

THE EDGE OF HAZARD

PICTURES BY A. WEIL COPYRIGT 1906 THE BOBAS-MERRILL COMPANY BY GEORGE HORTON

SYNOPSIS.

Frederick Hardy, a fashionable Boston society man, lost his wealth, was jilted by a girl and sent by a friend to take charge of an American Trading Company store in Russia. On his journey through Japan he met Stapleton Neville, supposedly an Englishman. They agreed to go together to Russia. Because of suspicious circumstances they were several times molested by the Japanese. Hardy was arrested and found upon his person papers showing maps of Jap forts. Hardy was proven guiltless. On a train he met Alsome Sano, daughter of a Jap merchant. In Neville's shoes Jap found pictures of forts, proving him to be a Russian spy. Hardy departed for Russia on a steamer, which was wrecked shortly afterward. He was rescued by a Russian steamer. On reaching Vladivostok he was well treated. He started for Siberia, meeting Princess Romanovna on the train. Hardy boarded a vessel for Amur. Hardy showed the princess his expertness as a rifle shot. The steamer was stranded. The princess and her maid were attacked by Chinese. Hardy saved their lives. The princess thanked Hardy for his heroism.

CHAPTER XIV.

An Exchange of Compliments.

The method of loshat and lotka was out of the question now, even for Gen. Catkoff. The wild bandits of Manchuria, who respect no government on earth, and whose only patriotic sentiment consists in the fact that they would rather kill a Russian than any other "foreign devil," were aroused and were thirsting for loot and vengeance. It would be courting death to go up that river unless escorted by a troop of cavalry. Moreover, it was the duty of every man about the boat to remain by the princess' side. Reinforcements were sure to arrive in the shape of muzhiks or Bouriat, who, impatient of remaining on the stranded steamer below, had pushed on afoot or by lotka. There was always the chance, too, that a squad of Cossack cavalymen might come along, following the military road, a long stretch of which was visible from the boat, between the skirts of the forest and the edge of the river.

In addition to Hardy and the general and the captain, there were on board five members of the crew. Weapons could be provided for all of these. The captain took a hurried inventory and found that, with economy, there was enough food to last all hands five days. As the first day wore on, an occasional horseman could be seen on the Manchurian side, in the dim foreground of the forest. These horsemen appeared singly at first, then in twos, and finally in groups of three or four. They were evidently increasing in numbers and collecting in the vicinity of the stranded steamer. Toward evening Smulders and his "Chulia" came along. The German had persuaded the Viennese to embark with him in a lotka and they had made nearly as great progress as the steamer, with its frequent delays on account of the sand-banks and the necessity of taking on wood. They had come on, perfectly unconscious of danger, and probably owed their immunity to the fact that they had stuck close to the Siberian side, to which the Chinese did not often cross.

"We will stay here," declared Smulders, when Hardy explained to him the danger of continuing the journey, "and I will fight for my Chulia till I die."

"How is your suit coming on?" asked Hardy, smiling. "She must like you pretty well, or she would not come up the river with you."

"Ah, she would have come up with a Russian, so I come along with the only lotka and she has to come with me. She will not much and I have no peevo, so I think I go mad. Ach, I loaf her very heavy!"

Nothing happened that night, save the arrival of four Bouriat, riding by turns a very tired and incredibly bony horse. After a shouted conversation with the captain, two of them mounted the animal and rode out to the boat. They were armed with short rifles and heavy cavalry swords. They turned the horse loose, which swam to shore, and was used by the other two as a living ferry, one riding this time, while his comrade held fast to the animal's tail.

In the morning six Manchurians rode down to the water's edge and began firing at the boat. The distance was long and they shot wildly, not putting Hardy and his friends in any great danger, though they made their intentions perfectly plain. The Princess Romanovna, attired in the gown of light blue and the hat trimmed with blue flowers, stood by the general's side, eyeing the scene with calm interest, twirling her open parasol carelessly on her shoulder.

