

The Free Press' Short Story

DYNAMITE DIPLOMACY

JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

"LEAVE it to me!" Morton Graft nodded his large head confidently at the middle-aged lumberman and his golden-haired daughter. An expansive smile twisted Morton's full lips and his black eyes lighted. "When I'm through blasting the bottom of the boats on Puget Sound can enter Shallow Bay, Mr. Laramie!" Dale McDonald frowned as he lifted the heavy copper breastplate over Morton's broad shoulders. Mr. Laramie's rugged face was stony with disapproval and even Elia Laramie had ceased smiling. Would Morton ever realize that the world was not his oyster? Dale's blue eyes swept over the diving tug with its gasoline pump for supplying air, its recompression tank and its winches, past the tugboat that towed it to the big lumber mill which was the reason for the town of Shallow Bay. Back of the mill with its ringing saws, log-loaded flat cars and endless chains of moving logs, lay the town, inviolate except for a few straggling houses which clung to the tree-studded slope which had so far escaped the teeth of the saws. There, in Shallow Bay, Dale had attended high school. There he had met Morton; and there the rivalry between himself and Morton for Elia's friendship had begun, a rivalry which had continued through college to the present moment. "You've seen Dale diving, Elia," Morton said. "Now you'll see a real diver!" Dale winced. Morton Graft had him at a disadvantage. A year Dale's senior, Morton was employer and Dale employee. Luck had favored Morton. In herding some money, he had invested it in a complete diving rig. His little firm had prospered. Dale's ability as a diver being no small factor in that prosperity. Strange what had attracted Elia to Morton. How different they were! Watching her now unobserved, Dale marvelled at first at her fragility beside the stocky figure of her lumberman father. Elia's nose was straight and small, her chin firm, pointed and determined; only the viscous tangle of her blue eyes and the dimples in her cheeks relieved her face of severity. Beside the girl, Morton seemed gross, heavy phlegmatic. Old Dad Branchaw, the lean, red-faced "skipper" of the barge and Nils Larson, the man-of-all-work, lifted the copper helmet onto Morton's head and helped him onto the landing stage. The winch creaked and rumbled as stage and diver vanished beneath the green foam. The lumberman broke a long silence. "What makes Graft think he can set a hundred charges simultaneously?" Dale shifted his rough-hewn body and ran his long fingers thoughtfully through his unruly mop of red hair. "I don't like trying it when time's so important, Mr. Laramie." "You mean you've no proof it will work?" "Not under water," Dale admitted. Mr. Laramie grunted. "And if it does not work, I've lost valuable time! Hang it, man, I can't afford to experiment! I want to get decent-sized boats into Shallow Bay to get out my lumber. I can't afford double-handling by my old, slow methods, lumber prices what they are!" Elia jumped as something thudded against the barge's flat bottom. "Well, I never! Is that a fish or—?" Again that scraping, bumping sound on the bottom of the barge! Dale sprang to the rig line and pulled. Rope rippled freely through the water. Dad Branchaw's wrinkled face grew apprehensive. "Dale, Mort's upside down! He's headed over to examine the bedrock, lost his balance, and the first thing he knew, he was coming up, feet first. Air must've risen to the lower part of his suit!" Dale seized the phones from the old man. "Mort!" "Don't worry!" answered Dale tersely. "I'll do something." He tried the line again. He took up all the slack and then an inch more caught somewhere. Not an inch more would it give. "I'll have to go down, Dad! Line's snagged!" Darning his wet suit, Dale climbed onto the landing stage and the groaning winch lowered him. A silver sheet of water creaked over his head and he could glimpse a jungle of swaying seaweed, kelp and dark green vegetation on the floor of the bay. Shifting his position on the landing stage, he saw Morton below the dark bulk of the barge. He appeared, inconspicuously enough, to be standing on its bottom; then he slipped out of view. Climbing off on the bottom, it was several moments before Dale could ac-

