

# Beyond the Desert

## THE STORY OF A STRANGE EXPEDITION INTO THE WILDS OF NORTHERN MEXICO

By William H. Hamby

IT was about eleven o'clock when Sol Miller called my room at the Palm-Tree Hotel. I had been in bed an hour, but so far the mosquitoes had successfully routed every attack of drowsiness.

"Got to make a trip across the San Felipe Desert to-morrow. Want to go?"

"What time do we start?" I replied eagerly.

"Five o'clock."

When I came down next morning at ten minutes to five, the hotel lobby looked gloomily deserted in the dim light. The dining-room doors were not only shut, but had the appearance of being barred. It was too early to eat, but I wanted a cup of coffee. Yet dared not tamper with Sol Miller's punctuality.

Almost immediately he drove up in a big automobile, old, scarred, and disreputable, but it was a car which always came home; and when you come to think of it, that is much more important than paint. The foot-boards were piled high with boxes and bundles, and camp stuff, and cans of water and gasoline. It looked more like a month's camping outfit than a two days' run.

"Hop in," said Miller, his hands on the wheel itching for action.

In the back seat were two other passengers—a man and a woman. There were no introductions or greetings. We were well out of town, and the sun was coming up over the cotton-fields beyond Mexicali, before Sol began to let loose fragments of information.

"Name's Baxter." Sol's head was thrust forward, as he was making speed while the road lasted, and he spoke under the roar of the big car. "He don't talk much, but sort of refers now and then to the middle of South America, or the north of China, or

the far end of Africa, as if they were just out behind the barn somewhere. Don't know a thing about him or what he is doing down here, but I got a hunch that he is after a queer bird I took down across the desert about three months ago—a fellow named Madson. He's never come out that anybody knows of."

Sol broke off to swear rhythmically at a Chinaman who had let his irrigation ditch overflow the road.

While he pondered the problem of whether to turn back and go four miles around, or to try to buck the soft, treacherous mud, I glanced over my shoulder in a casual way.

"This your first trip down here?"

It was my first effort at conversation.

"Yes—to this particular spot," replied Baxter in a matter-of-fact tone.

He was about fifty, with light sandy hair, pale blue eyes, and a solid, dogged-looking head. He was tanned so deep that his skin would never come white again, and I noticed he had square, strong hands.

The conversation seemed finished. He did not offer to carry it any further, and I faced about again; but I had got a pretty good glimpse of the young woman with him. I guessed her not over twenty-four or five, and she was interesting—disturbingly so.

I wanted to look back constantly. In that one glimpse I had got the impression that she was not enjoying this trip. Something like a flicker of fear passed over her eyes as she glanced at the man beside her when I spoke to him.

Sol had bucked the soft road after all, and came through none the worse for a few hundred mud spatters. What was a little mud to an old devil ark like that?

"Don't know who she is." He had re-

sumed his snatchy conversation. "Didn't say. Maybe his daughter—maybe his wife—then maybe not. Can't tell."

He gave the old car a whirl across a bridge over the irrigation canal, and we passed out of that rich irrigated strip of ranch land and headed south along a dimly marked road across the desert. To the left rose Black Butte, a dark mass of volcanic rock. Far to the southeast glimmered a serrated range of chocolate-yellow mountains.

I had begun to feel a most unmistakable desire for food. It was nine o'clock, and nothing had been said about breakfast. The sun came down hotter and hotter, and the car bucked harder and harder into that waste space of sand and scattered mesquite and cactus.

Ten o'clock came and still no stop, no suggestion that we should open a box or something and have a sandwich. Twice we halted and passed around the water canteen, while Sol watered his engine. At these times our conversation was of the meagerest.

"How far is it to the Big Pump?" Baxter asked at the last stop.

"About fifteen miles," replied Sol. He took out his watch with his left hand while he screwed on the hot cap of his radiator with his right. "We'll be there at eleven."

"That is where we come to the Colorado River?" the girl asked. She had a clear voice with a soft, rising inflection at the end of the sentence.

"Yes," said Sol; "and it will be the last inhabited spot we'll see for a hundred miles."

I held out nobly that fifteen miles, for I supposed that we were sure to rest and have lunch at the river. Eleven o'clock might be early for the others, but it was darned late for me.