As they stood looking, reinforcements to the Chinese arrived from time to time. Other horsemen rode out from the depths of the woods, till, in the course of an hour, the strength of the company had increased from six to 20. Hardy became convinced that the Chinese intended to attack, when their number should become sufficiently great, and here, by a strange freak of chance, he found himself actively involved in the ancient and unending war between Russia and Asia—mixed up in a fight to the death, which was as much his fight as it was the captain's or the general's, or that of any sailor or Bouriat on board.

"Will you," he said to the princess,

"convey a slight suggestion to the general for me? I make it in all humility."

She looked at him inquiringly as he explained. As a result, some of the men were set to work dragging up mattresses and bedding and piling them against the rail to form a barricade. This work was not more than half completed when the brigands made their first attack. Emboldened by the accession of half a dozen recruits, they deployed in a long line, and, swinging their rifles about their heads, they came galloping on through the shallow water of the river, the chief well in advance. The general gave a quick, sharp order and his little army fell on their knees behind the half-finished barricade, on the top of which they rested their rifles.

Evidently, being a good soldier, he had ordered the men not to fire till the enemy should get close. Smulders

Hardy shot and the chief still came on, followed by his men, shouting like wild Indians, in their barbaric tongue.

The American shot again without result.

Then he swore softly, a good, honest Saxon oath, removed his eye-glasses, wiped his eyes with his handkerchief, replaced his glasses, laid his cheek on his weapon and shot a third time. The chief's rifle dropped into the yellow Amur, his arms fell to his side, and he plunged over his horse's flank, head-first into the water. The animal whirled about and charged on the line behind him, dragging his rider's body, which hung by one stirrup. The other brigands turned and followed their leader's body to the bank and disappeared into the dark Manchurian woods.

The princess approached Hardy and extended her hand.

"I congratulate you, monsieur," she

you would not be able to break away from the fascinations of the geisha girls, who so strongly appealed to you." Hardy ignored the hand.

"I believe that you played a scoundrelly trick on me in Japan," he said, looking Romanoff coolly in the eye and speaking with great calmness, "but I am content, for the present, to pass it by. I—ah—suppose you have your own code as a gentleman. According to mine, it is our duty now to sink all private differences and unite in the rescue of this lady from a most perilous position."

"You are right," replied Romanoff, becoming insolent; "an addition to the crew is not to be despised at a time like this, especially a fellow who can shoot as you can. You ought to open a gallery in Petersburg. You'd make your fortune." He turned his back rudely, but looked over his shoulder to add: "But let us have no misunderstanding. Nothing you can do here will prevent my finding out why the Japanese were so friendly to you and what you are really doing in Russia."

CHAPTER XV.

Burning Arrows.

On deck all was silence, save for the whispering, bubbling and splashing of the treacherous Amur, or the occasional cry of some lone waterfowl, high overhead, following the course of the river. Hardy, coming above after his interview with Romanoff, found the general on watch. Two of the men also were awake, and were listening and peering into the darkness with a vigilance that proved that they understood that their own lives as well as the lives of all on board, depended on their alertness. The American also listened and watched, straining his eyes to see if, here and there in the darkness, darker forms could be seen of the foe stealthily approaching.

Hardy had not been standing on the deck more than 20 minutes, when he felt a hand laid lightly upon his arm. It was so dark that he could not distinguish the outline of the form stand-

"I will endure anything from him, at least until we have rescued you from this danger."

A small hand crept down his arm, found his hand, and pressed it.

"M-r-ci, mon ami!" whispered the princess.

At that moment a splash was heard by the side of the boat.

"Go below!" said Hardy in a voice of command—the voice that a real woman likes to hear sometimes from a real man; and he stepped lightly to the spot. He could see nothing, could hear nothing more, but he found the general standing at the place, which was on the down-stream side, gazing into the water. For a moment Hardy had confidently expected to see a throng of Chinese climbing up the sides. If this splash had indicated the arrival of the enemy, however, there was nothing in the general's demeanor to betray the fact. He did not move, did not awake the sleeping crew, but turned with a sigh and crossed the deck. He was stopped by the princess, who walked with him for a few seconds.

