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The Shepherd of Guadaloupe

By Zane Grey

The Story Thus Far:

THE Forrests and Lundeens have always been enemies. The Lundeens, formerly very poor, are now very rich, Mr. Lundeen having, by various crooked methods succeeded in acquiring the Forrest wealth and home, Cottonwoods.

Young Clifton Forrest, back very ill from the war, and Virginia Lundeen, not at all in sympathy with her father, are falling in love though Cliff doesn't realize it, or will not admit it.

Virginia's father is determined to have her marry Malpass, a half-breed who has control of Mr. Lundeen's property. She refuses.

One day, Virginia, Ethel Wayne and Helen Andrews and a party of Virginia's guests visit Cliff's little general store and Virginia provokes Malpass into buying the entire stock. Then, because Malpass is annoyed at Virginia's friendliness with Cliff, he knocks Cliff down. Virginia is enraged. Later she finds that Malpass is responsible for a fire which destroys Cliff's store and its new stock. She also finds that Malpass is determined to marry her or will ruin her father. She decides that the only way out is to marry Cliff. She arranges a secret meeting with him and when he realizes the difficulties Virginia is in he gladly agrees to marry her, thinking that he is not long for this world. When they are married she is happier than she dares admit.

VI

CLIFTON secured work at Watrous, in the Landis General Merchandise store, which, during the heyday of the cattle industry, had done a large business, but now had fallen into the hands of a creditor who was hard put to it to make ends meet.

His job as accountant was a trying one for Clifton. He did not shine at figures, and to be chained to a desk indoors seemed almost unendurable. But he had to work, and was grateful for anything.

The very first day at Watrous, at the noon hour of which Clifton took advantage to get out into the open air, he saw Virginia and her cowboys driving a bunch of beautiful horses through town on the way to Cottonwoods. Virginia certainly did her share of the driving. She looked and rode like a cowgirl. Clifton watched her out of sight, and deep within him his secret glowed. She was his wife, and he wanted to cry it out to the range.

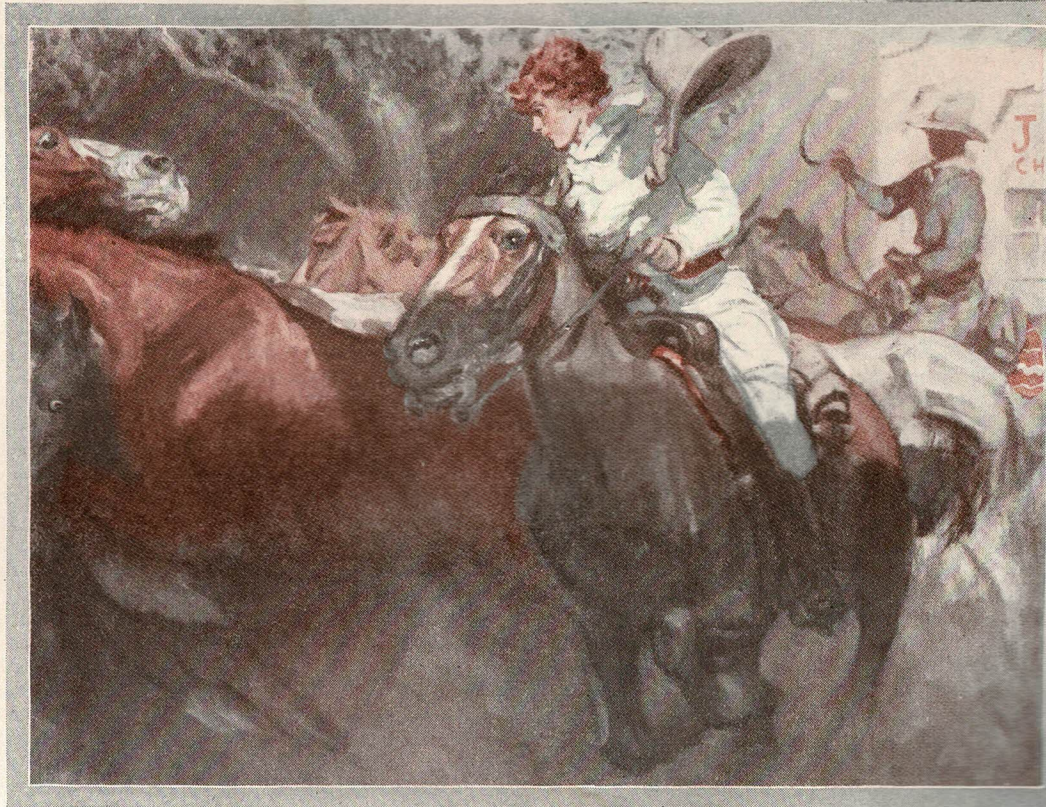
No doubt that secret was the spring of the persistence with which he kept at his task. In his store at San Luis he could rest and sleep and dream the hours away, and thereby he had very gradually gained strength. But this was a different kind of job. The books were behind and in a state that engaged his energy to the limit. At the end of a week he was on the down grade, and knew it. He was not, however, in the least discouraged. He would stick it out as long as he could.

August passed. He did not see Virginia again nor hear from her, both of which circumstances apparently indicated a favorable condition. At first Clifton had feared that the news of their marriage would leak out, and he both dreaded it and gloried in it. But no hint of its being suspected ever came to him. The condition of his father and mother had gradually improved; and

though happiness held aloof, it did not seem that this would be so forever. Clay Forrest brooded less and harvested the garden he had planted. And he stayed away from Las Vegas. This was a most welcome fact to Clifton. In town Forrest drank and harangued with other old cattlemen who had seen better days, and when he came home he was dark and moody.

