

The Man From Yonder

By HAROLD TITUS

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WNU Service.

CHAPTER—XIV—Continued

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 outlast that strangling pressure. But he could not do it. He went numb; his brain clouded. He lay still and then after a time, sweat 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.

A distinct odor pervaded the room. He groaned and strained again at his bonds.

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 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's 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."

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 hell 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? He 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."

"It's a lie! Whatever he wrote was a lie!" Brandon's cry was shrill. "He was a drunken, lying bum!"

"Which, even if true, wouldn't matter so much, now. Once, it would have. A few weeks ago, it might have. But not now. . . . Things have changed in the Tincup country; people have changed. There are dozens who'd jump at the chance to make trouble for you, now, Brandon, and—"

"Lies can't hurt me, you fool!" Brandon cried but his teeth rattled. "Plotting and scheming, were you, to drag that old case up and try to turn it against me? And basing it all on the death-bed ravings of—"

"But McManus isn't dead!" Ben cried, crowding all the conviction and triumph he could summon into his tone, playing his hunch to the utmost. "He's alive and we've located him—lying himself, now, in an attempt to beat the truth from Brandon. 'He's on his way back and what he'll have to tell, coupled with what old Don had the courage to put down in his own writing—"

"Stuart didn't know! He knew nothing, I tell you! He wasn't even here! He took Faxon's word for it and even Faxon didn't know. He was asleep in that room right there—"

—sitting—and he came out while we were talking and Mac went crazy and—"

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

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 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. "It's no good! It's a lie, but even if it weren't, it'd be no good in court." Then, sharply: "But what about McManus? Where's he? Where's he coming from? Yes, McManus! We might deal—cautiously—about McManus, Elliott. If you'd stop McManus I might . . . I might . . ."

"For the letter. And for word of McManus, I might, Elliott. I might trade your 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.

"But what assurance—" Ben began. "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.

"It's over now, you fool! It's the trail Faxon 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. He hid 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. "Nail 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 bellowed. "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.

"Trussed up, Tim. Cut 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 'd," 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 deceived 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, smiling at her in assurance, then, pushed her gently aside, stepped close to Martin.

"Let him up, now. . . . Here. . . . Into this chair, Brandon." They lifted him, for the man seemed incapable of movement himself. "Sit still now. We're simply going to get a few little matters straight for these people."

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 Dawn. "And I've watched you shrink 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

ing 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!"

"I have been a coward," Ben read aloud. "McManus did not kill Faxon. Brandon did. Brandon had McManus drunk and was getting him to sign away his share of the partnership when Faxon tried to stop it. Brandon shot Faxon 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 swear that Faxon said McManus shot at him he would send me to the pen for stealing from the company. This is God's truth. 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 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.

The evening had been an ordeal, explaining, recording evidence; talking with the coroner, the sheriff, the young prosecutor; and though it had ended in triumph, when the prosecutor slowly tore to bits the old warrant for Denny McManus, the tragic facts with which they had been concerned took toll.

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 and 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.]

Appeal to Honor

A terrible wreck occurred off the shores of Newfoundland. In the mad frenzy that followed the first shock of the collision, men forgot all else in their sense of self-preservation. An officer wearing the badge of the Legion of Honor was observed frantically pushing weaker ones aside to gain safety. A man stepped before him, pointing to the badge upon his breast. It was sufficient. The silent rebuke recalled him to himself. From that moment, self was lost sight of, and with undaunted heroism he sacrificed himself for the weak and helpless, and was seen at the last standing with folded arms on the deck of the doomed vessel in her last plunge to a watery grave, the badge of the Legion of Honor gleaming upon his breast.

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Raccoon's Feet Are Like Human Foot; Likes Fight

The raccoon comes from a winter sleep when other wild life begins to stir. And he is as thin and "hungry as a bear," for he is a relative of the bear. His baby-foot tracks may be found in the mud along streams; there is his hunting ground.

Crayfish, frogs, fish, snakes, small turtles, and mussels make up his early season diet. Fruit, corn, wild birds, and the farmer's poultry follow in season. The 'coon lives along some stream where he may handily dip his food in water, as if to wash it clean before eating it.

Coonskin coats are popular, and so the raccoon is much hunted for his beautiful fur.

He is clever in his ways, and quite tame. Woe betide the dog that expects to master him without a fierce struggle! The two black eyes of Brother Coon are proof enough that he enjoys a free-for-all.

The raccoon's feet are humanlike. He can climb like a monkey, and he can grasp a roasting ear with the best of us.—Indianapolis News.

Hypnotism, Once Ignored, Later Officially O. K'd

It is interesting to speculate on what might have happened if the invention of chloroform had been delayed by another twenty years or so, observes Aldous Huxley in Forum and Century Magazine. There can be little doubt that doctors would have carried out intensive research into the possibilities of hypnosis; and a rapid and infallible technique of psychological anesthesia would probably have been developed.

In the process of perfecting this technique much valuable information about the nature of the mind and its relation to the body would certainly have been made available—information which, for lack of sufficient practical motive for research, either was not unearthed till much later or still remains to be discovered.

After 1845 hypnotism sank into disrepute, and it was not till 1892, just fifty-one years after Braid had done his classical work on the subject, that the British Medical association at last officially admitted its existence and permitted its use.

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America Once Had Queen; Throne Room Now Empty

In the Capitol building at Honolulu, where the Hawaiian legislature meets, is to be found the only throne room under the American flag. The throne stands in majestic emptiness in a room where it suggests the tragic story of a great queen who was forced to vacate it four decades ago. The queen was Liliuokalani, who abdicated a few years before the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898. She was the only queen ever to become a citizen of the United States.

Stubbornly resisting the overthrow of her monarchy, Liliuokalani yielded only after she had been taken prisoner and a provisional government, under Sanford B. Dole, as president, had been set up. The queen protested to President Cleveland that United States troops had been landed to aid the revolution, and she appealed to him to restore her to her throne. Unsuccessful, she finally abdicated and, ex-queen, though she was, devoted the rest of her life to performing works that endeared her to her people.

She composed