

The RAGGED EDGE

by
Harold MacGrath

Ruth's eyes began to glow. She had often wondered if Hoddy would ever go back to it. She knew now that he never would.

"Sometimes a cup of lies is a cheering thing," replied the trader. In wine there is truth. What about that?"

"It means that drink cheats a man into telling things he ought not to. And there's your liver."

"Ay, and there's my liver. It'll be turning over tomorrow. But never mind that," said McClintock grinning as he drew the dish of bread-fruit toward him. "Tomorrow I shall have a visitor. I do not say guest because that suggests friendship; and I am no friend of this Wastrel. I've told you about him; and you wrote a shrewd yarn on the subject."

"The pianist?"

"Yes. He'll be here two or three days. So Mrs. Spurlock had better stick to the bungalow."

"Ah," said Spurlock; "that kind of a man."

"Many kinds; a thorough outlaw. We've never caught him cheating at cards; too clever; but we know he cheats. But he's witty and amusing, and when reasonably drunk he can play the piano like a Paderewski. He's an interpretive genius, if there ever was one. Nobody knows what his real name is, but he's a Hollander. Kicked out of there for something shady. A reticent man. A check arrives in Batavia every three months. He has a grand time. Then he goes stony, and beats his way around the islands for another three months. Retribution has a queer way of acting sometimes. The Wastrel—as we call him—cannot play when he's sober, hands too shaky. He cannot play cards, either when he's sober. Alcohol—would you believe it?—steadies his nerves and keeps his brain: which is against the laws of gravitation you might say. He has often told me that if he could play sober, he would go to America and reap a fortune."

"You never told me what he is like," said Spurlock.

"I thought it best that you should imagine him. You were wide the mark, physically; otherwise you had him pat. He is big and powerful; one of those drinkers who show it but little outwardly. Whisky kills him suddenly; it does not sap him gradually. In his youth he must have been a remarkable handsome man, for he is still handsome. I don't believe he is much past forty. A bad one in a rough-and-tumble; all the water-front tricks. His hair is oddly streaked with gray—I might say a dishonourable gray. Perhaps in the beginning the women made fools of themselves over him."

"That's reasonable. I don't know how to explain it," said Spurlock, "but music hits women queerly. I've often seen them storming the Carnegie Hall stage."

"Aye, music hits them. I'm thinking that the Wastrel was one day a celebrated professional; and the women were party to the cause of his fall. Women! He is always chanting the praise of some discovery; sometimes it will be a native, often a white woman out of the stews. So it will be wise for Mrs. Spurlock to keep to the bungalow until the rogue goes back to Copley's. Queer world. For every Eden, there will be a serpent; for every sheepfold, there will be a wolf."

"What's the matter, Ruth?"

"It has been . . . rather a hard day, Hoddy," Ruth answered. She was wan and white.

So, after the dinner was over, Spurlock took her home; and worked far into the night.

The general office was an extension of the west wing of the McClintock bungalow. From one window the beach was always visible; from another, the stores. Spurlock was invariably at the high desk in the early morning, poring over ledgers, and giving the beach and the stores an occasional glance. Whenever McClintock had guests, he loafed with them on the west veranda

in the morning.

This morning he heard voices—McClintock's and the Wastrel's. "Sorry," said McClintock, "but I must ask you to check out this afternoon before five. I'm having some unexpected guests."

"Ah! Sometimes I wonder I don't run amok and kill someone," said the Wastrel, in broken English. "I give you all of my genius, and you say—'Get out!' I am some kind of a dog."

"That is your fault, none of mine. Without whisky," went on McClintock, "your irritability is beyond tolerance. You have said a thousand times that there was no shame in you. Nobody can trust you. Nobody can anticipate your next move. We tolerate you for your genius, that's a fact. But underneath this tolerance there is always the vague hope that your manhood will someday reassert itself."

The Wastrel laughed. "Did you ever hear me whine?"

"No," admitted McClintock. "You've no objection to my dropping in again later, after your guests go?"

"No. When I'm alone I don't mind."

"Very well. You won't mind if I empty this gin?"

"No. Befuddle yourself, if you want to."