The old car swung up beside the platform of the store and boarding-shack of the irrigation project. I could smell apple pie from the cook-room.

Sol looked back over his shoulder.

"Shall we stop here for dinner?" he suggested.

Baxter shook his head.

"No, go on!"

And we went on.

Twenty miles farther, where the road turned from the wild hemp, and the cottonwood along the river, Sol Miller brought the car to a stop at the very edge of the

waste space and looked around at his passengers.

"This is the last shade for a hundred miles—shall we stop for dinner here?"

Baxter shook his head. "Everything is carefully packed—we will not stop until we get to San Felipe and camp for the night."

"Perhaps," the girl turned to him protestingly, "the other men are hungry."

"Hunger is a mere incident," Baxter spoke impersonally. "Whether a man eats three times in one day or once in three days is a trivial matter."

Something dogged, half angry showed in Sol Miller's lean chin as he thrust his head forward and bore down with his foot on the accelerator. His pride was touched. Sol would die in his seat of hunger and exhaustion before he would again suggest stopping.

"Hunger may be a mere trivial incident," I said to Sol as we hit the dim sand trail across the desert at thirty miles an hour, "but so is death and matrimony and thirst and rattlesnakes. Why in the devil didn't you warn me last night at least to eat breakfast?"

"Forget it," he snapped back at me. "We are headed for San Felipe—it's a hundred and nine miles and no road. With good luck we'll be there by nine o'clock to-night."

## II

THE traveler who has not crossed the San Felipe Desert has yet to learn what a desert can really be. The sand, beaten and stripped by centuries of wind, is a dead level, and hard enough to hold up the heaviest car. Far as the eye can reach, and vastly farther, the earth and sky are dead—not a sprig of grass, not a mesquite or a cactus, not a bird or an insect—not a living thing on the earth or in the air.

It never rains. The rim of mountains in the distance are dead as the desert. The sun pours down like melted brass into a vast caldron. At times the wind boils across the face of it, blinding with the dust of fine sand. Then it stills. The desert lies simmeringly before you, and the mirage appears on every hand—grass and trees, lakes cool and beautiful.

In the middle of it a tire blew up. We got out while Miller changed it. Baxter stood looking imperturbably off toward the distant mountain-range south.

"Suppose," the girl asked Sol Miller as he sweated over the tire, "something hap-

pened that you could not fix yourself—what then?”

“A four days’ walk to the nearest water—or telephone,” he replied jerkily. “Skeltons out there”—he nodded across the desert—“most anywhere.”

She went around to the other side and stood in the shade of the car. I followed her. It was mid-afternoon, and the sun was blistering. She was standing straight, looking out over the glimmering sands to the mirage of a green lake. Her eyes were bright, her nostrils dilating.

“I love that!” she said simply. “This is wonderful! I never was in a real desert before.”

Miller was back at the wheel, and I touched her arm in helping her into the seat. You can’t explain such things, but somehow just touching her arm that instant stayed with me for hours.

Hour after hour of the most bone-wrecking slamming and banging and bumping, and still no San Felipe, no camp, no food. I was now so hollow, so ravenous, that I just concentrated on holding myself together. Mountains and desert passed, and more mountains and desert—a long strip of glittering salt as we came in sight of the Gulf of California—and then night—stars, and at last a moon.

Then, at nine o’clock, a black mountain of rock at the water’s edge, a pass to the right, a broken patch with scattered vegetation, a ramada with three Mexican fishermen, an acrid well, a scrub mesquite big enough for a little shade; and this was San Felipe.

Baxter was the most methodically efficient man I ever saw. He dealt solely in facts, and had his facts all laid out side by side and consecutively numbered.

As the car was disburdened of its camp equipment, he took personal charge of the stuff, and laid it out in perfect order. The tent was to be pitched seven feet to the right of the mesquite-tree, the fire built here, the table set up there. Yes, he carried a folding table, collapsible cooking-utensils, exactly the right number of everything, and provisions nicely calculated for a given time. Just what that time was we were to discover later.

I started in feverishly to help, but every move I made was wrong. Sol Miller tried it, but got in bad with Baxter the first box he opened. It seemed that box was for the day after to-morrow. Even the girl had to

abandon her attempt to be femininely useful in the preparations of the supper. We all gave it up. The only thing I really could do satisfactorily was to carry a couple of buckets of water from the acrid well.

