



CHAPTER XIV—Continued

"Dawn!" he called loudly as he should open the door. "Hello, who's here—"

He had crossed the threshold, peering into the gloom, a sudden and cold misgiving sweeping him. "Turn back; withdraw!" a small voice warned but before he could gather himself a blow struck him and he went down under a heavy, living weight.

But as Elliott went down, with his assailant on top, he drew his knees upward, bowed his back and with a trick of rough-and-tumble fighting used the very impact which had floored him to toss the man on beyond.

He heard him curse, saw the other turn as he pitched across the floor and scrambled to his feet. "Brandon!" he cried hoarsely as a savage joy swept him.

Brandon did not speak. He rushed with head lowered. Great arms wrapped Ben's body, a head drove into the pit of his stomach, driving the breath from his body.

He fell to the floor fighting, but his blows were weak, ineffective. A hand clutched at his throat and he tore at it with all his strength. The fingers shut down on the windpipe and he writhed under that agony, summoning all his courage, all his will to break free, to oust that strangling pressure. But he could not do it. He went numb; his brain clouded. He lay still and then after a time, sweet air poured again into his lungs.

That was all of which he was aware for a long interval: air, bathing his tortured chest. Air, which had been denied him by the strangling grip of a man's hand.

That thought burned away the haze which enveloped him and he started to throw himself over, to rise, to be up and fighting. But he found that he was unable to move.

His hands were stretched out above his head; a harsh bond held each wrist helpless. He tried to kick and failed. His feet were locked together and held there as by a great weight.

Footsteps, then, came across the floor, and Nicholas Brandon looked down at him in the dim light, a whisky bottle in his hand, swaying a bit on an unsteady feet.

"So!" he grunted and laughed. "So you fell for it! So you followed your blessed Dawn, eh? He went off into a tantrum of crazy laughter.

Ben twisted slowly against his bonds and discovered that the rope which bound him was wet. He could no more free himself without aid than he could hope to fly.

"It worked!" Brandon cried. "G—d, how it worked! 'Dawn!' you yelled like a fool, standing outside there, 'Dawn!' . . . And then stepped into my trap, eh?"

He sat heavily in a chair. "It all worked, even to the weather! You came alone. It's starting to snow. Nobody's nearer than the Hoot Owl and the smoke of a burning camp wouldn't be seen twenty rods a day like this."

He leered. "Smoke of a burning camp! Ben's racing thoughts connected that idea with the odor which filled the room.

His fingers felt the strands of hemp that stretched from his wrists to the posts of bunks against the wall. Surely the rope had been soaked in kerosene. So it was Brandon's intent to leave him tied helpless, to fire the building.

Then his mind centered on thwarting the scheme of this ruthless man gone wholly mad. "Yeah. It worked . . . so far," he replied, and grinned.

Brandon snorted in contempt. "So far, yes; and on to the end, it'll work. You're tied fast, aren't you?"—leaning low so Ben could see the cruel lights in his eyes. "You're tied hand and foot! I'll touch the camp off. You'll roast . . . because this old camp'll burn like h—l itself! They'll find your bones here; they'll find an empty whisky bottle. That's all they'll find."

Brandon had schemed competently; no detail which would implicate him seemed to have been overlooked. Still, fear did not manifest itself in Elliott's heart; only contempt was there for a man so merciless. Contempt and a stout determination to stall for time.

"You're smart, Brandon," he said. "I'll admit that. The plan's so good I'm surprised that you overlooked a bet."

The other turned sharply. "A bet? They're cursed derisively. 'What d'you mean, a bet?'"

"A little thing. A thing almost anybody might overlook. But it's bound to come to light if I don't show up, and one murder charge's as good as another. I'm talking

about a letter Don Stuart wrote me just before he died."