Clifton feared he would not be able to carry on much longer. In the mornings he would feel fresh and equal to several hours' work, but by noon he was working on his will power, and by night he was "shot to pieces," as he described it. Still he refused to give up, and began his second month at Watrous.

One morning, during his second month at Watrous, as Clifton bent over his desk he heard Mr. Hartwell, his employer, enter the office with someone whom he very volubly made welcome. They passed close to Clifton, who, without raising his eyes, caught a glimpse of shiny high-top boots and tight, immaculate riding breeches that gave him a sharp start. It was not necessary to look up to recognize Malpass, even before the suave voice, a moment later, made him sure of the visitor's identity.



Cliff watched her out of sight and deep within him his secret glowed

"It's a particular job, Hartwell," Malpass was saying, and he slapped his boot tops with his whip. "Expect to be married to my partner's daughter soon, and spend the winter in the South. I'd want to start building here upon my return in early spring. You will have ample time to get all the material here. I'm giving you this large order because, as I expect to live in Watrous, I want to patronize men who'll be my neighbors." "I appreciate it, Mr. Malpass," re-

plied Hartwell deferentially, almost with gratitude. "I'll go over these orders very carefully an' guarantee delivery in time at lower figures than you could get in Las Vegas."

"Later I'll mail you orders for lumber to build barns, corrals and—"

Malpass ceased abruptly.

"Who is that?" he spoke up in a lower changed voice. "There—at the desk."

"That's my bookkeeper," replied Hartwell. "Fine young man. Shot up bad

in France. Name's Forrest."

"Aha, I thought so. Used to live at Cottonwoods."

"I don't know. You see, I'm a newcomer here. His father is Clay Forrest."

"Well, you can fire him right now, or consider my order canceled," returned Malpass peremptorily.

"Why—Mr. Malpass! Do you know anything to his discredit?"

"I do."

"Indeed. I'm very sorry. We get along fine. But, of course, I'll discharge him. I wish to serve you, an' I wouldn't keep any help you disapproved of."

"If Lundeen should happen to come in here and see you employed a Forrest he'd walk out and never enter your place again. He's in town too. Rode over with me. You'd better get rid of this wounded soldier here."

"Reckon I will, at once," replied Hartwell hurriedly. Clifton leaped up with a bursting gush of hot blood.

"Save your breath, Mr. Hartwell. I quit," he declared passionately.

"I'm sorry, Forrest. I'd have had to let you go. Mr. Malpass assures me he knows somethin' to your discredit, an' I—"

"He's a damned liar," interrupted Clifton, stalking to the rack for his hat and coat. "And you will live to regret the day you listened to him."

Malpass carried off his part exceedingly well. Manifestly his last encounter



Like a black snake the whip curled around Malpass' neck, and hurled him to his knees



with Clifton was uppermost in his mind, and he looked cool, contemptuous. There shone, however, a deep hot gleam in his slue-black eyes.

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"It'd be a sorry slap for you, Señor Malpass. . . . Of all the rotten tricks I ever heard of, this is the rottenest. To have me thrown out of a two-bit job! It wasn't enough for you to hire one of your greasers to burn up my store at San Luis. You've got to hound me here and put Hartwell against me."

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"Young man, you're making a plumb wild statement," said Hartwell.

"Not so wild, when you know Señor Malpass. He's a liar, and I'm not. That's all, and I'll live to prove it."

Then Clifton realized he was in for battle. Remembering Malpass' reaction in their former encounter, he saw

that he did not intend to let this pass unless Clifton fled. That, indeed, was the last thing Clifton would think of. He backed against a counter littered with leather accouterments for horse-men, and his quick eye caught sight of a long black whip, the kind used by teamsters. Clifton would far rather have had a gun within reach, but this weapon would serve.

"You take that back, you white-faced beggar!" ordered Malpass. He snarled, but he did not give way to undue anger. His play was to impress the bystanders, and, whatever he intended to do, he showed confidence.

"Make me take it back, you yellow-faced greaser millionaire," retorted Clifton, feeling the surge of released restraint. "You burned up my little store—all I had to make a living. Now you bully Hartwell to fire me! You'd like to see me and my poor old robbed father and mother starve. I said *robbed*. Do you get that? I said it, and you know it. What's more, Virginia Lundeen—"

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"Yes, my wife."

"You're crazy."

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"Forgery!" gasped Malpass, his lips white.

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Clifton had his right hand behind him, gripping the handle of the teamster's whip. With all his might he swung it. Like a pistol report it cracked and like a black snake it curled round Malpass' neck. The man let out a strangled yell. Clifton jerked so hard on the whip that he threw Malpass to his knees. Up he sprang nimbly, to ply his crop upon Clifton's head, in short, hard strokes, the last of which knocked Clifton flat, and also broke the bone handle of the crop.

