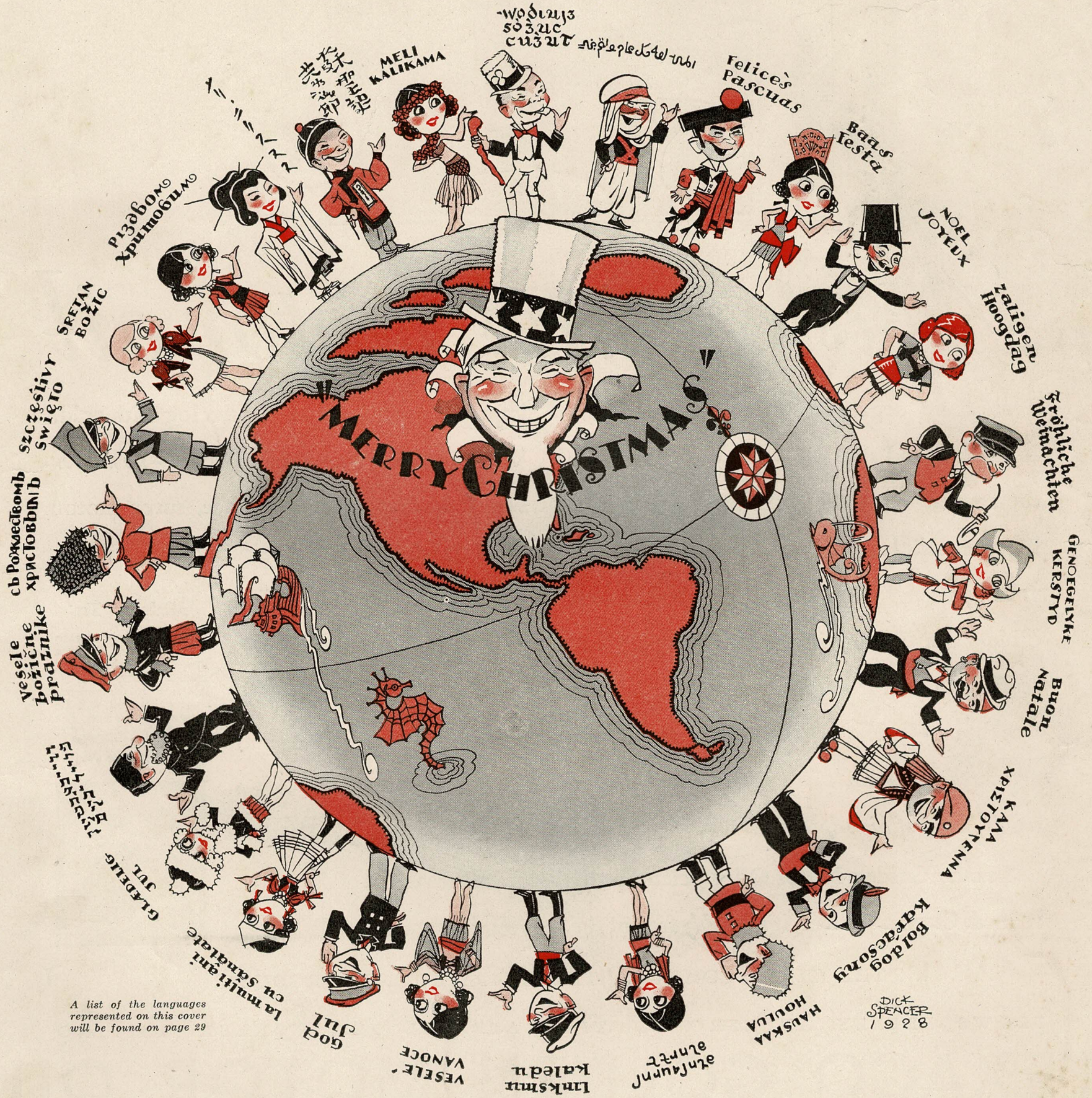


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A list of the languages represented on this cover will be found on page 29

DICK SPENCER
1928

The Shepherd of Guadalupe

By Zane Grey



A glory of red and gold stole over the lifeless reaches of naked earth, but the shepherd had eyes to see and a mind to think

The Story Thus Far:

THE Forrests and Lundeens have always been enemies. The Lundeens, formerly very poor, are now very rich. Mr. Lundeen and a half-breed, Malpass, having by various crooked means acquired the Forrest wealth and home, Cottonwoods.

Young Clifton Forrest, back ill from the war, and Virginia Lundeen are fast falling in love though they do not admit it to each other.

Virginia's father is determined that she marry Malpass. Malpass threatens to ruin her father if she refuses. Virginia decides that the only way out is to marry Cliff and he readily agrees, feeling that he will not live long and therefore will not be a burden to Virginia. They are really both very happy about the marriage for its own sake. However, they separate immediately after the secret ceremony though the news comes out when Cliff gets into a fight with Malpass.

Whereupon both young people are turned out of their homes because of the marriage. Cliff gets a job as a shepherd to Don Lopez and takes his sheep south to Guadalupe Springs, where he greatly improves in health and spirit and hates to think of returning in the spring. The only news he has from home is of Virginia's departure to Colorado to visit a friend of hers and of the townspeople's sentiments against Malpass.

Virginia returns from Colorado, learns that Malpass is arranging to buy Don Lopez' sheep in order to turn Cliff out and buys them herself.

Her father, now a broken old man, tries to make peace with Virginia and they half make up.

Virginia then sends for a mining engineer to investigate the so-called silver mine from which Lundeen and Malpass are supposed to have made so much money. Virginia has suspicions of it and the engineer strengthens those suspicions. However, while they are at the mine, Malpass arrives, shoots Jarvis, the engineer, and makes a grab for Virginia.

NOW, at last, Malpass stood revealed in all his monstrous baseness. The very hideousness of him probably was the one thing alone which could have shocked her from horror into savage and hot hate, into the spirit of self-preservation that was the most powerful instinct in her.

"Malpass, you'll have to kill me!" she cried, her voice rising.

