

The Thunder God

By PETER B. KYNE

"Skoal!" Ben said, and he and his friend drank the Swedish health. Julie grinned. "Here's to the wide open spaces, where men are men"

Illustrated by
HAROLD
BRETT



Putting two and two together, Ben Whitton discovers a few facts about his enemies

The Story Thus Far:

JULIAN GRANNIS, electrical engineer, loves Gloria Justin, but during the war marries Mercedes Lindberg, Y. M. C. A. entertainer, who is not good enough for him.

His Uncle Jarlath leaves him \$600,000, which he decides to use on some electrical experimentation—man-made thunder and lightning. He and a great friend, Ben Whitton, go into partnership, telling Mercedes nothing about the inheritance because of her extreme extravagance, though Julian arranges a trust fund for her.

Julie and Ben are in an automobile collision with Jake Brander. Mercy, without Julie's knowledge, is playing around with Brander and is at the time with him. She escapes Julie's notice but not Ben's.

Julie, still in love with Mercedes, is just beginning to realize what she is really like. Among other things he finds that she is in debt and has lied to him about money.

He and Ben Whitton start for Oregon on an engineering job, and Julian leaves Mercy with a certain amount of cash, ordering the hotel not to advance her any more.

Mercedes is secretly planning to divorce Julie and marry Jacob Brander as soon as he is free.

IN CONFORMITY with the plan concocted with Jacob Brander, Mercedes Grannis acted with promptness. The day following her interview with Brander she gave up her apartment at the hotel and went to Reno, where she engaged a small house-keeping apartment for three months. As soon as she was settled she called upon a prominent firm of attorneys, told them what she wanted, and made her deal with them. Then, after filing notice of her residence, she settled down to the unpleasant task of marking time

for three months, the statutory residential requirement, preliminary to filing her suit for divorce against Julie.

The morning after Mercedes' departure from San Francisco Gloria Justin found in Julian Grannis' mail at the office the closing bill from the hotel. She checked it, noticing an item of \$11.77 for transportation.

"I wonder where she has gone," Gloria thought. "That much transportation should carry her at least a hundred miles. Apparently she has not returned to Los Angeles."

Because she had a modicum of feminine curiosity, Gloria telephoned the hotel and asked for Mrs. Grannis, and was informed by the clerk that she had checked out the day previous. To Gloria's inquiry for information as to her new address, the clerk, after a brief wait, replied that she had left as a forwarding address "General Delivery, Reno, Nevada."

GLORIA pondered this information. General Delivery, Reno, Nevada! Why had Mercedes gone there? A musical engagement, perhaps. Evidently she intended remaining there some time, otherwise she would not have left General Delivery as a forwarding address. Rather would she have left the address of a hotel, or that of a friend if she contemplated visiting a friend. Apparently

she had no idea where she was going to live.

Instantly Gloria's alert brain solved the mystery. "She's going to engage an apartment. She's going to remain there while Julie is away. Is it possible they are going to have a divorce?"

She recalled the white and haggard face Julie had shown on his last day in the office. She had known then that some tragedy of unusual proportions had overwhelmed him; nevertheless, at leaving, he appeared to have recovered his composure to a remarkable degree. Gloria wondered if he knew!

"No," she decided presently, "he did not. Had he known, he would not have left the city. He loves her. He would not give her up without a struggle."

She looked over the schedule of her employers' movements which Whitton had given her. From this she ascertained that they would remain four days in Portland, outfitting for their trip into the wilds of the Columbia River basin; so, without an instant's hesitation, she called their hotel.

Ben Whitton answered. "This is Gloria speaking, Ben, but don't mention my name if Julie is in the room with you. I think you ought to know something, but I leave it to your own judgment as to whether you should or should not tell Julie. The day after he left with you, his wife checked out of her

hotel and went to Reno. Her address there is General Delivery. So I gather that she will remain there some time and will, in all probability, send the hotel here a more definite forwarding address after she has leased an apartment. Do you think she has gone up there to establish a residence, and then sue Julie for a divorce?"

"I do."

"Does Julie know anything about this?"

"If so, I am not aware of it."

"Is he cheerful?"

"REASONABLY so. Whatever the trouble is, I do not regard it, nor does our client, as anything extraordinary, anything that cannot be overcome. Is our man in town?"

She knew he was referring to Jacob Brander.

"I don't know, Ben."

