$1,028,505,000, as against \$1,019,230,000 up to the end of June in 1923.

The southern states show the greatest increase in construction for the six month period compared with that of last year or with any of the other sections. The increase is 26.6 per cent, making the 1924 half year total \$117,623,000.

Construction is holding relatively high rates in southern, western and middle atlantic sections. Substantial increases in these sections are shown month by month over their records of last year with the exception that the southern section fell below in June, the western in March and the middle atlantic in April.

The middle atlantic section shows an increase of 16.5 per cent over the first six months of last year with aggregate awards of \$321,035,000. The city of New York has had an unprecedented building period but the increase of this section cannot be accredited to that of the city alone, as the reported statistics show construction work has been active throughout the section.

The middle west shows the greatest reduction in construction, falling 30.9 per cent, below the 1923 period. The 1924 six month figure for this section is \$210,190,000. West of the Mississippi, the total of \$163,850,000 is 12.1 per cent, short of the 1923 figure. New England is 6.1 per cent, under the same period of last year with its total of \$61,278,000.

Most of the classes of construction show an increased money value of awards for this six month summary. The most active ones are sewers, bridges, excavation and irrigation, streets and roads, commercial buildings.

Chinese Blame Temple Fire on Angry "Great Dog"

Shanghai.—One of the oldest landmarks in Shanghai and an object of interest to thousands of foreign tourists each year was lost when the zung wang miao, or city emperor's temple, was destroyed by fire during the "Festival of the Ghosts."

The temple, situated in the Chinese city, about a mile from the foreign settlement, was near the famous willow tree pattern tea house, the original of the tea house appearing on so much chinaware. It was built during the time of the Ming emperors, about 1500 and had served as a place of worship and festival day and night ever since that time.

After making offerings in the temple, the Chinese, with the City God enshrined in a gaudily decorated chair, paraded through the city. While the procession was in progress and the temple deserted the fire broke out, and when the celebrants returned to the temple the building was smouldering in ruins.

Because it occurred on the day of the "Festival of the Ghosts" and because at the same time an eclipse of the moon was in progress, all sorts of causes are given. The "great dog" (the eclipse), being unable to swallow the moon (the empress) and thereby separate her from her heavenly lover (the sun), set fire to the temple in revenge. Eclipses, according to the Chinese, are merely attempts of the "great dog" to swallow the moon.

BERLIN CABINET CRISIS COMES TO ABRUPT END

President Ebert Dissolves Reichstag—Germany Faces Election

BY KARL H. VON WIEGAND, Universal Service Correspondent. Berlin, Oct. 20.—The German reichstag and "Dawes reichstag" was dissolved by a decree of President Ebert late Monday night.

As a result, Germany like America and England, will have elections which will probably take place between November 30 and December 7. That is the dramatic climax to the very undramatic cabinet crisis which has dragged on for exactly a month and led to so much inter-party bickering and attempted trading that it nearly degenerated into a farce.

The dissolution marks a defeat for Stresemann whose party precipitated the cabinet crisis with the demand that Chancellor Marx reorganize the cabinet to include German nationalists.

All attempts in that direction came to an end when democrats refused to work with the nationalists in the same government on the ground that their presence put the cabinet's present policy of international conciliation in jeopardy, as without them it could scarcely count on a workable majority.

Behind the cabinet crisis and the election fight there are bigger issues than jobs and personalities. The real issue, the one that will play the biggest role in the election campaign, is the burdens under the Dawes plan, which the reichstag accepted. That also is the real reason behind the original move of Stresemann's party, for this party as well as the nationalists, is dominated by big business, big industrialists and a big agrarian combination. These two parties would have dominated the reichstag and therefore dictated all the laws of distributing the tax burden under the Dawes plan.

Against this one-sided domination the democrats took a firm stand. Marx wouldn't agree to a cabinet without them.

The new election is expected to bring about a big shrinkage of both the communists and the Ludendorff radicals, the two extremist parties.

A general consolidation of the moderate parties is probable but the complexion of the future cabinet is very much in doubt.

HELIUM GAS FOR ZR-3 IS ASSURED

Supply to Be Shipped From Plant in Texas Soon

BY W. BOYD GATEWOOD, Universal Service Correspondent.

Fort Worth, Tex., Oct. 20.—A trail load of helium, noninflammable gas used by the United States government for its dirigibles, will shortly be on its way to Lakehurst, N. J., for the mighty ZR-3. America's newest dreadnaught of the skies, it was announced here Monday.

Lt. Z. W. Wicks, commander of the helium plant here, told Universal Service that an order for 2,000,000 cubic feet of gas had been received from Washington and that shipments will begin at once.

This dispels rumors that a shortage of helium existed at the local plant, the only one of its kind in the world.

The shipment of such a vast quantity of the nonexplosive gas will require 24 cars into which 14,000 large metal drums will be loaded to transport the rare gas to the mammoth hangar at Lakehurst.

There is sufficient gas on hand at the plant to fill the order for the ZR-3 and to re-inflate the Shenandoah when it ties up here at the mooring mast enroute to Lakehurst on the last leg of its 9,000 mile transcontinental test flight.

The order for helium to inflate the ZR-3 likewise establishes definitely that the bureau of aeronautics does not intend to perform a transatlantic operation on the Shenandoah, draining its helium to swell the gas bags of the ZR-3, as was first reported.

Plans are being made to supply the Shenandoah when it arrives here, and it is expected the big ship will anchor here two days to take on gas, fuel and supplies.

New York Bank Employees Form "White Collar" Union

New York, Oct. 20.—Ernest Bohm, secretary of the Bookkeepers, Stenographers and Accountants union, announced that the Bankers Trust company and the New York Trust company, employing about 1,700 persons, had granted their employees permission to join the union. Bank officers, however, would not confirm the announcement.

Burns Prove Fatal to Blind Wife of Invalid

Chicago, Oct. 20.—Mrs. Henry J. Dericken, Evanston, died Sunday from burns received Saturday evening while cooking dinner for her invalid husband. Mrs. Dericken was blind. When her clothing caught fire she rushed to her husband, who was in his little cigar store below their home. A customer, C. C. McDougall, extinguished the flames while the helpless husband watched.

Advice to Suffering Women!

Springfield, Mo.—"I had a nervous breakdown and tried several remedies without getting any permanent benefit from them. I suffered from bloating, chills and terrible headaches. Finally, a lady advised me to try Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription; I did so, and it overcame the trouble completely and I have enjoyed good health ever since. I advise all suffering women to give the 'Prescription' a fair trial."—Mrs. Bert Faulkner, 2069 Howard Ave. Obtain this "Prescription" of your nearest dealer, liquid or tablets; or send 10c to Dr. Pierce's Invalids' Hotel in Buffalo, N. Y., for trial pack, and write for free advice.



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1 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon
½ teaspoon salt
Flour for drop batter

Melt the butter in the boiling water and add the molasses, then other ingredients sifted together. Drop from a spoon onto a greased baking tin, having the cakes some distance apart. Bake in a hot oven, 350 degrees F.

An ideal mother is one who knows which one to spank when all appear equally guilty.



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