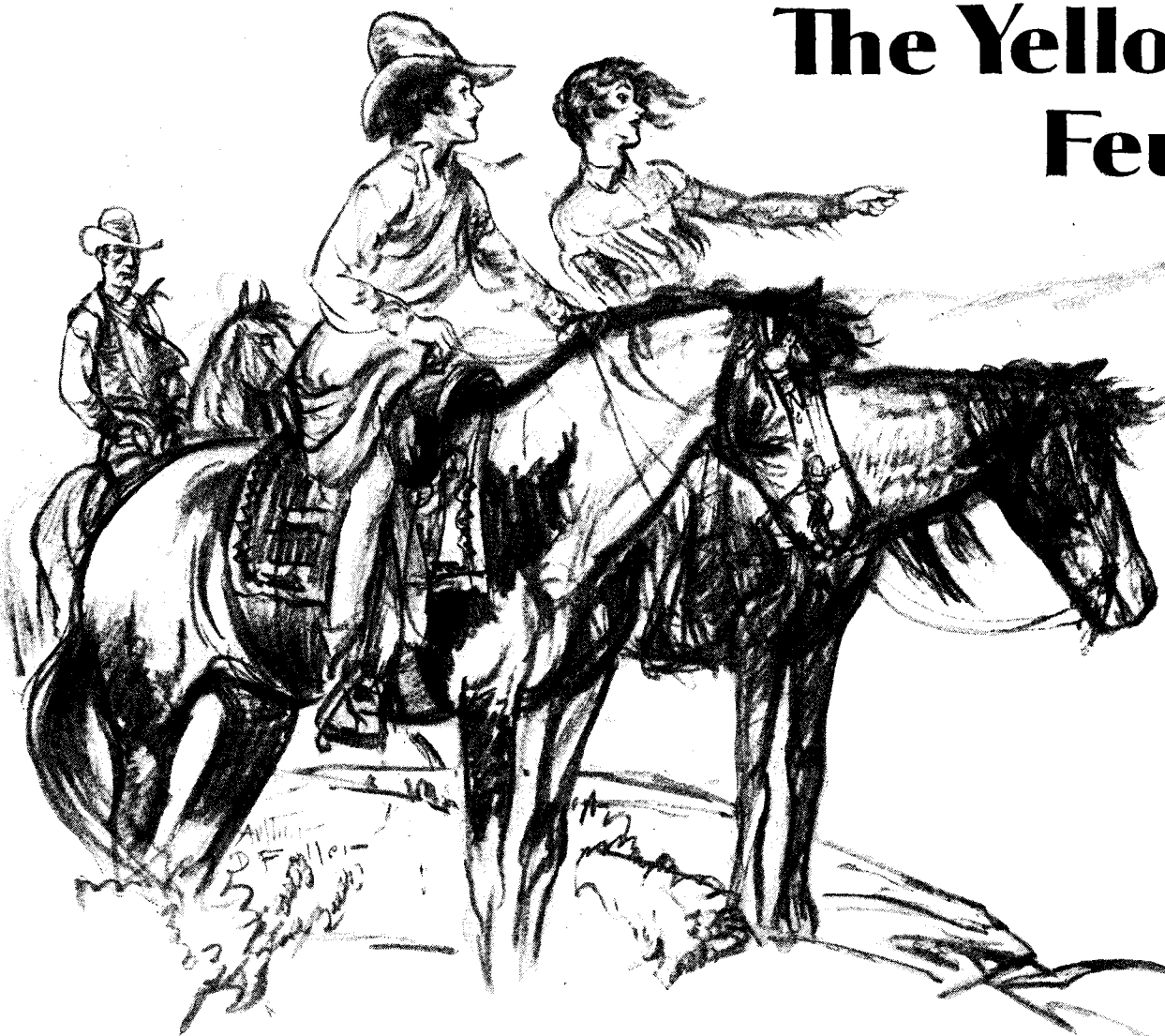


The Yellowjacket Feud

By
Zane Grey



"Now look, Glory. There's a bare spot in the green. An' a gray dot in the middle. Thet's my home"

The Story Thus Far:

GLORIANA TRRAFT, a beautiful and cultured Eastern girl, goes to Arizona to visit her uncle, old Jim Traft, a wealthy cattle king. She is followed by Ed Darnell, a scoundrel to whom she had once been engaged. Darnell goes to work for Bambridge, a crooked ranchman through whom the Hash Knife Outfit, a gang of desperadoes, has been disposing of cattle stolen from the Traft ranch—the Yellowjacket.