"Better call up the hotel; and if he is still there, wire me and I'll take the matter up direct. Thanks. Good-by!"

An hour later Whitton received a telegram, reading as follows:

Brander registered at Palace yesterday. Still there. GLORIA.

This telegram Mr. Whitton carefully tore into little bits and dropped them in the wastebasket. At a desk in the corner Julie was writing a letter—to

his wife, Ben inferred. "Probably telling her he's been a brute and asking her to forgive him for being a man," he soliloquized. Then he went downstairs and at the news stand in the lobby purchased a copy of the West Coast Lumberman. He searched through the advertisements in this trade journal, and when he had found what he wanted he called upon an advertiser who had a local office. The sign on this man's door read:

DAVID DEVER
Timber Broker

Into David Dever's chair reserved for visitors Ben Whitton settled his big bulk. "You will, I trust, pardon me for not introducing myself," he began. "I have a reason for remaining incognito for the present, and hence desire to work through a broker. I saw your advertisement in a trade journal, and have called to enlist your services in getting together a very large area of timber land and conducting the negotiations for its purchase. The deal may not amount to anything, but, on the other hand, it may; and if it should, 5 per cent commission on quite a few millions of dollars is worth working for."

DAVID DEVER nodded, and waited for his visitor to elucidate.

"Know the Brander Timber Company, Mr. Dever?"

Dever smiled. "Who doesn't? That company has liquidated to a considerable extent during the past ten years, however, and is now a holding company rather than an operating company."

"Know anything about its holdings in the upper part of the Columbia River basin?"

Dever drew a huge township map down from a case of maps, and indicated the Brander Timber Company's holdings, which had been blocked off in red ink. "So far as I know," said Dever, "a very representative body of fir timber, with perhaps 15 per cent red cedar and 10 per cent hemlock and larch; the remainder is Douglas fir. I understand it has been on the market for years."

"Wire Jacob Brander and ask him what he wants for it. He is at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco today."

Dever called in his secretary and dictated the telegram. "Seller pays the commission, of course," he reminded Whitton.

The latter nodded. "Next line up the Hale-Robinson Company and the Banning people, who have large holdings in the same country. I'll be back in three days. Remember, speed is very necessary."

And Mr. Whitton disappeared as mysteriously as he had appeared. At the public telephone booth in the lobby of his hotel he called up Gloria Justin.

"Engage an efficient private detective to shadow Jacob Brander," he ordered. "I've been trying to coördinate a few things which seem unrelated, but which may not be, after all. I have a great curiosity to know whether Brander boards a train for Portland this evening. Have the detective report to you by telephone at your home, and if he reports that Brander has boarded the train for Portland or Reno, let me know. If he heads south, pay off the 'dick' and forget it, but wire me the gist of the latter's report to you. Also have the same detective

agency wire its Reno representative to locate Mercedes and let us know what she's up to. I don't exactly know what I'm going to do to that man Brander, but of this much I'm certain: he'd better play his hand mighty carefully or it'll cost him a lot of money."

Ben's mind was working fast. Having given Gloria her instructions, he went to the writing-room and addressed a letter to Mercedes Grannis at the hotel she and Julie had occupied in San Francisco. "The hotel will forward it," he decided. "Mustn't let her know I know she's in Reno and suspect her reason for being there. Cat! She's going to sneak up on Julie's blind side if she can." He wrote:

My dear Mercedes:

I have a feeling that you and Julie had a very serious quarrel just before he left to come to Oregon with me. He is so depressed that I cannot help suspecting that you have threatened to sue him for a divorce.

As his oldest and dearest friend, I am, of course, profoundly interested in his professional success, because it affects my own. Julie is now on his first really big commission as a consulting electrical engineer, and it lies within your power to help him in this task or ruin him. If you should sue him now, if you should even threaten to and he should become convinced that you intended to make good on your threat, I feel that the shock would make it impossible for him to carry on with this very important mission he has undertaken.

You know I do not like you. I know you do not like me. But that is an unimportant detail. It would tickle me to death to see you divorce Julie—a little later; because I think that as a wife to a man of his temperament you have been a very complete washout. Therefore I make you this proposal.

