

The Man From Yonder

By HAROLD TITUS

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CHAPTER IX—Continued

He signed his name and sat back, brows drawn and after a time nodded vindictively.

Out at the Hoot Owl Ben Elliott went through a week of unbroken dismay. It was a situation such as he had never dreamed of facing.

Dawn had heard and seen and . . . believed! She had fled the hall, convincing him of her belief in Lydia's accusation. Days had passed and he had heard nothing from her. He was impelled to go to her but, under such circumstances, a young man does not do that. There are some affairs so embarrassing that words fall flat.

His men knew the story, of course; all the country knew it. But none mentioned it to him, none willingly betrayed to him their knowledge of his humiliation. He waited and suffered and tried to rally his self-possession.

He was walking, wondering grimly what Dawn was thinking then, what she was doing; he was hearing once again the biting voice of Lydia; hearing, in memory, the hush fall over that dance hall.

He was wholly alone. Far behind him loggers worked in the timber; down yonder the mill sent up its plume of smoke and he could hear the distant puffing of the exhaust in the stillness.

No wind blew; nothing stirred . . . that he could see. He could not observe that slight, cautious movement to his left, that figure which watched him some and edged out through young hemlocks to a point from which his view was unobscured but where he still had good cover.

The man up there stood still. Slowly he shook off his mittens and with a bare thumb released the safety on the rifle he carried, settled slowly to one knee, placing it on the tail of the other snowshoe. His breath was not just steady as he snuggled his cheek against the rifle butt. No man's would be, shooting from ambush that way. Nor were his hands just steady.

He sighted carefully, trying to still the tremor of his arms. He let his breath slip out slowly, he squeezed. The crack of the rifle echoed and re-echoed across the chopping. Ben Elliott lay still, as he had pitched on his face. One of his hands was outstretched, the other pinned beneath him. His face, one cheek in the snow, was turned toward the man who had fired but it was far away.

For many minutes the man in the timber remained kneeling. Elliott did not stir. Then, cautiously, the killer groped for the ejected shell, slipped it into his pocket, raised to his feet and, backing cautiously, struck into the deep timber.

CHAPTER X

The rifle bullet had passed so close above Ben's head that he had felt its breath even before he was aware of its whine.

A bullet . . . here . . . for him! A hunter? But what would a hunter be shooting at here? That bullet was designed for him and had missed by inches. And he was pitching forward, simulating a fall, letting himself go limp. It was the only protection he could conjure.

He saw nothing, no movement, even; heard nothing. He was a-tingle, scalp creeping with an odd sensation as he waited for another bullet from these heights to the eastward.

But no other came. Ben lay there until deep dusk had fallen. Then he rose to his hands and knees, watching, listening. After a moment he stood still. Then, resolutely, he left the road, walled through the deep snow, crossed the railroad track and toiled up the heights. He went on, through the snow to the first fringe of trees. Then he spoke, in a light hall: "Hi!"—and immediately dropped behind a stump.

After a moment he rose, went forward again and entered the shadows boldly. No one was there, for certain, but before he had gone more than a few spaces he came on that which he sought: a snowshoe track, visible in the gloom because of the softness of the snow. Whoever had gone that way had sunk deeply.

He followed this out of the thick timber to a little clearing. The trail was not visible in the darkness so he struck a match and holding it cupped in one hand, bent low.

The flare showed the track of a long, narrow shoe plainly and as he moved the tiny torch along toward its tip he stopped all movement. The match burned out. He moved on to the next track and lighted another. He examined several of the imprints made by the shoe. Then he went as rapidly as possible back down the slope to the road, and started on to camp.

After supper Ben called Bird-Eye Blaine to one side. "I'd like to have you harness the supply team and spend an evening in town," he said.

"The little barn boss cocked an inquisitive eye. "Just in town, Mistor Elliott? Or fer somethin' special?" "Somethin' special. . . . But no one

else is to know. What I want to find out is this: Who is wearing a pair of Canadian snowshoes with the webbing in the toe of one torn so it makes a hole about this shape."

Quickly he sketched a rough outline on a leaf of his notebook. Bird-Eye scanned it and nodded.

"Take it easy. Maybe you won't find out tonight. But make a start, anyhow. If you should have any luck, stop in at the siding on your way back. I'll ride that far with you."

