

The RAGGED EDGE

by Harold MacGrath

CHAPTER XXVII

His idea, cleverly planned, was to shatter her resistance, to confound her suddenly by striking her mind with words which would rob her coherent thought. Everything in his favour—the luck of the gods! The only white men were miles down the coast. She might scream until her voice failed; the natives would not come to her aid; they never meddled with the affairs of the whites.

"It is droll," he said. "Your father—poor imbecile!—believes we ran away together. I arranged that he should. So that way is closed. You never can go back."

There was a roaring in her ears like that of angry waters. Wanton! . . . This, then, was what her father had meant. And he had gone away without knowing the truth!

"My pro boys are ready; the wind is brisk; and in an hour we shall be beyond all pursuit. Will you come sensibly, or shall I carry you? You are mine!"

Ruth's peculiar education had not vitiated the primitive senses; they were always on guard; and in a moment such as this they rushed instantly to the surface. Danger, the most terrible she had ever faced, was substantially in this room. She must kill this man, or kill herself. She knew it. No tricks would serve. There would be no mercy in this man. Any natural fineness would be numbed by drink. Tomorrow he might be sorry; but today, this hour!

She rose, not quickly, but with a dignity which only accentuated her beauty.

"And you ran away with a weakling! You denied me for a puppet!"

"My lawful husband."

"Ah, yes, yes; lawful husbands in these arts are those who can take and hold. As I shall take and hold." The Wastrel advanced.

"If you touch me I will kill you," said Ruth, grasping the scissors which lay beside the pencils—Hoddy's!

The Wastrel laughed, still advancing. "Fire! That was what drew me to you in the beginning. Well, kill me. Either we go forth together, or they shall bury me."

"Beast!"

For a little while they manoeuvred around the table. Suddenly the Wastrel took hold of the edge and flung the table aside. Even in this dread moment Ruth was conscious of a pathetic interest in the scattering pencils.

He reached for her, and she struck savagely. But with the skill of a fencer he met the blow and broke it, seizing the wrist. "It looks as though we should go together," he said, pulling her toward him.

Ruth was strong in body and soul. She fought him with tooth and nail. Three times she escaped. Chairs were overturned. Once she reached the bamboo curtain, clutched at it and tore it down as his arms went around her waist. The third time she escaped she reached the inconspicuous barricade of the overturned table.

"If there is any honour in you, stop and think. I love my husband. I love him!" She was weak and dizzy: from horror as much as from physical exertion. She knew that the next time he caught her she would not be able to free herself. "What good would it do you to destroy me? For I have courage to kill myself."

The Wastrel laughed. He had heard this talk before.

The race began once more; but this time Ruth knew that there would be no escape. If only she had thought to plunge the scissors into her own heart! Hoddy . . . to return and find her either gone or dead! But even as the Wastrel's arms gathered her, there came the sound of hurrying steps on the veranda.

"Ruth!"

"Hoddy!" she cried.

Spurlock stepped into the room. One of those hanging

moments ensued—hypnotic.

Spurlock had seen Rollo heading for the jungle, and for some reason he could not explain the incident had bothered him. Fretting and fidgeting, he had, after an hour or so, turned to McClintock.

"I'm going back for Ruth."

"Nonsense!"

"Something's wrong."

"Wrong? What the devil could be wrong?" McClintock had demanded, irascibly. He had particular reasons for wanting to keep Spurlock away from the jetty.

"I haven't any answer for that; but I'm going back after her. She wanted to come, and I wouldn't let her."

"Run along, then."

"To me, you dirty blackguard!" cried Spurlock, flinging aside his helmet. That he was hot and breathless was of no matter; in that moment he would have faced a dozen Samsons.

"She was mine before you ever saw her." The Wastrel tried to reach Ruth's lips.

"You lie!"

Head down, fists doubled, Spurlock rushed: only to be met with a kick which was intended for the groin but which struck the thigh instead. Even then it sent Spurlock spinning backward to crash against the wall. He felt no pain from this cowardly kick. That would come later. Again he rushed. He dodged the boot this time, and smashed his left upon the Wastrel's lips, leaving them bloody pulp.

