THE IRON RIDER

A ROCKY MOUNTAIN ROMANCE OF A FIGHTING RAILROAD MAN

By FRANK L. PACKARD

Copyright, the Frank A. Munsey Co.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.—There is bad blood between Larry Lannigan, the young assistant paymaster of the Rocky Mountain division of a Western railroad, and his superior, Mason. When sent to pay off a gang of troublesome Italians, Larry finds that the payroll has been padded by the head of the gang, Masseno. Single-handed, he defies them all and after desperate fighting rescues a boy, Tommaso, from their clutches. Later Larry, taunted by Mason for his "needless" fight, writes his resignation and then proceeds to square accounts with Mason. He is determined to give the fellow a sound drubbing. He attacks the paymaster in his office at Angel. He knocks him down, and Mason's head strikes an iron safe. Larry cannot bring him back to consciousness, and he flees on the first freight train. At Beaver Dam, Larry, who is wanted "dead or alive," is found hiding in one of the cars. Larry beats off the train crew, and, seizing the engine, passes through several stations. He afterward seeks refuge at a lonely station in the private car of Mr. Pelenoff, a visiting Russian railway official. He is concealed in a stateroom by the Russian's daughter Mera, who, believing his story that he has killed a man in self-defense, sits with her back to the door while her father and Supt. Felton converse about the crime. When she hears that not murder, but assault and robbery is the charge she scornfully orders him to be gone. Larry later overpowers the telegraph operator at the station and uses the wire to gain information.

CHAPTER IX.

(Continued.)

The "Key" at Manloops.

"I WANT you to do me a favor, Peterson. I want you to get headquarters on the wire and get the full details for me."

"Why, certainly, I will!"—it was a little too eager, a little too spontaneous—like the quick turn the man made in his chair, reaching out his hand for the key.

The cold smile was back in Larry's gray eyes.

"Yes, certainly, you will," he said evenly; "but—take your hand off that key!"

Peterson snatched his hand back as though he had touched red-hot iron. He gulped.

"I thought you said you wanted—"

But Larry broke in sharply:

"So I did"—his voice was low and menacing—"but I don't want you to get yourself into trouble. You said a minute ago that I was in a bad mess. That ought to be enough to make you appreciate that you're taking long chances on any double cross."

"I wasn't," protested Peterson, nervously. "I—"

"Don't lie!" cautioned Larry levelly. "You know perfectly well they wouldn't answer any questions offhand from you—you were jumping at the chance to tell them I was here. And now let us understand each other thoroughly. If you attempt any tricks, if you send a word you are not told to send, I'll drop you where you sit. And don't run away with the idea that I am fool enough to trust you with the key without knowing what you are doing—and I never bluff!" Larry shifted the revolver to his left hand; and, standing up, the fingers of the right closed on the key. "To prove it to you, I am going to call headquarters myself. After that, you will do the talking—a man's 'sending' is sometimes recognizable, you know, and if I kept at it too long Forbes down there might tumble to the fact that it was not Peterson on the wire. I don't say he would, but he might—and I am taking no chances. Are you quite sure, Peterson, that I have made everything perfectly plain to you?"

Peterson touched his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"Yes," he said. "I'll do it. I can't help myself, can I?"

Sharp, quick, with a touch dispelling any doubts of his mastership of the key that might be lingering in Peterson's mind, Larry made the despatcher's call—and a moment later Angel answered.

Larry drew back, and with a jerk of his revolver motioned Peterson to "sit in."

"Tell him Detective Frere is here, and to call Supt. Manley to the wire."

"Manloops. Detective Frere here. Wants Supt. Manley on the wire," clicked Peterson.

The sounder broke with a splutter. Peterson looked up questioningly.

"You needn't translate"—there was the flicker of a smile on Larry's lips. "Tell him I say it's none of his business how I came here. It's his business to get the super to the wire, and be quick about it."

"I'll tell him you say so, all right," said Peterson, and for the first time an expression very nearly approaching satisfaction rested upon the operator's face.

"That's pretty stiff!" commented Larry, as the other ceased. "I didn't tell you to hand it to him as hard as that."