"Stuart didn't know! He knew nothing, I tell you! He wasn't even here! He took Faxson's word for it and even Faxson didn't know. He was asleep—and he came out there"—pointing—"and he room right while we were talking and Mac went crazy and—"

Elliott could not restrain the impulse to laugh in a wild shout of triumph.

"While we were talking! So that's it! And you've sworn that you weren't here that night! And you were here after all!"

"I wasn't here. . . . I wasn't here. . . . Wasn't here, I tell you. . . . And McManus won't dare come back, with a warrant waiting. . . . He won't dare . . . won't dare . . ."

"So you admit, as the rest of us now know, that McManus didn't throw himself into the river that night, eh? So you admit he still lives, do you?"

"Admit nothing . . . nothing. . . . He's a murderer, I tell you. . . . And I wasn't here. . . . He's a murderer, I tell you. . . . And I wasn't here. . . . Wasn't here. . . ."

He rubbed his palms together, looking about dully, like some hunted, haunted thing.

And back to the northward three people came through the darkening forest on Elliott's trail, bending low against the mounting storm. Two men were ahead, beating down a track for the girl who followed, pleading with them now and again for more speed.

Ben watched Brandon narrowly. The man's mind, under the influence of the whisky he had taken to goad himself to go through with his murderous plan, and beneath the shock of Elliott's fortunate shot in the dark, was cracking. Ben needed time, now; he spoke:

"I've a proposition, Brandon. How'd you like to trade? How'd you like to have Stuart's letter for, say, the use of my hands and feet for a minute?"

Brandon came slowly close and leaned over him. "Mean that? Where is it?"—craftily.

"My affair." Even then, he could feel the bill-fold in his breeches pocket where old Don's letter reposed. "What d' you say?"

Brandon's fingers plucked at his lips.

"For the letter. And for word of McManus, I might, Elliott, I might trade you liberty for—"

He checked himself with a grunt as if realizing that he had by his own words placed himself completely in Elliott's hands.

"To h—l with you and your questions!" Brandon snarled, straightening. "To h—l with you, Elliott! I'm not afraid of lies and McManus was so drunk he never knew what happened!"

"They'll find your bones," he growled between teeth which remained clamped to still their rattling. "They'll find . . . after a while . . . your rotten bones."

From beneath the sink he dragged an oil can and sloshed its contents along the walls, across the floor, over Ben's body until Elliott lay in a pool of inflammable liquid.

"You crossed me!" Brandon cried, digging into a pocket. "From the moment you hit town, you did what no one else had dared do! You kept it up, turning them against me, slipping through every trap I set!" He found the match for which he searched. "But you sealed your doom when you took me on, Elliott!" The match flared.

"It's over now, you fool! It's the trail Faxson took for you! Cross Nick Brandon? H—l . . ."

He took one step to a pile of oil-drenched debris against the oil-soaked wall. He bent forward to apply his torch and stopped, as if frozen, hand extended.

A shout outside; a body crashed against the door. It burst open and Tim Jeffers plunged into the room. Behind him came Martin and as Dawn slid down the steep drift to the entry the burning curl of tinder dropped to the floor and Brandon whirled.

"Get him, Tim!" cried Ben. "Nall him! Don't give him a chance!"

With a muffled shout Martin and Jeffers flung themselves on Brandon as he charged for the doorway. He screamed. He fought frantically, but quickly they bore him down.

"Take that!" Tim's voice belated. "Nd that! Nd that!" The sound of knuckles on flesh came with the words. . . . Curses, inarticulate shouts, and then Dawn's frantic voice:

"Ben, where are you?" The struggling ceased suddenly,

with a long, gagging sound from Brandon.

Tim rose, looked around the room and moved to where Elliott's prone figure showed indistinctly in the gloom.

"Well I'll be d—d!" he said. "Get up. . . . What? What's this?" "Trussed up, Tim. Out me loose. . . . Hurry! This is going to be a great party!"

A knife blade clicked open; the oil-soaked ropes parted. Ben lurched to his feet.