The Wastrel did not relish this. He flung Ruth aside, careless whether she fell or not. There was only one idea in his head now—to batter and bruise and crush this weakling, then cast him at the feet of his lovelorn wife. He brought into service all his Oriental bar-room tricks. Time after time he sent Spurlock into this corner or that; but always the boy regained his feet before the murderous boot could reach the mark. From all angles he was at a disadvantage—in weight, skill, endurance. But Ruth was his woman, and he had sworn to God defend her.

"One of us has got to die," he panted. "You've got to kill me to get out of here alive."

The Wastrel rushed. Spurlock dove headlong at the other's legs, toppling the man. In this moment he could have stamped upon the Wastrel's face, and ended the affair; but all that was clean in him, chivalrous, revolted at the thought. Not even for Ruth could he do such a beastly thing. So, bloody but unbeaten, weak and spent but undaunted, he waited for the Wastrel to spring up.

The unequal battle went on. It came to Spurlock suddenly that if something did not react in his favour inside of five minutes, he was done. In a side-glance—for the floor was variously encumbered with overturned objects—he saw one of his paper weights, a coloured glass ball such as McClintock used in trade. As the Wastrel rushed, Spurlock sidestepped, swept the ball into his hand, set himself and threw it. If the Wastrel had not turned the instant he did, the ball would have missed him; as it was he turned directly into its path. It struck his forehead, splitting it, and brought him to his knees.

Luck. Spurlock understood that his vantage would be temporary; the Wastrel had been knocked down, not out. Still, the respite was sufficient for Spurlock to look about for some weapon. Hanging on the wall was a temple censer, bronze, moulded in the shape of a lotus blossom with stem and leaves—deadly as a club. He tore it down just as the Wastrel rose, wavering slightly. Spurlock advanced, the censer swung high.

The Wastrel wiped the blood from his forehead. The blow had brought him back to the realm of sober thought. He glanced at Ruth (who had stood with her back to the wall, pinned there throughout the contest by terror and the knowledge of her

own helplessness), then at the bronze menace, and calculated correctly that this particular adventure was finished.

His hesitation was visible, and Spurlock took advantage of this to run to Ruth. He put his free arm around her and held the censer ready; and as Ruth smuggled her cheek against his sleeve, they were, so far as intent, in each other's arms. Without a word or a gesture, the Wastrel turned and staggered forth, out of the orbit of these two, having been thrust into it for a single purpose already described.

For a while they stood there, silent, motionless, staring at the doorway where still a few strings of the bamboo curtain swayed and twisted, agitated by the Wastrel's passage.

"I was going to die, Hoddy!" she whispered. "You do love me?"

"God knows how much!" Suddenly he laid his head on her shoulder. "But I'm a blackguard, too, Ruth. I had no right to marry you. I have no right to love you."

"Why not?"

"I am a thief, a hunted man."

"So that is what separated us! Oh, Hoddy, you have wasted so many wonderful days! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I couldn't!" He made as though to draw away, but her arms became hoops of steel.

"Because you did not wish to hurt me?"

"Yes. If I let you believe I did not love you, and they found me, your shame would be negligible."

"And loving me, you fought me, avoided all my traps! I'm glad I've been so unhappy. Remember, in your story—look at it, scattered everywhere—that line! We arrive at true happiness only through labyrinths of misery!"

"I am a thief, nevertheless."

"Oh, that!"

He raised his head, staring at her in blank astonishment. "You mean, it doesn't matter?"

"Poor Hoddy! When you were ill in Canton, out of your head, you babbled words. Only a few, but enough for me to understand that some act had driven you to this part of the world, where the hunted hide."

"And you married me, knowing?"

"I married the man who bought a sing-song girl to give her her freedom."

"But I was intoxicated!"

"So was the man you just fought in this room. There is no hidden beast in you, Hoddy. I could not love you else."

"They may find me."

"Well, if they send you to prison, I'll be outside when they let you go."

He took her face between his hands and kissed her on the lips. "I'm not worth it. You are all that I am or hope to be—the celestial atom God put into me at the beginning. Now He has taken that out and given it form and beauty—you!"