Panting and malignant, Malpass put his right hand to his hip pocket. Hartwell shouted in affright. The other onlookers, exclaiming incoherently, scattered from behind Clifton, who again swung the whip viciously. It streaked

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Clifton spoiled Malpass' aim by swift blows with his whip. But Malpass kept on shooting, breaking windows, scattering bullets into the wall. His eyes protruded, horrible with murderous in-

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BUT he did not lose consciousness, though his sight was dim and his hearing imperfect. Still it became obvious to him that a crowd was collecting, and this goaded his fainting spirit. With shuddering, desperate effort he wiped away the blood that flowed from a cut on his forehead into his eyes, and then started the car. He became aware of painful welts upon his face and his right hand and wrist, where Malpass' crop had fallen. His shirt was wet, and at first he thought it came from sweat. But it was blood. Malpass had shot him, after all.

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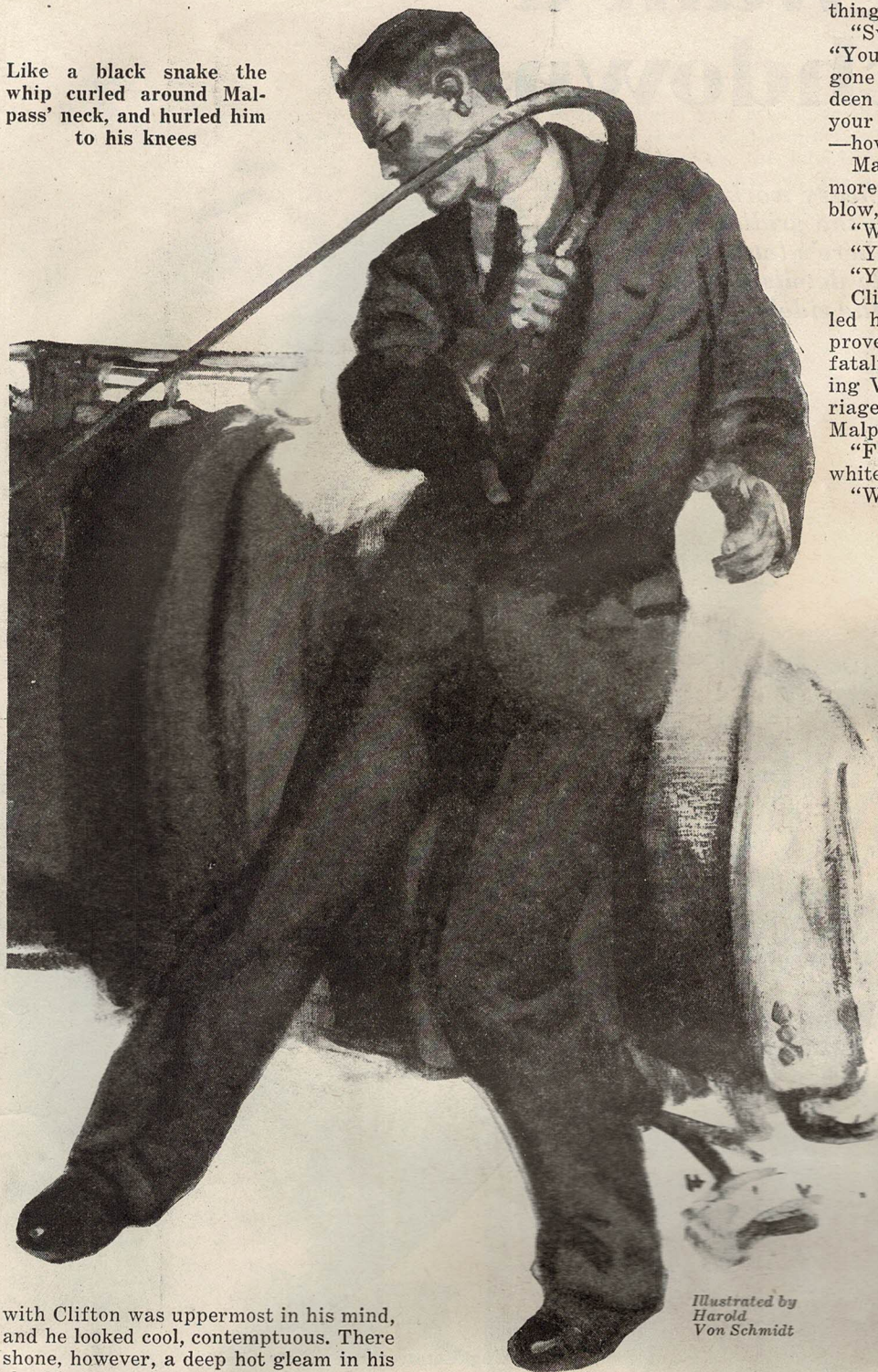
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Illustrated by
Harold
Von Schmidt

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LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE R.R.

The Shepherd of Guadalupe

Continued from page 15

Malpass dropped into the store. He talked over orders for lumber, and so on, for some building he expects to do in the spring. Big job. All of a sudden he saw me, and he hit the roof. He told Hartwell to fire me or he'd cancel the order."

"WAAL, if that wasn't low-down! An' Hartwell did?" Clay's great eyes began to flare.

"No. When he showed yellow I just quit. . . . I made a couple of remarks to Malpass, but at that, Dad, I meant to get out of the store to avoid trouble. I started out, backing out, in fact, and of course I kept shooting off my chin. Malpass backed me up against a harness counter. . . . Well, he hit me first, with one of those bone-handled crops.

Clifton dared not explain to his father. So he lied.

"Looks damn' queer to me," replied Forrest, dubiously, with his ox eyes piercing his son. "Reckon you didn't kill him?"

"No. But I'll bet he'll have a little dose of what I've had so much of."