Dawn, running into the kitchen of the camp she knew so well, came back with a lamp, its reservoir half filled. The wick was lighted and the shadows of the room retreated.

"We seen the note," Jeffers muttered. "Dawn there, 'd come out. We suspected you were in trouble and—"

"Never mind about me, now," Ben broke in. "But you're all that matters!" Dawn said, "Ben. . . . It was my note that decoyed you. It was an old one, written to him. He'd saved it."

Elliott smiled and covered her hands with his.

"Never mind anything that has to do with me, I'm only an accident in this. It's going to be a wonderful day, dear Dawn. This part is tough for you, but . . ." He gave his head an emphatic twist, smiled at her in assurance, then, putting her gently aside, stepped close to Martin.

"Let him up, now . . . Here. . . . Into this chair, Brandon." He stood back a pace and rubbed his chin with a knuckle.

"We've got this citizen in quite a stew," he said. "He schemed to get me out here and did a good job." He looked at Dawn quickly. "I hadn't even had time to wonder about that note. It doesn't matter, though. You saw me tied, there; that rope's soaked with oil. The place is drenched with it. He was just touching her off when you three came in and it would have been as neat a murder as I've heard about in a coon's age!"

"A lie!" Brandon muttered. "Was only trying . . . trying . . . letter. . . ."

"Have you forgotten what you admitted to me, Brandon?" Ben asked sharply. "You gave it away, gave yourself away!"

"You fool, you. You think you've got me cold, eh? You've nothing on me that'll amount to a snap of my thumb!" His gaze went back to



The Wick Was Lighted and the Shadows of the Room Retreated.

Dawn. "And I've watched you draw and cringe all your life, and I'm glad now that it's warped you and weakened you—"

"Hold your tongue, Brandon!" That was Martin's voice breaking in, thickened and shaken with congested rage.

He advanced toward Brandon slowly. He halted and did not speak for a long moment. Eyes still fast on the other, he reached toward the table, groping for a pair of rusted shears which lay there. A cloud came over Brandon's eyes and he blinked.

"And you'd taunt her with it! Because McManus disappeared!" Martin said slowly with low tenacity. "Ah, it made a plausible case, Brandon. . . . It, and your stories. . . ."

Then he did a strange thing. He lifted those shears in a quick gesture to his chin and a lock of the thick beard fell away.

"And you'd make lives h—l because you held the power. . . . And you'd write to the hiding, skulking McManus for years and tell him she was gone . . . that she was married . . . that she hated her father's name, eh? Another lock of hair fell, and another. His blue eyes were burning, now, and Brandon's chin trembled as a look of horror crept into his face.

"But if he was to come back, Brandon, and swear to her with his own lips that he did not kill . . . swear to a girl like that. . . . She'd believe him, wouldn't she? She'd believe him, wouldn't she, and be at peace. . . . At peace. . . . Ay, at peace with herself and . . . the one she loves."

He cut the last lock from the bearded jaw and flung away the shears. He stood erect, spreading his hands.

"See!" he cried. "See, Nick Brandon!"

The man in the chair made as if to rise. He could not. He lifted an arm as though to fend a blow.

"Denny!" he choked. "Denny Mc-

Manus. . . . You're a d—d . . . you're a . . ."

He ended in a wild scream and covered back against the wall. Beside Ben, Dawn was trembling. He put his arm about her and she sagged against him.

"So I wouldn't come back, eh?" the man they had known as Martin cried, and whirled to face her. "I came, Dawn! I've come back to tell you that I'm not afraid. . . . That my heart's clean. . . ." He gathered her in his arms, dropped his cheek to her head and closed his eyes. "I'm no killer. I don't know who killed Faxson. Nick told me I did and I lost my head for an hour and then it was too late. . . . I've hidden for years because he's written me things, terrible things to stand, little Dawn. But I couldn't read it longer!"