Young Jim Traft, Gloriana's brother, is leader of his uncle's men—the Diamond Outfit. He is engaged to little Molly Dunn, a lovely but uneducated Westerner.

Curly Prentiss, a cowboy, who is in love with Glory, catches Darnell cheating at cards and orders him to leave town. Jed Stone, an outlaw who, after leading the Hash-Knifers for many years, has been succeeded by Croak Malloy, kills Bambridge.

Stone encounters old Jim Traft. "I'm leaving Arizona forever, an' this life I've led," he tells the ranchman. But what Traft tells him is even more amazing: while driving with Gloriana and Molly Dunn, he was held up and robbed by Croak Malloy. The desperado has ridden away with the two girls, whom he has promised to return, alive, only on condition that Traft go to Tobe's Well within three days and leave \$10,000! Stone trails the bandit, finds him with his two terrified captives, and kills him.

In order to cure Gloriana of her Eastern pride and make her buck up against the real West, Jed and Molly pretend that Jed has rescued the two girls merely to have them for himself. He makes them cook for him and amuse him, and the next morning they are up early to be off for the Yellowjacket, though Gloriana does not know where they are going.

XI

PRESENTLY the girls appeared. Molly had taken the precaution to don a riding skirt and boots, but Gloriana wore the thin dress which Malloy had torn considerably.

"Where's your hat?" asked Stone.

"It blew off yesterday. . . . I—I forgot to look in my bag—and change. If you'll give me time—"

"Nope. Sorry, Gloriana. Didn't I tell you I was a hunted man? You'll have to ride as you are. Strikes me the Lord made you wonderful to look at, but left out any brains. You'll do fine in Arizona. . . . Here, wear Croak's

sombrero. . . . Haw! Haw! If your ma could see you now!"

She had to be helped upon the pinto, which promptly bucked her off upon the soft sward. What injury she suffered was to her vanity. She threw off the old sombrero, but Stone jammed it back on her head.

"Can't you ride?" inquired Stone, gazing down upon her.

"Do you think I was born in a stable?" she asked bitterly.

"WAL, it'd be a darn sight better if you was. An' far as thet is concerned the Lord was born in a stall, so I've heard. So it ain't no disgrace. . . . I'm curious to know why you ever come to Arizona?"

"I was a fool."

"Wal, get up an' try again. This little mare isn't bad. She was jest playin'. But don't let her see you're afraid. An' don't kick her in the ribs, like you did when you got up fust."

"I—I can't ride this way," she said, scarlet of face.

"Wal, you are a holy show, by golly," observed Stone. "I never seen so much of a pretty gurl. You shore wouldn't win no rodeo prizes fer modesty."

"Molly, I can't go on," cried Gloriana, almost weeping. "My skirt's up round my neck!"

"Glory, I don't see what else you can do. You'll have to ride," replied Molly.

"Thet's talkin'. Glory, you'll get some idee of the difference between a no-good tenderfoot from the East an' a healthy Western cowgurl. . . . Now, you follow me, an' you keep up, or there'll be hell to pay."

The ease with which Molly mounted her horse, a wicked black animal, was not lost upon Gloriana, nor the way she controlled him.

"Molly, you better lead this pack-hoss. I'll have to keep my eye on our cultured lady-friend hyar," drawled Stone, and he started off. At the gateway of the canyon, where a rough trail headed up toward the rim, he turned to

caution Gloriana: "Hang on to her mane."

When they reached the top he had satisfaction in the expression of that young woman's face. Stone then struck out along the rim, and he did not need to pick out a rough way. The trail was one seldom used, and then only by riders who preferred to keep to the wilder going. It led through thickets of scrub oak, manzanita and dwarf pine, with a generous sprinkling of cactus. To drag Gloriana Traft through them was nothing short of cruelty. Stone kept an eye on her, though he appeared never to turn his head, never to hear her gasps and cries. Molly, who came last, often extricated her from some tangle.

Stone, from long habit, was a silent and swift traveler, and did not vary his custom now. But he had to stop more often to let the girls catch up. The condition of Gloriana's dress—what was left of it—seemed satisfactory to the outlaw. What a ludicrous and pathetic figure she made, hunched over her saddle, with the gunman's battered and bullet-marked sombrero on her head! She had pulled it down now, to protect eyes and face, thankful for it. Where was her disgust and horror? Nothing could have better exemplified the leveling power of the wilderness. Before Gloriana Traft got through this ride she would give all her possessions for a pair of blue jeans.