"It's the first chance I ever had," said Peterson earnestly. "The big squirt! He thinks because he's down there in a despatcher's chair that as fellows up here have to crawl and kiss his feet every time he takes the notion. Say, I've never had a civil word, or a 'how's Peterson?' out of him in a hundred nights that I've been sitting all alone up here—not one! Only a call good and hard if I'm a second late on an O. S."

"All right—if you feel the better with it off your chest," said Larry indifferently. "But cut out any more of it."

There was silence while the clock on the wall ticked away a minute; then the sounder broke again.

"Supt. Manley here. What do you want?"

Larry leaned his elbow on the table in a sort of ominous negligence, as his revolver covered Peterson.

"Now go ahead as I dictate," he ordered. "Detective Frere says he was on the coast express. Did not know of trouble at Angel until after stop at The Forks for private car. Learned from Conductor Hines on way up to Manloops that burglary and assault had been committed. No details, except that Lannigan was accused. Met Asst. Supt. Felton when he got off here to inspect runaway engine. No time to secure further information. Mr. Felton ordered Detective Frere to remain here, report presence and obtain necessary particulars from you. Please furnish same."

There was a sickly smile on Peterson's lips.

"You're a smooth one," he mumbled. "I——"

"Shut up!" commanded Larry tensely—the sounder was clicking again; the superintendent now, evidently, was dictating in turn.

"Callboy passing down corridor on way from despatcher's room few minutes before 7 heard some one moaning in paymaster's office. Door was locked. Boy gave the alarm, door was broken in and Mason was found in a semi-conscious condition. Had been terribly battered. Drawers and contents of safe littered about the floor. Over $3,000 gone. Mason, taken to hospital, stated that attack upon him was made by Lannigan. Did not see Lannigan take the money, but prior to the blow that rendered him unconscious the safe and contents had not been disturbed and the money was there. Lannigan escaped on Extra No. 57. Was last seen by station agent at The Forks going by station in cab of 403. Is therefore now somewhere between The Forks and Manloops. Presume he has taken to the mountains temporarily and will attempt to make his way west. Sheriff Laing and deputies on way now. Report to Sheriff for orders on arrival."

"Ask him how Mason is doing," instructed Larry.

"Mason doing well," was the Superintendent's reply.

"That's enough!" said Larry, with a curious thinning of his lips. "Give him the O. K."

When he spoke it was with apparent irrelevancy.

"What's the engine number on extra No. 32?" he demanded.

"Eight-eleven," replied Peterson.

Again Larry was irrelevant.

"I want a piece of rope," he said shortly. "Got any?"

"There's some old bell-cord out in the shed," Peterson volunteered promptly. "Will that do?"

"That will do very nicely," said Larry, grimly. "Let's go get it. Move!"

With the revolver muzzle between Peterson's shoulder blades, they made the trip to the shed, and returned to the office with the cord. Larry knotted a noose in one end.

"As a railroad man," he said softly, "I don't want to smash those instruments and put the wire out of business; and, besides, I want to use them again myself. The only other course is to tie you in your chair. Put your hands behind your back!"

"I—what? Look here," began Peterson, growing white again, "you"——

"Do as you are told!"—Larry's voice was deadly cold now. "I haven't much time left. Put your hands behind you!"

Peterson obeyed. Larry slipped the noose over the other's wrists, jerked it tight, shoved the man down into a chair, and a moment later, with Peterson's arms, legs and body securely lashed, dragged the chair back against the far wall of the room.

A whistle came ringing down the gorge from the west. It was extra No. 32. Larry started.

"You mean," gasped Peterson, "that you're going to make No. 32 as she goes by!"

"She doesn't sound very speedy," said Larry judicially, listening to the approaching roar. "I've hopped faster ones."

He moved to the doorway.

"Well, goodby, Peterson. My compliments to Sheriff Laing." He smiled—and the door closed behind him.

CHAPTER X.

Two at the Same Game.

THE headlight of the eastbound freight, opening the bend of the track, played down the stretch in a thin line of light, grew brighter, threw into sharp relief the shape of the 403 on the siding, flooded station and platform with a dazzling brilliancy—and then darkness, Stygian by contrast, fell again as the big ten-wheeler at the head of its string of sleeving cars rumbled by.

Larry, from where he had hidden himself behind the 403, climbed into the cab of the engine for the simple reason that it afforded the maximum amount of comfort obtainable, and stretched himself out on the driver's seat. There was nothing to do now but wait. It would take extra No. 32 approximately fifteen minutes to get past The Forks, where the combination Sheriff's special and fast freight would be waiting, and another fifteen minutes after that for the latter to reach Manloops—half an hour in all.

