

UNDER PRESSURE

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By George Agnew Chamberlain

WNU Service

CHAPTER IX

Helm Blackadder was already closeted with the ambassador who opened the interview by handing over a resume, written in his own hand, of the situation to date.

"There you are, Mr. Blackadder, and I don't mind saying Miss Sewell's escapade has managed to put the United States government, as represented by my unfortunate self, in a nasty hole. You asked us for assistance; I now return the compliment by calling upon you to help me out."

"How?" asked Blackadder.

"That's the very question I was going to put to you," he said. "You have all the facts. What do you suggest?"

"Find me a car and a man who knows the way to La Barranca. Once I get in there I'll guarantee to bring the girl out."

"On what grounds do you intend to base your action?"

"She's a minor and authority has been delegated to me by her legal guardian," said Blackadder as though he were reciting a lesson.

"You're sure she's under age?" interpolated the ambassador anxiously.

"You probably know the laws of the state of New York better than I do. A girl becomes of age at eighteen for certain purposes and at twenty-one for others. I'm willing to risk an assumption."

"Good enough," said the ambassador with a nod. "I can't offer you an embassy car, but I'll have the town searched at once for a good one owned by somebody well acquainted with the roads and the location of the hacienda. When could you start?"

"At dawn tomorrow," said Blackadder. "I'd go tonight but I doubt if we'd gain much time and it won't do me any harm to get some sleep."

He named his hotel and left the embassy at the exact moment Arnaldo, half across the city, was being shown into the private study of the minister of war.

"Adan, my friend!" exclaimed the minister, holding out both hands.

Arnaldo dodged the embrace but grinned, showing a gleam of white teeth. "How much is it going to cost me?" he asked. "From the welcome I'll bet it runs into thousands."

"You've guessed it," said the minister, "but the wrong way round. Thousands for you."

"I can't believe it! Spread the map."

"Sit down and I will. It's a matter of buying off a young girl at anything up to \$50,000. You might talk her into signing for \$20, 30, or 10. With your tongue and looks you might get her to do it for nothing. However you manage it the balance is yours, and no questions asked."

Adan turned his head in a peculiar gesture of alertness. "Who's the girl? What's her name?"

"She's a young American, Mees Joize Sewell."

Arnaldo threw out his hands and rose. "You're too late—too late by a lot of hours."

"Why? What do you know about it?"

"She went to La Barranca a couple of days ago. How long would it take Dorado to cook her goose? Figure it out for yourself."

"Dorado!" gasped the minister, stifling a laugh. "Apparently you haven't read this morning's papers." He thrust forward the same newspaper clipping he had shown the ambassador. "Cast your eye over that."

Arnaldo read the single paragraph, his expression changing at almost every line. When he reached the end he burst into a roar of laughter. "Pepe, of all people! Pepe!"

"You think it's funny?" said the minister.

"Funny? It's so funny I'm going to have sore ribs for the rest of my life." He folded the clipping and put it in his wallet. "And Margarida Fonseca told me the girl had gone to plead with him—to throw herself on his mercy!"

"Margarida Fonseca!" cried the minister, suddenly going tense and leaning forward.

"Sure, and what of it?"

The minister sank back. "The plot gets thicker," he explained, "and when I say plot I mean plot. But I begin to see the light and by it the finger of Onelia. The time has come for you to declare yourself. Which are you for—him or me?"

"You," said Adan promptly. "Now tell me what it's all about."

After ten minutes' talk the minister picked up a signed slip of paper and read its contents aloud: "As minister of war and with the consent of my government I guarantee the payment of an amount not to exceed \$50,000 in case the senorita Joyce Sewell, daughter and heir of Cutler Sewell, signs a quitclaim to the property known as La Barranca and leaves the republic of Mexico within two weeks of the date hereof." He passed it to Arnaldo and asked with pardonable pride,

"You notice the simple wording? Whoever brings in the quitclaim together with this order gets the money."

"Provided the girl has left Mexico."

"Yes, yes; of course. We don't care to have the job of expelling her, but once she's across the border we'll undertake to see she doesn't come back. What about it, Adan? Doesn't it look like easy money?"

"On the face of it," said Arnaldo slowly, "it does—too easy. Where's the catch?"

"For a man like you and with your resources," said the minister, "there's no catch whatever. There can't be. What's your answer? Will you take it on or not?"