He is writing you today, I think. If you can reasonably do so, answer his letter in a kindly and affectionate strain. It will be rather difficult to get mail in to us where we are going, but a letter a week will keep Julie cheered up and on his toes. If you should leave the city for any length of time (Julie thinks you will not, for reasons best known to himself), it

would worry him. He expects you to remain where he parked you. I imagine, however, that you may visit Los Angeles, where you have many more friends than in San Francisco. If you do, please address your letters to him to our office, and my secretary will forward them to him as soon as I can inform her of our post-office address, which is, at present, unknown to us. Do not, however, post letters to him from any place out of the city. Enclose them in a large envelope addressed to my secretary, Miss Gloria Justin, and she will mail them. Thus the letters will bear the San Francisco postmark.

If you have to wire him at any time, send your wire to Miss Justin and ask her to forward it for you. I will give her complete instructions.

If you do this for me, Julie will be enabled to complete his report here. He requires a head on this job; he must not have his mental clarity obscured by domestic worries.

Now, if you coöperate and keep him in a cheerful mood, I promise not to make the slightest move to block your plans if you decide, following his return, to sue him for a divorce. If, on the other hand, you refuse or neglect to coöperate with me, I will employ all of my considerable influence with your husband to induce him to fight the case to a finish; to enter a cross-complaint, naming a correspondent but requesting that the decree be denied, and that you be granted separate maintenance, which will be considerably less, in that case, than you would be awarded in alimony if you should secure the decree. And it will be impossible for you to get a decree if he fights the case, because he is absolutely the finest, most decent, most faithful and blameless man in the world; and you haven't got an iota of evidence upon which to base a divorce action.

In all probability my suspicions at this time are groundless, but I know very well that you and Julie are drifting apart, and that in the end a divorce is inevitable. He knows now that you were with Mr. Whoozis in the park that day, and I assure you I did not tell him. On the contrary, I have tried zealously to protect him from the receipt of any information

or gossip that would make him unhappy. I think you know I'll keep a promise, and I trust you will be guided accordingly.

Sincerely,
BEN F. WHITTON.

P. S. The F stands for Fido.

This letter Mr. Whitton sent south by air mail, and then, feeling very much satisfied with himself—inclined, indeed, to feel that intrigue was his natural *métier*—he ascended to the suite where Julie awaited him. From his bag he took a quart of very good Scotch and mixed two highballs.

"Skoal!" Ben said, and he and his friend drank the Swedish health.

Julie grinned a bit painfully. "Here's to the wide open spaces, old pal, where men are men."

Ben Whitton mailed his letter to Mercedes Grannis on Saturday afternoon. The hotel in San Francisco promptly readdressed it to her, and Mercedes received it on Monday afternoon.

HAD the terrible Whitton been present to see her as she perused it, he would have felt amply compensated for all the worry she had caused him. She was furious; but, since she was a total stranger in Reno, her fury remained bottled within her until she reached her apartment, when she relieved herself in tears.

"That odious Ben Whitton," she soliloquized. "He spoils everything. He knows his power—damn him! I'll simply have to do as he commands."

However, before committing herself irrevocably to Whitton's program, she found relief in discussing his letter fully with Jacob Brander, who, after the fashion of the love-struck, called her up on the long-distance telephone that night just before retiring, alleging the sweet excuse that he knew he couldn't sleep until he had wished her good night.

"I think you had better obey this stout fellow, Mercedes," he advised. "I'm inclined to regard him as a dangerous man to monkey with."

"As you say, dear."

"Nobody knows where you are, and nobody need know except Whitton's secretary, who will, of course, receive your letters addressed to Grannis and note the postmark. But she will not betray you. She's taking orders from Whitton, even if Grannis is one of her chiefs. So you're quite safe to continue where you are and establish your legal residence. It will be time enough to spring the bad news on Grannis when he returns from Oregon; and when you do you'll have Whitton's moral support."

"Yes, I think so too, Jacob. It would please him to see me out of Julie's life, and the sooner the better. I believe he'll keep his promises."

"He's really a very powerful ally, Mercedes—very powerful. We need him on our side, so see to it that you retain him."

"When am I going to see you?" Mercedes queried. "It's so lonely up here in a strange city where one doesn't know a soul."

"I have a hunch," the man replied, "that I'd better keep away from you, Mercedes."

"Well, you can see me once, can you not? What's to prevent it?"

He pondered. "Well, I'm going to Portland, Ore., tomorrow night. But I can go to Reno instead. I'll be there for breakfast, spend the (Continued on page 49)

Gloria pondered this information. General Delivery, Reno, Nevada! Why had Mercedes gone there?