Larry smiled grimly. Sheriff Laing would not be pleased when he reached Manloops and, from the story Peterson would tell, be forced into the belief that his quarry had doubled back and was even then already well east of The Forks!

As for the rest, Larry figured that to all intents and purposes he was now free from pursuit. They would search extra No. 32 at the first point they could reach her, find nothing, of course, and the hunt thereafter would be red-hot from, say, Beaver Dam east to Angel, while west of Manloops obviously the search would be discontinued. The last place they would think of looking for him after they had heard Peterson's story when the fast freight pulled in would be here in Manloops—therefore he would be here in Manloops; the last place they would think of looking for him when the fast freight pulled out would be on the fast freight—therefore he would be on the fast freight. It was very simple!

Larry flung himself back on the driver's seat once more, his mind busy with its problem. When he roused himself again it was at the sound as of the distant mutter of thunder playing through the mountains, now low, now distinct, now dying away utterly. He jumped to his feet and listened. It was the freight with Sheriff Laing and the posse.

Larry's eyes roved speculatively over the line of box cars that were now immediately in front of him. He was playing in luck again! Two cars down the line was one with its door wide open, and he would only have to spring inside as the train pulled out again.

His means of escape assured, Larry turned his head in the other direction—toward the station—and listened. The Sheriff's posse had left the car, and he could hear the scuffle of their feet and the sound of their voices from the platform—and then a sudden yell. It was Peterson, finding his voice and bawling for help.

Larry began to crawl forward cautiously, silently. It was perhaps half a dozen yards to the siding, then across the siding rails to the door of the car on the main line.

A yard, two yards he made—and then he lay suddenly still and motionless, his eyes riveted in a sort of numbed fascination on the closed door of the car that was next ahead of the one with the open door.

Was he dreaming? Was it the moonlight playing tricks upon him—just a shadow creeping there, darker and darker, on the side of the empty box car?

And now there came a slight sound, a creaking, very faintly, very low. Tense, strained, Larry lay there. It was neither dream nor imagination. The car door was being stealthily opened from the inside! Wider grew the opening, still a little wider—and then a face peered out from the aperture—and the dark of the car's interior was like a sinister and congruous frame for the brutal, scowling features that the moonlight disclosed.

It was Masseno!

CHAPTER XI.

Fellow Passengers.

FOR perhaps a minute, prone on the ground, Larry did not move. Other faces, which he recognized as members of the gang, peered out over Masseno's shoulders. And then the long freight began to jerk into motion, the door was closed as stealthily as it had been opened, the car rolled by—and Larry, crawling swiftly across the intervening space, sprang to his feet, flung himself in through the open door that was his goal, and the next instant was crouched far back in the blackness of the car behind the one that held Masseno.

A minute more passed. The train began to gain a little momentum; a light filtered suddenly in through the side doors, laying a curious white, flickering path across the centre of the car; there was a riot of voices rising to a sort of cumulative height from the platform that as abruptly died away—and the car was past the station.

Larry shrugged his shoulders, dismissed Masseno from his thoughts and stretched himself out as comfortably as possible on the car floor. He dozed off to sleep. But almost instantly, it seemed to him, he was aroused again by the train slowing down and a moment later thoroughly awakened by a loud, hollow rumble that echoed up from beneath the wheel trucks.

He got up and went to the car door, where a glance enabled him to recognize his surroundings, and with a little shock of surprise he realized that he must have slept, and slept soundly, for well over half an hour. Far down below, deep in the moonlight, lay a valley, a river winding through it like a shimmering thread, the banks like enormously wide, black, painted bands with their thick timber and foliage rising abruptly to the height of the plateau level on either side. They were on the great Passnock steel trestle, nearly three-quarters of a mile in length, that was ranked one of the finest engineering triumphs of the Rockies.

Wonderful in its scenery perhaps, but, save for a few ranchers and settlers here and there, a wild and deserted country this! From Beaver Dam straight through to Thunder Mountain there was practically no sign of human habitation except for the small and lonely stations strewn along the right of way, and whose existence even was due solely to the operating exigencies of the railroad. In a moment now, as soon as they were across the trestle, they would come to another of these stations, identical in every respect with its isolated fellows. Passnock had a siding, a station, an operator—that was all.