"Wonderful hand!" Ruth seized his right hand and kissed it. "All the wonderful things it is going to do! If I could only know for certain that my mother knew how happy I'm going to be!"

"You love the memory of your mother?"

"It is a part of my blood . . . my beautiful mother!"

He saw Enschede, putting out to sea, alone, memories and regrets crowding upon his wake. Her father was right: Ruth must never know. The mother was far more real to her than the father; the ghostly far more substantial than the living form. So long as he lived, Spurlock knew that in fancy he would be reconstructing that scene between himself and Ruth's father.

Their heads touched again, their arms tightened. Gazing into each other's eyes with newfound rapture, neither observed the sudden appearance in the doorway of an elderly woman in travel-stained linen.

There was granite in her face and agate in her eyes. The lips were straight and pale, the chin aggressive, the nose indomitable. She was, by certain signs, charged with anger, but she saw upon the faces of these two young fools the look of angels and an ineffable kindness breathed upon her withered heart.

"So, you young fool, I have found you!" she said, harshly.

Ruth and Spurlock separated, the one embarrassed, the other utterly dumfounded.

"Auntie!" he cried.

"Yes, Auntie! And to date

you have cost me precisely sixteen thousand dollars—hard earned, every one of them."

Spurlock wondered if something hadn't suddenly gone awry in his head. He had just passed through a terrific physical test. Surely he was imagining this picture. His aunt, here at McClintock's? It was unbelievable. He righted a chair and sat in it, his face in his hands. But when he looked again, there she was!

"I don't understand," he said, finally.

"You will before I'm done with you. I have come to take you home; and hereafter my word will be the law. You will obey me out of common decency. You can scribble if you want to, but after you've given your eight hours daily to the mills. Sixteen thousand! Mark me, young man, you'll pay it back through the nose, every dollar of it!"

"I owe you nothing." Pain was stabbing him, now here, now there; pain was real enough; but he could not establish as a fact in his throbbing brain the presence of his aunt in the doorway. "I owe you nothing," he repeated, dully.

"Hoity-toity! You owe me sixteen thousand dollars. They were very nice about it, in memory of your father. They telephoned that you had absconded with ten thousand, and that if I would make good the loss within twenty-four hours, they would not prosecute. I sent my check for ten thousand; and it has cost me six thousand to find you. I should say that you owed me considerable."

Still his brain refused to assimilate the news or to deduce the tremendous importance of it.

"You are Ruth?"

"Yes," said Ruth, stirred by anger and bitterness and astonishment. This, then, was the woman from whom Hoddy would not have accepted a cup of water.

"Come here," said the petticoated tyrant. Ruth obeyed, not willingly, but because there was something hypnotic in the authoritative tone. "Put your arms about me." Ruth did so but without any particular fervour. "Kiss me." Ruth slightly brushed the withered cheek. The aunt laughed. "Love me, love my dog! Because I've scolded him and told him a few truths, you are ice to me. Not afraid of me, either?"

"No," said Ruth, pulling back.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

AMERICANS ARE WORST TOURISTS

This Is Conclusion of Writer in London "Daily Graphic"

London.—The world's worst travelers have been found. They are the Americans.

At least that's the conclusion of a writer in the Daily Graphic, who claims he conducted an American tourists party through Europe last summer.

"Say, this is a bum tour, I'll tell the world," the American tourists are alleged to have declared in disgust. "No Pullman cars up the Jungfrau, and cabmen who can't talk English. What do you know about that?"

The travelling American's thirst for information is prodigious, according to the conductor. They fire a continual barrage of questions and expect truthful answers. When they suspect that the guide is only guessing they fish their own guide books from "grips" for corroboration.

"Geography does not appear to be taught with any degree of thoroughness in the United States," declares the conductor. "Members of the party were continually demanding impossible journeys and mixing up one district with another. Thus:

"Say, why can't we go from Rome to Naples and back in an afternoon?"

"Because the Italian train average less than 200 miles an hour."

"Or: 'Why do they spell Lucerne this funny way? 'What funny way?'"