"No, by God!" he shot at her. "I'll treat you like a peon slave! . . . you'll never lift your face again! . . . Then I'll make your father believe this Jarvis did it—and I killed him—because of that!"

"Insane monster!" flamed Virginia, and then she screamed with all the power of her lungs—a piercing sound that rent the air.

As Malpass lunged she darted away from the table, but too late to escape him, for he caught the sleeve of her coat. Whirling out of the coat she left it in his grasp and ran for the door. She reached it too, and the porch, before he pounced upon her and dragged her back.

Virginia saved her breath. No use to scream again! If no one had heard the last, she could not hope another

would bring succor. She had to fight for life and more than life. His intent and his soiling hands had made a frenzied woman of her, a tigress who would rend and tear.

But she eluded him. She got the stove between him and her. She preferred flight to fight, for she believed if she got out she could run away from him, at least down the road far enough to alarm the chauffeur.

Malpass kicked the stove down and leaped over it. He got her, but could not keep his hold. She left part of her waist in his grasp. She ran with him close after her, always between her and the door.

His reaching hand clutched her shoulder, checking her, dragging her off her balance. Then like a beast he had her again and a terrific struggle ensued. She was as strong as he, and actuated by a passion as great. She came out of that struggle with her upper clothing torn to shreds, her bare arms bleeding from scratches, her white shoulders blackened by his sweating, dust-be-grimed hands.

"YOU—hell cat!" he hissed. "The more you fight—the more joy I'll get—out of you."

Virginia was past words. She was in the grip of something terrible. No fear of this beast! No more flight! She awaited his next attack, panting, disheveled, crouching, like a cornered tigress.

He came on, and as ever, his intent

was to hold, to weaken, to master her and she beat and clawed at his face, and kicked.

But Malpass broke through this rain and closed with her. His arms folded her back on the table and his weight augmented his advantage.

Virginia did not surrender or lose her wits. She was momentarily at a disadvantage. She ceased her struggles. Then her assailant, with a hoarse utterance, fell to kissing her face. He thought she was beaten.

She took that vile unguarded moment to fasten both hands in his hair, and dragged with all the strength left her. Like a dog he howled. Her right hand, the stronger, came away full of hair. Then the table collapsed, letting them down, and breaking his hold. Virginia rolled out of his reach. She had heard the ring of the iron poker on the floor. If she could get her hand on that!

But as she bounded up Malpass grasped her leg, tripped her, pulled her down into his arms. It had been his weight, however, that had handicapped her. Without that he simply could not master her. The whistle of his breath told that he was more winded than she. Not for nothing had Virginia taken those long climbs in Colorado! She fought more fiercely and, while her arms were free, with tight pounding fists. Then when he got her head down under his arm, pressing her helpless, choking her, she opened

her mouth and like a wolf at bay she fastened her teeth in it.

Cursing horribly he released her and she dropped to the floor. She rolled away. She felt the poker. Swift as light she snatched it. Leaped up! Malpass was on his knees. Bloody, be-draggled, dirty, holding the arm she had bitten, with distorted face expressing a fiend's defeat, with basilisk eyes betraying murder now, where before they had burned only with lust, he roused all that was virile and primal in Virginia.

SHE swung the poker. He ducked, but she hit him a glancing blow that rang off his skull. He toppled over with a thump that jarred the house.

Virginia heard other thumps. Heavy boots on the porch! In vain she tried to scream, but only a dry, thin sound issued from her lips.

A huge frame hurled itself into the room.

Lundeen! Like a black-maned lion he glared. Virginia staggered back. The wall stopped her. And with legs buckling she slid to the floor. Her sight almost failed.

"God Almighty!" thundered her father.

Virginia by supreme effort fought off faintness.

Lundeen stamped into the middle of the room. It appeared to the girl then that the squirming, groaning Jarvis halted her father. Jarvis was not dead.

"Who's this man?" boomed Lundeen, his great eyes popping half out of his

head. "Virginia! . . . Malpass! . . . What the hell?"

Slowly Virginia gathered what force was left her. Deliverance had come, but the reaction of it gave her a deathly sickness, a sense that her flesh wanted to succumb and a consciousness that her spirit refused.

Malpass rose to his feet, a spectacle to make any observer blink. But he was not in as bad bodily shape as he looked. He moved easily, warily. He was thinking hard. Trapped, he still seemed to have latent power. His eyes narrowed to black daggers.

"Answer me," commanded Lundeen. "What's come off? Who shot this man?"

"I did," replied Malpass.

"He's dyin'. Why'd you do it?"

"I caught him trying to outrage Virginia."

"Huh?" ejaculated Lundeen, in blank stupidity.

Malpass repeated his assertion in stronger terms. Lundeen's jaw dropped as he stared at his partner, and then at Virginia.

"How come?" he asked, hoarsely.

Virginia bided her time. She would let Malpass have his say and then destroy him.

Malpass swallowed hard, and that part of his face not bloody or black showed ghastly white. He was at the end of his rope.

"I saw a car from town crossing the bench below," he said, hurriedly. "I jumped my horse and rode up here. . . . Found Virginia wrestling with this man. Think he'd got the best of her! . . . He—he beat me up before I could pull my gun, but finally I shot him."

SUDDENLY Jarvis sat up quickly as if propelled, like a corpse revived to life, his eyes awful to behold.

"He lies." The gasping voice was just distinguishable. "I caught him—assaulting her." He fell back and seemed to expire.

"Crazed by a bullet," said Malpass, through ashen lips. "I've seen men act like that."

"More'n crazy heah," muttered Lundeen, gropingly. The fact that he stepped so as to place his bulk before the door attested to the gradual trend of his thought.

"I tell you that's what happened," went on Malpass, sharply. "I'm all bunged up. . . . I want to get out of here—to a doctor."

He made as if to pass Lundeen, but was thrust violently backward.

"Stand back!" roared Lundeen. "Are you shore it's a doctor you need?"

"Lundeen, you'll cross me for the last time," returned Malpass, with threat in tone and mien.