The freight crossed the trestle, and, as it jolted over the Passnock siding switch beyond, beginning to pick up speed again, Larry, standing in the doorway of the car, with a startled exclamation quickly drew back out of sight. Passnock, for once, possessed more than his mental enumeration had credited it with. Lighted windows had flashed suddenly out at him from the siding—it was the private car.

He approached the doorway once more to gaze back after it—and for the second time retreated hastily. What was that! A dark form appeared and suddenly as from nowhere on the track side—and vanished. Then another, and still another. He counted the three before, in a flash, the explanation came to him, and edging quickly forward once more, he crouched close against the side of the car, and cautiously looked out. Yes, it was as he had surmised—it was Masseno and the men in the car ahead jumping to the ground. He counted the rest of them now—four more—seven in all.

Unseeing, Larry stared out into the darkness. It was not only the mere looting of the private car—there was the girl!

And then Larry leaped.

Where there had been silence, it was as though pandemonium were suddenly loosed in all directions. Masseno had been craftier than he had given the man credit for. Came a crash of shattered glass and a wild yell from the direction of the private car; then a shout from the operator, as, in a glance that lasted but the fraction of a second, Larry saw the station door burst in, and the operator, springing to his feet, grapple with the intruder; while, coincident with it all, he whirled to meet a quick rush upon himself from behind that was more sensed than heard.

A form leaped at him, there was the sheen of a knife blade in the moonlight, a downward thrust that he instinctively avoided by springing to one side—and he was locked in a death grip with his assailant. Around and around they swayed. A swarthy face, black, glittering eyes, snarling lips were before him—and, alternating this, as he kept swinging about, he caught views of the operator in a like struggle through the station window.

As he fought, fierce yells from the car still split the air. He caught another glimpse through the station window—the operator, freed somehow from his opponent, was working frantically at the key. The knife blade gleamed again in the moonlight—the man had wrenched his arm loose. A queer, low grunt escaped Larry's lips. A sharp pain shot through his side. But now, their hold on each other broken, Larry's own arm swung lightning quick in a vicious blow, his pistol crashing down on the other's head—and, as the yells rose louder, more triumphant, more demoniacal from the car, the man dropped like a log to the ground.

CHAPTER XII.

The Fight In the Private Car.

WITHOUT a glance at the other, Larry turned and ran for the car. He was barely conscious that there was a hot, trickling sensation down his side. There were five of them in the car, he told himself. He had accounted for one, the operator, evidently, for another. His brain was working in curious flashes. Those yells were hideously triumphant. But they were still fighting. Strange, quick-moving shadows showed from the lighted car windows, thrown, as it were, upon the track side as upon a screen.

He sprang onto the front platform, rushed in through the door and on down the corridor. Came a scream in a woman's voice—her voice. Inside the galley, as he passed it, the negro cook lay moaning on the floor.

The living-room compartment of the car showed before him in the abrupt turn of the corridor. He paused for the fraction of a second as his eyes swept the scene that confronted him—and then the great towering bulk of the man hurled itself forward, and the butt of his automatic crashed again upon a man's skull, and the man—it was Masseno—fell at the girl's feet where he had been holding her, struggling fiercely, against the side of the car.

The fury, ungovernable, that he had known in flashes since childhood was upon Larry now, and he was like a madman—and with the strength of one! About, all was like a panorama of some wild orgy—chairs were broken and hurled in every direction; and the compartment was filled with fighting, snarling, little groups of men. The Russian was down, a man on top of him and at his throat; the remaining negro was struggling from behind a barricade of chairs; and Felton, blood streaming from his face, was being beaten to his knees by the other two members of the gang.

It had been barely half a minute, no more, since Larry had burst into the compartment, and now with a spring he reached the assistant superintendent's side, and tearing the two assailants away, hurled them backwards with terrific force into the centre of the car. There was a yell of mingled surprise and terror from all four of the gang. The one on the floor over the Russian leaped frantically to his feet and retreated to join his two comrades, as did the one attacking the negro.