the charges closest to shore and wiring them up in series of five, each series being connected with a single line running to the dock. Gradually they worked into the deeper water near the entrance of the bay. Dale came up from a dive one morning to report that but five more dynamite charges were to be connected and they would be ready to blast. Morton sent word to Mr. Laramie; then he went down to set up the last series. Mr. Laramie and Elia arrived and still Morton did not send up word that he was ready to ascend. Dale took the ear-phones from Dad Branchaw and listened. He could hear only Morton's labored breathing and the hissing of air entering Morton's helmet. Suddenly the other's voice, strangely altered, came through the ear phones. "There—there is an octopus coming out of a crevice in the rocks ahead of me!" An electric shiver of apprehension raced down Dale's spine. "Can we pull you up?" "No! Do you want to blow me to atoms? There are wires on three sides of me. I can only go ahead, and the octopus is there!" Dale's face drained of its color. The young man knew from his last dive that wires circled Morton except for a pinnacle of rock toward the deep-water side. He had intended to walk along the bottom toward deep water so that he could be pulled up without danger of his cast-iron shoes striking any of the many wires. Dale explained tersely to Elia. Her blue eyes widened with horror. "Dale! I'm there something that can be done? Can't you move the barge out into deeper water and pull him toward us?" "Risky!" said Dale grimly. "You have to use diplomacy with dynamite. If we pulled him from one side to carry him over the octopus, he'd have a fair chance, in rising, of striking the wires leading almost up to the pinnacle of rock." "Then what can you do, Dale?" "Remove the octopus!" Elia gasped. Mr. Laramie stared at Dale through narrowed lids. "How do you propose to remove the octopus?" Dale shrugged helplessly. "I didn't say I could. I said that was the only thing which could be done safely." "Safely?" snorted Mr. Laramie. "If you call battling an octopus safe! What will you use?" "A crowbar, sir." "Hain't Graft a crowbar?" "Yes; but I imagine he's afraid to use it for fear of striking a wire and blowing himself to pieces." Dad and Nils helped Dale into his damp diving suit. Before the helmet could be slipped on, Elia raised a working face to Dale's. "Please, Dale, be careful!" "For Morton's sake?" She shook her golden head. "For your own. I never knew anything quite as courageous as your going down." Her voice ended in a little nervous cough which concealed a sob. The tug had pulled the barge into deeper water while Dale had been darning his suit. The winch squealed and rattled as it lowered the landing-stage beside him. Dad gave the helmet one-quarter of a turn to fasten it, and Dale stepped onto the stage. In a moment the green surf closed over his head. He moved climactically on the landing stage, trying to accustom himself to the dim light so that he could gauge his chances. Myriad wires cut the water between himself and shore but he was safely out-there their radius. Not wishing to be bothered with the landing stage, he stepped off, to be suspended by his life line. An icy shiver raced down his spine as he wondered whether or not the barge had moved out far enough. If it had not, he landed squarely on top of the octopus! He gripped his crowbar a little more tightly, his lips moving with a silent prayer. Suddenly Dale felt the hair rise on the back of his neck. Directly before his eyes, magnified to horrible proportions by his vision plate, was a shapeless, grayish mass. The octopus! It raised itself on its eight snaky arms, waiting, watching. It then passed from sight like a nightmare upon awakening, but his knees would scarcely support Dale when his heavy shoes struck the bottom—having slack, he was able to look upward slightly now. The eight-armed cuttlefish was sprawled over the pinnacle above him, measuring some twelve feet from tip to tip. Dale considered his chances. That octopus had to be removed if Morton was to reach the surface safely. Why was it not Morton's business, however, to take the risk? He was as well armed as Dale was. Dale pushed this thought out of his mind as cowardly. The bedrock dropped off in a ledge on the deep-water side of the pinnacle. First he must gain this ledge! Shutting off his exhaust valve, Dale permitted his suit to inflate. He then "jumped" the twenty feet to the ledge, water buoyancy making this possible. The change in pressure, however made his eardrums ring. Dale took a long breath of highly-compressed air and moved cautiously toward the octopus. It reared up on its tentacles and seemed to settle back; then two long arms shot out. Beyond reach, Dale's heart nevertheless constricted. Crowbar poised, he moved forward. An arm lashed at him. Dale struck with the bar, before the sucking vacuum cups could reach his suit. The crowbar impaled the tentacle. Dale could feel the weapon twisting out of his hands as the cuttlefish sped an inky fluid which turned the water dark. Somehow he clung to the bar and escaped the lashing tentacles. He could feel the bar moving toward him and realized that the octopus approached. His heart plinched with fear, Dale stepped back just as more inky fluid blackened the water. Currents eddied and swirled about him as the octopus thrashed frenziedly. His crowbar came free. Dimly he could see again. Morton stood in the center of a maze of wires, apparently clung to the bar and escaped the lashing tentacles. Dale knew his life depended on accuracy. Striking downward with the crowbar, he bore through the gray, gelatinous body with scarcely any resistance. The struggling cuttlefish beat the water into whirlpools and filled it with its defensive fluid. The tentacles reach-