ABOUT the middle of the morning Jed came out on the high point of the Diamond Mesa. And he halted.

The girls came up, to gaze out and down.

"Oh—h!" cried Miss Traft, her voice broken, yet deep and rich with feeling. She did not disappoint Stone here.

"The Tonto!" screamed Molly, suddenly beside herself. "Jed, why didn't you tell me you were comin' heah? . . . Oh, Glory, look—look! It's my home."

"Home!" echoed Gloriana, incredulously.

"Yes. Home! . . . An' oh, how I love

it! See thet thin line, with the white? Thet's the Cibique windin' away down through the valley. See the big turn. Now look, Glory. There's a bare spot in the green. An' a gray dot in the middle. Thet's my home. Thet's my cabin. . . . Where I was born."

"I see. But I can hardly believe," re-

Illustrated by
Arthur D.
Fuller

plied Gloriana. "That tiny pin-point in all the endless green."

"Shore is, Glory. You're standin' on the high rim of the Diamond, a mile above the valley. But it looks close. You should see from down there. All my life I've looked up at this point. It was the Rim. But I was never heah before. . . . Oh, look, look, Glory, so you will never forget!"

The Eastern girl gazed silently, with eyes that seemed to reflect something of the grandeur of the scene. Stone turned away from her, glad in his heart that somehow she had satisfied him. Then he had a moment for himself—to gaze once more and the last time over the Tonto.

The Basin was at its best at sunrise or sunset, or in storm. Tranquil and austere now, it withheld something which the outlaw knew so well. The dotted green slopes from the rim merged in the green-black forest floor, so deceptively level, but which in reality was a vast region of ridges and gorges. Molly called it home, and so it was for backwoodsmen, deer, bear and wild turkeys, and outlaws such as he. He liked best the long sections of yellow craggy rim stepping down into the Basin toward the west. They showed the ragged nature of the Tonto. Away beyond them rose the purple range, spiked as a cactus plant, and to the south, dim on the horizon, stood up the four peaks that marked the gateway of the Cibique, out into the desert. But nowhere was the desert visible. Doubtful Canyon called to Stone. He had killed a man there once, in an argument over spoil, and he had never been sure of the justice of it. Doubtful had been well named. It was deep and black and long, a forest- and cliff-choked rent in the vast slope of the mountain.

"MOLLY, don't forget to show Gloriana some other places," said Stone, with a laugh. "There's West Fork, the village I used to ride through an' see you at Summer's store. An' buy you a stick of candy. . . . Not for years now. . . . An' never again. . . . There's Bear Flat an' Green Valley. An' Haverly's Ranch, an' Gordon Canyon. An' see, far to the east, the bare yellow patch. That's Pleasant Valley, where they had the sheep an' cattle war which ruined your dad, though he was only a sympathizer, Molly. I reckon you never knew. Wal, it's true. . . . Miss Traft, you're shore the furst Eastern gurl ever to see the Tonto."

Though they wanted to linger, Stone ordered them on. Momentarily he had forgotten his rôle of slave-driver. But Gloriana had been too engrossed in her own sensations to notice his lapse.

Straight back from the rim he headed, through trailless forest of stunted pines

and wilderness of rock and cactus, toward the far side of the mesa, which sloped to the east, and gradually varied its rough aspect with grassy levels and healthier growth of pine. When Stone crossed the drift fence, which along here had been cut by the Hash Knife, he halted to show the girls.

"Traft's drift fence. Gloriana, this is what the old man saddled on your brother Jim. There's nine miles of fence down, which Jim an' his uncle can thank Croak Malloy fer. But I will say the buildin' of this fence was a big thing. Old Jim has vision. Shore I'm a cattle thief, an' the fence didn't make no difference to me. I reckon it was a help to rustlers. But Malloy hated fences. . . . Wal, it'll be a comfort to Traft an' all honest ranchers to learn he's dead."

"Jed Stone, you—you seem to be two men!" exclaimed Gloriana.

"Shore. I'm more'n thet. An' I reckon one of them is some kin to human. But don't gamble on him, my lovely tenderfoot. He's got no say in my make-up."

Molly Dunn lagged behind, most intensely interested in that drift fence, the building of which had made her lover, young Traft, a marked man on the range, and which had already caused a good deal of blood-spilling. Stone had to halloo to her, and wait.

"What's ailin' you, gurl?" he queried, derisively. "Thet fence make you love-sick fer Jim? Wal, I reckon you won't see him again very soon, if ever. . . . Get off an' straighten thet pack."