"He has sent one of the crew, Stenka Pugacheff, down the river for help," she said to Hardy. "Brave Stenka! He hopes to get far enough in the darkness to escape the eyes of the band which is collected here, and then he will take to the woods. Is he not a hero, this simple Cossack? It is 30 versts to the military station, and there is death waiting for him at every step."

A light flashed and went out 30 or 40 yards below, and immediately a blazing object described an arc through the air and fell on the deck not far from their feet. One glance was enough to show that the object was an arrow which, freighted with some highly inflammable material, was sticking upright in the deck and burning like a candle. It cast considerable light. Hardy leaped to snatch it, but, ere he reached it, one of the Cossack soldiers anticipated him and threw the blazing missile into the river. Just as he was in the act of seizing it, several shots rang out

about 30 Chinese shooting arrows, accompanied by from six to ten firemen. If they were trying to set fire to the boat, or merely to light it up so that they might pot at its occupants from the safety of the darkness, it soon became evident that their scheme was not destined to prove highly successful. The men, for one thing, made themselves plainly visible for an instant or so while they were scratching their matches and applying the burning arrows to the string.

They kept shooting now, sporadically. First here and there and then in some other spot a red, fitful light would gleam for an instant, dyeing a patch in the river blood-red by its radiance, and revealing a wild, savage-looking Mongolian, armed with great bow and quiver, who flicked into view for a moment and as soon was swallowed up again by darkness.

Hardy, not understanding the general's orders, reasoned that he would be pardoned for acting under his own. If he were going wrong, he reflected, it would be easy to stop him. He therefore held his rifle ready for action, as a man who is expecting a covey of quail to rise, and stood watching the water, alert, tense, keen as a cat about to spring. His chance came soon, when one of those lights flashed nearly in the direction of his gaze and not far away. He threw the gun to his shoulder and fired. He could not see the sights, but he could make out the object plainly, and he knew he should not go far wrong. He missed, for the Chinese, standing about waist-deep in the water, flitted the arrow to the string and discharged it. The shot rang out loud and clear. It seemed to Hardy that he had never heard a rifle make such a loud report before. The general exclaimed:

"Monsieur Hardy, ah!" and made no further comment, so the American continued his shooting—once, twice, three times. Meanwhile the attacking party seemed to be approaching a little nearer, and they succeeded in lodging several of their burning missiles in the woodwork of the boat; one arrow in the rail, two in the side of the wheelhouse, and one in the hull. These were broken off almost as soon as they stuck and did no damage, for, strange to say, the Chinese themselves had ceased firing their rifles.

And now Hardy had the inexpressible joy of killing one of the attacking party, who fell backward into the water with his blazing arrow in his hand.

"I'm getting the knack of it," he muttered; "I shall be able to do it more frequently now. Perhaps I, alone, can stop them."

A moment later he heard sudden shouting, the sound of running feet, snarls of rage and the splash of heavy bodies falling into the water. A party of Chinese, that had crept down from above in rowboats, was attempting to board, and the Bouriat and crew were repelling them savagely with bayonets and swords.

CHAPTER XVI.

Battle by Moonlight.

The burning arrows had been a diversion, as the books on tactics say, to draw the attention of the little band of defenders and occupy it completely on the down-stream side, while another attacking party crept up under cover of darkness and boarded from above. But for the fact that the wily old general, fearing the trick, had kept a guard stationed at that side, the ruse might have succeeded perfectly. The boat, as we have seen, was swung diagonally across a sort of channel, her nose and stern being imbedded in sand-banks. The Chinese, coming down stream in three rowboats, struck her at either end and near the middle, their evident intention being to spread the Russians out as much as possible.