But now Larry was "seeing red," and he rushed upon the four, his left fist smashing in and out in consonance with the swinging, murderous blows from the clubbed pistol in his right hand. For a moment they held their ground; and then, their leader gone, and before a fury that was resistless, and the onrush of Felton and the Russian to join the fray, they broke and ran for the corridor. Larry plunged after them a step, two; then, a strange, sudden dizziness seizing him, he stumbled and fell. As he picked himself up unsteadily, he heard the four jump from the car and their footsteps race away on the roadbed.

A tense silence held for a moment the car. Mera Pelenoff had dropped into a chair toward the lower end of the compartment and away from where Masseno lay upon the floor, and, white-faced, was staring at Larry in a strained, incredulous, wondering way. Felton stood as though stunned, also staring at Larry. Only the Russian official moved; he ran to his daughter, stooped for an instant over her, and then faced Larry.

"I have to thank you, sir," he gasped out, "for what?"—

"It's Lannigan—Larry Lannigan!"—it came as though involuntarily, in heavy amazement from the assistant superintendent's lips.

Unnoticed by any one, Masseno, still cunningly feigning unconsciousness, had succeeded in gaining a yard toward the rear door of the compartment from the roof of which he had fallen, and now evidently was preparing to make a dash for liberty, for he was turning himself very slowly and cautiously on his side.

With a jump, Larry reached the man, and, gripping him by the collar, yanked him to his feet, deftly snatched a knife from the other's hand—and before Masseno's shriek of terrorized surprise had died away, had flung the man into the empty stateroom that once before that night he himself had occupied.

Larry straightened up. He had only fifteen minutes.

Felton spoke with a curious mingling of severity and uncertainty.

"How did you get here so opportunely, Lannigan?"

A plan was germinating in Larry's mind. He answered mechanically.

"I was riding in an empty box car on No. 57. I saw Masseno and his men jump out of the car ahead of mine after we had passed the private car here. I was afraid they were up to something of this kind, and jumped off myself."

Felton's brow furrowed perplexedly.

From across the car, Larry saw Mera Pelenoff half rise from her chair, and in her eyes, fixed now on his, he caught a startled look of dawning comprehension—but he glanced away from her again at once. Would the plan he had formulated do? There was one thing against it—but he would have to risk that, for it seemed the only chance.

"As I understand it," said Felton, in a slow, perturbed way, "you were safe enough and pretty sure to get away on No. 57, for it is true that every one believed you somewhere east of Beaver Dam again, and you threw away those chances to come to our assistance. I'm sorry Lannigan, it's pretty rough to turn on you after that, but I'm an official of the road, and I have no choice but to hand you over to Sheriff Laing when he gets here. But what you've done ought to stand you in good stead, and I'll speak for you at Angel. I can't let you go, of course, and"——

"You sit down in that chair!"—there was a sudden snarl in Larry's voice, as his automatic pistol swung up and covered the assistant superintendent. "That's all you have to do—but do it quick!" And then, as with an astounded grunt Felton obeyed, Larry's weapon swept around and held a bead on Thurston's head. "You there, Thurston"—he was clipping off words, as with well simulated inadvertence he threw down his hand, as it were, face up, for them to see—"I'll trouble you for the key of that section shanty up there. I want to borrow your handcar."

He glanced swiftly, meaningly, at Thurston, at the Russian official and the negro in turn—and lastly at the girl, who was standing up now, who was very white, whose lips were quivering strangely. There was something in her face that he did not understand, something that made him linger for a second's space to drink in the wonder of her, the sheen of her hair, the grace of the tense, lithe body as she stood there, her beauty—and then, without another word, he turned and ran back along the corridor, reached the platform, jumped to the ground and, running again, headed up the track for the section shanty.

CHAPTER XIII.

An Ally.

FOR a moment after Larry had left the car there was silence in the compartment; then suddenly, swiftly, as though moved by a passionate impulse, Mera stepped toward Felton.

"I think"—her head was high, though her lips were quivering—"I think your treatment of that man was abominable!" she burst out. "And cowardly, Mr. Felton!"

"Mera!" protested Mr. Pelenoff hurriedly.

She turned toward her father with flushed cheeks.

"Yes, I do!" she cried. "And I thought that at least you, a Russian gentleman, would have interfered. You thanked him warmly enough!"

"But Mera," he began, "you"—

"I do not think that Miss Pelenoff quite understands," interposed Felton, a little embarassed, as he rose from his chair.