Silence. Spurlock mused over the previous night. After he had eaten dinner with Ruth, he had gone to McClintock's; and he had heard music such as he had heard only in the great concert halls. The picturesque scoundrel had the true gift; and Spurlock was filled with pity at the thought of such genius gone to pot. To use it as a passport to card-tables and gin-bottles! McClintock wasn't having any guests; at any rate, he had not mentioned the fact.

Spurlock had sensed what had gone completely over McClintock's head—that this was the playing of a soul in damnation. His own peculiar genius—of a miracle key to the hidden things in men's souls—had given him this immediate and astonishing illumination. As the Wastrel played, Spurlock knew that the man saw the inevitable end—death by drink; saw the glory of the things he had thrown away, the past, once so full of promise. And, decently as he could, McClintock was giving the man the boot.

There was, it might be said, a double illumination. But for Ruth, he, Howard Spurlock, might have ended upon the beach, inescapably damned. The Dawn Pearl. After all, the Wastrel was in luck; he was alone.

These thoughts, however, came to a broken end. From the window he saw the Tigrress faring toward Copley's! Then somebody was coming! Some political high muckamuck, probably. Still, he was puzzled because McClintock had not spoken.

Presently McClintock came in. "General inspection after lunch; drying bins, stores and the young palms south-east. It will be hot work, but it must be done at once."

"All right, Mr. McClintock," Spurlock lowered his voice. "You are giving that chap the boot rather suddenly?"

"Had to."

"Somebody coming?"

"Yes. Top-side insurance people. You know all this stuff is insured. They'll inspect the schooner on the way back," McClintock lied, cheerfully.

"The Wastrel seemed to take it all right."

"Oh, it's a part of the game," said McClintock. "He knows he had to take it. There are some islands upon which he is not permitted to land any more."

At luncheon, preoccupied in thought, Spurlock did not notice the pallor on Ruth's cheeks or the hunted look in her eyes. She hung about his chair, followed him to the door, touched his sleeve timidly, all the while striving to pronounce the words which refused to rise to her tongue.

He patted the hand on his sleeve. "Could you get any of

the music last night?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful! It's an infernal shame."

"Couldn't . . . couldn't I go with you this afternoon?"

"Too hot."

"But I'm used to that, Hoddy," she said, eagerly. "I'd rather you went over the last four chapters, which I haven't polished yet. You know what's what. Slash and cut as much as you please. I'll knock off at tea. By-by."

The desperate eagerness to go with him—and she dared not voice it! She watched him until McClintock joined him and the two made off toward the south. She turned back into the hall. Rollo began to cavort.

"No, Rollo; not this afternoon."

"But I've got to go!" insisted Rollo, in perfectly understandable dog-talk.

"Be still!"

"Oh, come along! I've just got to have my muck bath. I'm burning up."

"Rollo!"

There were no locks or panelled doors in the bungalow; and Rollo was aware of it. He dashed against the screen door before she could catch him and made the veranda. Once more he begged; but as Ruth only repeated her sharp command, he spun about and raced toward the jungle. Immediately he was gone, she regretted that she had not followed.

Hidden menace; a prescience of something dreadful about to happen. Ruth shivered; she was cold. Alone; not even the dog to warn her, and Hoddy deep in the island somewhere. Help—should she need it—from the natives was out of the question. She had not made friends with any; so they still eyed her askance.

Yes; she had heard the music the night before. She had resisted as long as she could; then she had stolen over. She had to make sure, for the peace of her mind; that this was really the man. One glance through the window at that picturesque head had been sufficient. A momentary petrification, and terror had lent wings to her feet.

He had found her by the same agency her father had; native talk, which flew from isle to isle as fast as proas could carry it. She was a lone white woman, therefore marked.

What was it in her heart or mind or soul that went out to this man? Music—was that it? Was he powerless to stir her without the gift? But hadn't he fascinated her by his talk, gentle and winsome? Ah, but that had been after he had played for her.

She had gone into Morgan's one afternoon for a bag of salt. One hour later she had gone back to the mission—without the salt. For the first time in her life she had heard music; the door to enchanted sounds had been flung wide. For hours after she had not been sensible to life, only to exquisite echoes.