"And a warrant!" Brandon croaked. "A warrant's here . . . there, in Tincup. Murder won't outlaw. . . . You'll pay . . . you'll pay. . . ."

McManus drew Dawn even closer. "But you'll know, little Dawn! . . . You'll know!" he murmured.

"Wait!" cried Ben. "All of you! Listen! This . . . this . . . this thing, here, as much as admitted to me that he killed Faxson himself! He was here in this cabin the night Faxson was shot. He was here, I'm telling you! He admitted it to me, not ten minutes ago!"

"I don't know much about the rules of evidence"—tugging at the bill-fold in his pocket—"but I've a good guess about what Don Stuart had to tell the night he died, now that Brandon has trapped himself!" He shook the soiled, folded envelope from the purse. "I've had this thing for weeks and like a fool I didn't read it. . . ."

"Listen!" He ripped open the flap and Brandon, cowering against the wall, watched him with jaw sagging.

"I have been a coward," Ben read aloud. "McManus did not kill Faxson. Brandon did. Brandon had McManus drunk and was getting him to sign away his share of the partnership when Faxson tried to stop it. Brandon shot Faxson and when McManus was sober enough to understand, told him that he—McManus—had done it. McManus believed him. I don't know what became of McManus. Brandon came to me before Sam died and told me McManus had lit out and that if I did not forbid Faxson said McManus shot at him he would send me to the pen for stealing from the company. 'This is God's truth. I was afraid to do anything else. I have been a coward. I am sorry I did not tell this years before.'"

Brandon's head was twitching. "Lie," he gasped. ". . . drunken bum. . . ."

"No lie, Brandon. It's truth!" Ben said without heat, quite soberly. "Tim Jeffers turned to McManus smiling gently, and as he moved Brandon sprang forward. With a wild cry he gained the doorway, snatched it open and plunged outside.

"Get him!" Tim cried and McManus followed, leaping out into the gloom of late afternoon. . . . "Don't leave me alone! Not here, Ben!"

It was this cry of Dawn's which arrested Ben on the threshold. He turned to see her swaying dizzily. "Hold me! Hold me close. . . . Ah, Ben, dear!"

Her arms clasped his neck and she began to cry softly.

"Easy!" he said unsteadily. "Easy, now! It's all over. . . . Everything's over!"

No sounds of the three who had fled into the darkness came for many minutes and then old Tim Jeffers stamped grimly into the room. He did not speak as the two looked inquiringly at him. He waited for the man who had been known as John Martin. . . . He came slowly, this man, breathing heavily.

"Compensation," he said in a whisper as he advanced toward Dawn, arms outstretched hungrily. "The Mad Woman has him. . . . Here it started. . . . Into that river I was supposed to have gone, in a confession of murder. . . . There he went tonight. . . . We saw it, Tim and I. . . . We watched him swept under the ice. . . ."

It was after midnight when the group assembled in the McManus home. Tim Jeffers, Able, Doctor Sweet, Denny McManus, Dawn and Ben Elliott sat rather silently in the long, low living room while Aunt Em busied herself in the kitchen.

Little was said and when Aunt Em appeared, bearing a tray laden with glasses and a bottle, she walked into a hushed silence.

"Fiddlesticks, what folks you are!" she exploded. "Sittin' here like it was a funeral instead of about the happiest time this house has seen in a coon's age!"

She passed the glasses but no one spoke. She took the last herself and looked around the circle of faces in disgust.

"Has the cat got all your tongues?" she demanded and Able chuckled and old Tim Jeffers smiled.

Still, no one spoke until after old Tim had said his say. He rose to his feet, a giant of a man in that low-ceilinged room. He eyed the clear wine in his glass and then looked about, lifting it in a little gesture of salute.

"Well," he said. . . . "Happy days!"