It was after midnight when Ben Elliott roused from his sleepless bed to hear Bird-Eye speaking to his team outside. He crawled out of his blankets and opened the office door to let the other in, but before he asked any questions lighted a lamp.

"Well, how about it?"—as he replaced the chimney.

Bird-eye looked at him narrowly. "I found th' shoes," he said with an emphatic nod. "Nd I found out who's they be!"

"Good!"

The barn boss blinked. "I dunno 'bout that. It ain't so good, I'd say. They're the property," he said with profound emphasis, "av wan Red Bart Delaney, a celebrated killer from somewheres in Canada!"

From the second small bedroom separated from the office by a board partition, a bed creaked sharply. Elliott did not hear it.

"So that's it!" he said softly.

"Yes! That's it! Th' presence av a rattlesnake like Red Bart in th' community don't forecast nawthing but th' hottest kind av trouble! Ye've heard av him, ain't it?"

"Yes, I have. He was mixed up in that spruce war on the Zhing-Wauk. A hired killer."

"Killer is right! 'Nd what may he be a-doing in these parts?"

Elliott did not reply to that question. "What else did you find out?" he asked.

"Well, he brought his stinkin' prisence into Tincup Wednesday night on its own two stinkin' feet! He's favorin' Joe Piette's hotel. Te' snowshoes was in th' office 'nd it come up so I didn't have to seem curious to find out whose they was. He's here lookin' fer cedar, he says. But it gives a body a lot av bother wonderin' what his rale reason might be. Lyin' 's as natural as breathin' to th' loikes."

"I can tell you," Ben said. "He's gunning for me, Bird-Eye."

"Sain'ts! . . . I thought ut, I did! Ah, me b'y—"

"Yes, he started today. I was shot at with a rifle two miles up the road just at sundown. The man who shot at me wore a snowshoe with the web broken. He wouldn't be lending his snowshoes."

Bird-Eye stood motionless and silent for a moment before he spoke.

"Thin th' sooner we give him both barrels av somethin', th' safer ye'll be,

can't help but think Bird-Eye's advice is good. Swear out a warrant for the first thing. This is a time for caution. It'll do you no good to take risks."

"I'll not walk into any traps, but if Brandon thinks he can make me hunt my hole—"

"Oh, Brandon!" The cry was bitter and Martin threw his arms wide in a gesture of helplessness. "You've got to watch him as you've never watched a man in your life. Why, son, you don't know, you don't dream, of the ends he'll go to!"

"But I thought you didn't know him," Ben said, puzzled. "I thought you said you were a stranger to this country."

"Yes. But stories travel. And isn't your experience today enough to convince anyone of the man's ruthlessness?"

"Oh, sure," Ben agreed, but still wondering at Martin's mood. It was not just easy to believe that a steady-going, mature man should be so moved by mere tales.

"You're right. He'll stop at nothing, not even murder. And I agree with you that he's got to be watched. But if I ran into my burrow or didn't try to get at the bottom of this thing, he'd gain part of what he's after, you see. No, that can't be done."

He rose and began to pace the floor.

"And it's not only the Hoot Owl, now, that's at stake. He's mixed up in more important matters than just property. He caught me foul where it hurt . . . hurt!" Martin, following him with his eyes, winced. "He's used a woman to come between me and the finest girl that ever walked the earth!" Martin looked away as Ben confronted him, almost as one will avert his face from a painful sight. "Lastly he brings a hired killer to polish me off. Darned if I know what to expect next. But one thing he can bank on: I won't run. I'll drive him into the open if I can by hook or crook, but I won't run!"

"No, I know you won't. But I wish . . . Oh, how I wish you'd counsel with some one else, with Able or anyone. You're young, you're in danger. . . . And this matter you just mentioned: Can't you think of Dawn a little? If you love her can't you see that she has a right to believe that you will protect yourself?"

The man's voice had fallen to a broken whisper. He held out both hands in appeal and tears sprang into his eyes. This man, this mature, quiet gentleman, this stranger to the country, begging him with tears in eyes and voice to consider Dawn McManus struck Ben dumbfounded.

"Oh, it's only that you've shown yourself to be so decent," Martin said after a moment, emotions under better control. "I hate to see you putting yourself in danger."

"I won't stick my head into any noose," Ben replied. "Lord, it's late.

man that, in reality, they spoke briefly and cautiously.

"Well?"

"In his tracks. . . . Two mile above th' mill."

"Was he alone?"

"Sure. . . . They'll find him stiff. . . . When do we settle?"