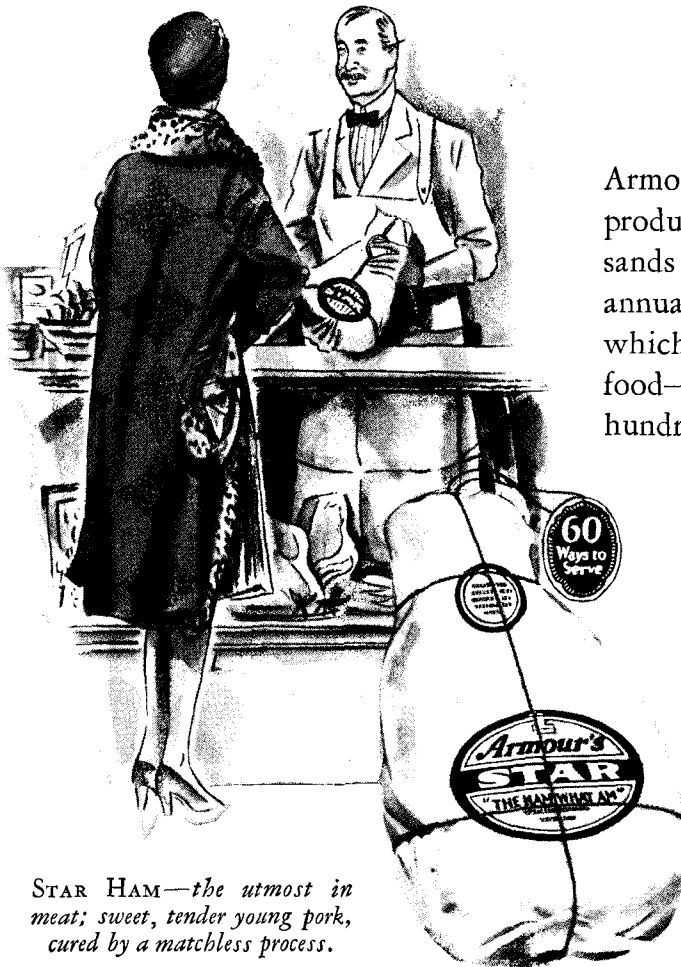
Armour

A Star Ham, to us, is something you are going to eat

... something you are going to eat. Delicious, tender ham that you can boil, fry or braise with confidence that it will turn out *just right*. Ham leftovers that make countless dishes surprise you with new zest and richness.

Meat is the most important item in the daily diet. Millions of homes look to thousands of retail meat dealers every day to supply this necessary food. These in turn look to Armour and Company as their source of supply—which never fails.

Back of this picture is another—a score of huge packing plants strategically placed to best serve consumers of meat and producers of live stock—500 branch houses bringing daily supplies close to daily markets—1500 refrigerator cars of freshly dressed meats leaving these packing plants for these 500 branch houses every day—60,000 employees upholding the

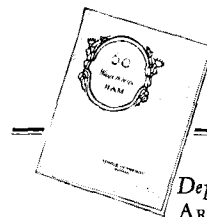


STAR HAM—the utmost in meat; sweet, tender young pork, cured by a matchless process.

Armour standard—"Armour on a food product is an assurance of quality"—thousands of farmers and ranchers producing annually fifteen million head of live stock which Armour and Company turn into food—and for which they pay the raisers hundreds of millions of dollars on delivery.

And back of this, another picture—the Armour Kitchen in Chicago—the point of contact between you and your home, the ranchers and farmers, the buyers, dressers and processors of meat. Here under the direction of domestic science experts is determined for Armour what you and your folks demand. From here is enforced every step in preparation that must be observed so that every Star Ham is a delight when it reaches your table.

For sixty years Armour and Company have been perfecting methods to safeguard the meat supply of the nation. Star Ham is but one of the quality products that has established Armour and Company's reputation among the world's leading provisioners. Armour and Company, Chicago.