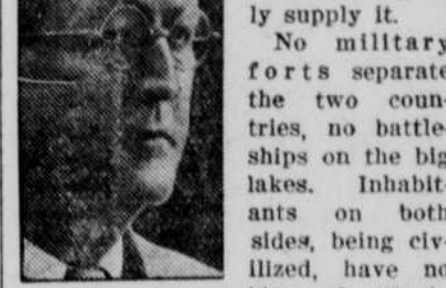
(THE END.)

BRISBANE THIS WEEK

Explaining to Canada Mr. Morgenthau's Work A West Point for Crime Alfred du Pont

Canada, hearing of a proposed United States "camouflaged military airplane base near her border," asks for information. The State department will gladly supply it.

No military forts separate the two countries, no battle-ships on the big lakes. Inhabitants on both sides, being civilized, have no idea of attacking each other;



Arthur Brisbane neither craves what the other owns.

Some day, let us hope, the two countries will be one, by mutual agreement, or Canada might annex the United States in a friendly way, if that were more acceptable, a majority of voters ruling.

The North American continent, from the Mexican border to the North pole, should, be one nation, or if Mexico and others would come in, all the way down to the Panama canal, so much the better.

There will be no war between this country and any part of the British empire. Common sense forbids it. Any air base of ours would probably be as useful to Canada as to ourselves, and we should be delighted to see Canada establish a string of bases to the north of us, especially along her Pacific and Atlantic coasts.

Secretary Morgenthau, never in business as a banker, interested, personally, in farming more than in money, has shown the outside world, to its surprise, that he can make the American dollar keep its place in the procession, regardless of many billions of bond issues, no gold basis, and other novelties.

Gamblers that ordinarily enjoy speculation in "exchange" are afraid of the American dollar. And curiously, while some Americans are sending money to other countries, to make it "safe," foreigners, and especially Britishers, are investing more and more heavily in the United States.

Washington discusses a "West Point for war on crime," a semi-military school under the attorney general to train fighters to meet the national crime army, that collects almost as much money as the national government itself takes in.

The war would be simple if government would treat crime as it would an outbreak of yellow fever, or Asiatic cholera, taking it really seriously.

Habitual criminals are known, men of ten or fifteen convictions, racketeers, gunmen. Make it clear that once locked up they would never get out as long as they lived and you would see the crime fade away.

Very bad news for the country, in which efficiency and energy counts as public asset number one, is the sudden death of Alfred du Pont, stricken with heart disease in his residence near Jacksonville, Fla. At seventy years of age, Mr. du Pont was planning, as he should be, all sorts of new enterprises that would have been interesting to him. He needed no more money, wanted to be useful.

Great Britain is excited about the Germans building submarines, especially annoyed to learn that the submarines are of a "super" type, carrying guns as well as torpedo tubes, able to hunt British or other ships anywhere on earth, some alleged to carry a small airplane, easily launched. Britain has plane-carrying submarines, but that is different. German submarines now finished are about to start maneuver practice off Wilhelmshafen.

Nations rise to great heights, glorious power, then crumble, disappear; desert sands cover their streets and temples. Patient archeology digs them out and wonders. Read Volney's "Ruins of Empires" to find that process well described.

What causes it? Do nations grow old and die "naturally," inevitably, as individuals do? Sometimes plagues wipe them out; the black death nearly destroyed Europe. Malaria tore down the power of Rome.

A crime, unbelievable, has been reported from Texas. Howard Pierson, aged twenty, killed his mother and father, then shot himself in the arm, pretending that bandits had done it.

After police had kept him awake for awhile he confessed, said he did it "for revenge."

He did it actually, authorities declared, for \$17,000 insurance on his father's life. He killed the mother because she would have got the insurance.

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MEMORY OF WAR NEVER LASTING

Horror Has Small Effect on New Generations.

It is not so long since war was "outlawed" and the outlaw was ostracized. Even that mild and gentle child named Neutrality was not mentioned in polite or academic society. The slogan was not neutrality in thought, but peace in thought.