"If I do, you can bet it will be the last time! Malpass, this heah deal looks queer. Keep your loud mouth shut or I'll knock your white teeth down your throat."

Malpass sank against the wall, quivering all over.

"Daughter, come heah," went on Lundeen.

"Dad, I can't. I'm too weak. And I'm torn to pieces."

"Ahuh. So I see. Wal, you're able to talk. . . . Are you hurt—the way he said?"

"No. He lied. I'm beaten and bruised but I'm all right otherwise."

"Who stripped you half naked—an' blackened an' bloodied you up this heah way?"

"Señor Malpass," declared Virginia, ringingly. She saw her father's huge form swell, but he kept himself well in hand.

"How come?"

"Dad, last summer my cowboy Jake found signs of a salted mine here," replied Virginia, swiftly flowing to this denunciation she had prayed for. "When I went to Denver I consulted a mining

engineer, an expert. Mr. Jarvis. . . . Oh, I fear I've been his death. . . . Upon my return I wired for him. This morning he arrived. We drove out at once. Left the car below. We—"

"All a damned lie," interrupted Malpass, wildly.

Lundeen made a threatening gesture. "If you don't shut up I'll fix you so you won't heah nothin'. Didn't you have your say? Let her have hers."

VIRGINIA rushed on: "We climbed up here. Mr. Jarvis went to investigate the mine while I waited. . . . Presently Malpass rode up. He came in. He was astonished and scared. He had reason to be. I refused to answer his questions. He grew furious—tried to choke me into explaining. . . . Then Mr. Jarvis came back—caught Malpass mauling me—knocked him down. . . . He told Malpass the mine had been planted. That every grain of gold coming out of there had been planted before. The clumsiest cheat Jarvis had ever seen. . . . Then Malpass shot him! . . . After that he tried to frighten me into lying to protect him.

"Then, Dad, on my honor, Malpass swore he'd degrade me—blame it on to Jarvis—give that as an excuse for shooting him. . . . Then we fought. Oh, I fought him. I wasn't afraid of him. He would have had to kill me. . . . But, Dad, he couldn't master me. . . . He gave up that. . . . He meant more murder. . . . I hit him—with the poker! . . . And then—you came."

Lundeen gradually crouched, as a huge cat that meant to spring. His bushy hair rose upon his head. His arms lifted and bowed—his large hands crooked like claws.

"You—planted—that—mine!" he bellowed in slow-swelling, awful voice.

"You manhandled my daughter!"

"Yes, and I'll plant you!" Malpass thrust out the gun. It was steady. He had accepted the issue. There was only one way out. And the little gun began to crack—crack—crack spitefully.

But the bullets, though staggering Lundeen, did not stop him. Like a bull, lowering and blood-lustful, he plunged on. Malpass shot again, missing for the very reason that he aimed at Lundeen's head. One sweep of Lundeen's giant arm sent him spinning. But up he sprang, cat-like, to fire again. This bullet rang off Lundeen's skull to thud into the ceiling.

Virginia's ears filled with her father's mad roar. She saw him sway, beating the air, and fall with a crash. Malpass stepped over his body toward the door. Then Lundeen kicked with terrific force, knocking Malpass' legs from under him, and when he struck the floor the gun went flying across the room. Lundeen hunched himself with spasmodic full-length hops toward the gun, but Malpass beat him to it. And he shot again as Lundeen half rose to clutch his arm. There came a snapping of bones—an awful cry of agony.

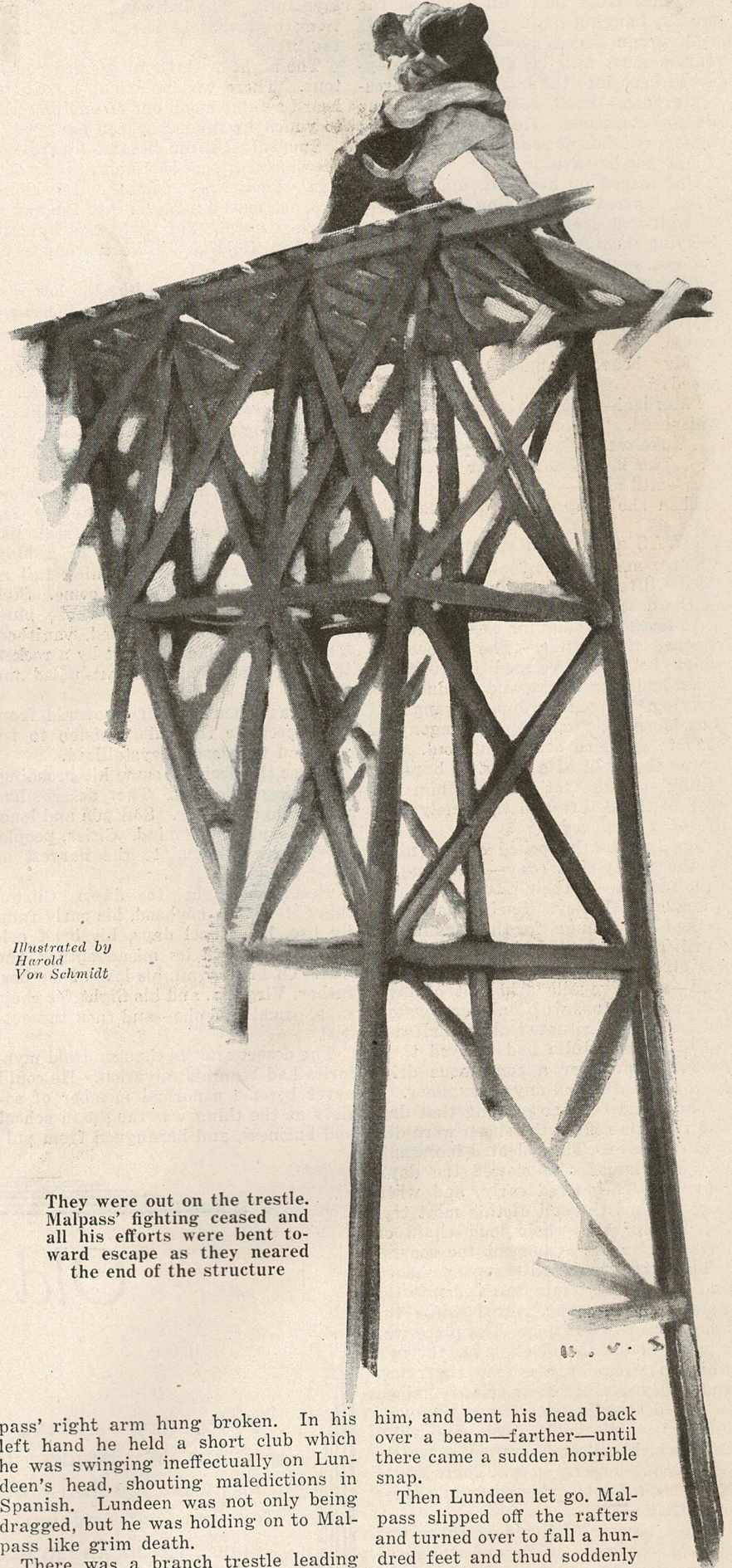
CONSCIOUSNESS gradually faded from Virginia. But though her sight was dark that horror filled her ears and beat upon her brain, until she fainted.

