



2ND. INSTALLMENT

Duval leaped. He leaped high and without warning and, feet spread, drove his peavey into the log again, lurching his shoulders, thrusting his peavey before him for balance, bending forward. The spin of the log was checked sharply and had his opponent been caught unprepared, he certainly would have pitched face foremost into the pond.

But Elliott was not unprepared. He had watched the Bulls every move. He did not jump when Duval jumped; he waited a split-second, eyes on Duval's feet and when he saw the toes pointed stiffly downward he rose slowly into the air, a galloping break in his swift run, and came down poised, spread-legged himself, crying out in an ejaculation of mock distress as he

landed on the cedar which swayed and heaved beneath them. A great roar went up, cries of encouragement for the stranger, some shouts of admonition for their townsman. The Bull would have no crotch in this contest! On the shore Bird-Eye pranced up and down, swinging his arms. "Duck him, Elliott!" he yelled. "Duck th' big chunk! Sure 'nd he needs him a bath!"

The smooth bole gathered momentum swiftly and Elliott began to skip and dance, breaking the steady measure of his run. As his weight came and went irregularly upon the cedar it commenced to teeter, causing Duval's feet to splash in ankle-deep water. Again without warning the Bull leaped. He went higher, this time, but instead of driving his spikes into the far side of the log and stopping its spin as he had done before, he drove them into the near side, increasing rather than checking the momentum.

"Got you, big boy," Elliott cried as he, too, came down running. . . . That was quick thinking, instantaneous action. To leap was simple; but to determine the oncoming move and meet it with composure and poise was another matter. To have come down to a stance, then, would have swung the challenger to wet defeat. "Ah, th' big chunk as a Bull's got to get that bath he needs!" Bird-Eye shrieked into the air. But this was only one man's enthusiasm, his animosity for Duval finding voice. Tincup knew that; and Ben Elliott knew it well. He, like the town-woman waiting for the king of the Mad Woman to draw more items from his bag of tricks before he should assume the offensive.

Without a flicker of warning Duval dropped the pick of his peavey, twisting the shaft in his hands, flipping the hook open. The point plummeted into the water, the hook bit into the log simultaneously and as the handle swung upward in a swift arc the man drove his weight on it. His body twisted, he grunted and his face wrenched into a lightning expression of great strain as the cedar, in a quarter turn, stopped dead. . . . And Ben Elliott, back bowed acutely, peavey high above his head, teetered back to balance on one foot, laughed aloud! "Quick work, big boy!" he cried. "Almost got me!"

But what happened stilled the clamor quickly. Ben Elliott shifted his peavey. He had held it across his body, arms wide spread. Now he swung the point upward and outward and as he ran the spinning log drew it back and tossed it toward shore. Tossed it high and far, sending with it his chance for a quick and certain victory. The silence was that of amazement. This was like letting a man you had knocked down get to his feet and have another chance; this was opportunity handed to truculent Bull Duval on a silver platter. This was the sportsmanship one read about. . . . And then came an excited clatter of tongues, rising to an even greater roar. The outsider was through fooling, though with trickery and through with strategy. He was going to run the Bull off his feet!

Fast and faster spun the log. Spray from it drenched the men to their knees, rained behind them into the pond. The log was hissing in the water. Rigidly ran from the Bull's shoulders down his back. He was upright, now, where Elliott was poised forward. And his scowl was gone. His brows no longer gathered but were upraised; his eyes were wide open in the distress of fatigue and he breathed through his mouth. Thought of the rules swept the crowd, because Duval was edging to the right. He moved slowly, awkwardly, at the cost of great effort, on toward the center of the log. Was he trying one more trick? Not likely. A man under such a strain does not attempt strategy. . . . not fair strategy. As he progressed an inch at a time Elliott countered by also creeping toward the center so his end might not dip beneath the surface.

Both men had their arms extended and Elliott's grin had faded to a sort of curious smile, a speculative alertness. . . . Close and closer they came together and then, as their extended hands were all but touching, Duval suddenly felled

his right wrist in a pin left hand. "Ah, th' dirty—" But Bird-Eye's high scream was cut short by an ominous roar. The Bull, facing defeat, had overstepped all rules. The slightest touch on the other's body would upset his balance, now, and after Elliott had proven himself above taking what was even recognized as a fair advantage, the last vestige of loyalty to town or whatever it was which had put men on Duval's side was whisked away. On Duval's face was ruthlessness along with the flush of fatigue and humiliation. He would be the last man on that log, though disqualified for any prize. At that moment he would stay on that log.