ed up onto the shelf to seize Dale. He struck them, slashed them, pried at them, tore away their grip on the rock. This octopus' tenacity was incredible. Regardless of how badly it was torn, the shapeless creature continued to fight for nearly an hour, an hour in which Dale expected every moment to be his last. Only his advantage in elevation saved him. Finally he called for a weighted line. Spearing the writhing octopus through, he passed the rope around the crowbar and had the creature drawn up to the deck of the barge. During all that battle, Morton had done nothing. When he reached the deck however, his blustering self-confidence had returned. "I'd been in any position where I could have used my crowbar, it wouldn't have taken me half so long to dispose of this octopus!" Elia's blue eyes flashed. "Oh, keep still, Mort!" said the girl with sudden irritation. "Of all the conceited persons I ever knew!" Mr. Laramie's eyes were like ice. "Graft has lived so long on the credit of others, that he's forgotten how to do anything for himself." Morton's black eyes blazed. "Mr. Laramie, I don't believe you realize what you're saying!" "Realize? I'm the only person who does realize you're all cackle and no egg. Graft! I realize it so well I'm going to make McDonald to a complete diving rig, to be repaid when he earns the money. I'm sick of seeing him win glory for you—and then get blamed for everything you do wrong!" "Mr. Laramie!" Dale's eyes brimmed and a lump rose in his throat. "Are you—serious?" "Serious?" Elia dimpled and her blue eyes brightened. "I should say Dad is serious! He's talked of nothing else but giving you a chance for the past two weeks. And Dale, why don't you drop in for dinner to-night? I've so wanted to have a good talk with you!" Locomotives cannot swerve to avoid reckless motorists. Railway engineers are carefully trained in the laws of safety, says an editorial in the Canadian National Magazine. They go everything in their power to avoid accidents. They cannot, however, swerve their engine from the steel rails on which it must operate, and this fact the motorist seems at times to overlook. Warning bells and lights, watchmen's flags and crossing gates give notice of the approach of trains, yet there are far more accidents caused by automobiles crashing into the side of trains than by trains striking automobiles. It is here that the co-operation of the motorist is required. In one province (Quebec) the law requires that every vehicle come to a full stop before crossing a railway track. This

IMPORTANT Price REDUCTION of HAMCO COKE

LOWEST PRICE IN YEARS

Save dollars throughout the next heating season by filling your bin with Hamco Coke NOW. Ask your local Hamco Dealer for full particulars.

GET A DANDY HAMCO COKE SHOVEL at a fraction of regular cost. See your dealer. Ask him, too, about the new HAMCO AUTOMATIC DRAFT CONTROL and HAMCO HOT WATER HEATER. HAMCO COKE. HAMILTON BY-PRODUCT CO. LTD. HAMILTON, CANADA. RITCHIE & AGAR J. B. MACKENZIE & SON

INSIST ON HAMCO CANADA'S FINEST COKE

CARROLL'S LIMITED QUALITY FIRST ECONOMY ALWAYS

Our Break O'Morn COFFEE 1 lb 25c. Our Dander TEA 1-lb pkg 41c. Fresh Rolled OATS 3 lbs 13c. Aymer Tomato JUICE 3 25 oz tins 25c. Aymer Peas and BEANS 3 21 oz tins 25c. Aymer Tomato or Vegetable SOUP 10 oz tin 7c. Green Pie APPLES 4 4 tin 10c. Durham Corn STARCH 4 lbs 9c. McCormick's Butter BARS 2 lbs 25c. Extra Special Choice PRUNES 3 lbs 19c. Laing's Chocolate Peppermint PATTIES 1 lb 19c. Eagle The Best Pie BLUEBERRIES No 2 tin 71c. Silver Star FLOUR 24 lb bag 53c. Carroll's Baking POWDER 10 oz tin 17c. Evaporated MILK 76 oz tin 8c. Kellogg's ALL-BRAN 15 pks 19c. Our Break O'Morn COFFEE 1 lb 25c. Our Dander TEA 1-lb pkg 41c. Fresh Rolled OATS 3 lbs 13c. Kellogg's Rice KRISPIES 2 pks 21c. Evaporated APRICOTS 1 lb 25c. Burford Ontario PEACHES 2 No 2 tins 25c. Cattell's Cooked SPAGHETTI 34-oz tin 15c. LARGE IVORY SOAP 1 lb 15c. LUX FLAKES 1 lb pkg 23c. SOAP CHIPS 3-lb bag 19c. CORN BROOMS ea 27c. HO AMMONIA pkg 5c. P & G or PEARL SOAP 5 bars 16c. BON TON TISSUE 4 rolls 13c. KIRK'S CASTLE 2 cakes 9c. Silver Crest Bed SALMON 2 1/2 lb tins 25c. Clover Leaf Pink SALMON 1 lb tin 11c. Ingersoll Malted CHEESE 1/2 lb pkg 14c. Frankford TOMATOES 3 No 2 1/2 tins 25c. Green Valley PEAS 3 No 2 tins 25c. Aymer Golden Bantam CORN 3 17 oz tins 25c. Locking Cut Wax BEANS 3 No 2 tins 25c. Free Tumbler with OVALTINE 10 oz tin 98c. SAVE 24%! SPECIAL! LUX CASE. IF YOU BUY THIS CASE AT SPECIAL PRICE 39c. STORE CLOSED WEDNESDAY AFTERNOONS. Free Delivery. MILL STREET. PHONE 158.

GOOD SHOES FOR YOUNG AND OLD. Correctly Fitted. B. D. RACHLIN, Acton.



Bananas 3 Golden Yellow Firm Ripe lbs. for 20c

TOMATOES POTATOES. Hot-house — Delicious 20c | 5 New, Nice Size 19c. Flavor, per lb.

Oranges Valencia Full of Juice Nice Size Per Dozen 19c

Wax Beans Pineapples. 2 Tender Quality 19c | 2 Cuban — Medium Large — Full Flavor 19c

SPECIAL SALE NEW CARROTS — CUCUMBERS, ETC.

CARROLL'S LIMITED