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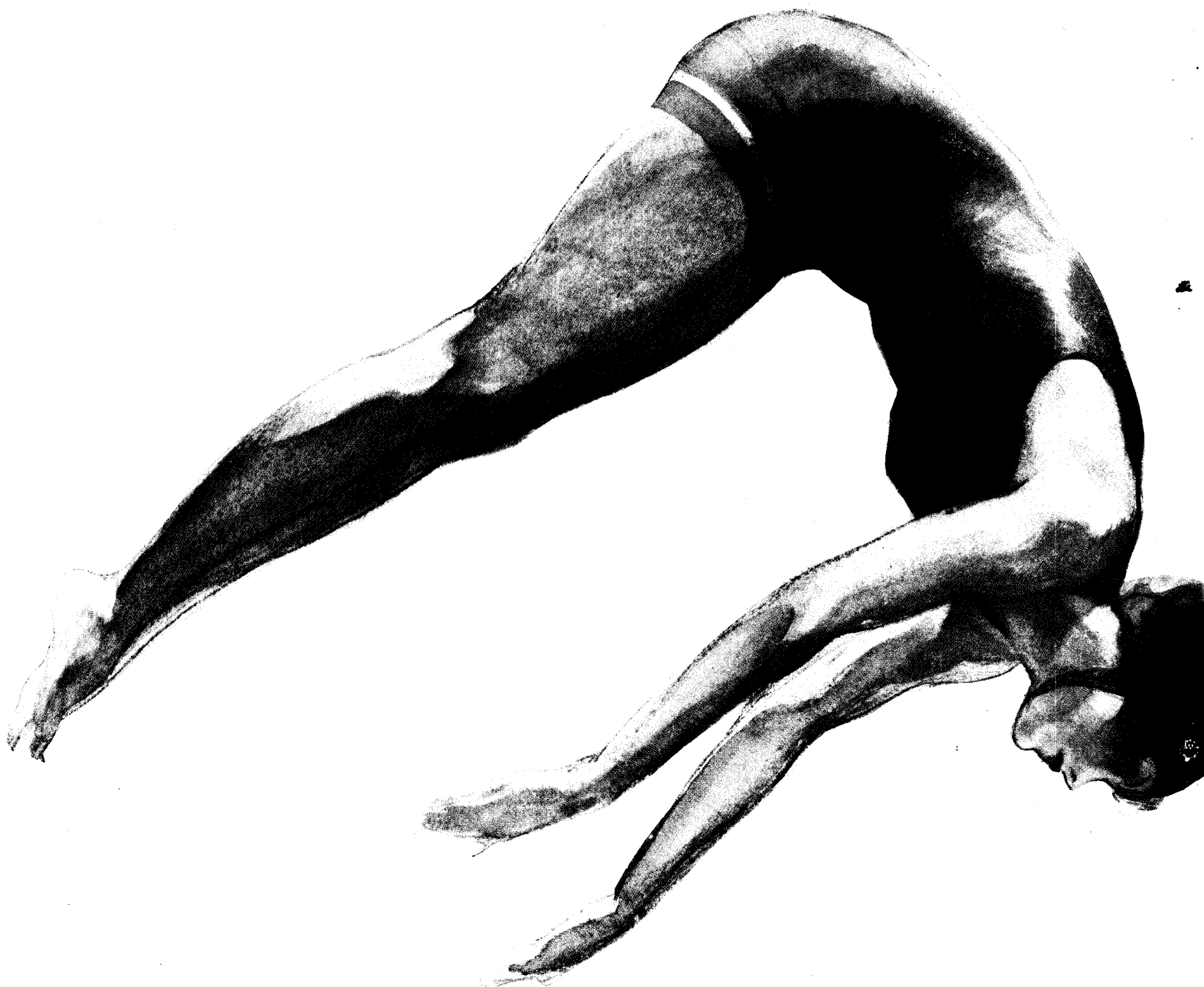
Please send me Free Recipe Book, "60 WAYS TO SERVE HAM."

Name _____

Address _____



The recipes for these delicious dishes—Star Ham au Gratin and Star Ham and Cloverbloom Eggs—are featured in "60 WAYS TO SERVE HAM"—an unusual recipe book prepared by the Armour Kitchen. Send the coupon for it.



Spalding.

STYLE NOTE

The trunks are cut shorter in a Spalding Swimming Suit. You never have to pull them up. They stay up—where you have always wanted them—on a level with the skirt.

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When you go to buy a swimming suit

*don't buy a cheap one , ,
don't buy a cheap one , ,
don't buy a cheap one , ,*

because the best , , a Spalding , , costs only \$5 or \$6

FEW things can make a mortal so self-conscious as a swimming suit that isn't quite right. And a cheap suit never is right. If it were, it couldn't be cheap.

