

The RAGGED EDGE

by
Harold MacGrath

He offered cigars, and Ruth got up. She always left the table when they began to smoke. Spurlock had not coached her on this line of conduct. Somewhere she had read that it was the proper thing to do and that men liked to be alone with their tobacco. She hated to leave; for this hour would be the most interesting. Both Spurlock and McClintock stood by their chairs until she was gone.

"Yes, sir," said McClintock, as he sat down; "that's South Sea stuff, that yarn of yours. I like the way you shared it. I have read that authors are very selfish and self-centred."

"Oh, Ruth couldn't put it on paper, to be sure; but there was no reason to hide the source."

"Have you told her?"
"Told her? Told her what?"
Spurlock sat straight in his chair.
"You know what I mean," said the trader, gravely. "In spots you are a thoroughbred; but here's a black mark on your ticket, lad. My friend the doctor suspected it, and so do I. You are not a tourist seeking adventure. You have all the earmarks of a fugitive from justice."

Spurlock grew limp in his chair. "If you thought that, why did you give me this job?"—his voice faint and thick.

"The doctor and I agreed to give you a chance—for her sake. Without realizing what she has done, she's made a dreadful mess of it. A child—as innocent as a child! Nothing about life; bemused by the fairy stories you writers call novels! I don't know what you have done; I don't care. But you must tell her."

"I can't! I can't—now!"
"But!—can't you see that she's the kind who would understand and forgive? She loves you."

The walls appeared to rock; bulging shadows reached out; the candle flames became mocking eyes; and the blood drummed thunderously in Spurlock's ears. The door to the apocalypse had opened!

"Loves me? . . . Ruth?"
"Why the devil not? Why do you suppose she married you if she didn't love you? While you read I watched her face. It was in her eyes—the big thing that comes but once. But you! Why the devil did you marry her? That's the thing that confounds me."

"God help me, what a muddle!" The cigar crumbled in Spurlock's hand.

"All life is a muddle, and we are all muddlers, more or less. It is a matter of degree. Lord, I am sixty. For thirty years I have lived alone; but once upon a time I lived among men. I know life. I sit back now, letting life slip by and musing upon it; and I find my loneliness sweet. I have had my day; and there were women in it. So, when I tell you she loves you, I know. Supposing they find you and take you away!—and she unprepared? Have you thought of that? Why did you marry her?"

"God alone knows!"
"And you don't love her! What kind of a woman do you want, anyhow?"—with rising anger. He saw the tragedy on the boy's face; but he was merciless. "Are you a poltroon, after all?"

"That's it! I ought to have died that night!"
"Or is there a taint of insanity in your family history? Alone and practically penniless like yourself! You weren't even stirred by gratitude. You just married her. Lad, that fuddles me!"

"Did you bring me down here to crucify me?" cried Spurlock, in passionate rebellion.

"No, lad," said McClintock, his tone becoming kindly. "Only, what you have done is out of all human calculation. You did not marry her because you loved her; you did not marry her because she might have had money; you did not marry her out of gratitude; you did not marry her because you had to. You just married her! But there she is—with her eyes full of sapphires and her mouth full of pearls!" McClintock quoted with gentle irony. "What have you got there in

your breast—a stone? Is there blood or water in your veins?"

The dam broke, but not with violence. A vast relief filled Spurlock's heart as he decided to tell this man everything which related to Ruth. This island was the one haven he had; he might be forced to remain here for several years—until the Hand had forgotten him. He must win this man's confidence, even at the risk of being called mad. So, in broken, rather breathless phrases, he told his story; and when he had done, he laid his arms upon the table and bent his head to them.

There followed a silence which endured several minutes; or, rather a tableau. The candles—for McClintock never used oil in his dining room—were burning low in the sconces. Occasionally the flames would bend, twist and writhe crazily as the punkaboy bestirred himself.

McClintock's astonishment merged into a state of mild hypnosis. That any human being could conceive and execute such a thing! A Roundhead, here in these prosaic times!—and mad as a hatter! Trying the role of St. Anthony, when God Himself had found only one man strong enough for that! McClintock shook his head violently, as if to dismiss this dream he was having. But the objects in his range of vision remained unchanged. Presently he reached out and laid his hand upon Spurlock's motionless shoulders.