It was nine when we arrived. At nine thirty Baxter had every piece of luggage carefully disposed. At ten he had tent stakes set, the tent up, and a model cooking-fire going.

Those who have fasted forty days say the first twenty-four hours are the worst. I can easily believe it. I went off to wait.

The beach was a slope of the purest white sand. The wind from the water was tropically warm. The moon was half up, and the San Felipe Mountains, a pile of black, stood out vividly to the left in the soft light.

On the beach near the edge of the lapping water, the girl stood bareheaded, motionless, gazing seaward.

“Aren’t you tired?” I had approached within a few feet of her. “I am. Let us sit down until the supper call.”

“Poor man, you must be nearly starved! I am too; but, knowing daddy, I ate an enormous breakfast.” She sat down near me and dipped her hand into the warm sand. “You see,” she explained, “he is a scientist—several scientists rolled into one—and he simply has to follow his way.”

“Scientists are admirable,” I remarked; “but I would not voluntarily pick them for hurry-up camp cooks.”

She laughed. It was the first time I had heard her laugh.

“Are you going back with the driver to-morrow?” she asked in a tone which I fancied had in it the same lurking fear that I had seen in her eyes.

“Why, I suppose so. Aren’t you?”

I had taken it for granted that the whole party would return at the same time.

“No.” She shook her head. “Daddy has engaged two Mexicans to bring down pack-mules. They will be here in about five days. Then we are to start out on a quest of a month or so.”

“Good Lord! Alone down here?”

She did not say anything.

The tide was coming up. Few bodies of water in the world have more turbulent tides than the Gulf of California. It rises twenty-six feet at San Felipe. It backs water fifty miles up the Colorado River, and one can hear the roar of it for many miles.

There was a hallo from camp. I scrambled to my feet and put out my hand to help her up.

"Supper is ready!"

I was almost running.

"I wish you were going with us," she said as we drew near the camp-fire. "I—I'm just a little bit of a coward. I'll tell you more about it to-morrow."

Supper was all ready. Camp-chairs were pushed up to the little folding-table, knives, forks, spoons, and paper napkins were carefully placed, and there was a tin bowl on each plate. Something was boiling on a suspended kettle. How I hoped it was Irish stew!

It was cove-oyster soup. The one thing in the world that I can't eat is cove oysters. They give me the hives.

That soup and some boiled potatoes formed the supper menu. I ate a lot of potatoes.

After supper I went speedily to the thin, scientific camp bed provided by my host—that is, if Baxter was my host. As the invitation for the trip had come from Miller, and had not been seconded by anybody since, I was not sure just where I stood. That was why I had refrained from asking for any amendment to the supper of cove oysters and potatoes.

But breakfast was better—pancakes and molasses. I made a full meal.

As Sol Miller and I went to the well for water, he remarked:

"We'll go back to-morrow. Start at daylight. The old geezer and the woman."

"His daughter," I corrected sharply.

"All right—his daughter, then," said Sol. "They are going to stay over and wait for some Mexicans and mules and then go prowling around those mountains to the west. Fool trip! But I guessed right—he's after that bird Madson. That's the direction he went."

### III

THAT morning I tried to engage Baxter in conversation; but it was an unknown art to him. He could give the most accurate answers of any man I ever saw; but when your question was answered, he was done.

"You have been in South America?" I put out as a starter.

"Yes."

He continued looking at a limb of the mesquite-tree, neither interested nor bored.

"Been up the Orinoco?"

"Yes."

"How far?"

"All the way."

I scratched my jaw and looked around to see if the girl was laughing at us, but she was not. She was watching and listening with intent interest.

"Some fine hardwood along the Orinoco, I've heard," I suggested.

"Forty-six varieties," he replied.

It was the same way about everything. It was not rudeness or incivility that kept him from conversation; but he did not consider it necessary. He had no imagination, and apparently few sensations. He dealt in facts. He had a world thirst for them—exact, scientific facts. If you needed them, you got them, but you had to ask.

The only emotion he ever displayed was when some one questioned, or seemed to question, his facts. Then heat came into his face and a glare into his eyes. I stumbled on this discovery by attempting to argue a point about the Gila monster.

Nor was the girl easily communicative. There was a shyness about her, perhaps born of her long isolation, that made it difficult for her to talk freely at first. In one way, at least, she was very different from her father—she was seethingly alive under the surface, and not at all a worshiper of dry facts.