For it does cost more money to make you a suit that is perfect in every detail—that doesn't sag or pucker at the armholes—that has no clumsy, lumpy seams to show—that won't grow baggy with frequent use—that won't curl up at the shoulder straps—

A suit that is beautifully tailored, and fashioned with custom care—that fits with true athletic snugness, yet gives you perfect freedom in the water—and is the smartest suit on the beach—

One that is made of the finest wool that can be put into a

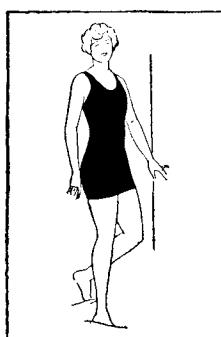


swimming suit—that is knit of double-ply yarn to give it double-strength—that always springs back into shape no matter how far you stretch it—that retains its liveliness, its color, its smartness, no matter how much you subject it to sun, sand, and water—

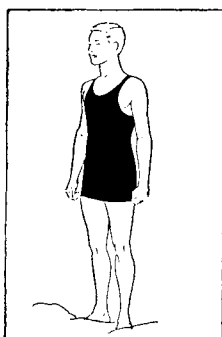
It does cost more to make you such a suit—but not a great deal more. Only a dollar or two. And you'll be eternally grateful that you spent it—that you got a genuine Spalding Swimming Suit.

So go to your nearest Spalding store or dealer. There is one in almost every town. And buy the Spalding Swimming Suit you like the best. If, however, you cannot locate your Spalding dealer, write direct to A. G. Spalding & Bros., 104 Nassau St., New York, for a free folder showing the 1928 models.

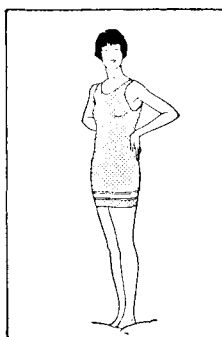
Swimming Suits



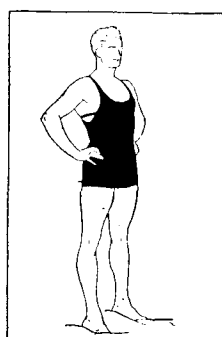
The SURF QUEEN
\$6



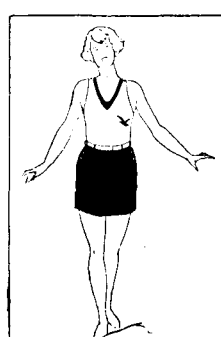
The SURF KING
\$6



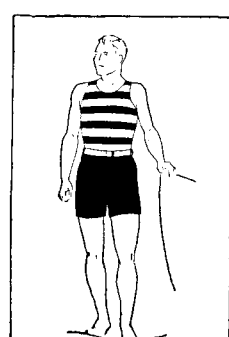
The DEB
\$5



The SPEEDSTER
\$6



The PLAYBOY
\$9



The SOUTHAMPTON
\$7

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C A M E L



“Personally, I smoke for pleasure”

When enjoyment is the first
consideration, the overwhelming choice is

CAMEL

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Company, Winston-Salem, N. C.

A Mean Joke

A Short Short Story
By DON MARQUIS



Illustrated by
JEFF
TESTER

He was standing in a level place beside the creek bank, near the mill, looking about

"WHY is old Noah always stopping in his tracks like that, to take a look around him every hundred yards or so?" I asked old Noah's brother, Jack Williams.

"Old Noah, he's got a kind of a notion some of the boys is layin' to shoot him," said Jack, looking after his brother, with a faint smile.

"Shoot him?"

"Uh-huh. From in behind a tree or a rock or some place," said Jack. "Hit's a joke the boys has got onto old Noah, and in my opinion hit's a joke that has been carried too far in this heah settlement."

I was in the hill country of north-west Georgia, camping out with a friend who knew the natives well. Jack had come over to the camp to "set by for a spell," as he called it, and gossip.

"Old Noah, there," he said, "is like as not goin' to turn the tables onto the boys one of these heah days. He's

a dead shot with that theah old rifle of his'n, ef he kin get his eyes sot on anythin' to shoot at."

Old Noah was a fascinating figure to me. He must have been well over seventy, and he had a long, dirty, yellowish-white beard that had evidently never been trimmed in his life. He carried always a heavy, octagon-barreled muzzle-loading rifle such as Daniel Boone himself must have carried, and I had once seen him "bark" a squirrel with it. When you bark a squirrel you do not shoot the squirrel himself; you put a bullet just beneath the bark of the tree limb the squirrel is clinging to, right under the squirrel's heart; the bullet "explodes" the bark against his chest, so to speak, and he falls dead from the shock, without a mark on him. It takes extraordinarily good shooting.