"Waal, if he killed somebody, it sure strengthens our side. In any case it will stew up the Lundeen-Forrest deal good an' hot. I'll go to law."

"I wouldn't, Dad. We haven't any money, and we'd only get the worst of it," advised Clifton.

The hum of a swift-running motor car came in at the open window, and what made Clifton note it was that it ceased abruptly. It had stopped outside. He groaned inwardly, sensing calamity. His father got up uneasily, and began to pace the room.

Soon quick footsteps struck Clifton's ears. Then they sounded heavily on the porch. A powerful hand assailed the door. It swung in, as if irresistibly impelled.

Jed Lundeen stood on the threshold, his dark face and somber eyes indicative of mighty passions all but spent. Stamping in, he closed the door, and seemed to fill the room with his presence.

Clifton sat up. He knew what was coming. His father paled with more than amaze.

"Forrest, there's shore hell to pay," he announced stridently.

"Waal, I'm lookin' at you," returned Forrest, in cold, sullen expectation. The mere sight of his old enemy had unleashed his passions.

"Forrest, I didn't come heah to fight. But I'm packin' somethin' that'll hit you harder'n any bullet."

"Is Malpass dead?"

"No. But shore he's darn near it. That war-crazy son of yours jumped him with a bullwhacker's whip."

"Lundeen, it was a plumb good job. An' I wish it'd been better. Reckon you ain't acquainted with facts. Malpass started the fight, an' when it got too hot he throwed a gun. Shot Cliff, as you can see for yourself."

OBVIOUSLY that was astounding to Lundeen, and he required the confirmation of his own penetrating eyes. His regard, however, was one of icy indifference to the established fact. He had no word for Clifton.

"I'm inquirin' if the other man Malpass shot is dead?" continued Forrest.

"Did he shoot someone else?" demanded Lundeen hotly.

"Yes, by accident," interposed Clifton. "He was aiming at me."

"Fine chance that half-breed would have if a Westerner threw a gun on him instead of a whip," added the older Forrest scornfully.

"Malpass was aboot out of his haid. Maybe that accounts for his omissions. He raved an' cursed."

"Waal, Lundeen, if that's all you've butted in here to say—"

"I came sayin' there was hell to pay, didn't I?" interrupted Lundeen harshly. "An' there shore is. This slick son of yours, with his crippled-soldier-sympathy bluff, is goin' to pay it too."

"Leave out what you think my son is. It ain't safe. . . . What more has he done?"

"He married my girl, by God—that's what!"

Forrest turned a dead white. "Say, you're drunk, or crazier'n your crooked partner. No son of mine would ever

(Continued on page 46)

Arthur Somers Roche

takes the stand in defense of a killer who wouldn't hide behind a woman's skirts. Here is fiction that's as keen as a blade and as fast as a bullet.

The Third Degree

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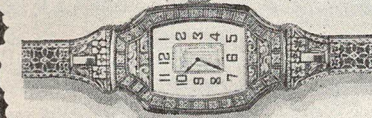
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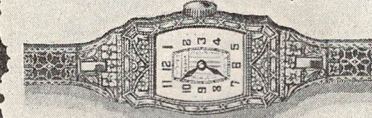
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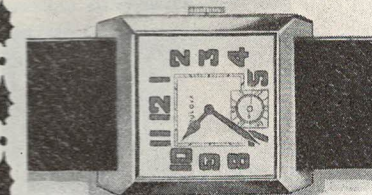


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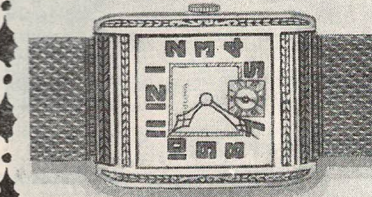


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The Shepherd of Guadaloupe

Continued from page 45

give the name Forrest to a Lundeen." "Ha! But he did, an' though my Virginia takes the blame, the disgrace of it is just that. My lass has become a Forrest."

"It's a lie. Another of your plots," shouted Forrest, his neck bulging purple. "An' if it was so I'd swear the disgrace was suffered by the Forrests. But it's an infernal lie."

"Ask him."

Forrest whirled a distorted face toward his son. "You hear him. Why don't you nail his lyin' talk?"

"Dad, it's true," replied Clifton.

SUDDEN death could scarcely have caused a more ghastly change in a strong man's features and body. This was the last straw. The end of pride! The conclusive stab to bleeding vanity! Forrest fell into a chair, so abject, so beaten, that Clifton could look no more at him.

"Forrest, that's why I'm heah," said Lundeen acidly. "Because it's true, an' I can't change it. My daughter is of age. It couldn't be kept secret, an' Virginia refused to hear of a divorce. She took the blame. She led your son on. Marriage with him was an escape from Malpass. I wanted a match between him an' her. But she'd have none of him, an' to keep out of it she aboot asked your son to marry her. She knew he wasn't long for this world, but long enough, maybe, to serve her turn. . . . He's dirt under her feet! She cared nothin' on earth for him! You understand?"

"Lundeen, I reckon I do," returned Forrest hoarsely. "But I wouldn't believe your oath on your knees before God. . . . Clifton, is that last true?"

"Is what true?" echoed Clifton, his voice failing huskily.

"That this Lundeen woman thinks you're dirt under her feet."

"Dad, I don't believe that. She's too big for hate. She's kind. But I think she cared nothing for me."