At sundown we were on the sand watching the light glint along the deep blue swells. No matter how turbulent it may be, a warm sea always seems like a friendly sea to me. It is the cold water that makes me shudder; and the Gulf of California is warm in January as well as in June.

She was bareheaded, and the tropical breath off the sea stirred her hair. She looked fragile in spite of her strength, and this evening she had that troubled look again.

"Miller tells me you are going early in the morning," she said.

It was her first reference since last night to the matter of my going or staying. I had waited for her to bring it up.

"He means he is going," I replied.

She turned and looked at me thoughtfully for a moment.

"You must go, too," she said. "I was foolish last night to ask you to stay. Ours will be a dreadfully long, hard trip—and there is no need."

"Would you mind telling me just where it is you are going—how, and why?"

She frowned and stirred the sand with her right forefinger.

"I don't really know myself. He did not want me to come; but it's—trouble of some sort with a man."

She bit her lip and looked off across the water. The sun was gone, but the light still trailed over the soft, rolling swells.

"It was some man who was with him in South America. There was trouble, dreadful trouble, but I never could find out about it. I have never seen my father so violently upset. He won't mention the man's name, but I have known for a long time that he was hunting for him. There comes a look in his face that frightens me. I don't know what it was that caused the trouble—"

She broke off and frowningly shook her head.

"Only a few times has he shown any interest in women. Still, it might have been a woman."

She was digging her hand nervously into the sand. "Anyway, I'm afraid to let him go alone, for I—just feel it might be murder between them!"

Sol Miller's guess had been right. This matter-of-fact, methodical scientist was after a man—no doubt the man Madson, who had come out these months before.

"It is a fool trip," I said directly. "It's a dangerous trip for anybody; but for you to go alone with your father into these mountains—ten days' journey from civilization—it's criminal! You can't do it, in fact." I broke off. "I'm going with you; but you'll have to fix it with your dad, or tell me how. It is a little awkward, you know."

Her spirits rose instantly. I liked the look she gave me.

"Just tell him"—she was smiling now—"that you are looking for—let's see, what do you know most about?"

"Copper," I replied. "I've some interests of that sort in Arizona."

"Just the thing!" she exclaimed. "Tell him you are hunting for copper and want to go along. He would take anybody anywhere who is really hunting for something. I think that is his religion—to find something that is hard to find."

After supper, while Baxter sat with his back against the mesquite-tree, his knees thrust up in front of him, smoking, I asked:

"Do you suppose there is any copper in those mountains west of us?"

"Don't know."

"I would like to know," I remarked.

I discussed, with what knowledge I had, the possibilities of copper.

"Find out," Baxter said, with the first gleam of real interest I had seen in him.

"I would if I had an outfit."

It was an obvious bid, but I could not help it.

"Go along with me," he said—ungrudgingly, yet not cordially.

"Why, I—I'd be delighted to go!"

He nodded affirmatively. Then, taking his pipe from his mouth, he turned to the girl, who sat with her hands about her knees looking moodily down at the fire.

"You will have to go back with the driver in the morning. I have only provisions for two."

#### IV

SOL MILLER left with the car early next morning, and Eudora Baxter did not go with him. I imagine she had rebelled very few times in her life, but she did it thoroughly this time.

We watched the old car boiling up the sand as it spun through the gap west of the San Felipe Mountains, and then turned and looked into each other's eyes. I was glad I had stayed.

The Mexicans with the pack-mules were due in four days. We waited five, and saw no signs of them.

"I am afraid something has happened to them," said Miss Baxter that evening, after supper. "They may have lost their way, and perhaps are dying of thirst in the desert."

"The accident," I suggested, "is more likely to have happened before they started. They probably remembered they didn't want to come."

"Started two days ahead of us," remarked Baxter, puffing at his pipe.

"Then they are two days overdue," I said.

Baxter nodded, but there was not the remotest sign of uneasiness or impatience in his gesture. As he sat there with his back against the mesquite, his legs crossed in front of him, the flicker of firelight on his intelligent but inexorable face, he seemed to me the incarnation of the force of facts. He had traveled in hundreds of byways that were crooked and dangerous; but I doubted if he had ever felt a thrill, even of danger.