"'Tis a cruel thing you've done, lad. Even if you were sick in the mind and did not understand what you were doing, it's a mighty cruel thing you have done. Probably she mistook you; probably she thought you cared. I'm neither an infidel nor an agnostic, so I'll content myself by saying that the hand of God is in this somewhere. 'He's a good fellow, and 'twill all end well' You have set out to do something which is neither God's way nor man's. What'll you be doing?"
"What can I do?" asked Spurlock, raising his haggard face.
"Can't you see? I can't hurt her, if . . . if she cares! I can't tell her I'm a madman as well as a thief! . . . What a fool! What a fool!"

A thief. McClintock's initial revulsion was natural; he was an honest man. But this revulsion was engulfed by the succeeding waves of pity and understanding. One transgression; he was sure of that. The boy was all conscience, and he suffered through this conscience to such lengths that the law would be impotent to add anything. All this muddle to placate his conscience!
"Here—quick!" McClintock thrust a cigar into Spurlock's hand. "Put it in your teeth and light it. I hear her coming."
Spurlock obeyed mechanically. The candle was shaking in his hand as Ruth appeared in the doorway.

"I thought we were going to have some music," she said.

Her husband stared at her over the candle flame. Flesh and blood, vivid, alluring; she was no longer the symbol, therefore she had become, as in the twinkling of an eye, an utter stranger. And this utter stranger . . . loved him! He had no reason to doubt McClintock's statement; the Scot had solved the riddle why Ruth Enschede had married Howard Spurlock. All emotions laid hold of him, but none could he stay long enough to analyze it. For a space he rode the whirligig.
"We were talking shop," said McClintock, rising. Observing Spurlock's spell-bound attitude, he clapped the boy on the shoulder. "Come along! We'll start that concert right away."

In the living room Spurlock's glance was constantly drawn toward Ruth; but in fear that she might sense something wrong, he walked over to the piano and struck a few chords.

"You play?" asked McClintock, who was sorting the rolls.
"A little. This is a good piano."

"It ought to be; it cost enough to get it here," said the Scot, ruefully. "Ever play one of these machines?"

"Yes. I've always been more or less music-mad. But machinery will never approach the hand."

"I know a man . . . But I'll tell you about him some other time. I'm crazy over music, too. I can't pump out all there is in those compositions. Try something."

Spurlock gratefully accepted the Grieg concerto; gratefully, because it was brilliant and thunderous. Papillon would have broken him down; anything tender would have sapped his will; and like as not he would have left the stool and rushed into the night. He played for an hour—Grieg, Chopin, Rubenstein, Liszt, crashing music. The action steadied him; and there was a phase of irony, too, that helped. He had been for months without music of the character he loved—and he dared not play any of it!

McClintock, after the music began, left the piano and sat in a corner just beyond the circle of light cast by the lamp. His interest was divided: while his ears drank in the sounds, his glance constantly roved from Ruth to the performer and back to Ruth. These amazing infants!

Suddenly he came upon the true solution: that the boy hadn't meant to steal whatever it was he had stolen. A victim of one of those mental typhoons that scatter irretrievably the barriers of instinct and breeding; and he had gone to the rocks all in a moment. Never any doubt of it. That handsome, finely drawn face belonged to a soul with clean ideals. All in a moment. McClintock's heart went out to Spurlock; he would always be the boy's friend, even though he had dragged this girl on to the rocks with him.

Love and lavender, he thought, perhaps wistfully. He could remember when women laid away their gowns in lavender—as this girl's mother had. He would always be her friend, too. That boy—blind as a bat! Why, he hadn't seen the Woman until tonight!