Adan stood staring at the paper in his hand without seeing it. "I'll go," he declared finally.

They shook hands and he started out but before he reached the door the telephone rang with such insistency he paused. A moment later the minister was holding up his



"I See," Said Blackadder, Frowning Thoughtfully.

hand, ordering him to wait. The conversation began with "Yes, Excellency," and ended with the same phrase. He relinquished the apparatus and sat back.

"Well, Adan, you have a rival. The ambassador is sending his own emissary, a compatriot with the strange name of Blackadder."

"Good," said Adan. "Blackadder—it sounds like a snake. Then that let me out."

"On the contrary; it doubles the importance of your mission. My thinking of you was a stroke of genius, because the more gringos get mixed in this business the worse it is for us. Besides, I feel the ambassador's choice hasn't a chance of success."

"By the way," Arnaldo said suddenly, "what do I get out of it?"

"I told you!" gasped the minister. "Isn't fifty thousand enough?"

"That's for the girl," said Arnaldo coolly. "If I lick Onelia, save your neck, attend to Dorado and keep a couple of countries out of war it's going to cost you fifty thousand more. Is it agreed?"

"I suppose so," said the minister after a long pause. "Do you want me to put it in writing?"

"Why should you?" asked Arnaldo with a thin gleam of shining teeth. "Once I've heard it you and I know your word is as good as your bond—once I've heard it."

He departed.

Arnaldo knew when to rush to a job and when to take it easy. He got away around seven in the morning, curled up in the back seat and disposed himself for slumber. Juanito, his daredevil driver, knew little of speed under 60 miles an hour, consequently Adan's nap ended violently a little after eight o'clock. For a moment he thought it was an earthquake, then realized it was merely the difference between the road before and after Toluca. He climbed into the front seat and presently was dangling from the overhead struts as Joyce had done.

As they rounded a low butte the white blot of La Barranca burst into view, yet neither of them saw it. Instinctively Juanito slowed even before Adan could tap his wrist. Directly before them, possibly a little over halfway to the distant hacienda, a troop of horsemen was swirling in contracting circles around a slowly moving car.

"Back up," ordered Arnaldo, "and hide her. Stick her nose against the hill."

Juanito obeyed. A moment later they were climbing the mound which was crowned by a growth of three kinds of cacti, one of them a towering and many-branched sample of the giant torch variety. The horsemen, having brought the car to a halt, had gathered in a group ahead of it. Now a thick-set man

stepped out of its tonneau and walked directly toward the man. Scarcely had he left the car than its driver raced it backward into a Y turn, reversed his gears and presently was shooting at top speed across the plain with his recent employer in a direct line between him and the bandits.

"For once a coward saves his master's life," murmured Arnaldo. "I don't get it," said Juanito. "The man you see down yonder is a gringo named Blackadder. Dorado and his men would have filled him full of holes if his louse of a driver hadn't created a diversion."

"Dorado!" breathed Juanito in an awed whisper.

Blackadder was scarcely conscious of his driver's treachery, so absorbed was his attention by the gaping muzzles of two double-action forty-fives and the man who held them. Experience in many tough spots of the world, notably mining camps and the diamond fields of Lencoes, had taught him a gun at the level of the hip invariably means business. Besides, Dorado's pear-shaped face presented such a vivid incarnation of brutality as to arouse doubt as to whether the six-shooters might not in the long run turn out to be angels of mercy. Instinctively Helm raised both hands and kept them high. Without appearing to move a muscle Dorado sent a searing bullet between the spread fingers of one of them.

"Put 'em down," he ordered in guttural English, then murmured instructions to two of his followers.

They dismounted, frisked Blackadder for arms, seized him by feet and wrists, swung him into the saddle of one of their horses and trussed his ankles beneath its barrel so tightly he winced at the pain. He started to protest in Spanish but caught his tongue in time. Both men mounted the remaining riderless horse and the cavalcade was off. Dorado rode at its head at a mile-eating hand gallop and the rest followed, closely bunched around the prisoner.

The barranca was narrowing steadily. Three abandoned drifts gaped in the walls of the chasm, two on the southern, one on the northern side, and along the stream for a distance of a hundred yards men could be seen busily sloshing wooden bateas for placer gold. With a muttered order Dorado dismounted and passed into the recesses of the largest of the cave-like openings.

In a moment every rider had unsaddled and the freed horses were driven helter-skelter upstream into a cliff-locked corral.