Of course she had often heard sailors hammering out their ditties. Sometimes ships would stop three or four days for water and repairs; and the men would cavort in the back room at Morgan's.

Day after day—five, to be exact—she had returned to Morgan's; and each time the man would understand what had drawn her, and with a kindly smile would sit down at the piano and play. Sometimes the music would be tender and dreamy, like a native mother's crooning to her young; sometimes it would be like the storms crashing, thunderous.

On the fifth day he had ventured speech with her. He told her something about music, the great world outside. Then he had gone away. But two weeks later he returned. Again he played for her; and again the eruption of the strange senses that lay hidden in her soul. He talked with his manner gentle and kindly. Shy, grateful in her loneliness for this unexpected attention, she had listened. She had even confided to him how lonely it was in the island. He had promised her some books, for she had voiced her hunger for stories. On his third visit to the island she had surprised him, that is, she had glanced up suddenly and caught the look of the beast in his eyes.

And it had not shocked her! It was appalling absence of indignation that had put terror into her heart. The same look she had often seen in the eyes of the drunken beachcombers

her father had brought home, and it had not filled her with horror. And now she comprehended that the man (she had never known him by any name) knew she had surprised the look and had not resented it.

Still, thereafter she had avoided Morgan's; partly out of fear and partly because of her father's mandate. Yet the thing hidden within her called and called.

Traps, set with peculiar cunning; she had encountered them everywhere. By following her he had discovered her secret nook in the rocks. Here she would find candy awaiting her, bits of ribbon, books. She wondered even at this late day how she had been able to hold her maddening curiosity in check. Books! She knew now what had saved her—her mother's hand, reaching down from heaven, had set the giver's flaming eyes upon the covers of these books. One day she had thrown all the gifts into the lagoon, and visited the secret nook no more.

And here he was, but a hundred yards away, this wastrel who trailed his genius through the mud. Hoddy! All her fears fell away. Between herself and yonder evil mind she had the strongest buckler God could give—love. Hoddy. No other man should touch her; she was Hoddy's, body and soul, in this life and after.

She turned into the study, sat down at the table and fingered the pencils, curiously stirred. Lead, worth nothing at all until Hoddy picked them up; then they became full of magic. She began to read, and presently she entered another world, and remained in it for two hours. She read on and on, now thrilled by the swiftly moving drama, now enraptured by the tender passages of love. Love . . . He could imagine it even if he could not feel it. That was the true miracle of the gift; without actual experience, to imagine love and hate and greed and how they would react upon each other; and then, when these passions had served their temporary purpose, to cast them aside for new imaginings.

She heard the bamboo curtain rattle slightly. She looked up quickly. The Wastrel, his eyes full of humorous evil, stood inside the room.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

FEW SLAYERS HANGED IN U. S.

Only One Person Pays Death Penalty in 146 Homicides

Chicago.—Out of every 146 homicides in the United States, only one person pays the death penalty, according to Frank E. Hand, supreme vice-chief ranger of the Independent Order of Foresters, in an address here.

"In a recent survey of 116 typical homicide cases," said Mr. Hand, whose society has 165,000 members in the United States and Canada, "32 were classed as 'justifiable.' In the other 114 instances, cases of unjustified murder, indictments were returned in only 69 cases, or 60.5 per cent. Of the 45 unindicted cases one-third of the assailants remained at large, 22 committed suicide, and in eight the evidence was insufficient to warrant indictment.

"Among the 69 indictments, 11 were 'no trial' cases. In the remaining 58 trials, verdicts of 'not guilty' were rendered in 16 cases, or 27.6 per cent. Of the 41 adjudged 'guilty,' 35 served time, with appeal pending in six cases; three were held for new trial, one was paroled and one was executed."

METHUSELAH MERE STRIPLING OF 80, PROFESSOR SAYS

Berkeley, Cal.—That Methuselah isn't even the oldest man in the annals of history is the firm belief of Professor R. T. Crawford, of the astronomy department of the University of California.

"According to Genesis, Methuselah attained the improbable age of 969 years," he said.

"However, the people of that era reckoned time by cycles—a term which many of us have misinterpreted as being the equivalent of one of our years, whereas in all probability the Biblical term 'cycle' means a lunar cycle, or a period of time about equal to one of our months.