"L-A-U-S-A-N-N-E." They don't. "Altogether I was rather glad when I finally shepherded my flock to Cherebourg (some of them thought it was Calais and bade them a last fond farewell."

First Fishing Party Surprise for Lillian

Norwalk, Conn.—Her first fishing party brought a surprise to Lillian Stoots, aged 12. Fishing, with her father and others, in the harbor here, the girl pulled up her line at the first tug and found an eight-inch oyster on the hook. Attached to the oyster was a dead oyster about as long, and within that shell was found a burgall—a small fish that preys on oysters and annoys mackerel fishermen by stealing their bait.

COOLIDGE SIDES WITH REGULARS IN SENATE FIGHT

Indicates Sympathy With G. O. P. Leaders in Ousting Western Insurgents

BY DAVID LAWRENCE, Special Tribune Correspondent.

Washington, Dec. 21.—The war on insurgency in the republican party is war to the hilt. President Coolidge now has taken a step which demonstrates to the political world his absolute sympathy with the move whereby the republican leaders ousted from their ranks the insurgents of the west who, in the last campaign, gave aid and comfort to the La Follette candidacy.

This is the most significant happening in politics since the election and more than anything else may lay the lines of battle for the future. President Taft endeavored to use the weapon of "patronage" to fight the enemy within the ranks but it proved a boomerang to him. Mr. Coolidge has the advantage, however, of beginning the fight not in the middle of his term, when most of the ammunition is usually spent, but at the unprecedented time when he has four full years to serve and his own inauguration is still more than two months away.

Backs Regulars

The president made no public statement when the republican leaders in the Senate and House read out of the party the La Follette insurgents. In presenting to the Senate, however, last week, the names of postmasters recommended by anti-La Follette republicans of Wisconsin, Mr. Coolidge lined himself up definitely with the regulars in Wisconsin and fired the first gun of the 1926 congressional fight when Senator Lenroot, staunch administration supporter, will be up for renomination.

Undoubtedly the La Follette forces will enter a candidate in the primaries to defeat Lenroot and the latter has for several months known that he had a fight ahead of him. The White House was urged repeatedly before the last national convention to make war on the La Follette group but it was deemed by the White House strategists to be unwise to precipitate a controversy until after Mr. Coolidge had been nominated. The action of Wisconsin delegation at the convention, followed as it was by the La Follette candidacy for the presidency left the administration no alternative, however, and from that time forward the republican national committee began to realize that it must build up a new organization in Wisconsin, or rather organization the regular republicans who had been making the fight year after year against La Follettism with heavy odds.

Usually the La Follette people have been helped in the republican primaries by democrat votes. The Lenroot forces know that conservative democrats can be drawn to a republican ticket when a radical is in the race and there is no doubt that the Lenroot campaign will need democratic support.

The use of patronage may or may not be of value so far as actually getting votes. But it has a great deal to do with the spirit of an organization. If, for instance, the workers understand that they can hope for no rewards at Washington when they support for congress, men who are not recognized by their own party organization and who, of course, can expect nothing from the democrats if the latter come into power, the whole problem of political organization in local precincts is likely to be made very difficult.

The theory back of political appointments is that deserving workers get rewards. The opposition usually attacks this theory as the "spoils" system. That political offices are traded for support is not a demonstrable proposition as a rule, but the La Follette people will not hesitate to develop a controversy over it in the hope that sympathy will come to them as they feel themselves being punished for trying to make the republican party a "progressive" instrumentality.

Already there are signs that even friends of the administration in some western states doubt the wisdom of sending eastern money to western primaries and warnings are given that the surplus preserved by the republican national campaign committee after the last election should not be used for that purpose. The Lincoln (Neb.) State Journal, which supported Coolidge, says that a "westerner could think of no more certain way than this to insure the nomination these (insurgent) senators and that 'if Pennsylvania and New York are to furnish money to control western primaries, they will need to be very secretive about it.'"

Senator Capper's own paper, the Topeka (Kan.) Capital adds that the national committee has "more western than eastern men on it and will hardly fall for such a political game—if it should, new western men would undoubtedly be elected to represent the west."