"There is a warrant out for the man's arrest, he is a thief, he nearly murdered our paymaster, and he robbed the road to-night of a large sum of money."

"So I heard you say a little earlier this evening," Mera returned curtly. "Well, I don't believe it!"

"Come, come, Mera!" he said soothingly. "After all, the man has escaped again, so there is no need to"——

"Escaped!" she whirled toward her father. "Oh, yes, he has escaped—when a trainload of detectives will be here in ten minutes that you will set like bloodhounds on his track again by telling them he has just run away on a hand car, which they can catch easily with their engine before he has gone perhaps a mile. I think it is horrible and inhuman to hound a man who"—she stopped abruptly; and as abruptly, with a low, sharp cry, leaned forward.

Felton turned quickly at the sound.

"What is it, Mera?"—Mr. Pelenoff was staring at her in anxious amazement.

It was Sam, the negro porter, who had edged forward curiously, who answered.

"Foh de Lord's sake!" he gasped. "Dat's—dat's blood!"

"Yes!" Mera cried tensely. "It's blood, and it's his blood." She was pointing to a dark spot on the carpet at the entrance to the corridor where Larry had been standing. "He has been wounded in saving us! And he is out there alone now! You are not going to let him go like that, are you? You—father! Mr. Felton!"

"This is certainly a cruelly embarrassing position," said Felton. "But he's gone now, and I don't see what we can do."

"If you will permit me, then," she said monotonously, "I will retire." She moved past her father and Felton. "Sam," she called over her shoulder, "come and prepare my stateroom for the night."

Followed by the porter, she walked quickly along the corridor, threw open the door of her stateroom and entered, motioning Sam to close it behind them.

Something told her it was because he knew that she, a woman in peril, was there, that had prompted him to throw his own chances of liberty away.

"Sam, take the sheet off my bed and tear some of it into narrow strips!" she commanded quickly. "And see that you don't make any more noise about it than is necessary."

He approached the bed, took off a sheet, hesitated, tore it a little, chuckled suddenly and ripped the strip completely across.

Mera, from her knees on the floor, where she had been ransacking a dress suit case, rose to her feet with a small silver pocket flask in her hand.

"No," she said tersely. "You are going. Hurry up! You can get off the front end of the car without anybody seeing you."

Sam refused to go with her.

For an instant Mera was too enraged to speak—then she snatched the strips of sheeting from Sam's hands and wrapped them around the flask.

"Then I'll go myself!" she announced angrily, and taking up a cloak threw it about her shoulders.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Flight by Hand-Car.

MEANWHILE, as Larry ran from the car, he kept glancing warily about him. That was the risk he was forced to accept—he had no fear that Felton would attempt to follow him, but there were four of Masseno's gang somewhere about, and certainly not far away.

He stopped running, changing his pace to a walk. He was growing weak, and flashes of dizziness kept coming over him again. It was his side, where the man who had jumped on him out here in the darkness had stabbed him. His thoughts grew a little disconnected as he forced his way along. He had only to keep up for a little while longer. He had meant Felton to know that he had taken the hand-car; but he would not go very far with it, and anyway it was down grade for quite a distance west of Passnock. It was only to throw the Sheriff off his track again and gain time. The plan could not fail. After that he would have a chance to rest.

His step grew slower, began to lag, and finally he was obliged to stop and sit down on the ground. His head was whirling like a top. He wasn't going to be caught like this, was he—without even a chance to make a fight for it? It was the blood he was losing that was making him weak. If he could stop the bleeding in his side he would do better. Why hadn't he tried to do that before? He tore his shirt open, rolled his handkerchief into a ball and buckled it tightly over the wound with his belt.

He was stumbling as he reached the shanty, but success within his grasp now buoyed him up. The other thing he had feared had not come to pass—there had been no sign of any of the remaining members of the gang. He unlocked the double doors, swung them open, and pulled the hand-car down the runway.

It was all right now, all right now! He had only to keep up for just a little longer, and—with the hand-car half on the main line tracks, he swung sharply around. Was that a step he heard behind him!

He snatched his automatic pistol from his pocket—only to let his hand fall impotently to his side. A woman's form, a loose wrap flying from her shoulders, was running toward him, and he heard Mera Pelenoff's voice calling his name over and over again.