"Figured in this way Methuselah's age comes to about eighty years."

A Transposed Age.

From the Edinburgh Scotsman. Maggie—How old are you? Nellie—I've just turned 21. Maggie—Oh, I see 32!

Three American race horses are to be shipped abroad next fall to meet the best in England and France.

BAD MEN SENT TO STATE PEN

Their Record of Petty Thievery and Jail Breaking Ended

Center, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—With a long record of wild west depredations, jail breaking and playing hide-and-seek with officers of the law which they have been making for several years, Christian and Jerry Denny, Indian quarter-breeds of Knox county, recently were sentenced to the penitentiary, having been captured by Sheriff Kellogg on the Dakota side of the Missouri river in a cave. Christian received a sentence of two years and Jerry was given from one to 10 years.

The two, according to Sheriff Kellogg, who, with a deputy, delivered them, are not as bad as they think they are. Thinking to have a good time they broke up a basket social, pulling a gun on the teacher. Christian broke jail here twice, in 1920 and 1922, and Jerry broke once in 1922. They broke the lock attached to a man-hole covering in the jail, dug down and out to a point beyond the outer cellar wall and then dug upward about 10 feet to freedom, using their hands to loosen the dirt and their feet to kick it out of the way.

For two years they have eluded the officers by playing hide and seek along the northern border of the state. They lived in caves when the officers got hot on their trails, one of these hiding places being in South Dakota and the other in Nebraska. Sheriff Kellogg found both caves and the men claimed that a "fence" tipped them off when it was time to move from one to the other.

ALLEGED SPITE FENCE CASE UP

Owners of Fence Say Suit Is Result of False Pride Of Neighbors

Omaha, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—False pride on the part of property owners in the exclusive suburb of Dundee is declared by attorneys for Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Bralley for the suit in supreme court to compel them to take down what the neighbors say is a spite fence. In their answer the attorneys for Bralley say that because his wife took in washing the neighbors became offended and abusive, and when she did not stop they began a series of indignities that caused them to put up the fence. The lower court said the fence was not offensive and refused the injunction asked.

REQUEST FOR INCREASED PHONE RATES WITHDRAWN

Lincoln, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—The Ainsworth Telephone company has withdrawn the application for increased rural rates that it filed last June. The owner writes the state railway commission that they need the revenues in order to keep up their plant, but that there has been a bad flattening out of corn production in that neighborhood, and he "guesses I won't be to hard on the farmers." The company asked for a raise of 50 per cent. in switching rates and 20 per cent. in exchange rates. It says it will now be satisfied if the commission will allow it to add 25 cents a month where prompt payment is not made of rentals.

WAYNE COUNTY HAS AN ELECTION CONTEST

Wayne, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—Contest proceedings having been filed by Thomas R. Sundahl, democratic candidate at the late election for county commissioner of the second district in Wayne county, through his attorney, C. W. Peasinger of Randolph, against Henry Rethwisch, republican, who was declared elected by a majority of 4 votes, a hearing will be held here before Judge J. M. Cherry, December 29, when the ballots will be inspected in court and evidence submitted. The petition claims that while, according to the canvassing board, Sundahl received 1,598 votes and Rethwisch 1,602 sufficient errors were made by election boards in counting some votes and throwing out others to have elected Sundahl.

Mr. Rethwisch is the present county commissioner of the second district, having served several terms in that office.

CHILD ACCIDENTALLY HANGS SELF IN BARN

Beatrice, Neb., Dec. 7.—Charles Meyer, 4 years old, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Meyer living southwest of here, accidentally hung himself yesterday while playing about a feed barn where his father was at work. He attempted to crawl through a crack in the side of a bin and was caught in such manner that the weight of his body rested on his neck. He was dead when discovered by the elder Meyer.

HOLT FAIR ASSOCIATION RE-ELECTS OLD OFFICERS

O'Neill, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—President A. J. Hahn, or Stuart; Vice President Jacob Hirsch, of O'Neill, and Secretary-Treasurer John L. Quig, of O'Neill, all were re-elected at the annual meeting of the Holt County Fair association. Mr. Quig has been secretary of the association for five years and in that time the exhibits have increased from a total of 440 to 6,460. Fifty show cattle, five dairy herds, 450 hogs and 1,000 head of poultry were in the livestock exhibits this year.