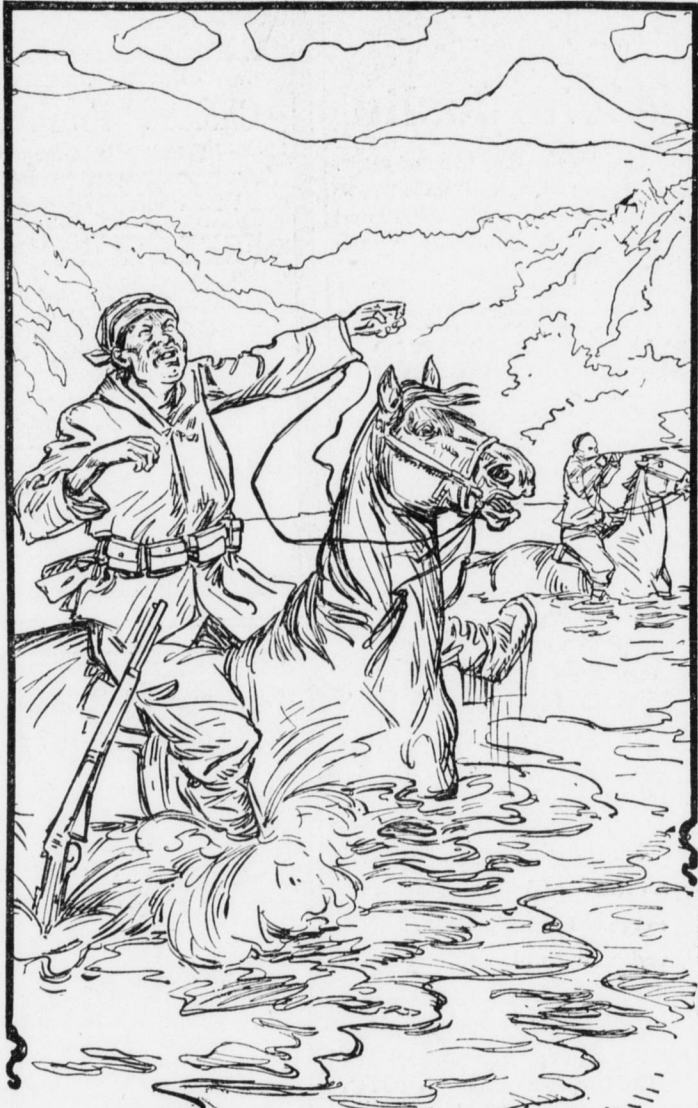
At this moment a frayed and worn old moon floated up out of the Siberian forest. Hardy saw, by its light, a wide expanse of water, dimly shining between ghostly forests; he saw several Mongolian heads, covered with round black caps, looking over the side of the boat; he saw Julius Smulders whirl a heavy oak pole in the air and bring it down on one of these heads with terrific force; he saw one of the Bouriat cleave another head so completely that one-half stood erect for a second, while the other fell over the victim's shoulder, as the Bouriat wrenched at his sword, which was imbedded in the rail; he saw a gigantic Manchurian, with a long two-handed sword, leap aboard, to be thrust through by a bayonet lunge just as his feet struck the deck.

All this the American took in with one glance of the eye just as the moon rose above the woods.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Mirage Seen in Scotland.

One morning recently there was a curious mirage seen at the entrance of the Firth of Forth, Scotland. It had all the appearance of an island studded with trees and spires, many of which seemed upside down. As viewed from Dunbar it had a lovely aspect, as it was encircled by a rainbow of abnormal proportions—London Mail.



The Chief's Rifle Dropped Into the Yellow Amur.

had no rifle, but he seized a stout boat-hook, shod with a sharp iron point, and sank on his knees, shouting:

"They shall never get my Chulia!"

On came the wild line, splashing through the water, which was now up to the horses' knees. When they had traversed about one-third of the distance, they stopped and deliberately took aim. The general spoke sharply to the princess, who sat down on the deck behind the barricade. At this moment the brigands fired and several of the bullets passed over the boat and splashed in the water on the farther side. One struck the smoke-stack with a "pluff," and another, evidently flattened by its impact with the water, hummed musically. The old general stood erect, without flinching, repeating some order to his men. His voice sounded affectionate, almost caressing.