When she came to, the combatants were gone from the room. Jarvis lay with suggestive limpness. What had happened? She was too weak to rise. Had it all been a fearful nightmare? No—there was the man who had befriended her, prone on the floor.

From outside came sounds of scuffling—then again her father's roar, hoarser now, strangling in his throat.

Virginia crawled across the room and out on the porch, and fell flat as if she had been deprived of movement. Yet she could still see what had paralyzed her.

They were out on the trestle. Mal-



Illustrated by
Harold
Von Schmidt

They were out on the trestle. Malpass' fighting ceased and all his efforts were bent toward escape as they neared the end of the structure

pass' right arm hung broken. In his left hand he held a short club which he was swinging ineffectually on Lundeen's head, shouting maledictions in Spanish. Lundeen was not only being dragged, but he was holding on to Malpass like grim death.

There was a branch trestle leading across the ravine. Not improbably Malpass had sought to escape by this. His struggles indicated that. When he reached it, however, he could not shake Lundeen off. He beat frantically, weakly with the club, until it bounced off Lundeen's head and flew out of his hand.

Then they wrestled and fought all the way to the tottering end of the trestle. It was broken there. The floor consisted of a few beams on rickety poles. It shook and rattled under them.

Malpass' fighting ceased and all his efforts bent toward escape. His shrill wild cries attested to the doom he realized. Lundeen dragged him down, like a wolf at a crippled deer, on the swaying verge of the trestle. He knelt on

him, and bent his head back over a beam—farther—until there came a sudden horrible snap.

Then Lundeen let go. Malpass slipped off the rafters and turned over to fall a hundred feet and thud suddenly on the rocks below.

Lundeen peered down. His shaggy head bowed, his broad shoulders sagged and sank, and his legs flopped over the beam that sustained them. He slipped and it appeared he would follow his adversary. But the weight of his upper body held him there.

Virginia got to her knees—then to her feet. Yes—he still hung there. How long had she watched? She held desperately to the porch post. They had destroyed one another. Awful retribution! She must keep on her feet—think of something to do. A gray cloud filmed her eyes—cleared away. There was an icy gnawing at the pit of her stomach. She could not unrivet

her gaze from that still form on the trestle, hanging limp.

A groan freed her—quickened her. Jarvis must still be alive. She staggered back into the house—to the prostrate form—knelt beside it. He was living—conscious. He knew her. His lips moved, but no sound came. His life might yet be saved.

She picked up her coat, and putting it on, started out, needing the support of wall and door, and the porch posts. Leaving them for the open road she fell, but got up again.

She was crawling again, dragging herself round a bend in the road, when the chauffeur's cry roused her failing senses.

"My heavens, miss, what's happened?"

"Murder!—But I'm all right," she whispered. "Go quick. . . . Up the road. . . . Take water—whisky if you have it. . . . The last—house—door open—one man—still alive—"

Then she slipped into darkness.

IT WAS a rare and remarkable phenomenon of nature that definitely decided Clifton Forrest to spend his life on the desert.

At least this singular experience had clinched the matter. The process by which he had developed to such decision had been a long and gradual one, covering an extraordinary range of consciousness, from supreme agony of body to supreme ecstasy of soul. But it was the sight of a comet or bursting falling star that at last won him forever to the desert and the lonely, free life of a shepherd.

The incident happened on the night of the thirty-sixth day—according to Julio's count—of their return trip from Guadalupe Valley. Spring had come to the higher range, for this was in late April. They had reached the one dangerous stretch for sheep on all the long trail—a twelve-mile arid belt of lava, rock and cactus, with only one water-hole, and that situated about halfway.

Clifton and Julio had arrived there at sundown, after a continuous drive on a day as hot as any in summer.

There had been no grazing that day, and for this reason the sheep were difficult to move. They bleated incessantly. The lambs also slowed the day's journey. They tired early, and when they reached the end of this most trying link of the whole long chain of days it was not a moment too soon.

The thirsty parched sheep baa-baaed and drank; the lambs tumbled into the water. Then many rested while the others went to grazing. The place was a wide hollow in black lava, through which a stream ran during the rains, and in dry weather clear pools remained in the deeper holes. The region was infested with coyotes, foxes, and wildcats, which collected around a water-hole because of easy prey. There would be no sleep for the shepherds and their dogs that night.

After supper Clifton had taken one side of the wide wash and Julio the other. The dogs were down among the sheep.

Clifton's beat was a high wall of black lava, rough and difficult to walk over. He had to keep going all the time and maintain a vigilant lookout. A mile or more to the eastward this hollow closed and here under the cliff there was always water, even during the *ano seco* of the Mexicans. Westward the hollow spread out into the bleak bare desert. Here was the greatest danger of losing sheep at night, because the opening was wide and rough.