"See!" she cried, "I have brought you brandy and—and—something that will serve for bandages. And now you must let me see what I can do. I am really very clever at it"—she laughed a little anxiously—"I took 'first aid' lessons at school, you know."

"Why have you come here?" he asked, dully.

"Do you think that I would let you go without trying to help you when I found out that you were wounded?" she exclaimed passionately. "I saw the blood on the floor where you had been standing after you had gone."

And then, very simply, laying her strips of sheeting and the flask of brandy on the handcar: "And I think I know why you jumped off that train after those men; and whatever else you may be, Larry Lannigan, you are a brave man, and I owe you my life."

"You should not have come," he said. "They should not have let you come; four of those men are still about here somewhere."

"They did not let me come," she answered quickly. "I went to my stateroom—for these things. They think I am still there and"—— Her words ended in a little gasp of dismay.

From eastward down the line came the hoarse scream of an engine whistle. And as peak after peak answered it, tossing the echoes from one to another through the mountains, she caught hurriedly at his arm.

"We—we haven't much time, have we?"—she tried to speak lightly. "That is the train that is bringing the—the Sheriff, isn't it? See! I will be very quick. Let me"——

"I am not badly hurt"—Larry steadied his voice. Not much time, she had said—there wasn't any time now, for he could not go until he was satisfied that she was safely back at the car, and that would take the few remaining moments before the special arrived. "It is only a scratch," he lied earnestly. "The brandy will be all I need. You mustn't give it another thought. I am really all right." He was speaking rapidly now, but his voice was beginning to choke in spite of himself. If only somehow before she went he could make her know what this act of hers had meant to him. "You must get back to the car at once. I—I shall always remember this—always. And you"—— His voice rose suddenly in a hard, bitter cry. "My God—too late! It is what I was afraid of!"

From barely twenty yards away a dark form sprang from the bushes on to the track, another, and another—and a fourth. They too had heard the whistle, these men who were rushing toward him, drunk with the fear of what they had done, mad with desperation—and they were between the girl and the private car, cutting off any possibility of escape.

He turned, wrenched at the handcar, lifting it the balance of the way onto the rails, swung again to face the four—and fired. The report was echoed by a scream, a form twisted as though wriggling on a pivot—and dropped.

"Get on! Get on the car!" he shouted at Mera.

He fired a second shot, and a third—only his hand seemed borne down by the weight of the weapon, and he missed both shots. He was conscious that she had obeyed him quickly, coolly, full of self-possession.

"The handle!" he cried out again. "Pump it up and down—hard—with all your strength!" And, his own back against the hand-car, he began to push at it, starting it into motion, while he still faced the remaining three as they leaped toward him.

"Larry—quick!"—her voice rang clear and steady above his head. "Jump on before you fall! The car is going itself now. Quick—give me your pistol—I'll help you."

He felt her reach down and her fingers close on his hand. Then from over his head came a vicious spurt of flame, the bark of the report—and then she was tugging desperately at his collar as he heaved his body backward and upward and, legs dangling, sprawled across the edge of the handcar platform.

CHAPTER XV.

Two in a Dilemma.

"TAKE a little more. That's right! There—you are better now, aren't you?" The words seemed to come stealing upon his senses as though he were in a dream. Then something hot and burning trickled down his throat, and stirred the blood in his veins into warmth and action.

Larry opened his eyes. Mera Pelenoff's face, very pale in the moonlight, a little drawn, a little haggard, was smiling bravely into his. It brought him back in a flash to the moment when he had lost consciousness—to her peril. He was still on the handcar! There were no siding switch lights, no station, no private car.

"Where are we?" he asked.

She shook her head.