But would he? Elliott, a steady quality coming into his grin, retreated until he was out of the other's reach. He loosened the last reservoir of his energy and by the way his feet flickered and clawed and spurred that log one might well have believed that until now he had only played with this crowned king of the river that towed past Tincup. Watchers felt their middles aching as they followed those straining contestants. Again the Bull sought to strike Elliott's extended hand and missed by inches. His left hand raised jerkily, up and up. His body tilted. His great torso was twisting, wrenching at the hips, and, seeing this, Elliott leaped high, came down running, sent water sloshing back and forth the length of the stick until with a throaty cry of rage and humiliation, of hatred and jealousy, the great Bull, mistaking a stride, went sideways and backward, disappeared beneath the surface of the pond with a mighty splash and came up blowing and shaking his black thatched head. Hats went into the air, then along with yips and yells and enthusiastic oaths as Ben Elliott, panting heavily, brought the log to a stop, hands on his knees, stood blowing and grinning and watched the man whose title he had taken swim for the broom sticks. The Bull slunk quickly toward the boiler room of the mill, water streaming from his pants and sleeves. The pond man threw out his pile pole and brought the cedar log to shore and there Elmco, the announcer and master of ceremonies, greeted Elliott with a clap on the back and, with the other hand, thrust a roll of currency at him. "Here's your money and you sure deserve it!" he cried, close in Ben's ear to make himself heard. "You'd got to a foul anyhow. Better this way!"

Others surged around the victor and Elliott accepted this homage modestly. "Luck!" he said to one enthusiastic well-wisher. "I got the breaks in luck." "Lucky!" shrieked Bird-Eye. "I'll hock any man ave me own old or me heavy who says 'twas luck! You got stuff, me b'y; you got guts!" "Thanks, chum!" Elliott laughed. "I hope you don't find me out!" He shouldered his way slowly to his pack-sack and, surrounded by his admirers, with Bird-Eye in the fore, changed to his shoes again. He looked about for Don Stuart, craning his neck to see over the crowd which was now moving up toward Tincup's main thoroughfare. "Who ye mean?" Bird-Eye asked. "Owd Donny?" "Yeah, Stuart. The old duffer's broke, on top of being sick, and I want to look out for him."

A man at his elbow said cautiously: "The sford old Don won't do much vittin' in Tincup." Bird-Eye turned to him inquiringly and the man nodded. "Brandon. He found him here while th' brilin' was goin' on. He's likely made other arrangements." "Th' dirty stinker!" Bird-Eye said beneath his breath. "So he's drivin' him out already, is he? Well, th' low down—" "Who's drivin' who out?" Elliott asked. "Misther Brandon. Americky might be a free country but Tincup ain't in it, this. Owd Donny ain't welcome here 'nd 's likely he's got his orders to move on."

Elliott hitched his back-sack a bit higher. "What's this? Orders? What's wrong with him? Seemed like a harmless old gaffer to me. Bent on coming to Tincup, too; wanted it like a little kid wants candy. Got my goat. . . . Who's going to run him off?" Bird-Eye had hopped nimbly to a log from which point he could see across bobbing heads. "Ah-ha!" he exclaimed. "Sure, it's Misther Brandon himself who's a-runnin' owd Donny off!" Elliott craned his neck and could see, half-way to the depot, two men on the sidewalk. One was his companion in travel earlier that day; the other a man he had not seen before. The latter had Don Stuart by one arm but that contact was not the friendly assistance which Ben had offered the old fellow. As Elliott looked, the feeble old man tried to draw away, but the other was insistent, scarcely hesitated in his progress toward the station. "Train wait's due now," Bird-Eye said. "Sure, 'nd pore owd Donny, he'll be a passenger. It's a cryin' shame, kapin' him away from Tincup so!" Elliott started forward, Bird-Eye at his heels, crossing the street, leaping to the high board sidewalk and swinging on.

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