"As soon as the bank opens tomorrow."

Inside, the man seethed with a savage exultation. He crossed the street, drunk with the feeling of relief, mounted to his office and drank to his own success. . . . And drank again. For hours he sat at his desk, whisky bottle at his elbow and when he went down the hallway to his bedroom at the rear he carried the bottle with him.

His first move for the day, once in his office, was to draw the cork of a fresh flask and drink deeply. A grow-



"Good Morning," He Said in a Hoarse Gasp.

ing warmth ran through him. That was better. It was not comfortable to wake up, thinking of a man lying lifeless on the snow . . . at your orders.

Soon, now, word would be coming into town from Hoot Owl, tragic, final word. He must be in shape to meet the news dispassionately. No one would know his part in the killing; none would guess. Still, it would not be easy to have people saying that Ben Elliott was dead. . . . Elliott is dead; Elliott is dead. . . . The words spun about in his mind, a savage chant, and Brandon wanted to be glad but could not. Elliott was gone, though. The Hoot Owl was at his mercy, and Dawn . . . Dawn!

And then he turned to the opening door.

His jaw sagged, a light retching sound came from his throat as breath drained out. . . . Ben Elliott was standing there and smiling good-naturedly at him.

But dead men do not stand up. . . . Not men left dead on the snow. . . . Men whose life you have had taken do not smile. . . . Men stiff on the snow cannot smile. . . . This combination of truths coupled in Brandon's swirling mind and struck him cold. This could be no man, then; this was an apparition, this was—

And then whatever it was spoke. "Good morning, Brandon!"

Elliott spoke naturally and easily, and closed the door behind him. Dead men do not speak; ghosts do not open and close doors—they pass through them.

And Nicholas Brandon, gathering his faculties, lurched to his feet, panting and clenching the edge of the desk. "Good morning," he said in a hoarse gasp. "Good. . . ."

Ben Elliott laughed bitterly. TO BE CONTINUED.

Crocodiles of State

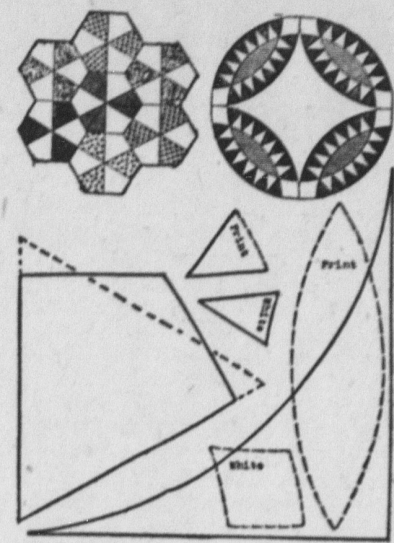
The government of Jaipur pays out good money every day to keep crocodiles alive. It has often been said that Jaipur is the most "different" city of India. Certainly it is the only one in that country to be built on a straight-line principle and the only one to have each and every one of its buildings colored mauve or pink. The Crocodile tank is one of the sights of Rajputana, and though it is difficult to ascertain from what far distant religious or mythological rite these beasts obtained their privilege, it is a fact that they are provided with three square meals a day and are tended by a keeper. Whenever this wizardlike old man appears at the water-edge with their food the big beasts, no matter how soundly they appear to sleep in the mud, immediately swim towards him.

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The complaint recites that Protestants, Catholics, and Jews disagree, and that "for several centuries the said three sects hated and murdered each other in their controversies over said Bibles, but now are not allowed by secular law to murder each other, though the controversies and religious hatreds are quite as vocal as ever."—Literary Digest.

Dr. Pierce's Pellets are best for liver, bowels and stomach. One little Pellet for a laxative—three for a cathartic.—Adv.

Wisdom in Old Saw

"If the brain sows not corn, it plants thistles," says an old proverb.

Overcame Her Nervousness

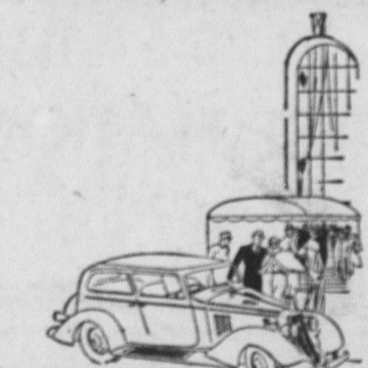
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