"You think!" returned Lundeen, dark in passion. "You need to be damn' shore you know, young man. I'm tellin' you. I choked it out of her. If she'd confessed to love of you, I'd have killed her with my own hands."

Clifton slowly sank back against the wall. But the brutal speech that crushed his tired heart had an opposite effect upon his father, who rose in a single upheaval, and towered erect.

"Tell this man Lundeen you had no use for his daughter! You did a manly act to save her from a schemin' half-breed! No more. Tell him quick!"

Clifton had seen his mother open the door part way, to disclose a terrified face. It steadied him. He must prevent bloodshed here, and if the quarrel between these blinded foes went farther it would end in tragedy. He would have perjured his soul to save his mother any more agony.

"Dad is right, Mr. Lundeen. I just wanted—to help Virginia."

"That's good, then, on both sides, if any good could come out of an impossible relation," replied Lundeen, a visible break in his relentlessness. "Forrest, I gave my daughter a choice. Either to divorce your son or get out of my house."

"Ahuh!" muttered Forrest.

"She chose to get out," concluded Lundeen thickly.

"Waal, they never fooled me," rejoined Forrest in acrid tones. "An' I'm not givin' my son any choice."

"Shore you're not," retorted his enemy with strong sarcasm. "You're

bankin' on him gettin' money through Virginia. An' you'll die hopin'."

"Lundeen, you always was low-down white trash from the South. You couldn't savvy a Westerner. My son gets no choice. He gets out."

Both fathers, gray with passion, implacable, clutched in the vise of their hate, turned haggard gaze upon Clifton.

He rose to take his father's pronouncement.

"Young man, you're no more son of mine. Get out!" thundered Forrest, and the gray shaded black.

"Dad!" cried Clifton.

But the outcry was involuntary. And an instant afterward Clifton had a revulsion of emotion. His sluggish blood regurgitated to his cold veins.

"You're a couple of fine fathers," he lashed out, pitilessly on fire. "If you had any guts, you'd play the game like men. You fight and impose your hate upon two innocent young people who have the misfortune to be of your blood. . . . Lundeen, it's no wonder Virginia sought the protection of even a poor, crippled and now homeless man. You're no father. You're no better than the greaser dog you'd give her to. For money and greed! . . . Now I've one more word: You and Malpass stay clear of me."

Then Clifton vented the climax of his accumulated wrath upon his ashen-faced parent:

"I'll get out. And I'll never come back. You're not only wicked, but a doddering old idiot. Locked in your insane hate of anything Lundeen! If you ever were a Forrest, you've lost the thing that made you one. You, not I, have brought the name down."

Clifton stalked to the door of the hall leading to his room and stepped out. But the white heat of his anger demanded more. He faced them again.

"I lied to you. I love Virginia with all my heart and soul. And it'd be retribution for you both if she came to love me the same way. I pray to God she will. . . . I'll not die! I'll live so that she may! . . . Now, you cowards, go out and kill yourselves!"

THE fortification of secret marriage far exceeded Virginia's vacillating hopes. For, while making up her mind to this grave and uncertain step, she had been both inspired and frightened. It turned out, however, that in her most sanguine moments she had not realized its true portent. She was saved from the peril of a despicable alliance. She had only to safeguard herself from being shamed again by physical violence.

Therefore she gained a tranquillity of mind she had not experienced since her arrival home. She laid clever plans to avoid Malpass and adhered to them, while waiting for the end of August, at which time she was to visit Ethel in Denver. She took her meals to suit the convenience of her mother. When she went to Watrous to get her horses, and on rides thereafter, she made sure to be accompanied by Con and Jake. She avoided the living-room and the porch except when her father or mother was present. She was always careful to lock herself in her rooms.

Thus when Malpass approached she had him at a disadvantage. He knew it was intentional and chafed under the restrictions. Sometimes, before her father, he would attempt to further his suit, but Virginia found countering these advances interesting if not stimulating. She mystified the vain courtier, whose Latin blood boiled at restraint. On several occasions she amused her

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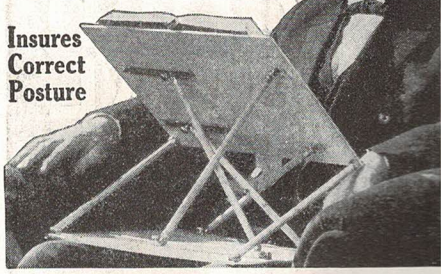
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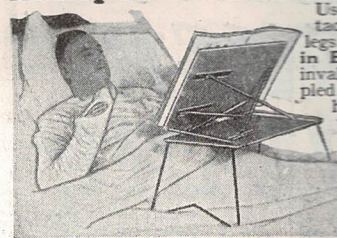
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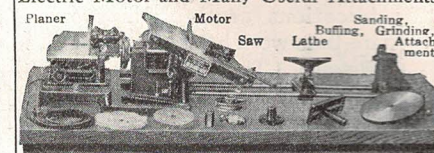
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father, who gradually grew less hearty in his championship of Malpass. She deceived both men, in that she did not seem to be absolutely unattainable. Evidently Lundeen had wearily retrenched to a wearing-down process. But Malpass labored under not only the hot impatience of a lover but also the growing doubts of a man whose intelligence has begun to operate against his vanity. Now and then Virginia caught a veiled gleam in his eyes that caused her to bless Clifton Forrest and to renew her unending vigilance. Malpass was capable of resorting to anything.