We waited two days more, and the only change I noticed in Baxter was a systematic shortening of our rations; but I was growing increasingly uneasy, and restless. The only way out was back over that desert. To cross it on foot and carry provisions and water enough for seven days!

The three Mexican fishermen gave me some worry. They were three as villainous-looking Yaqui half-breeds as ever I saw—sullen, suspicious, and dangerous. A few months before two American aviators had lost their way and landed with a broken machine on the beach south of here. Later a searching-party found them buried in shallow sand, with their heads crushed.

But the guides and pack-mules straggled in next morning. Baxter had shown no impatience in waiting, but now he fell to breaking camp with a vigor which expressed his haste to be on his search. I wondered if really he was following some thirst for revenge, as his daughter feared.

We started toward the mountains at three o'clock, the mules loaded with the camp outfit, provisions, and water, the three of us and the two Mexicans walking.

During the next five days, as we drove deeper and deeper into those wild unexplored mountains, I learned a new respect for the human frame. I had never before guessed half that it can endure. Eudora Baxter suffered most, of course; but never once did she whimper or ask her father to turn back.

I tried to ease it up for her in every way I could. Twice, when she was about to drop with exhaustion, I made one of the Mexicans carry part of the load, while the girl rode for a time on the mule's back; but Baxter never seemed to notice either his own discomfort or any one else's. He would set out to make such a peak, or crag, or cañon, before camping—and he always made it. While at times I was angry enough to murder him, yet I was forced to admire the tremendous endurance, the nonchalant, absent-minded, unconscious, matter-of-fact fortitude of the man.

Twice we found water to replenish our huge demijohns. Once we encountered human beings—four Mexicans, whose occupation in the mountains was not apparent. These were, if possible, more villainous-looking than the fishermen at San Felipe, or even our guides. For a long time, after we passed them, I made the girl walk behind her father, while I fell behind the

pack-mules and kept my hand close to my gun.

That night we found water—blessed fresh water, a whole stream of it, flowing down from a timber-filled gorge in the mountains. Here, too, was the first human habitation we had seen in seven days. A Mexican had a patch of cultivated soil, a cow, and a few chickens and goats.

I overheard Baxter questioning him.

"*Si, si*—an American stayed up in the mountains, came down sometimes—once a month, maybe—and got eggs and frijoles."

When we camped that night and I had gone to bed, I lay on my side for a long time and watched Baxter sitting with his legs crossed in front of him, smoking. I knew he was nearing the end of his quest, and I feared for the man Madson, for there was no mercy in his face.

## V

We followed along the course of the stream next morning. The mountains on this side caught some rain, and were covered with live-oak and pine. I kept a close watch for signs of the other white man, and I knew Baxter was doing the same thing.

About four o'clock in the afternoon I saw a path that came down from the woods on the mountainside to the little stream. Baxter stooped and examined it closely as an Indian might. It had been recently used.

Baxter straightened up and turned to the Mexicans.

"Unpack!"

While he was laying out the camp stuff, Eudora watched his careful, methodical movements with terror in her eyes. I knew, in spite of their reticence, that she loved him tremendously; and I also knew that for days she had been foreseeing a mortal combat between him and his enemy.

She turned and went down to the stream for water. The glance over her shoulder was a signal for me to follow.

"Mr. Gordon!" She caught my arm appealingly. "You must not let him get out of your sight. Wherever he goes, follow. That man is near here!"

"But I can't leave you alone."

"Yes," she said, "you must. I'll be all right."

I did not promise, for I had discovered a much greater danger than a fight between her father and his enemy. The four Mexi-

cans we had passed two days ago were following us. I had glimpsed them twice that day, but, not wishing to frighten Eudora, I had kept still about it. I intended to guard her rather than her father.

Immediately after supper Baxter went to his cot, and in thirty minutes he was sleeping soundly. His daughter was sitting on a blanket looking into the fire, her hands locked about her knees, her head bent forward. She was dead tired.

"Go to bed," I urged. "You are all fagged out."

She put up her hand and pushed the hair from her forehead.

"What are we going to do?" She looked up at me, her large brown eyes swimming with troubled tears. "I just can't figure it out. When he starts on a thing, I don't believe anything in the world could stop him—and they will meet to-morrow!"