Clifton perched on a high section of the broken wall. Julio was down among the flock with his dogs. Clifton could see the slight dark figure moving to and fro, seldom resting. He had learned to

love Julio. The lad was honest, simple, true; he loved the sheep and he loved the life.

The night or the hour seemed portentous. There was no wind, yet Clifton heard a faint moan out of any direction to which he turned a keen ear.

Suddenly Clifton became aware that the darkness was lessening. It amazed him. There was no moon. The clouds had not moved away across the sky to leave it open. Yet there was light all around. He heard Julio cry out to his saints.

Then came a sound like the low rush of wind in high grass. It increased. So did the light. Clifton whirled to see the approach of a comet or a falling star. He sat transfixed, with all functions but that of sight in abeyance.

How inconceivably swift its flight, its brightening radiance, its strange increasing roar! All in a second the desert became whiter than a noon of the clearest day. The rushing body cracked like particles of dry splintering ice. It passed by, a blue-white streak like the air-blown molten iron in a blast furnace, leaving a diminishing tail as long as the distance it had come. Suddenly it exploded into immense blue-white stars that fell, faded, vanished. The long tail, like that left by a rocket, lived for a moment, and then paled and died.

It was when Clifton recovered from this spectacle that his decision to remain on the desert crystallized.

After the decision came his brooding, pondering thought. The desert had made him a thinker. Solitude and loneliness inspired the mind. Cities, people, noise were inimical to the harvest of quiet thinking.

From midnight to dawn Clifton thought—of his boyhood, his early family life, his school days, his brief college career with its misadventure, the war. Of his travail, his love of mother, father, Virginia, and his flight for their sake, of catastrophe—and then the desert!

The desert and its thousandfold mysteries had been his salvation. He could never become a normal member of society as the thing was taught in school and business, and harangued from pul-

pits, from benches and editors' chairs.

He needed to sit down alone with the elements. What he had gone through had left no bitterness now, no hate, no unrest, no scorn for the selfish, the ignorant, the brutal. He had seen behind a veil, caught just a glimpse of the infinite from which man had come and where he must go.

Clifton watched the gray dawn lighten. A rose bloomed over the eastern ramparts of the desert. Wisps of clouds grew shell-pink and burned to silver. Then a glory of red and gold stole over the lifeless reaches of the naked earth. He had eyes to see and a mind to think. And there the sheep bleated and the wide trail wound away. When he slid down from his perch he was whistling. It was good to be grateful, to have chosen irrevocably.

ON THE march northward that day he saw Old Baldy stick a white, round dome up over the rim of the world. It had the unreality of a mirage—the illusion that it seemed soon attainable. But for days the strange blue medium between Clifton and the peak that loomed over his home remained the same. It was distance on the desert, and it had never deceived him.

The closer Clifton came to San Luis the more proof he had of his tranquillity. Far back along the sheep herders' trail he had left that phantom of himself—the frail, suffering, tormented past. He had rebuilt his soul on the rocks of the desert.

About the first of May the shepherds reached their permanent camp on the range behind Don Lopez's ranch, a few miles back of San Luis.

Julio had missed count of days, so that Clifton could only guess at the date. However, the cottonwoods said it was spring on the uplands and summer below. Clifton found cactus blooming and bunches of daisies. The sage appeared gray and forlorn after the long winter.

The summer range for Lopez's sheep consisted of valleys and ridges as far from Sycamore as the herders could graze the flock and get back the same day. Since the decline and almost total failure of cattle this range had been a

boon to sheepmen. There had been snow during the winter, and the grass was coming out fresh and green.

Sycamore was the name of the camp at the head of one of the large bottle-necked valleys characteristic of this region. Water flowed from a narrow gorge. A few distorted old sycamore trees gave the spot its name.

The sheep knew they were home. Almost they rolled in the green grass.

Clifton liked the place well. Years before, with boys from town, he had come here to shoot rabbits. Cotton-tails were more plentiful now than then, which was owing to the depletion of foxes and coyotes.

It was in Clifton's mind to start a flock of his own, however small it might be. Lopez, after the manner of sheepmen, would sell that fall. Clifton had seven months' pay coming, which, little as it was, would purchase a few sheep. He laughed at his wardrobe, which was on his back; a patchwork of his own mending. He would require a new outfit, for Sycamore was far removed from Guadalupe. It would be fun, however, to let his mother—and anyone else, for that matter—see him in his present shepherd's garb.

Julio went singing away across the valley, taking the trail to San Luis. He was to stop at the ranch and report to Lopez, then go on to San Luis to see his people and return with supplies.

Clifton remained with the sheep. They had made Sycamore early in the afternoon, and Clifton, meaning this camp to be his home during the summer, pitched his tent with an idea of permanence. Up the gorge there was abundance of cedar brush, some of which he cut for his bed. He built a fireplace, and packed down a quantity of wood. His tasks this day, however, were broken by desultory spells, in which he gazed partly over the hill. Three miles from San Luis—five from home—six from Cottonwoods! Incredible! He could not keep from wondering, longing, hoping.

All afternoon he alternated between long periods of labor and short ones of idle speculation. But the sum of his work resulted in a most comfortable, picturesque camp.

Sunset and evening star! Always different, always the same! He ate supper beside his lonely camp fire. Always the sheep herder would be lonely, no matter where. The lambs were bleating, the dogs were quiet. All was well with the flock. And with him.

He went to bed early. The next morning while he ate breakfast, which was an apology for a meal, and later than usual that morning, the dogs set up a clamorous barking, so unusual that it startled him.

He espied Don Lopez riding across the green flat towards his camp. Then a rush of blood throbbed to Clifton's temples, which, slowly receding, left him cold. He had been absent seven months. A long time in the life of elderly people! Fateful and mutable lapse of days for a girl in her twenties!

"Don Lopez!" he murmured, gladly, yet with reluctance. "He will tell me everything—if only I can understand him!"

THE selfsame hour that Clifton Forrest arrived at Sycamore that golden early May day, Virginia rushed out of the house possessed by she knew not what. Indeed she had been possessed ever since she had taken up her abode in the old home where as a girl she had played and wept and dreamed her girlhood away.