Several weeks went by. Mrs. Lundeen's health did not improve, and plans were effected to send her to Atlanta for the winter, to visit her old home and relatives. Virginia approved of this, but it meant that she must prolong her own absence from Cottonwoods. Still, the immediate present was all that she could meet adroitly. The future would take care of itself.

Her attitude of mind toward Clifton was something over which she had no control. The meeting with him that night, her monstrous deceit, the calm, barefaced carrying out of an apparent marriage of convenience when she loved him more every moment—these thrilling things could not be barred from consciousness, never by day and seldom by night. She resisted numberless temptations to drive here or there in the hope of accidentally seeing him. Her woman's heart told her that he was big and fine and good; that he would win his battle against any odds of health or fortune; that when the differences of the Lundeens and Forrests were settled—as some day they must be—she might find his love.

ONE morning Virginia, with her cowboy escorts, started out to see the silver mine which had played such an important and mystifying part in the affairs of Forrest, Lundeen and Malpass.

Virginia had ridden up there often, especially in early years when it was merely an abandoned mine, picturesquely located and romantically significant with Spanish legend. Con had seen it. But Jake, range rider though he was, had never been there since the rediscovery of silver.

Now, it chanced that Jake, according to his own version, was something of an authority on minerals. He had prospected, on and off, while riding the range, all over that section of the country. This information had come in an-

swer to Virginia's queries, which had been instigated by a thought-provoking remark of Jake's: "Waal, I'm from Missouri, an' I gotta be showed. Never took much stock in the Padre Mine."

Added to this was the significance of the fact that Malpass had lately ceased to have the Padre worked. Once more it had become an abandoned mine. Any move whatever of Malpass' roused distrust in Virginia. Her father had been considerably upset by the assurance that the mine had "petered out," as Malpass described it. After the first large profit the others had been considerably smaller and dwindling. Virginia was interested to get the keen range rider's opinion of the late operations at the Padre.

IN DUE time they arrived to find, to Virginia's disappointment, that its former picturesque charm had given place to sordid ugliness. A hideous slash had been cut in the beautiful grove of juniper, piñon and cedar. High up the slope the brook had been choked into a rough chute, now broken and down in places. The willows that once had graced the little pool—where, according to legend, the padres were wont to drink—were gone along with the glancing water. Flowers and sage were not. Tracks and trestles, dumps of clay and rock, seepings of russet-colored water from denuded banks, bleak sheds with galvanized iron roofs, and rusting machinery littered around, and piles of tar-coated pipe attested to the approach and desertion of destructive men.

"Waal, wouldn't the old padres turn over in their graves?" asked Jake, with a mirthless grin, as he surveyed the scene.

"They surely would," returned Virginia ruefully. "Now, Jake, we'll play that I am a prospective buyer with very little cash and you are an expert adviser."

"Shure, it looks loike a dump outside of Noo Yoark," put in Con.

"Miss Virginia, I reckon you'd better find a shady place an' wait," advised Jake.

"But I want to poke around," she replied, dismounting. "You boys needn't bother about me. I'll not crawl in any holes or walk out on a trestle."

"Con, bring your flashlight," directed Jake. "It'll be dark in the tunnel."

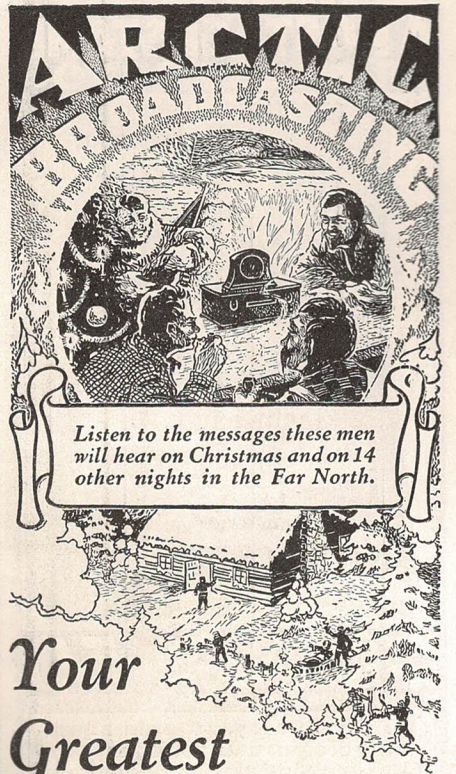
"If you don't moind, I'll stay out," returned Con as he clambered down after the businesslike Jake.

(Continued on page 48)



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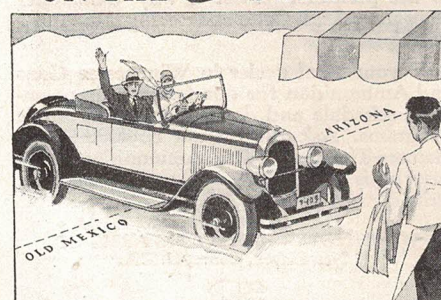
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The Shepherd of Guadalupe

Continued from page 47

Virginia was left to her own resources. On previous occasions she had ridden by up the trail, merely casting curious and disgusted glances at the jumble of wood, iron and earth, trying to piece them together into the idea of silver production. This time she followed an intuitive prompting which seemed at once both strong and illusive. She was on a tour of inspection. Her father had informed her lately that the failure of this mine had killed extravagant hopes. Her own large income had formerly come from this source. Virginia's opinion was that Lundeen, after running cattle all his life, was no judge of mining ventures.