"I don't know." I sat down near her—near enough to touch her if I should reach out my hand. I wanted to slip my arm around her protectingly, but did not. "If we only knew what the quarrel was about, we might have something to work on."

"But we don't. I can't get a word from him. When I even mention Madson, he just shuts his jaw hard and thrusts his head forward, and that awful look comes into his eyes. I know one of them will be killed when they meet—and I believe we are within a mile of Madson's camp!"

"I'll do my best to keep them apart," I said.

Somehow I did not fully trust the girl's judgment of her father. I did not believe they at all understood each other; and yet I, too, had seen that set, grimly ferocious look in Baxter's face for days. It might be a murderous feud between the two men; but, even as I promised, I could think of no way of turning Baxter aside from his vengeance.

We both threw up our heads with a start, and listened. There were footsteps on the path above. We sat motionless, staring into the shadows beyond the firelight. The steps came nearer—heavy, deliberate steps that scuffed the gravel in the path.

A man emerged into the firelight—a big man, bareheaded, with bushy hair and heavy beard. He was dressed in heavy trousers and a woollen shirt open at the throat; but around his waist was a brilliant silk sash. He looked like a sort of cross between *Robinson Crusoe* and De Soto.

"Good evening," I said, feeling relief that at least he was a white man.

"Good evening," he repeated with a rumble.

He approached the fire and stood looking down at the girl and me. Neither of us had stirred. His eyes were almost hidden under shaggy brows. I heard a sharp in-drawn breath from the girl, saw her hands clutching the skirt at her knees, and knew this was the man she feared.

I never was more nonplused for words; and I feared to speak at all, lest the conversation awaken Baxter. The man carried an innocent wooden water-pail in his left hand, but had a long, heavy revolver sagging at his belt.

He had never seen the girl or me before, and unless Baxter roused up he would probably take us for some sort of adventurers, and pass on after water, for which he had obviously come.

"Hunters?" he asked.

"For copper," I replied as briefly.

"None here. Some iron, signs of lead, a little silver, and traces of gold, but no copper."

"Thanks," I replied. "It will save me the trouble of investigating."

I wanted to get rid of him quick. The strain on the girl was terrific.

He turned and stalked on down to the stream, filled his bucket, and went thumping back up the path.

I turned to Eudora. She was almost ready to collapse, and I put my hand on her arm. In spite of her fright, she smiled.

"Isn't he odd? It would be dreadful for daddy to kill him!"

"Go to bed," I ordered peremptorily. "I'll watch for a while."

I waited nearly an hour, and then, to be sure she was asleep, tiptoed over to the door of her tent and listened. She was sleeping soundly.

I ripped off the end of a blanket, tied strips around my shoes, saw that both my revolvers were in good working order, and slipped off down the back trail.

Two miles from camp I got a glimpse of a fire in a thicket of chaparral on the other side of the cañon. This was what I was looking for. From the brightness of the fire I knew that the Mexicans had very recently made camp, and were probably cooking their supper.

I crossed over to the other side of the little stream and slipped toward the light.

I wanted to learn just what those cut-throats were after.

There were four of them. They were broiling a rabbit, or some sort of game, over the fire, and were gesticulating and talking loudly. I easily slipped within thirty steps of the fire, and with my indifferent understanding of Spanish I soon picked up the thread of their talk. They were a villainous lot, and I have never heard, even in Mexico, anything quite so obscene as their sallies at each other.

I lost their drift for a moment. Then I knew they were talking about our party—what they were going to do, and how they would do it. Sweat and chills seemed to pass over me at the same time, as I listened to their diabolical plot. I drew a gun and aimed it carefully at the one who seemed to be the leader.

No, that would not do. I could not kill all of them. One or more would be sure to get away; and an American who shoots a Mexican two hundred miles south of the border, even in self-defense—

It would not do at all—not with Eudora Baxter in my keeping.

I waited until they settled down to sleep—there would be no attack on our party to-night—and then I slipped away.

## VI

It was eleven o'clock when I got back to camp. At two I roused up Baxter. If he had a murderer's conscience, it did not interfere with his sleep. I almost had to wreck his cot before I could arouse him.

"What's the matter? What do you want?" he grumbled, as he finally sat up.

"It's two o'clock," I said, far from amiably, "and I want you to stay on guard the rest of the night. I need a little sleep."

"Stay on guard?" He was awake now. "Ridiculous!"