From the first chord of the Grieg concerto to the finale of the Chopin ballade, Ruth had sat tensely on the edge of her chair. She had dreaded the beginning of this hour. What would happen to her? Would her soul be shaken, twisted, hypnotized?—as it had been those other times? Music—that took out of her sense of reality, whirled her into the clouds, that gave to her will the directness energy of a chip of wood on stormy waters. But before the Grieg concerto was done, she knew that she was free. Free! All the fine ecstasy, without the numbing terror.

Spurlock sat limply, his arms hanging. McClintock, striking a match to relight his cigar, broke the spell. Ruth sighed; Spurlock stood up and drew his hand across his forehead as if awakening from a dream.

"I didn't know the music had such stuff in it," said McClintock. "I imagine I must have a hundred rolls—all the old fellows. It's a sorry world," he went on. "Nobody composes any more, nobody paints, nobody writes—I mean, on a par with what we've just heard."

The clock ticked ten. Shortly Ruth and Spurlock took the way home. They walked in silence. With a finger crooked in his side-pocket, she measured her step with his, her senses still dizzy from the echo of the magic sounds. At the threshold of the study he bade her good-night; but he did not touch her forehead with his lips.

"I feel like work," he lied. What he wanted desperately was to be alone.

"But you are tired!"
"I want to go over the story again."

"Mr. McClintock liked it."
"He couldn't help it, Ruth. It's big, thanks to you."
"You . . . need me a little?"

"Not a little, but a great deal."
That satisfied something of her undefined hunger. She went to her bedroom, but she did not go to bed. She drew a chair to the window and stared at the splendour of the tropical night. By and by she heard the screen door. Rollo rumbled in his throat.

"Hush!" she said.
Presently she saw Spurlock on the way to the lagoon. He walked with bent head. After quarter of an hour, she followed.

The unexpected twist—his dis-

closure to McClintock—had given Spurlock but temporary relief. The problem had returned made gigantic by the possibility of Ruth's love. The thought alured him, and therein lay the danger. If it were but the question of his reason for marrying her, the solution would have been simple. But he was a thief, a fugitive from justice. On that basis alone, he had no right to give or accept love.

Had he been sick in mind when he had done this damnable thing? It did not seem possible, for he could recall clearly all he had said and done; there were no blank spaces to give him one straw of excuse.

Ruth loved him. It was perfectly logical. And he could not return this love. He must fight the thought continually, day in and day out. The Dawn Pearl! To be with her constantly, with no diversions to serve as barricades! Damn McClintock for putting this thought in his head—that Ruth loved him!

He flung himself upon the beach, face downward, his out-flung hands digging into the sand: which was oddly like his problem—he could not grip it. Torment!

And so Ruth discovered him. She was about to rush to his side, when she saw his clenched hands rise and fall upon the sand repeatedly. Her heart swelled to suffocation. To go to him, to console him! But she stirred not from her hiding place. Instinctively she knew—some human recollection she had inherited—that she must not disturb him in this agony. She could not go to him when it was apparent that he needed her beyond all other instances! What had caused this agony did not matter—then. It was enough that she witnessed it and could not go to him.

By and by—as the paroxysm subsided and he became motionless—she stole back to the bungalow to wait. Through her door curtain she could see the light from the study lamp. If, when he returned, he blew out the light, she would go to bed; but if the light burned on for any length of time, she would go silently to the study curtain to learn if his agony was still upon him. She heard him come in; the light burned on.

She discovered him sitting upon the floor beside his open trunk. He had something across his knees. At first she could not tell what it was; but as her eyes became accustomed to the light, she recognized the old coat.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

PLAN AIR MAIL TO AUSTRALIA

British Air Ministry Is Arranging for 100-Hour Service From London

London.—The British air ministry is making plans to inaugurate a 10,000-mile 100-hour air mail service between England and Australia, linking up a large portion of the British empire.

Almost 2,000 miles of this route is already being operated regularly. Imperial airway planes connect London with Zurich. Next year this service will be extended to Constantinople. From there a short sea link will join up with the existing service between Cairo and Bagdad and thence to Calcutta.

For the trip from Calcutta to Rangoon, a distance of 900 miles, all metal flying boats are being constructed, the metal construction being proof against the ravages of tropical weather. The remainder of the route will be by way of Singapore to Port Darwin, in Australia, where the traffic will be distributed by the Australian airways, who are already operating more than 1,000 miles of commercial airplanes.