SHE inspected every place she could get at, and did not mind exertion or rust or dirt. And after she had thoroughly tired herself she concluded that this mine, once famous in legend if never in productiveness, was nothing but a conglomeration of clapboards, old iron, tracks and trestles and various shades of dark naked earth. She repaired to the only shade tree on the bench, and there sat down to rest. From here the valley below was not in sight, but the distant range spread out to the dim mountains, compelling and beautiful.

Her reverie and gaze might have been more pleasant if she had been far removed from this spot desecrated and despoiled by Malpass. She could not quite forget it and that an insistent and insatiable distrust of the man had led her there. She was glad when she espied the cowboys emerge from under the brow of a slanting bank of clay and climb back to the horses. Their faces were hot and their clothes, especially their knees, had come in contact with something like chalk, and their boots were splashed with red mud. Seeing Virginia under the tree, they led the horses up to her.

"Waal, Miss Virginia, shore an Irishman is scared more of the dark than a nigger," observed Jake, complacently, as he dropped the bridles and sat down to remove his sombrero.

"Oim sayin' no nigger would ever have follered you where I went," responded Con.

"You both look spooky," laughed Virginia.

"Miss, I'm plumb curious," went on Jake, now serious. "Did Mr. Lundeen ever employ any white man on this minin' job?"

"Father never employed anybody. Malpass did all that. I remember there used to be complaints on Father's part. Malpass hired none but Mexicans. And, as I understood it, the work suffered for this reason. Inefficient boys running engines, and—oh, I can't recall much. I do remember that no consistent work was carried on, much to Father's annoyance."

"Waal, between you an' me an' Con here, I don't believe there ever was any work carried on."

"What!" ejaculated Virginia, sitting up with a jerk. "Why, Jake, it appears to me endless work went on here. Look at the sheds, the tracks, the old cars, the trestles, the piles of pipe, the flumes, and hill after hill of rock, gravel, clay, all dug out of the ground."

"Shore, it took work to do thet, an' a mighty sight of it, but what I'm alludin' to is miners' work. All this packin' an' buildin' an' diggin' was done for nothin'."

"But, Jake, many thousands of dollars came out of that hole," asserted Virginia emphatically.

"Then, by gosh, it was shore planted there beforehand," returned Jake bluntly.

"What an extraordinary statement!" ejaculated Virginia, her receptive mind whirling with conjectures and imaginings.

"It is—sort of," admitted Jake, scratching his close-cropped head. "But, doggone me, thet's my idee. . . . Miss Virginia, I've seen a heap of mines. I spent some years over around Silver City. An' I've been in Colorado. I know how mines are worked. I'd bet a million there was never an ounce of silver came out of this hole."

"Jake, on what do you base that positive opinion?"

"Because I couldn't find a single trace of silver. But, look here!"

He opened his huge palm, in which had been crumpled a bit of paper. When he carefully unfolded and smoothed it out Virginia's astonished sight recorded a number of grains and specks of gold.

"Gold! Where on earth did they come from?" demanded Virginia, much mystified.

"Where! Haw! Haw! Waal, they came out of the earth an' not from on it."

"Jake, I know I'm stupid, but please explain."

"Waal, back in the mine there are holes thet were made by blasts. Some heavy ones, shore. I'll bet no miners were inside when they shot them. Must have clogged up the shaft. I ought to have told you how a number of shafts run off from the main tunnel. No sense or reason in them, accordin' to my fingerin', except to make more shafts. . . . Waal, I thought of somethin', an' I crawled into one of the biggest blast holes, higher'n my head an' wide as a room. I filled an old pan I found with loose earth an' shale. Fetchin' it out to the light, I shook and blew the heavy parts away. We used to call this dry pannin'. When I got out of wind Con took a turn, and shore he's windy enough to be a glass blower. Result was we got down to these few grains of gold."

"**A**ND what does all this prove?" queried Virginia, in breathless interest.

"Waal, when all's said it proves nothin' thet I can prove," returned Jake, in perplexity. "I know what I think. We shore found this little trace of loose gold. There it is in your hand. But I'd bet a lot nature never put this gold in thet hillside."

"You mean you believe gold like this—in large quantity perhaps—was taken into the mine from outside?" asked Virginia, her mind quickening with many scintillating thoughts.

"Planted in there, Miss Virginia," said Jake, very soberly. "Thousands of dollars in gold, mebbe. An' then blasted! Thet would blow the gold fragments into the dirt an' gravel an' shale. It's an old trick. But I never heerd of it in these parts."

"An old trick! . . . To deceive? To raise greedy hopes? To blind? To give false and tremendous value to a worthless hole in the ground?"

"Miss Virginia, you've hit it plumb center. . . . But I'm bound to tell you I may be wrong. Thet's the hell—pardon, miss, I'm some excited—but thet's the worst of it. The gold might have been there of its own an' nature's accord. I don't believe so. It looks fishy to me. But I might be wrong."

"Jake, could a mining expert prove positively whether this gold was planted

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there to defraud or belonged there along with the other natural deposits?"

"He shore could," asserted Jake, emphatically nodding his head.

"Boys, this is a very singular thing," concluded Virginia gravely. "It may mean nothing, and then again it may mean a great deal. . . I'm asking you both on your word of honor to keep this secret with me."