Bad Weather Causes Delay In Test Trip of Dirigible

Universal Service

Lakehurst, N. J., Dec. 21.—High winds which raced across the naval air station here Sunday, and the prediction of heavy snow, caused another postponement of the second test flight in America of the dirigible Los Angeles. The possibility that the weather might clear by Monday gave rise to hopes that the trip may be undertaken Monday afternoon.

SPECIAL COURT ON NAVY 'LEAKS' OPENS MONDAY

Investigation of Statements By Officers Called By Secretary Wilbur

Universal Service.

Washington, Dec. 21.—Are officers of the United States navy to be prohibited from expressing their opinion of the merits or demerits of the administration's national defense policy?

This was the questioning going the rounds in naval circles here Sunday while a special court of inquiry was preparing to investigate so-called "leaks" of certain information concerning the strength of America's sea forces.

The court of inquiry, convened by order of Secretary Wilbur, will meet Monday at the Brooklyn navy yard. Orders to appear have been sent to Capt. Hugo W. Osterhaus and Capt. Robert L. Berry.

The "leak" which so perturbed high officials of the navy department, it is understood, resulted from the publication of a letter presumably written by Captain Osterhaus to Captain Berry, in which the Washington arms conference was severely criticized as detrimental to the proper strength of the American navy. Attention was also called, in the letter, to the inferior position which the navy now holds among the maritime powers of the world.

William B. Shearer, civilian naval expert of New York, released the letter for publication without revealing who had written it or to whom it had been sent. He expressed a desire to testify before the special board and assume all responsibility for the publication. As Shearer no longer is a naval officer, doubt has been expressed as to whether he could be forced to appear if he were unwilling to do so.

Certain naval officials have charged before that they suffered discrimination when they made bold to express their opinion of the condition of the navy or of the method of administration of the department. They want the "gag" rule effaced. They declared that if the regular officers of the fleet had been allowed to voice their opinions of the terms of the arms conference the navy would not be in the condition it now occupies.

WEST LEADS IN RAIL EXPANSION

Roads Lay Several Hundreds Of Miles of New Rails

BY J. C. BOYLE, Consolidated Press Correspondent.

New York, Dec. 21.—"I've been working on the railroad." That half century old song accurately describes the business occupation of thousands of men during the last year and there is every indication that fully as many handlers of the pick and tamping bar will be found along the rights of way in 1925.

Construction and betterment work has been active in all sections, but the west has witnessed more new construction of rail lines than all the remainder of the country combined.

The construction program of the Southern Pacific called for the expenditure of \$49,000,000 and about half this sum will be carried over for disbursement during the coming year. Altogether 382 miles of new road were started by the company in Oregon, California, New Mexico, Nevada and Lower California. The construction in the latter district will serve to link the west coast of the United States with Mexico City and promises to develop valuable trade with Mexico.

The Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe road laid 133 miles of new rails this year and will spend \$11,000,000 for 119 miles of additional double track the coming season, providing a double track system all the way from Los Angeles to Chicago. Each road has ordered thousands of new refrigerator cars and other equipment to handle the traffic which these improvements will open up.

Hunter Traps 16 Large Wolves Within 10 Days

Nellisville, Wis., Dec. 21.—Within 10 days Walt Dangers, hunter, has brought 16 large wolves into this city from his hunting lodge, 12 miles west of here, where the animals had trapped themselves in the window of the cabin.

Dangers said that he was awakened the first night he spent in the shack by a terrific commotion and howl of pain at the window. Leaping from his bunk and striking a match, he saw the head of a wolf caught beneath the window. A blow from his hatchet killed the beast.

NEBRASKA'S FORECLOSURE STATUTE IS ATTACKED

Lincoln, Neb., Dec. 18. (Special).—Attorneys for W. H. Pilger of Antelope county attack in supreme court the constitutionality of the present law governing sales of land under mortgage foreclosure.

Formerly the law forbade the sale of land to satisfy claims unless it sold for two-thirds of the appraised valuation. The law was recently changed so that the decision rests with the trial judge as to whether the land brought an adequate price.