No Medals, No Heroes German Police Learn

Berlin.—No medals—no heroes. That's the experience of Commissioner Wollenberg, of the Berlin police, who handles all accident and life saving cases.

Since the German revolution swept away all decorations, including even the life saving medal, the number of heroic deeds in which men risked their lives to save others has decreased considerably in Germany, he finds.

Instead of a medal, the heroes now get a public commendation and a reward of—\$3.

"Most potential life savers instinctively get the thought that the reward is not even sufficient to pay them for the likely ruin of their clothes," says Wollenberg. "The thought inhibits quick action. They hesitate and the other is lost."

There is a German Lifesavers Society at Dresden, which awards a silver and bronze medal for heroic deeds. Wollenberg finds that most life savers prefer this private medal to the public commendation and reward on the part of the state.

HOUSEWORK NOT DRUDGERY

For Women In Good Health

Read How Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound Changed Conditions For These Housewives

Back Don't Bother Me Now

Lincoln, Nebraska. — "My back would bother me so and when I had to do any heavy lifting it made me sick to my stomach with the pains in my back. I have my housework to do and four babies to take care of so when I heard of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound I took it and I feel better. My back don't bother me and I can eat more and work. I do all my housework and washing for six in the family. I will tell other women to take the Vegetable Compound and you may publish my letter."—Mrs. CHARLES F. DOLEZAL, 1201 Garber Ave., Lincoln, Nebraska.

Felt Better At Once

Volga City, Iowa.—"I will tell you what Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound did for me. I was all run down and could hardly be on my feet. I was so cold I could not keep warm. I had numb feelings and then heat flashes would pass over my body. I had severe pains in my sides and was very nervous. I saw your advertisement in the newspapers so I thought I would try your medicine. My husband got me a bottle of the Vegetable Compound and I began to feel better as soon as I started taking it. I have taken it off and on for three years now. I keep house and do all my work for my husband and two

little boys and make my garden. I feel fine and I tell others what the medicine has done for me. I think it is the best medicine in the world for women."—Mrs. THOMAS GRINDLE, Volga City, Iowa.

Can Do Any Kind of Work

Fouke, Arkansas.—"I had the 'Flu' and after that I had a pain in my side and was not able to do my work I was so weak. I found an advertisement in a paper and it told what Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound would do, and I took it. Now I can do any kind of work I want to. I think every family ought to keep it in the house all the time and I intend to do so."—Mrs. DORA PHILLYAW, R. R. No. 2, Fouke, Arkansas.

Over 100,000 women have so far replied to our question. "Have you received benefit from taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound?" 98 per cent of these replies are "Yes."

This shows that 98 out of every 100 women who take this medicine for the ailments for which it is recommended are benefited by it.

This goes to prove that a medicine specialized for certain definite ailments—not a cure-all—can and does do good work. For sale by druggists everywhere.

Not Meant to Be Seen

"Why don't you put something in your window?"
"The window is not empty."
"I can't see anything."
"That's a display of invisible hair nets and vanishing cream."—Exchange.

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There is no higher talent than that of being able to maintain kindly and helpful relations with uncongenial human beings.—Selected.

He who envies the happiness of others will never be happy.



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Accept only "Bayer" package which contains proven directions. Handy "Bayer" boxes of 12 tablets—Also bottles of 24 and 100—Druggists. Aspirin is the trade mark of Bayer Manufacture of Monoaceticester of Salicylic acid

Laxatives do not overcome constipation

LAXATIVES and cathartics provide temporary relief only. Their continued use leads to permanent injury. In time, says an eminent physician, an almost incalculable amount of harm is done by the use of pills, salts, mineral waters, castor oil and the like.

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Medical science has found at last in lubrication a means of overcoming constipation. The gentle lubricant, Nujol, penetrates and softens the hard food waste and thus hastens its passage through and out of the body. Thus, Nujol brings internal cleanliness.

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