She could not stay indoors, despite the work that had fallen to her hands. The day was gorgeous, lovely, like one of the amber-tinted, white-cloud-pag-eanted June (Continued on page 40)

Old Sniff

A dog story—and a very human one, besides. It may make you shed a tear or two, but you won't mind that, for the author of this comedy knows the art of making tears delightful.



PETER B.
KYNE

IN NEXT WEEK'S COLLIER'S



Royal Rages

By Jack

Binns

KING ALEXANDER of Yugoslavia is reported to be so confirmed a radio fan that he builds his own apparatus. His latest effort is a receiver with which he hopes to pick up American broadcast stations using very short waves.

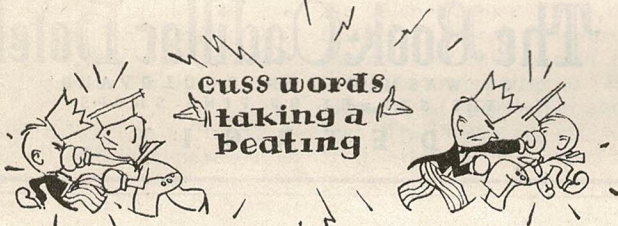
Too bad history does not record the royal language that is used when a battery wire is crossed or wrongly connected.

I would love to learn the regal words that are the equivalents of the ones I use in explosive moments.

Ah, well, we'll never know, and

Francisco, for the very simple reason that the 300-mile measure is the radius of the circle that would cut off each chain station from the other. Moreover, cities are not so mindful of the Federal Radio Commission in the matter of their geographical location. All of New England, New York State, much of Pennsylvania and the east coast states would have to be satisfied with a single New York station as their particular chain broadcaster.

We do not know very much about the financial affairs of the companies operating the chains, but I have no doubt they are still on the red-ink



anyway mine were learned from many years at sea and they will take a lot of beating.

Breaking the Chains

It is safe to predict that one order of the Federal Radio Commission will never go into effect. It is the one which provides that two or more stations on cleared waves shall not broadcast chain programs simultaneously more than one hour daily after 7 P. M. unless they are separated by a distance of more than 300 miles. The commission has already postponed the effective date of this order once, and it is my conviction it will continue to postpone the evil date.

The enforcement of this order would ruin radio broadcasting. It would mean that not more than five stations could carry the same program throughout the entire distance between New York and San

side of the ledger. They are now engaged in that development work that promises future dividends. Take away those possibilities and the chains would break immediately. Quite aside from this, a reduction in the number of stations on a chain puts an end to nationally sponsored programs. Since we have, as a people, elected to leave broadcasting to private operation, this would mean collapse of the whole structure. The listener would be the sufferer. The time has arrived to consider these facts very soberly.

There are undoubtedly some faults in the chain system. Given time they can be eradicated. It should not be forgotten that the two major chains have vastly improved the type of programs, and the influence they have exerted is even beginning to affect the small local stations whose advertising methods in the past have been blatant and in some cases actually obnoxious.

The Shepherd of Guadalupe

Continued from page 14

days in the East. There was something in the air beyond her ken.

Virginia had been distraught for long, waiting for him she called her sheep herder to come home. But it had been a wholesome counter-irritant. Only lately had the aftermath of the tragedy of her father's end left her to take up the threads of the future she prayed for and dreamed of. Sorrow would always abide with her, and remorse. For though her father had been the tool of an unscrupulous villain he had at the last been true to the blood of the Lundeens.

Every day had been a little easier to bear. Summer was coming. It would not be long now until—And she would try to still her aching, throbbing heart. Ethel would be coming soon—after what seemed ages of separation.

SHE wandered restlessly under the cottonwoods, catching at the white thistle-down cotton that floated from above, as if it bore hopes to clasp to her bosom. She sat by the irrigation ditch and trailed her hand in the cool clay-colored water that came sliding and gurgling along under the grassy banks.

A few violets lifted wistful purple faces out of the green. She could not linger there long; the music of the water and the melody of birds grew unbearable. She dared not venture back into the garden, to that secluded corner by the broken wall where she had lured Clifton to ask him to marry her. She had gone there only once since coming to live here.

She strolled away. She stood watching the white sails in the sky. Her hands drooped idly. She saw nothing—heard nothing. Then the cloud-rimmed mountain peaks gave her a pang. She must get up to her shrine at Emerald Lake. There would be strength in the solitude and sublimity of the heights. But she could not go until—

The beauty and mystery of the day stung her. Of what avail to live, to be young, healthy, handsome, longing—if one must look back at sadness and fear a gray uncertainty of future?

It had been only of late, though, Virginia reflected, that she could find no peace, no occupation. There had been incalculable happiness, upon her return from Georgia, in deeding Cottonwoods to its rightful owners—the Forrests. That had been no easy task—not for her to surrender, but for Clay Forrest to accept. In the end she had won him. "You girl—you Lundeen," he had said brokenly. "First my son—then his mother! An' now I, too, must love you!"

With hatred overcome, and the recovery of his beloved Cottonwoods, Forrest became a transformed man. The years of his exile were as if they had never been. Though Virginia had to admit she could never have won him to accept her sacrifice had she not told him that the estate in the South left by Lundeen had enriched her far beyond and outside Cottonwoods. It had been her whim to bind Forrest to secrecy for the present.

She had gone back to the old adobe home in the Cottonwood grove, and asked no more than for Clifton to seek her out there. But would he? How endlessly long these last weeks! Was he dead? Her prophetic and loving heart could not abide that possibility. She knew, and the torture was only fear that he might not want her. Where had gone the old vain coquetties and audacities?

Virginia dragged herself back into the house, to try to take interest in the work of creating beauty and comfort there. For a while she shared the efforts of her two Mexican women servants, but soon she grew listless again. Her little room claimed her for hours by day as well as by night. It had been Clifton's room, too. The few things he had left there had never been moved, or touched, except with reverence, for they were relics of his boyhood, his brief days at college, and of the war.