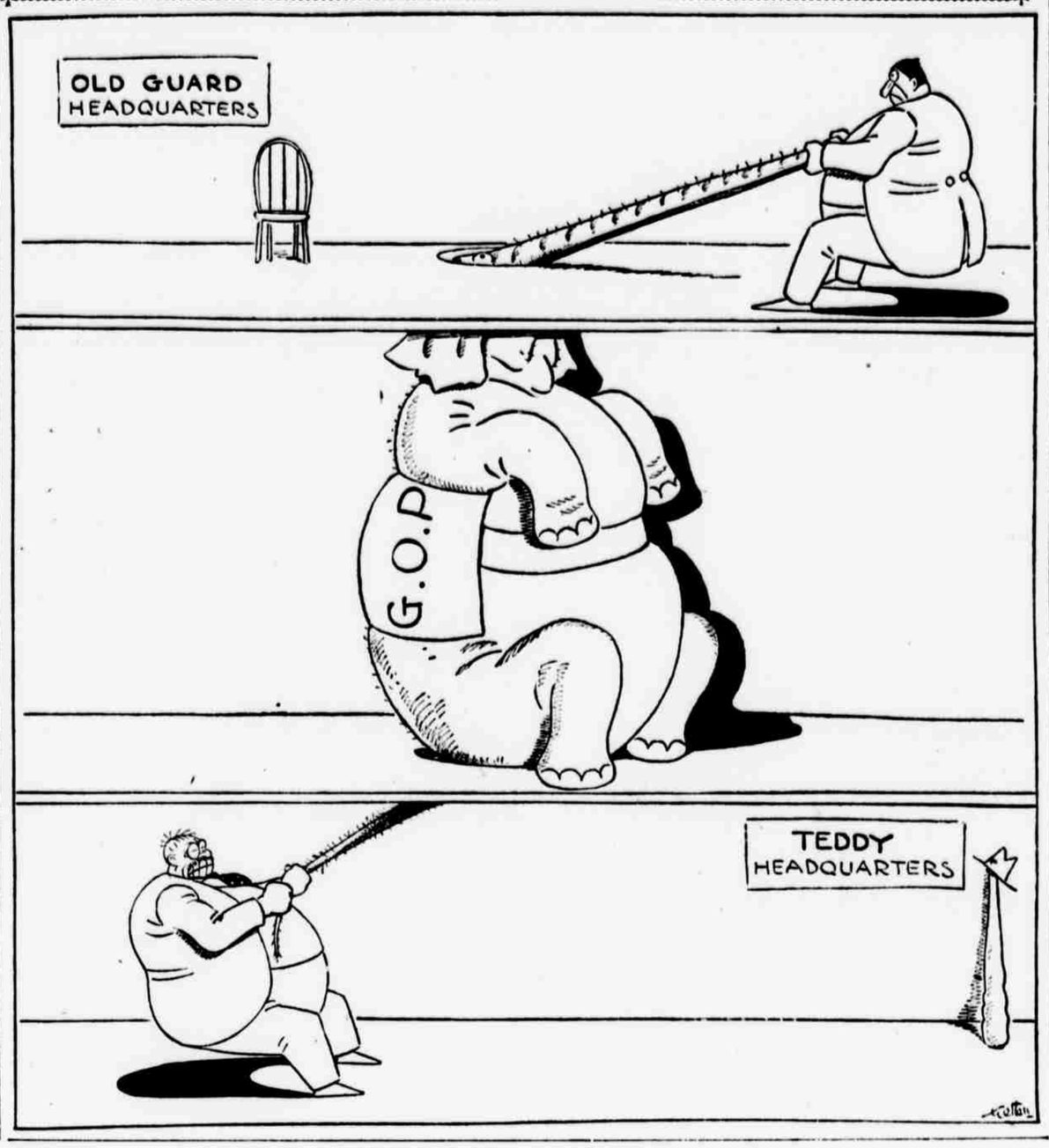
"I do not know," she answered, "except that we are a very long way from Passnock. The car kept running down the grade"—she laughed a little tremulously—"and—and I could not stop it. You see, I couldn't give all my attention to the brake, or else, sir, you would have fallen off. I—I don't think that I ever went so fast in my life before. We stopped a few yards back of this, but I heard the noise of the water and I pumped the car the rest of the way to the edge of this little bridge here."

(To Be Continued)

Can You Beat It?

Copyright, 1916, by The Press Publishing Co. (The New York Evening World.)

By Maurice Ketten



DASH, DARING, WIT AND GENIUS
Were possessed by FRANCOIS VILLON, the beloved vagabond poet of France. All his lovable brilliant qualities are brought out vividly in

THE GLORIOUS RASCAL

By JUSTIN HUNTLY M'CARTHY

NEXT WEEK'S COMPLETE NOVEL IN THE EVENING WORLD

You will be thrilled by the flashing of sword and color in this fascinating story of
ROMANCE AND ADVENTURE