HE IS ANXIOUS TO BE CITIZEN

Nebraska Alien Makes Long Drive in Bitter Cold to File Papers

O'Neill, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—It is believed that the application for citizenship of Gottfried Huth, of Holt county, will be favorably acted upon when it comes up for final hearing before Judge Robert R. Dickson in district court here next March.

Huth, a young German, drove more than 40 miles, Tuesday, in an open car without a top and in below zero temperature, to file his citizenship petition with the naturalization examiner who was here.

Huth resides near Goose lake, on the south line of Holt county, where he is engaged in ranching. He started from home in a temperature of 4 degrees below zero which still was dropping, at 8 o'clock a. m., and after facing a stinging north wind for hours arrived at O'Neill shortly after 1 o'clock p. m. Huth and a witness who accompanied him were covered with ice and frost when they drove up to the courthouse. They had to make an eight mile detour from the regular route, on their way up, because of heavy snow drifts on the roads.

Huth and his companion cranked up the car again Wednesday morning in a temperature of 10 below zero, started back for the ranch, but with the wind to their backs on the return trip.

FORCED DRINK ON HIRED MAN?

Farmer's Helper Now Suing Lancaster County Man For Damages

Lincoln, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—An attempt is being made in the district court to fasten liability upon Jennings Lidolph, Lancaster county farmer, for the injuries that came to William Gable, his hired man, after he had pressed a drink upon him. Gable wants \$5,000 damages. His story was that one day in the hot harvest time he suggested to Lidolph that a good drink would be most welcome. The next day Lidolph appeared with a bottle and told Gable to drink heartily. Gable did. Lidolph invited him to take a second and a third drink, and then left him with the bottle. A little later Gable's team came in unattended, and when search was made for him he was found badly hurt. He said that the last thing he remembered was taking another drink.

SURGEON CLEARED OF NEGLIGENCE BY JURY

Omaha, Neb., Dec. 7.—A verdict in favor of the defendant was rendered by the jury in the \$30,000 damage suit brought against Dr. Clyde Roeder, of this city by the parents of Averdine Seeley, 5-year-old girl of Magnolia, Ia. The suit alleged that Dr. Roeder left a sponge in the child's body after an operation.

AYRES SEEKS TO BE AGRICULTURE SECRETARY

Lincoln, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—Harry E. Ayres, who managed the primary campaign for Speaker A. N. Mathers, defeated for the republican nomination for governor, is in Lincoln bearing petitions signed by influential republicans from the western part of the state, recommending him to Governor McMullen as the proper man for secretary of agriculture.

SUPREME COURT ASKS FOR MORE MONEY

Lincoln, Neb., Dec. 7 (I. N. S.)—The supreme court has asked for an appropriation of \$222,550 for the support of the supreme court and the state library. H. B. Lindsay, clerk of the court announced he would request this sum from the next session of the legislature. The proposed appropriation represents an increase of \$12,860 over last year's allotment, the greater part of which will be used to supply increases in salaries of subordinate employees who were subjected to a 5 per cent cut by the last session.

Baby Daughter of Nebraska Couple Found Dead in Bed

Crofton, Neb., Dec. 7 (Special)—Kathrynne Lorraine, the 20 months old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Gutshaw, was found dead in bed Tuesday morning by her parents. The family had gone about their morning duties as usual and about the daughter's usual rising time went to see about her and found life extinct. A physician was called and an examination proved that the child had been dead since midnight.

Generally all common clays contain aluminum, but as yet no satisfactory process for extracting this aluminum from all clays has been discovered.

DANCER'S PART IN PROGRAM CANCELED

Omaha, Neb., Dec. 7.—Dorothy Devere's Oriental dance will not take place at the Christmas pageant to be given by the choir of the Hanscom Park Methodist church Friday night. Walter B. Graham, director of the choir, announced.

Church parishoners were shown photographs of a pose in Miss Devere's dancing skirt and decided that the costume to be worn by the dancer was "not quite proper" for a church entertainment and voiced their protest.