She had made no change in this room. She trembled whenever she lay down on that old bed. The hard mattress had the same sag in the middle as when she was a girl. It used to hurt her back. As long as she could remember it had been there. And Clifton had lain there night after night, his mother had told her, sleepless and racked with pain, staring into the blackness, listening to the patter of the leaves outside and the murmuring water.

"I'll be all right when he's back, even if he doesn't come to see me," she sighed, and clenched her hands, and gazed up at the blank, dark wall.

And next day Jake, returning from an errand to San Luis, informed Virginia that Clifton Forrest had come back with her sheep.

"My sheep!" cried Virginia, in rapture, and silent gratitude to God. But she was thinking of her sheep herder!

"Eight hundred lambs, ole Lopez said," went on Jake, grinning. "He shore was sore for sellin'. That was a plumb good buy of yours, lady. An' with sheep jumpin' on the market you're settin' pretty."

"Did—did Lopez say how—how Clifton was?" asked Virginia, tremulously. "Never nuthin'. Lopez is a talky ole cuss, too, but he was shore stumped about them eight hundred lambs."

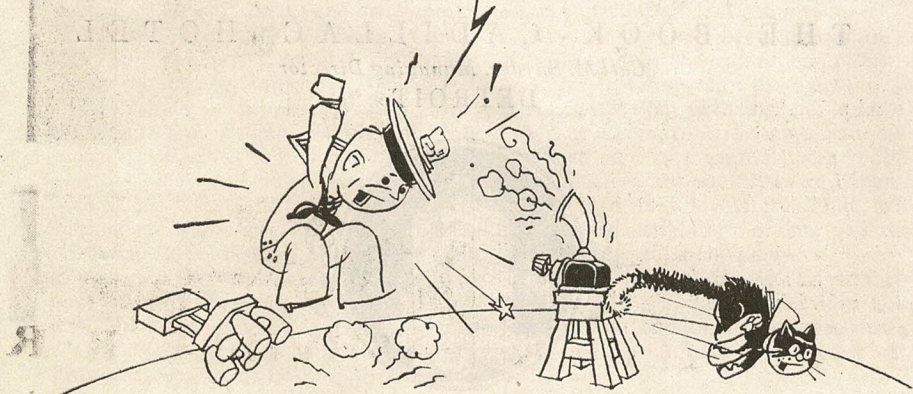
Virginia rushed away to the green covert of the cottonwoods where she felt unseen even by the eyes of birds. And there she wept for joy, and raged at her weakness, and paced the walled aisle, and whispered to herself, and at the sound of her voice betrayed herself utterly:

"Oh, he's back—he's back! Thank God! . . . It was time. I'd soon have died. He must be well again. Seven months on the desert! Alone! Ill and weak when he left! O God! Poor brave boy! And I could not help him! Oh, how I love him! He must know! . . . But if he doesn't know—if he doesn't want me—his wife—what can I do? I can't crawl to him, like a dog, to lick his feet. But I want to—I want to."

SHE felt the better for her outburst, for the facing of her soul. That he was alive—strong enough to toil as a sheep herder for over half a year—that he had come home—was near her—only a few short miles across the hills! These facts mastered her selfish longings, and stilled the troubled depths of her.

Virginia decided there was no understanding human nature. First she had prayed that if only Clifton would live, she would be forever grateful and satisfied. Then it was for his return. And now that he was home, she yearned irresistibly to see him. How little she divined the complexities of love! What would she want—nay, more terrifying, what would she do when she met him?

The following morning she drove to Las Vegas to meet Ethel, who was coming on the early train; and timed her arrival so that she would have but few moments to wait at the station. Since



her return from Atlanta, and the change in her fortunes, she had avoided town and people as much as possible. There had been much discussion of the Lunden-Forrest feud, and her relinquishing of Cottonwoods had made her the subject of endless gossip. She did not care to run the gauntlet of acquaintances just yet.

When the train pulled in, Virginia scanned the Pullman vestibules with eager eyes. Soon she saw Ethel appear on the step, trim, dainty, like a butterfly in her spring finery. She looked anxiously up and down the platform, and did not espy Virginia coming toward her from the parking place. There were other passengers, trainmen and loungers present. Ethel pointed out her several pieces of baggage to the porter, which momentary lapse enabled Virginia to slip up behind her and put both hands over her eyes. She felt Ethel shake and whirl. Otherwise the meeting was the only solemn one they had ever had.

AFTER the porter lifted the baggage into the back of the car Ethel, still holding to Virginia and piercing her with hungry eyes, opened the dammed gateway of her speech.

"Oh . . . you perfectly stunning Virginia," she burst out. "You lovely marble thing! Where's your old tan—and the red of your cheeks? You're pale. You've thinned out. And that's all you needed to beat Helen Andrews two ways for Sunday. . . . But your sad, sad eyes! Poor darling, if you haven't had the rottenest deal! . . . Oh, Virginia, I'm so glad to see you, I'll cry my eyes out."

"So will I, honey, but let's wait till we get out home," replied Virginia, conscious of a sudden, sweet and wonderful warmth. It had not occurred to her that Ethel would be the best medicine in the world. Now she knew it. She took her seat at the wheel, and Ethel got in beside her.

"Just one word, darling, and a question," said Ethel, "after that it's all you."

"I think I can guess," replied Virginia.

"But you're not smiling. . . . Virginia, I'm to be married in June."

"Marvelous! I congratulate you. I'll be happy with you."

"Will you come to my wedding?"

"I surely will. How could you be married without me?"

"I couldn't. That's why you've had me guessing. Virginia, do you know I've had only two letters and one telegram from you in seven months? . . ."

"But, honey, how could I write, even to you?" implored Virginia.

"It would have been better for you. But you always were a strange close-mouthed creature. I think I understand and I forgive you."

Virginia drove out of town on the San Luis road, which was far from being a thoroughfare.

"I'll make up for my neglect," returned Virginia, humbly. "I'll talk you deaf and dumb and blind."