"Why are the boys laying to shoot Noah?" I asked.

"They ain't really," said Jack. "Hit's a notion they give him some yeahs ago. That's the joke of hit."

He frowned, and took a chew of tobacco. He had some difficulty getting

into his story. Presently I realized it was a difficulty concerning liquor.

"About fifteen yeahs ago," began Jack, "some of the boys in the settlement heah went to jail foh quite a spell on a charge they had been makin' whisky."

He paused. I respected his silence. Pretty soon he resumed, "None of us hadn't made no whisky."

At the bottom of the slope on which we sat was an old-fashioned gristmill, turned by a considerable creek that came down out of the hills. And farther up the creek was a moonshine still.

Jack knew that I knew it was there, and only three days before had brought me a jug of liquor manufactured there. But never at any time would he admit that he had made liquor. He'd give it to you or sell it to you, if you were a friend; he'd tell about having been to jail on three separate occasions on charges of making it; he would even discuss processes of making it and methods of attempting to remove some of the cruder oils by running the liquor through charred logs—but he would always wind up by saying: "Of course, hit's a thing none of us around this heah settlement 'ever made."

"Of course not, Jack," was the proper answer always, and I gave it to him. Then we had a drink from the jug that he had brought me, from the still that he knew I knew was up the creek, and he proceeded:

"No, sir, none of we-uns ever made it around heah. But the United States Gov'ment convicted us, and after we had laid around jail quite a spell the word come to us that it was old Noah had went and info'med onto us.

"WELL, sir, we helt a caucus as to what was the right and fittin' thing to do when we got back to the settlement. The most nacheral thing to do was to shoot old Noah. The' wasn't no argyment I could make again' hit. I knowed hit was the right thing and the moral thing. Still and all, old Noah, he was my brother; and you don't

take no pleasure in thinkin' of yo' own kinsfolks bein' shot that-a-way.

"But hit was, most p'intedly, a case wheah hit wasn't my turn to speak. Ef hit had been anyone else exceptin' of my brother, I mought 'a' put in a word for Noah. But hit would 'a' looked like I was prejudice' in his favoh ef I had been the one to say he wasn't wo'th killin'. Hit was a mos' delicate p'int foh me to speak to, and I didn't speak. And the plain moral facks was, he had hit comin' to him.

"And then one of the boys—Bud Hightower, hit was—laughs of a sudden, and he says: 'Hell's pepper,' he says, 'old Noah, he ain't wo'th killin', and never was. S'pose we-all jus' keep him thinkin' we-all is goin' to shoot him!'

"Well, sir, they all laughed at that, and that's what's been done ever since. Fo' the last fifteen yeahs, sir, every six or eight weeks one of the boys shoots near to old Noah, out'n the bushes, or from behind a rock. It's a joke that everybody knows in this heah settlement but old Noah himself.

"And that's why he's always stoppin' and lookin' over his shoulder and swingin' that theah old gun of his'n this way or that—like he is now."

HE WAS standing in a level place beside the creek bank, near the mill, looking about him. As I gazed on the old man he took on, for me, a look of pathos for the first time. He must have died fifty—a hundred!—deaths, in the last fifteen years, on account of the primitive sense of humor of his neighbors.

"Hit's gettin' to be a kind of a mean joke, I opinionate," mused Jack. "The last fo' or five yeahs old Noah, he's done aged considerable. Hit's my opinion hit's been carried too far. I'm lookin' to see him shoot himself one of these heah days, just fo' to get hit ovah with."

As he spoke there was the report of a gun from farther up the hill, twenty yards from where Jack and I were sitting, and a bullet tore up the sod five feet beyond old Noah.

"Bud Hightower's gun, by the sound of her," commented Jack.

Just then old Noah lifted his ancient rifle and fired. And with a cry Bud Hightower pitched forward from a clump of bushes and lay still.

"I reckoned I'd git him sooner or later, Jack," squeaked old Noah excitedly, running up the slope toward us. "He's been poppin' away at me fo' fifteen yeahs!"

Not then, nor at any previous time, it appeared, had old Noah taken the matter as the pleasantry it was intended for.