While Molly heaved and pulled to get the pack level on the packsaddle again, Stone rolled a cigarette, and watched Gloriana. Her amaze at Molly Dunn amused him.

"Wal, Glory, she used to pack grub an' grain from West Fork on a burro, when both of them wasn't any bigger'n jack-rabbits."

"There's a lot I don't know," observed Gloriana, thoughtfully, as for the hundredth time she tried to pull her torn skirt down to hide her bare legs.

"Shore," agreed the outlaw. "An' when a feller finds thet out there's hope fer him."

HE LED on, calling for his followers to keep up, as they were losing time and the way was rough and long. As a matter of fact Stone could have led down into Yellowjacket that very day, but this was not his plan. He intended to ride these girls around, through the forest, up and down canyons, across streams, and among the rocks until one of them, at least, could no longer sit in the saddle. He was enjoying himself hugely, and when he saw how Gloriana had begun really to suffer, he assuaged his conscience in the same way that a surgeon excused his cruel bright blade. Stone believed now that the Eastern girl would come off in the end with flying colors, even if she went down flat on her back. She had something, he began to divine, and it would come out when physically she was beaten.

The rest of that day he rode through a maze of wild country, at sunset ending upon a weathered slope where he had to get off and walk.

"Hey, there," he called back. "Fall off an' walk. If your hoss slides, get out of his way. An' step lively so you won't go down in one of these avalanches."

All of which would have given a cowboy something to do. Molly had to stop often to rescue her friend, and more

than once a scream rent the air. But at length they got across and down this long slant of loose shale, and entered a grassy wooded flat where water ran. Here Stone halted to make camp.

Gloriana came staggering up, sombrero in hand, leading her horse, and her appearance would have delighted even the most hardened Westerner who was inimical to tenderfeet. Her face was wan where it was not dirty, her hair hanging disheveled, and tangled with twigs, her dress torn into tatters. One stocking hung down over her shoe, exposing a bloody leg, and the other showed sundry scratches.

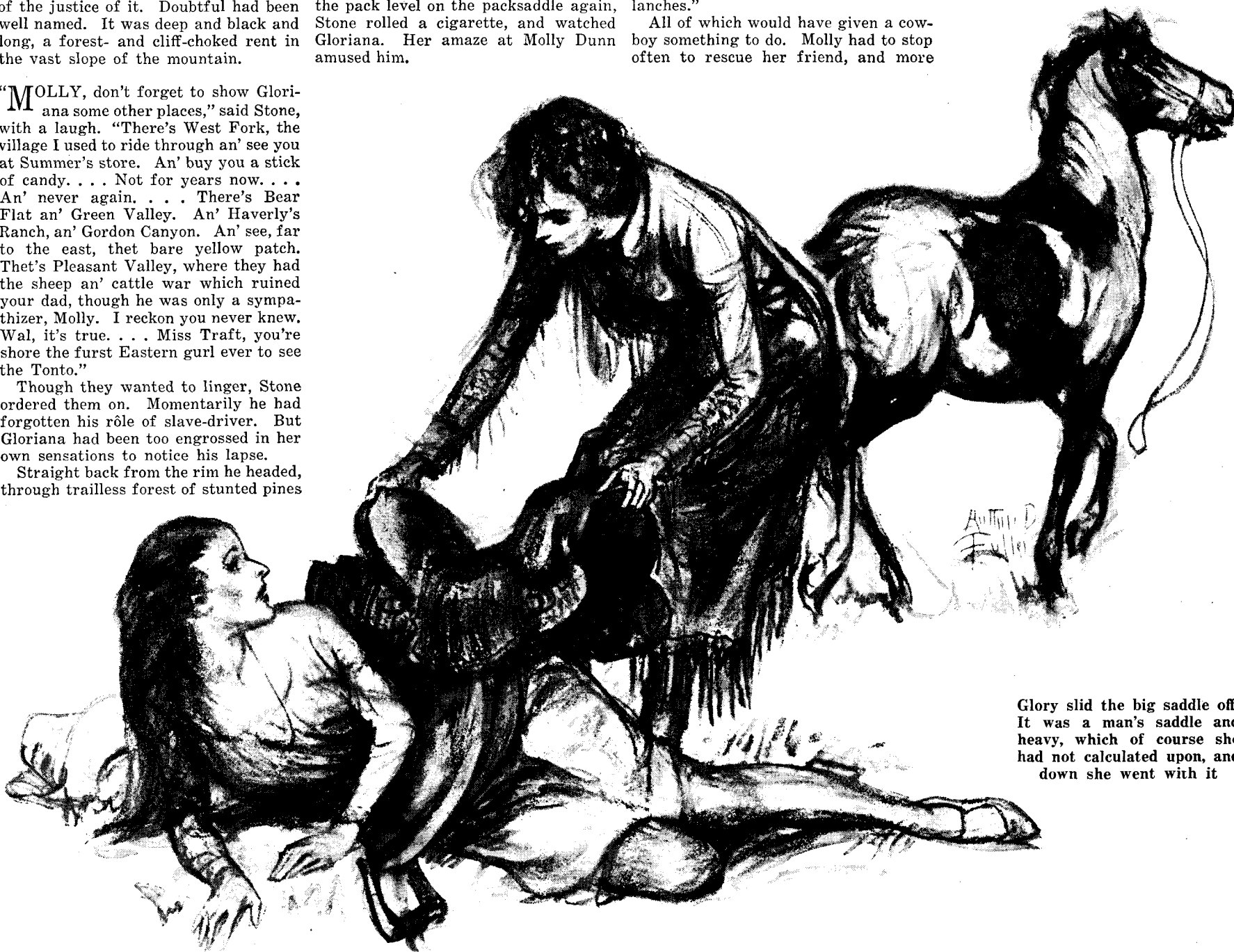
"Wat—er!" choked Gloriana, huskily, as she sank down on the sward.