"I had your letters, as I said, and I read what was in the papers. You need not rake up that horrible—"

"But I shall," interrupted Virginia, as her friend hesitated. "It will do me good to talk."

"I met Mr. Jarvis yesterday. He asked all about you. I told him I didn't know much, but I would soon."

"How is he now?"

"Oh, he's completely recovered."

"I am very glad," said Virginia.

"Virginia, were you hurt in—in that fight?" asked Ethel, anxiously.

"I should say I was. Scratched—beaten black and blue! He even hit me! Ugh! . . . I'll tell you all about it some day."

Virginia could see that her faithful friend was repressing all kinds of explosives in consideration for her feelings. But Virginia would not have minded anything now. The ice was broken. She had been too long choked by her own inhibitions.

"Say, this is a swell road, if you don't know it. Where are we going?" remarked Ethel.

"Home."

"But this isn't the way to Cottonwoods."

"I don't live at Cottonwoods now."

"Oh, I see," rejoined Ethel, bursting with curiosity. "Is your mother with you?"

"No. I left her in Atlanta."

"How is she?"

"Pretty well. I spent three months with her. I don't think she will ever come back to the West. She likes her old home best and has better health there. My grandfather and grandmother have a fine plantation just out of Atlanta. I like it there too—for a visit. But give me the desert."

"Well, dearie, it's better news than I expected. I was afraid your mother would sink under that calamity."

"No, she didn't. Of course she never heard any but the barest details."

When they crossed the lower end of the valley below San Luis the whole wonderful triangle of green led up beautifully to the impressive white and red mansion on the bluff. Cottonwoods shone clear and stately in the sunlight. Virginia saw it with a pang. She had never been happy there.

"It's so lovely—everything, I mean," murmured Ethel. "I don't blame you, though, for not living at Cottonwoods, just yet."

"I gave Cottonwoods back to the Forrests," said Virginia, quite casually.

"Virginia!" cried Ethel, and with a flop sank back in her seat. She had been prepared for revelations, but this was too much. For the time being she was crushed by the catastrophe.

THEY drove out of the valley, through the sleepy little town of San Luis, past the spot where the blackened walls of Clifton's store still stood, and up the shaded, dusty country road where nothing had changed. And at length under the old weatherbeaten Spanish gate and into the green-gold grove where the vine-covered adobe house stood, surely in Ethel's eyes memorable of Clifton Forrest and inseparable from his story. Virginia's heart was full. It was strangely sweet to bring her dearest friend here. Ethel was pale, her eyes were wide and brimming with tears.

"You live here?"

"Yes, honey."

"Alone?"

"I have two servants. Jake and Con have a cabin below."

"It is—lovely," concluded Ethel, with trembling lips.

"I like it better than Cottonwoods. Come. We can carry your bags in. You take the lighter ones."

The room into which Virginia led Ethel had once been her mother's and later Mrs. Forrest's. It was light and fairly large. Virginia had furnished it most comfortably, in harmony with the old-fashioned walls and beams, the open fireplace and the Spanish windows.

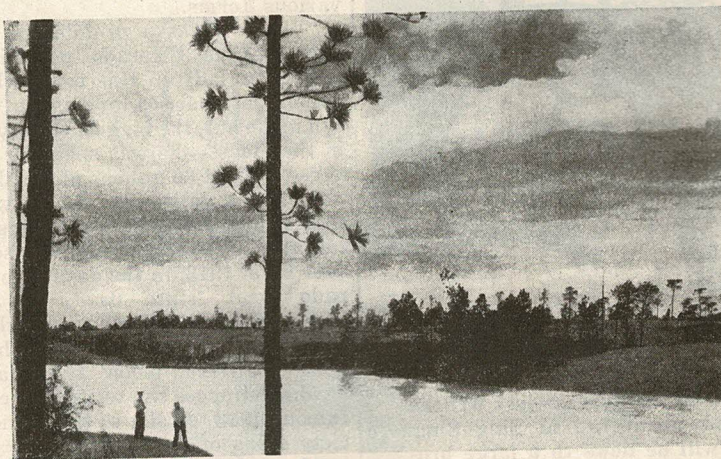
"One wouldn't think it was so nice—from the outside," murmured Ethel, as she divested herself of gloves and hat, and fussed with her pretty blond hair before the mirror, significantly keeping her back to Virginia. Presently she turned a convulsed little face and eyes streaming with tears.

"Gin-ia, I'm going—to bawl."

"So am—I," choked Virginia, and spread wide her arms.

(To be concluded next week)

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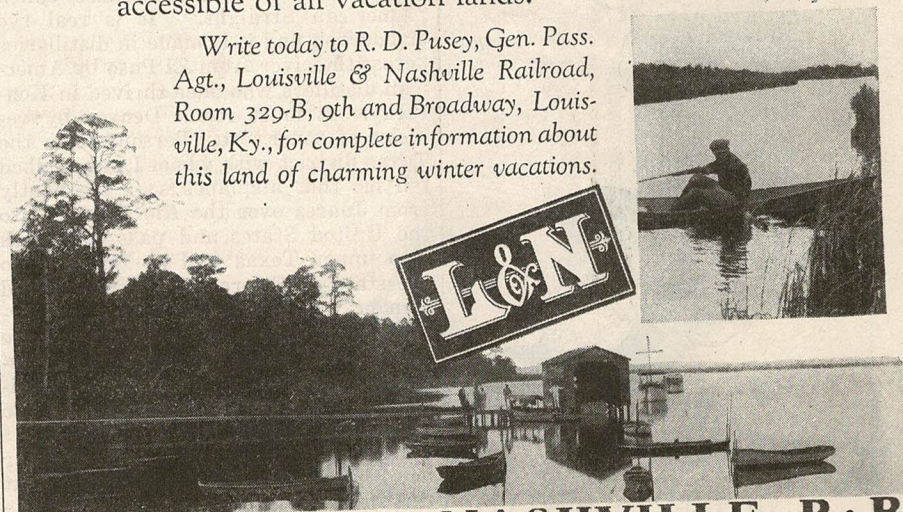
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