The nearest man to Blackadder drew his sheath knife and slashed the taut thong connecting his ankles. Either by accident or on purpose the knife severed the girth and gashed the pony's hide as well. The horse leaped in air, hurling rider and saddle to the ground. There was a roar of laughter. Finding himself unable to rise Blackadder started to crawl on hands and knees to the brook, intending to bathe his lacerated and half-paralyzed legs in the cooling water.

At each sash of the icy water his fury rose, restoring his courage and determination to more than their normal level. Leaning far over he extracted passport and wallet from his breast pocket and managed to thrust them under a flat stone. Presently Dorado called to him—loudly, but the funnel of the drift acted like a megaphone.

"Come here, cabron."

Blackadder found he could barely walk. He approached, entered and at a gesture from Dorado sank on a truss of hay with his back against the wall. Instantly his long training as a miner set his senses alert. He deduced the fact that there must be a shaft, small or large, some-

where in the rear of the cave. Blackadder's nostrils informed him such was the case, not by reason of any odor but because of an indescribable thinness in the air. Dorado straddled a camp stool.

"You spik Castellano?" he asked. "No," lied Blackadder. "What is your name?"

"Henry Gilfalcon."

"Henrique, hein? You gringo—Americano?"

"No, I'm British," said Blackadder, but instantly regretted the falsehood, for at the sudden hardening of Dorado's luminous eyes he realized it had not gone over.

"I think perhaps you lie," said Dorado softly. "When I know you lie I send a finger to the American ambassador—one finger each week. How much money you got?"

"I did lie," said Blackadder, "and I'm sorry. I'm an American, but all my money—everything I had in the world—was in my dispatch case in that car."

"No money, eh? Perhaps pretty soon somebody want to buy you for 25,000 pesos. Better write letter while you have enough fingers. You write letter any time you like; I read it. You say send money to General Dorado, Mexico City."

"I see," said Blackadder, frowning thoughtfully.

Something was stirring in his brain—a seed, an acorn that developed in a flash to the size of a full-grown oak. Roughly it could be framed in a single question. Why not substitute La Barranca for the ransom of 25,000 pesos and thus kill four birds with one stone?

In spite of exhaustion he could not sleep, tortured by the aching of his swollen ankles, but toward dawn fell into a doze. It proved a misfortune, since by the time he was roused Dorado and his riders had already departed on their daily foray, but the guards remained. The day proved unlucky for Dorado as well. At nightfall, wafted along within a blue cloud of blasphemy, he was carried in on an improvised litter and laid on his cot; the bullet that had pierced his thigh had killed his horse.

CHAPTER X

Arnaldo had stayed crouched beside the trunk of the cactus much longer than ordinary caution required, thinking and thinking hard. A full hour elapsed before he led the way back to the car and ordered Juanito to proceed.

Juanito never missed a chance to make speed and as the trail frequently forked this way and that, dodging the mudholes of the recent rainy season, he was forced to come to some quick decisions. Such a choice now presented itself. The fork to the left was undoubtedly the main road but the wheel marks to the right seemed fresher. He chose the former, yielding instinctively to the pull of memory, for he had driven this way once before. Recollection told him there would be a short bridge, relic of more prosperous times. But there was no bridge; it had been carried away in the last floods. He jammed down both feet, reached for the emergency brake and brought the car to a halt on the very lip of an arroyo fully 12 feet deep and twice as wide.

"Numskull!" growled Arnaldo. "Jump, imbecill!"

Slowly the car was nosing down and but for the emergency brake would have glided forward and then rushed. Arnaldo on one side and Juanito on the other scrambled up the bank just in time to cross a steadily widening fissure. The push of their feet was the last straw; a great block of earth gave way with a dull rumble. The car made a nose dive, bounced and fell on its back, its four wheels in air.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

South Africans Taught U. S. New Game Called "Rabbits"; Twelve Men in Team

Some years ago a number of South African boys came to this country to stage a play representing the English-Boer war, notes a writer in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. They played for hours at a time an active outdoor game called "Rabbits"—the favorite game of South Africa.

The field on which the game is played is 120 feet long and 24 feet wide. It is divided by six cross lines, each 24 feet apart.

There are two teams of about 12 each—the hunters and the rabbits. The hunters take their places on the crosslines of the field, two on each line. They can move up and down this line as they please, but a hunter must keep one foot on the line all the time.