"Aha! Spittin' cotton, my proud beauty?" ejaculated the outlaw. "Reckon you'd better have a drink out of my bottle." But she waved the suggestion aside with a gesture of abhorrence. And when Molly came carrying a dipper of water, Gloriana's great tragic eyes lit up. She drank the entire contents of the rather large vessel.

"Wal, Glory, you have to go through a good deal before you find the real value of things," remarked Stone, thoughtfully. "You see, most folks have life too easy. Take the matter of this drink of cold pure spring water. Sweet, wasn't it? You never knowed before how turrible sweet water could be, did you? It's the difference between life an' death."

"Thanks, Molly," said Gloriana, gratefully. "Aren't you—thirsty?"

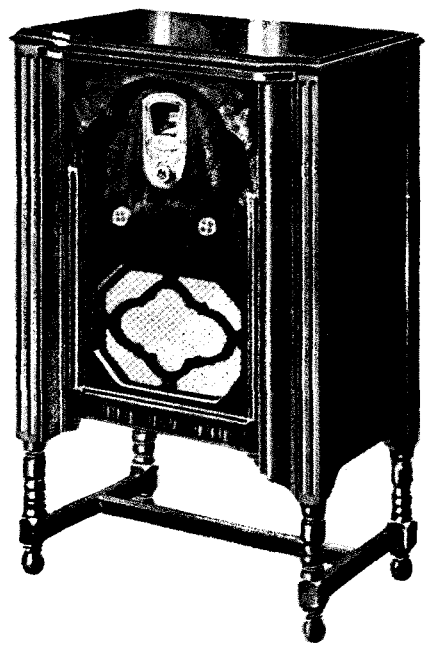
"Not very. (Continued on page 44)"



Glory slid the big saddle off. It was a man's saddle and heavy, which of course she had not calculated upon, and down she went with it

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FROM the doorway Harber's frowning gaze swept the room. Save for the still figure on the bed, the room looked as he had found it.

Never before had he struck a woman—let alone killed one. But there had been no alternative. She had surprised him, had come in suddenly when he believed her to be at the Mansion Club and good for two hours longer. When she switched on the lights he had been close enough to strike. And, as her eyes widened with fright, even as her lips opened for a scream, he had struck. Then, to keep those lips from ever telling what the startled eyes had seen, he stripped off one of her stockings and tied it tightly about her neck.

Harber's gaze now shifted quickly from the dangling bare leg and the satin slipper that lay, like a dainty caravel on its beam ends, where he had dropped it, and passed to the picture that hid the silly little wall safe. Reassured, he felt with gloved fingers the bulge of his breast pocket, switched off the lights, and went noiselessly into the night, confidently leaving another mystery for the police.

AT EIGHT o'clock in the morning a patrolman hurried to the apartment with the colored maid who made the discovery. And at his urgent summons Inspector Dan Starr hurried uptown, picking up Deputy Innis on the way. Their first impression when they entered the apartment of Mrs. Gillespie—formerly Countess d'Espar, and before that, two marriages earlier, plain Minnie Martin—was of a strangely powerful perfume that pervaded the place.