"A gang of Mexican bandits have trailed us for two days. They are within two miles of here now."

"My dear sir!" Baxter shook his head. "I have been followed by bandits all over the world, and not one of them ever got more than fifty dollars from me."

"These," I retorted, with a rush of anger at the utter selfishness of his mental habit, "are after much more than fifty dollars!"

"But I haven't twenty," he replied, yawning.

"But you have a daughter." I put a sting into that—or tried to.

"She's all right," he said, stretching out to lie down again. "She grew up among Mexicans in Arizona. She can manage them."

"But see here, Baxter!" I spoke roughly. "Don't be a damned fool! These men are worse than savages. They are renegade half-breeds—without fear of punishment in this wilderness. They are after your camp outfit—and your daughter!"

Baxter shook his head again.

"I never pay any attention to the natives. Let them alone, and they won't bother you."

Already he had stretched out and was pulling the blanket back over him.

I thought there really was no special danger that night. Unless cornered, a Mexican will usually put off even murder until to-morrow.

I spread a blanket on the ground in front of the girl's tent, and lay down, intending merely to rest while I watched; but when I awoke the sun was shining, and Eudora was bending over me, desperately shaking me by the shoulder.

"Oh, hurry, hurry! He has gone!"

I was on my feet in a moment.

"You come along, too," I said.

"No, no!" She was urging wildly. "You must hurry! Run! One of them will be killed!"

"I won't leave you."

"Oh, please, please!" she begged. "I'll follow—I'll come after you as fast as I can—but don't wait!"

On that promise I started up that path at a speed that would have wrecked the lungs of most men; but I was used to mountains.

Every minute I expected to overtake Baxter, but I must have climbed three miles, and still did not come upon him. I began to grow uneasy about leaving the girl so far behind; and yet, if I returned without him, and anything happened, she would never get over it.

Presently I came upon a rude shack in a clump of pine, and heard angry voices beyond. The two enemies had already met!

Gathering the remnants of my strength, I sprinted forward to prevent murder. I dashed around the corner of the cabin, pulled up suddenly, and stood staring. Just beyond were Baxter and the big, hairy Madson, denouncing each other in the most violent language as they sat side by side on a log!

They did not see me, and Baxter went on waving his forefinger violently under the other's nose.

"But I tell you, Madson, your article in the *Geographic* was absolutely unscientific. The roots of the ipecac, or ipecacuanha, are little larger than a knitting-needle, and often run straight down for eighteen or nineteen inches. Your whole article tended to discredit my explorations along the Yapura, and I demand that you make a retraction!"

Good Lord! That was what I had come to prevent! I almost collapsed in my tracks.

At that I thought of the girl and her danger, and wrath flamed up. I whipped out a gun, leveled it at the two, and called sternly:

"Hands up!"

They faced about, mildly annoyed at the interruption, and obediently lifted their hands.

"Quick!" I ordered. "If you have any guns, get them and come running! Those Mexican bandits have captured Baxter's daughter!"

I had no scruples over unscientific statements if they would get action.

I went back down the trail like a mountain goat, the two scientists trailing after me at a creditable speed; but even as they trotted I could hear them arguing about the ipecac plant and the Yapura River.

A pistol shot two hundred yards down the mountainside cracked the stillness of the morning. Terror went through me like a knife. They were attacking her now! I leaped fifteen feet down a bank, staggered up, and plunged through the chaparral in the direction of the shot.

I saw her standing huddled behind a clump of bushes, and life came back to me. "Eudora!" I called, as I ran down to her. "Are you hurt?"

She shook her head, but pointed below.

"They are there." She still held the revolver in her hand. "I saw them slipping after me. I was frightened, and fired to scare them."

She was trembling as I laid my hand on her arm.

"Let's get back to the path," I said. "It is the only way down."

"Oh, did you find him?"

"Oh, yes, I found him!" Disgust was in my tone. "He and Madson were quarreling over the length of ipecac root."

"Was that it?" She gasped—and then, in spite of our danger, began to laugh. "Shall I ever learn any sense about daddy?" she said. "I might have known it was something like that!"

We got back to the patch above where the Mexicans were lurking, and waited for Baxter and Madson.

"Ah!" Baxter looked at me, annoyed and amazed. "Your statement, I think, young man, was that they had captured my daughter!"