The rabbits are assembled at one end of the field, and at a signal they run or walk through to the other end without letting any one of the hunters touch them. As they pass through, the hunters try to tap them. If a rabbit is tapped he is dead and must leave the field until the next play. For each rabbit who

passes safely through the field, the rabbits get one point.

If a rabbit passes beyond the side-lines, he is counted dead. Likewise if a hunter has both feet off the lines when he taps a rabbit, he is out for the rest of the play.

At the end of three or five minutes a whistle is blown and the first play ends. Then the hunters change their places with the rabbits and the game begins again.

If there are too many hunters, some should act as policemen to see that there are no fouls committed and that the rabbits pass through the entire field. Twelve on each side is a good number to play the game, but more or less can play by changing the number of cross lines.

Montenegro Lost Independence

Although one of the principal objects of the Allies in the World war was to protect the rights of small nations, little Montenegro, which fought so valiantly with the victors, lost its independence.—Collier's Weekly.

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

IF YOUR Christmas tree is a balsam—and that is the loveliest kind of all, both for appearance and for fragrance—then when you first light it a cheerful old superstition urges a glance at your shadow on the wall—if you dare. Should it appear headless you will not live to see another Christmas. Then, later, when the tree is burned, another tradition suggests keeping a partly burned stick to ward off lightning.



Caroline Was Not Alone With Her Bright Fire and Holly.

Caroline told herself a dozen times a day that she did not care whether she heard from Stephen or not. What possible difference could it make now, after all these months of silence?

And here it was Christmas eve. Not a message! Not a card! Oh, well. . . . She turned away from the window. One must not allow one's self the luxury of regret.

Fires burned brightly on the hearth. Holly hung above the man-



Caroline Was Not Alone With Her Bright Fire and Holly.

tel. Snow outside, cheer within. That was all she required. She hummed a tune in false gait.

A ring at the door. Stephen? No, just a messenger boy with a box. Caroline's fingers cracked the red cellophane unwrapping it. No card. Just crazy dozens of jig-saw pieces.

She walked restlessly about the room. There she returned to the box. Black and white pieces only. Idly she fitted a few together, leaned closer and frowned. Familiar hand-writing. Stephen's hand-writing!

Excitedly she bent above the puzzle fitting the rest together. Gradually Stephen's clear strong writing stared up at her.

"Dear Caroline," it read, "if you have the patience to put this together, I shall know you are still interested in me. I could not tell you what I wanted to, before I left, because I was not sure of circumstances. But now I know. I can take care of you. Will you marry me, Caroline? A yes would be the most marvelous Christmas present in the world. I love you."

"Stephen."

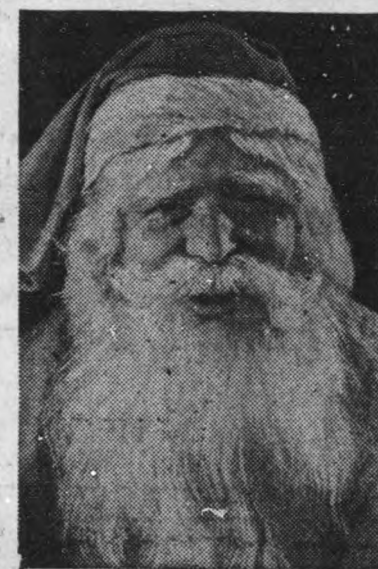
She laughed a little. She cried a little. Then she went to the mantel and snatched down a photograph of herself. This she cut up into small jagged pieces. On several she wrote a single word, which, when put together, read: "I have gone all to pieces, missing you." Then on the mouth of her pictured face, she added the single word "Yes."

These pieces she quickly wrapped up in the box sent to her, and dispatched it by a messenger, who admitted that a gentleman had given it to him, who was staying at the Inn in town.

In another hour Caroline was not alone with her bright fire and holly. And Christmas eve was what it should be. Stephen declared he had been too scared to come himself and sent the puzzle as a test-case. Then he kissed her.