They solemnly promised in unison, and Virginia felt that she could trust them. With trembling fingers she carefully tied up the telltale grains of gold in a corner of her handkerchief and stowed it safely away, thinking the while of the strange result of a chance remark. But, then, how alertly distrustful she was of anything pertaining to Malpass' activities!

AT HOME she rode in abruptly upon a scene of disorder and confusion. The court appeared full of strange cars and strange people. Jake, with a warning call, caught up to her and reached for her bridle.

Her father and a young man and Mr. Hartwell of Watrous were lifting someone out of the car.

"Father, what has happened?" she cried.

But no one heard her. They were all talking excitedly, and the Mexicans crowding about were exclaiming to their saints. Then Virginia saw Malpass' boots, his white riding breeches, and lastly his face—that she did not recognize. It appeared webbed with bloody stripes.

She clapped a hand to her lips too late to stifle a scream. Then: "My God! Is he dead?"

"Go into the house," shouted her father.

Virginia had no idea of obeying, even had she been capable of moving. Her feet might as well have been cased in leaden boots. A horrible chill attacked her within and froze pulse and vein. Her mind had flashed upon one appalling thought, and there had congealed.

"Lundeen—drive them—away!" shrieked Malpass, and then he cursed and raved in Spanish.

Virginia nearly dropped with the instant release of her faculties from an icy compress. Suddenly she had a sensation not unlike the worst of seasickness.

Lundeen bellowed at the gaping employees of the house, at the drivers and occupants of the other cars.

"Hell's fire! Get me—inside!" Malpass could not stand without the aid of the men who locked arms under his. He could not walk at all. They slid and dragged him. His thin coat and shirt were cut into ribbons. The olive tan of his neck showed a broad welt like a band of red velvet.

Following them, quaking and thrilling alternately, Virginia entered the wide hall, and then the living-room, where they laid Malpass back in an armchair. He called faintly for whisky. The chauffeur ran out. Lundeen rushed to the cabinet where he kept liquor. Hartwell endeavored to ease the stiff posture of the recumbent man. Virginia stood fascinated and horrified.

"Oh, Father! What happened?"

"How the hell do I know?" he quavered, his jaw wobbling.

"Miss Lundeen, there's been a terrible fight," said Hartwell.

"Between whom?" queried Virginia, her hand on her bursting heart. She did not need to ask. That heart told her what her fears wanted confirmed.

"Leave the room," ordered Lundeen, hurrying across the room with a glass full of red liquor that spilled over his shaking hand.

"No! She stays to hear this—by God," hissed Malpass.

When he had gulped the whisky his head fell back, his eyes closed. And Virginia engaged all her forces in an effort to look clearly at him.

He presented a spectacle like a beaten beast. His striped shirt was red with blood, whether from cuts on face and neck, or a wound not visible. The sleeves of coat and shirt were ripped back to the elbow, showing a wrist that looked as if it had been burned to the bone.

"Hartwell, who'n'll's to blame?" burst out Lundeen, throwing the empty glass back to crash on the cabinet.

"Cliff Forrest," returned Hartwell explosively.

"So help me Heaven! I reckoned so. . . How'd he do it?"

"Beat him with a bullwhacker's whip. Beat him unconscious, Lundeen, an' if Forrest hadn't give out he'd have beat him to death."

"For Gawd's sake, why?"

Malpass stirred as if he had been pricked. His eyes opened. Under the swollen lids and the brand across his forehead they gleamed with most baleful luster.

"Hartwell, get out of here," he ordered in stronger voice. "And keep your mouth shut—if you want my favors."

"But if Mason dies, sir, they'll make me talk. An' he's bad hurt," replied Hartwell, nervously wringing his hands. "Besides, there were other people present."

"Wait, then. Keep me posted."

Hartwell mumbled a few incoherent words and beat a hasty retreat.

"August, hadn't I better send to town for a doctor?" queried Lundeen anxiously.

"No. . . I'm in agony, but only beat-en, burned. . . It was a whip. Forrest jumped me with a whip."

"He'll go to jail," boomed Lundeen.

"—! I'll cut his heart out!"

Weakly, with strength infinitely less than his passion, he stretched the lacerated arm, and pointed a bloody hand and quivering finger at Virginia.

"You brazen hussy!"

Not the frenzied insult of his words but their connotation left Virginia stricken and mute.

"Heah!" shouted Lundeen, his paleness vanishing. "Have a care. You're shore cause to rave, but not—"

"Lundeen, you'll—kill her!" panted Malpass, his breast alternately lifting and sinking.

"Me! You're wild, man. She's my own flesh an' blood."

"That's why. . . If you don't kill her—you'll curse her—throw her out—Then, by God, I'll drag her down!"

VIRGINIA flamed out of her petrifaction.

"Mr. Malpass, I make allowance for your condition. But you're not quite insane. I tell you nothing you have done or can do or say will move me in the slightest."

"I'll drag you through mud!" he hissed with fiendish malignity.

Lundeen intervened, at least with semblance of self-control.

"Shut up, Virginia," he ordered, "an' you, Malpass, do the same or talk sense. What's this all about?"

"Your loyal daughter is the wife of young Forrest."

"What!" yelled Lundeen, leaping up as if at the sting of a lash.

"She's married to Clifton Forrest. I saw the marriage certificate. He stuck it before my eyes! . . . Laughed in my face, the —"

Lundeen sagged under the blow, though mind and body seemed to repudiate it. Slowly he turned to Virginia, his dry lips failing, his eyes strained in terrible question.

(To be continued next week)

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