"They had," I said severely, "and had started to torture her; but I shot the leader one-thirteenth of an inch west of the center of his clavicle, and he let go. Now get this," I added sternly. "We are in the worst danger of our lives. There is about one chance in three of our getting out of it. I am in charge from now on; and if you silly scientists don't obey my orders, you'll be shot by a white man instead of a Mexican!"

Either the Mexicans were frightened off by Eudora's pistol shot or they decided that the hairy Madson was too strong a reinforcement, for they did not molest us on the way back to camp. They had looted our supplies, however—our guides being conveniently absent at the time.

We got what food Madson had at his cabin, packed up, and headed down the cañon, all four of us carrying our guns ready for immediate action. We camped that night in an open stretch two or three miles wide, and I ordered the scientists to take turn about standing guard.

Madson proposed that he should turn back here.

"No!" I said. "You have got to see us safely out of here."

"But, my dear sir"—he looked at me in amazement—"I had nothing to do with your coming. I am investigating—"

"It doesn't make a darned bit of difference what you are investigating," I declared vehemently. "We've got to get this girl out of here, and that quick. You and Baxter can come back and argue to Doomsday after we get to San Felipe!"

We reached San Felipe; but we lived on fish for three days until Sol Miller arrived. I had left orders with him to come back in two weeks, and every seven days thereafter until we returned.

I still bossed the expedition, for it was my hired machine this time. I made Baxter sit with the driver, while I sat in the

back seat with Eudora. Madson, who had decided to go back with us, was assigned to the extra seat beside the luggage, in the center of the tonneau.

When we came in sight of Calexico and the American line, Eudora broke into a laugh that was almost hysterical with relief.

"My, but I'm glad to get back!" she said. "But"—and her eyes were bright—"I'm glad I went!"

When the machine pulled up at the Palm-Tree Hotel, Baxter was the first out. As I alighted, he put out his hand to me in a purely formal good-by, and remarked in his matter-of-fact tone:

"Young man, I am considerably indebted to you for your company on this trip.

I hope we may run across each other again some day."

"We shall," I said, turning to smile at Eudora, who stood at my shoulder. "We shall meet every time you come to visit your daughter. She is going to be in my care from now on, for I can't trust her to you. We are to be married in just an hour and a quarter."

And as we turned into the hotel we heard Madson repeat:

"Quite a violent young man!"

"A little precipitate," agreed Baxter, but with a sigh of relief. "It is probably for the best, though. It will relieve me greatly, for it takes so much of my time looking after her!"

## An Interesting Couple

CONTAINING A USEFUL HINT UPON THE SECRET OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ADVANCEMENT

By Garret Smith

"AREN'T they an interesting couple?" whispered timid little Mrs. Bristol to her husband, as they followed the impressive David Harkness and his strikingly dressed wife into the glittering café.

"They are indeed," agreed John Bristol mildly.

Mildness was John's chief characteristic; but now, in half-conscious emulation of his male companion, he tried to square his own solidly built but desk-bent shoulders and to walk with a little of the Harkness aggressiveness. No one would call him and Molly an interesting couple, he thought wistfully. For once John Bristol pined to be interesting instead of unimaginatively useful, as he had been for the last thirty years or more.

As far as the superficially physical was concerned, the two couples were not unlike. Both women were petite and dark, both men fair and amply built; but there ended the resemblance. The Bristol couple were outfitted in the mode of a Brooklyn department-store; the Harkness raiment bespoke Paris modistes and London tailors.

In the subtle aura of personality emanating from the two wedded pairs there was an even more striking contrast. The Bristols shrank into the café; the Harknesses burst in. Had John Bristol piloted his spouse into this uncharted sea without convoy, they would have drifted about helpless for a while, looking timidly at the table they would have liked, until some captain of waiters shooed them contemptuously into the most undesirable corner of the room and left them to be insulted by one of his pirate crew.

Not so Harkness. He looked blandly over the head of a mere captain, summoned the head waiter with an imperious gesture, told him where he would sit, and sat there, being served subsequently with gusto and obsequiousness under the personal direction of the captain and an occasional anxious glance from the chief himself.

There are two kinds of passengers on the great accommodation train of life—those who fear the conductor and those who make the conductor fear them; those who stand in awe of waiters, traffic officers, chauffeurs,