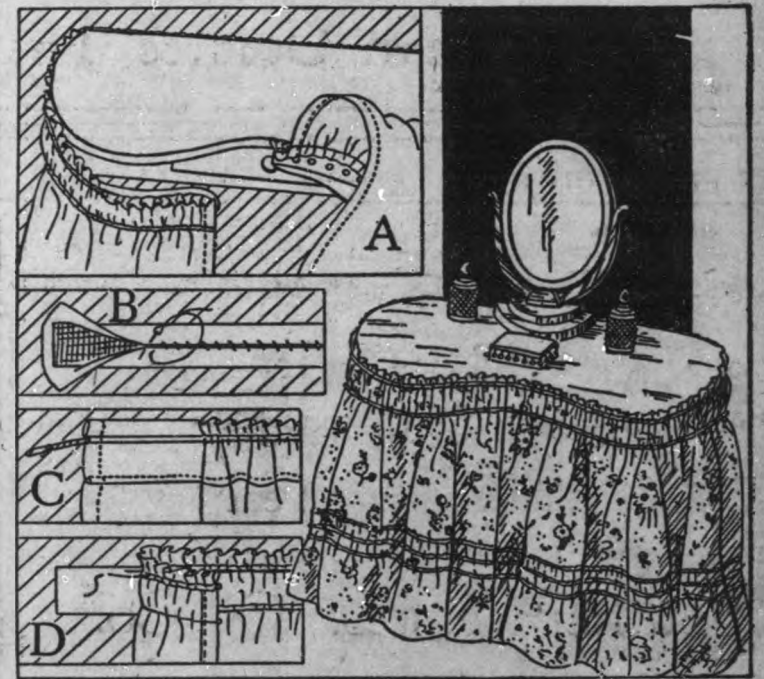
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Santa Himself



HOW to SEW

By RUTH WYETH SPEARS



A Dressing Table Skirt With Corded Shirrings

THIS dressing table has a curved front and hinged arms on which to mount the skirt so that it can be opened to permit access to the drawer. To mount the skirt it must first be sewed to a band of covered buckram. Cut the buckram in a strip 2 1/4 inches wide. Cover it with a straight piece of material as shown here at B.

Make the heading at the top of the skirt just the depth of the thickness of the table edge so that it will cover the edge of the table when the arms are closed. Use 1/4-inch cable cord for the shirring. This is sewed to a safety pin and run through tucks stitched in the material as shown here at C.

The top of the ruffle is also shirred with cords. When the shirrings are all finished, sew the top of the skirt to the covered buckram strip as shown at D and then thumb tack it in place as at A.

Every Homemaker should have a copy of Mrs. Spears' new book, SEWING. Forty-eight pages of step-by-step directions for making

AROUND THE HOUSE

Salt and Pepper Shaker.—A large shaker containing six parts salt to one part pepper and kept on the stove will save steps when seasoning cooking foods.

Preventing Rust in Oven.—After using the oven, leave the oven door wide open, to allow it to cool down thoroughly. This allows all moisture to escape and prevents rust.

Drying Silk Hose.—Never hang silk hose over the radiator or next to any hot surface.

Lining a Coat.—When lining a coat, put the coat on inside out. Have the lining all ready stitched up, and slip it over the coat. It will fall into position naturally. Pin it in place, and finish in the usual way.

Watch Your Step.—Painting the bottom step of the cellar stairs white makes it more conspicuous and often helps to prevent accidents.

Sliding Dresser Drawers.—Rubbing a candle stub or wax along the sliding edges of dresser drawers will make them move in and out much more easily, even when heavily loaded.

Ask Me Another

A General Quiz

1. How many bachelor Presidents has the United States had?
2. What does the abbreviation "non sec" stand for?
3. How does a twelve-year-old dog correspond to age in a human being?
4. What is wind?
5. Who was the Greek cynic philosopher who lived in a tub?
6. What is the procedure when a bank certifies a check?
7. What was the last federal territory to be admitted into the Union as a state?

Answers

1. Two—James Buchanan and Grover Cleveland, but Cleveland was married while he was in the Presidential office.
2. Non sequitur (it does not follow).
3. A dog twelve years old is as old as a man at eighty-four.
4. Air naturally and horizontally in motion with a certain degree of velocity.
5. Diogenes.
6. It withdraws the amount of the check from the drawer's account, and holds it for the purpose of paying the check which it guarantees.
7. Arizona.

Constipated?



What a difference good bowel habits can make! To keep food wastes soft and moving, many doctors recommend Nujol.

INSIST ON GENUINE NUJOL

CHEW LONG BILL NAVY TOBACCO

LIFE'S LIKE THAT

By Fred Neher



"That feels better . . . but it's still a little snug."