Now the outlaw is found not to be dead, but lurking in the woods, and it is discovered that all nations border on the same forest. The youth and some of their elders contemplate the future possibility of war by forswearing any participation in it—when it comes. Veterans' organizations advocate legislation now to take the profit out of war—when it comes. Scholars and students of peace begin to re-examine the utility of our traditional neutrality policy as a device for keeping us out of war—when it comes.

Through it all drones the refrain of those who picture the horrors of the next war—the wiping out of cities from the air; newer and more frightful gases; death rays. The same song was sung before 1914 and long, long before. It has never deterred nations from war, because it acts, if at all on the individual and not on the mass, not on the nation, not on the government.

Even for the individual it is too overwhelming and too remote to be grasped except by those in whom it touches and torments the chords of personal memory. Soon a new crop has ripened. Those impersonal things known as governments respond more readily to the stern high calls of national honor and prestige. They seek, often sincerely, the welfare of their country. It is both a material and a spiritual warfare. World either be served by war today or on a near tomorrow?—Philip C. Jessup, Current History.

Might Try It If you have a tree that bears no fruit put a stone in its first crotch just before blossoming time; the tree will surely be fruitful after that.—Old Belief.

DEBT TO SCIENCE

When sugar was first made from beets it required about 20 tons of beets to produce one ton of sugar; now it requires but six tons, the change being due to scientific production of beets.

Week's Supply of Postum Free Read the offer made by the Postum Company in another part of this paper. They will send a full week's supply of health giving Postum free to anyone who writes for it.—Adv.

Meet It Bravely Main thing in life is not to elude danger; but to elude the fear of it.

Rash Disfigured Face

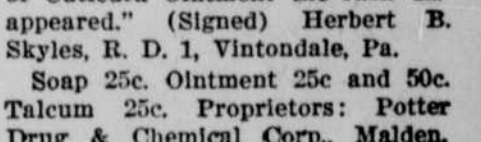
Disappeared After Using Cuticura

"A rash broke out on my face from some external irritation and spread very rapidly. The skin was red, and the rash burned and itched so that I scratched night and day. Then it developed into large spots or eruptions and disfigured my face. I tried different kinds of soaps, but had no success. I read about Cuticura Soap and Ointment and decided to send for a free sample. The result was so good that I bought more, and after using one cake of Cuticura Soap and one box of Cuticura Ointment the rash disappeared." (Signed) Herbert B. Skyles, R. D. 1, Vintondale, Pa.

Soap 25c. Ointment 25c and 50c. Talcum 25c. Proprietors: Potter Drug & Chemical Corp., Malden, Mass.—Adv.

AILING ALL THE TIME?

Mrs. Dan Thompson of 800 E. 16th St., North Platte, Neb., said: "At one time I was in a depressed and weakened condition, had headaches, my appetite was poor and I ached all over. I was ailing all the time. But Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription restored my health to normal. I gained weight and my appetite was fine." All druggists. Write to Dr. Pierce's Clinic, Buffalo, N. Y., for free medical advice.



Advertisement for Grape-Nuts Flakes featuring cartoon characters and text: "BY EVERY VOICE THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE LET'S VOTE ON IT LET'S DOTE ON IT I NOMINATE FOR EVERY PLATE— GRAPE-NUTS FLAKES! ONCE you taste Grape-Nuts Flakes, you'll cheer too! Crisp, crunchy, delicious—and nourishing. One dishful, with milk or cream, contains more varied nourishment than many a hearty meal. Try it—your grocer has it! Grape-Nuts Flakes is a product of General Foods."

Advertisement for Simoniz car wax: "MOTORISTS WISE SIMONIZ So Easy to Use . . . and It Lasts Always insist on Simoniz and Simoniz Kleener for your car. If dull, the new, improved Simoniz Kleener quickly restores the lustre. It's surprising, too, how easy Simoniz is to put on, but it's hard for weather to wear off. That's why your car stays beautiful when you Simoniz it."