This scent was wasted on the officers. They looked for something more definite than a perfume. Yet they did not overlook the source of it. Starr picked up the delicate crystal bottle from under the dressing table and, after searching on hands and knees, found the jewel-like stopper, with its tapering dropper.

"Knocked off!" he announced. "See?" He indicated whitish spots on the front of the dressing table and on the floor where the alcohol had eaten away the varnish.

That was, however, all they found. There were no fingerprints, no clues of any kind. The night elevator man, roused from his sleep, insisted that he had taken up no strangers, seen none. He had snap-locked a rear entrance when he came on duty; investigation

showed no sign of its having been forced.

Yet it was plain that someone had been in Mrs. Gillespie's apartment; as plain as the fact that she could not have strangled herself. Her wall safe was empty of all save a few valueless baubles; the jewels she always wore were gone from her person.

Starr and Innis searched and questioned and pondered—and got nowhere. They were on scratch, all set, but got no starting gun. For the moment it was just another puzzle. And the once obscure Minnie Martin, after many appearances, was first-page material for the last time.

At four o'clock, after a day of work in the dead woman's luxurious apartment, Dan Starr stopped at Temple's drug store. With the lemon-and-lime that he ordered at the fountain, he crossed to the toilet goods counter. A blond head appeared from behind a pyramid of bottles, and mischievous blue eyes smiled into his.

"Hello, Lou!" he said over his paper cup.

"Hello yourself!" the girl returned airily. "Phew! You smell like an afternoon bridge of the Ladies' Aid. Gee, Dan! You must have stuck awful close to her to carry away so much scent."

"Say," Dan rumbled indignantly, "where do you get that stuff?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. We've got nothing like it here." Then, as he bristled—"But maybe they've got up a distinctive perfume for men lately."

Dan Starr's red face grew redder. "What do you mean—men?"

"Well, you're the second one that's come in here wearing that perfume. It's certainly distinctive, Dan, but I didn't think—"

"WHAT'S that?" he broke in. "When was this?"

Lou looked at him wonderingly. "About the man, you mean?" He nodded impatiently. "Why, around quarter past one last night—or this morning—I dropped in here for a sundae—I'd been out to May's, you see—and this man came in. He's a regular, Harry says—comes in early about every eve-

Harber's gaze now shifted quickly from the dangling bare leg and passed to the picture that hid the silly little wall safe

ning—good-looking guy in dinner clothes. I got a whiff when he passed me, and say—the way he sprays himself must cost him plenty. That stuff's probably sold by the drop."

"You say it's unusual—and expensive?" Dan asked earnestly. Lou nodded agreement. "Well," Dan went on, "where would a dame with plenty of cash buy such stuff?"

"Hard to say," Lou replied, with a shrug. "But there's Ardnott's and there's Combray's. Then most beauty specialists carry special perfumes. What's up, anyhow?"

"I'll tell you later," Dan frowned. "I see that I got a lot of running around to do."

Inside of an hour Dan Starr, now belligerently jealous of his fragrance, set the crystal bottle before the experts in Combray's. They sniffed and smelled, and gave up. The perfume was of an exquisite rareness, but unknown to them.

At Ardnott's, however, he met better fortune, though the connoisseurs of scents were at first noncommittal, if not actually secretive. But, upon being desolated at

learning their loss of a client, they admitted creatorship. The perfume had been invented and was manufactured exclusively for the Countess d'Espar!

Harber, immaculate in dinner clothes, came into Temple's drug store shortly before seven. He was suddenly seized from behind by a man who, at a wink from the soda clerk, strolled towards the cigar counter. His natural surprise developed into amazement when Dan Starr and Deputy Innis appeared from the rear of the store and manacled him to his captor.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Gillespie's maid came to Harber's room and identified the jewels which had been discovered at the bottom of Harber's trunk.

In the face of this evidence Harber, who had maintained a sullen silence, made full confession. "But what I can't understand," he wondered at the end, "is what led you to me. There wasn't a thing—"

"Oh, yes, there was," disputed Starr, drawing the crystal bottle from his pocket. "The private perfume of the woman. Here, smell of that. Why, you're drenched with it, man!"

Harber stared at the bottle. His head went back in a quick movement of resignation. "No use." With a hopeless gesture he waved the bottle aside. "I'm one of those freaks who never had the sense of smell."



Fatal Distinctions

A Short Short Story complete on this page

By Frederick Skerry