Hardy raised his rifle and measured the distance.

"What does he say?" he asked of the princess, kneeling by her.

"Not yet, my children, not yet."

"Now," said the American, "you can do something for me, if you will; I think I can hit the chief now. Ask the general, as a special favor to you, to let me try!"

The Manchurians sat silent upon their horses, shading their eyes with their hands, to see, if possible, the result of their volley. The princess ran to the general and spoke hurriedly to him, and the latter turned and nodded at Hardy. The American adjusted his pince-nez and raised his rifle to his shoulder. It was a long shot, but he had done better in the Adirondacks at deer. His nerves were good and his muscles as tense as steel. Just as he was about to press the trigger, the chief swung his rifle about his head, pointed at the boat and came plunging on again. It was a more difficult matter now, as the man was in motion. Yet he was a splendid mark, looming big and dark there against the bright water, with a dash of two of vivid color about him, evidently ribbons or a sash.

said, "on your splendid marksmanship."

"I take your hand, madame," he replied, "but I cannot accept the congratulations. It was very bad shooting. My only excuse is that this is the first time I have used this rifle."

Smulders dropped his boat-hook to the deck, and running up to the American, seized both his hands in his fat, pink palms.

"You have saved my Chulia!" he sobbed.

There was, indeed, no further attack on the part of the Chinese that afternoon, and at night, before the moon arose, the besieged received an important recruit. A man heard shouting from the Russian side was allowed to approach and come on board. Hardy could not see his face, as lights were not allowed on deck, but he thought he recognized the voice, even though it was speaking Russian. The newcomer went below immediately. Half an hour after arrival, Hardy was summoned by the princess to her cabin.

"Mr. Hardy," she said in French, "this is my cousin, Boris Romanoff. I take pleasure in introducing two brave men to each other. Mr. Hardy has saved my life, and Boris has braved the most fearful dangers to reach my side. When he arrived at Vladivostok and inquired for me he learned that I had started for Moscow, so he did not wait a moment, but fairly flew up the river. Had he known what gallant defenders were by my side he would not have felt such anxiety."

Hardy took this last remark as simply complimentary to himself and the brave old general, and he acknowledged it by a polite bow; how could he know that Boris Romanoff was a suitor for his fair cousin's hand, who was a cousin far removed, after all, and that the princess often tried the big fellow's temper in the most insidious and seemingly innocent ways.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Hardy," said Romanoff in English, extending his hand. "I hardly hoped to meet you again in Russia. I feared



He Threw the Gun to His Shoulder and Fired.

by his side, but he knew, without looking around, that this was the princess.

"We must not speak loud," she whispered, "the general has commanded absolute silence." He could feel her warm breath on his cheek and her hair brushed his brow. "I came to say that you must not mind my cousin. I saw at a glance that he does not like you, and I think I understand the reason."

"What possible reason could he have for not liking me?" asked Hardy. "I assure you I never did him any intentional harm."

"He is very brave, is my poor cousin, and he is furious that it was you and not he who saved my life from the brigands. Bear with him, I beg of you. He will come to his senses in a day or two and will himself thank you."

and the man was slightly wounded in the arm, as was discovered later—for the brave fellow made no outcry at the time. The general sprang to the princess' side, took her by the arm and turned her toward the gangway, speaking kindly but firmly to her.

"Da, da!" she replied, and left the deck.

The first arrow was but the precursor of a shower of 20 or more, the majority of which either passed far over the vessel or fell short, thus proving that the accuracy of the first shot had been largely the result of a lucky guess.

One of the arrows stuck fast in the rail and a sailor broke it off by striking it with a long pole. The rifle volley of which it was the precursor did no damage, as most of the Russians were either lying on their stomachs, or were crouching behind the improvised bulwarks. There were evidently