BURNING DAYLIGHT

By JACK LONDON

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

"BURNING DAYLIGHT"—Elam Harnish—is introduced to the reader as he enters a Circle City dance hall, saloon and gambling house like the whirlwind that he is.

Essentially a man's man, Burning Daylight resents, or rather fears, the wiles of the women who frequent the dance hall. But he is afraid to be even civil to a woman, because he dreads the idea of being mastered by anybody or anything, and to surrender to a woman means, in his mind, that he is conquered.

Drink leads to boasting, and in the turmoil that follows Burning Daylight shows his amazing muscular strength. He wins all the tests and downs all the giants that come before him.

Then comes a poker game—the greatest ever played in the Klondike. Burning Daylight's luck deserts him at the end, and he rises from the table penniless—worse than broke.

The indomitable courage of this master among men shows itself. He declares himself in readiness to accomplish an impossible task—to run the mail to Dyea and back with a dog team and an Indian.

After overcoming what to the ordinary man would prove insurmountable difficulties he reaches his goal, and returns to Circle City a winner.

Without rest this amazing man makes a wild night of it. He outdances men, and women, too; wins at roulette, and then, still scorning slumber or any recuperation, starts at daylight, with three partners and a dog team, for the newest gold strike in the upper country along the Stewart.

Then comes the battle for gold. Strike after strike is explored. Daylight sees himself the dominant figure along the Yukon and in the golden Dawson. Discouraged frequently, he refuses to allow life's loaded dice to beat him, and in the end comes victory—and millions. He is at length a great mine owner—and an almighty big pile is his.

Daylight leaves the Yukon behind for new fields of endeavor. His departure is an event of great importance, and as the vessel swings clear this all conquering man weeps—a little.

In San Francisco Daylight sweeps all before him. Money comes so easily that he feels the call of Wall street.

He goes to New York and is "done" to the tune of $10,000,000. This, however, he recovers by means of his automatic pistol and a display of his old time courage.

Wall street, he finds, is not for him. So he returns to the Golden Gate, where he becomes a financial Robin Hood. His fortune increases magically and he lives a hard, cruel life.

All of a sudden Dede Mason enters his ken and he sets his heart on winning her. But this strong hearted girl will have none of him. So the game of love goes on.

Constant association with Daylight and admiration for his persistence begin finally to impress Dede Mason, and one day they have a heart to heart talk, in which she practically "takes the hide off" the man. She tells him flatly she does not like his life and his business. So the profligate Daylight begins to see her meaning, but after a tame defence of his methods he resolves on a new plan, and, to the amazement of his business associates, proceeds to carry it out.

Daylight has, meantime, doubled his fortune, but the more money he possesses the more distant seems Dede Mason. He at last proposes marriage to her, twice, but is refused. He does not give up—that is not his way—he demands that the girl tell him just what is amiss, for she has confessed to an interest in him. Whereupon she tells him he has too much money, is living the wrong kind of life, and, in short, is owned by his wealth and nothing else. She shows him how he is taking on unhealthy flesh, is becoming harsh and cruel and brutalized and degraded. And Daylight listens, amazed.

CHAPTER XXXIII. (Continued.)

"YOU are getting eight thousand dollars a year," he told Matthewson. "It's better pay than you ever got in your life before. Your fortune is in the same sack with mine. You've got to stand for some of the strain and risk. You've got personal credit in this town. Use it. Stand off butcher and baker and all the rest. Savve? You're drawing down something like six hundred and sixty dollars a month. I want that cash. From now on stand everybody off and draw down a hundred. I'll pay you interest on the rest till this blows over.

Two weeks later, with the payroll before them, it was:—

"Matthewson, who's this bookkeeper, Rogers? Your nephew? I thought so. He's pulling down eighty-five a month. After this let him draw thirty-five. The forty can ride with me at interest."

"Impossible!" Matthewson cried. "He can't make ends meet on his salary as it is, and he has a wife and two kids"——

Daylight was upon him with a mighty oath.

"Can't! Impossible! What in hell do you think I'm running? A home for feeble minded? Feeding and dressing and wiping the little noses of a lot of idiots that can't take care of themselves? Not on your life. I'm hustling, and now's the time that everybody that works for me has got to hustle. I want no fair weather birds holding down my office chairs or anything else. This is nasty weather, damn nasty weather, and they've got to buck into it just like me. There are ten thousand men out of work in Oakland right now, and sixty thousand more in San Francisco. Your nephew and everybody else on your payroll can do as I say right now or quit. Savve? If any of them get stuck, you go around yourself and guarantee their credit with the butchers and grocers. And you trim down that payroll accordingly. I've been carrying a few thousand folks that'll have to carry themselves for a while now, that's all."

"You say this filter's got to be replaced," he told his chief of the water works. "We'll see about it. Let the people of Oakland drink mud for a change. It'll teach them to appreciate good water. Stop work at once. Get those men off the payroll. Cancel all orders for material. The contractors will sue? Let 'em sue and be damned. We'll be busted higher'n a kite or on easy street before they can get judgment."

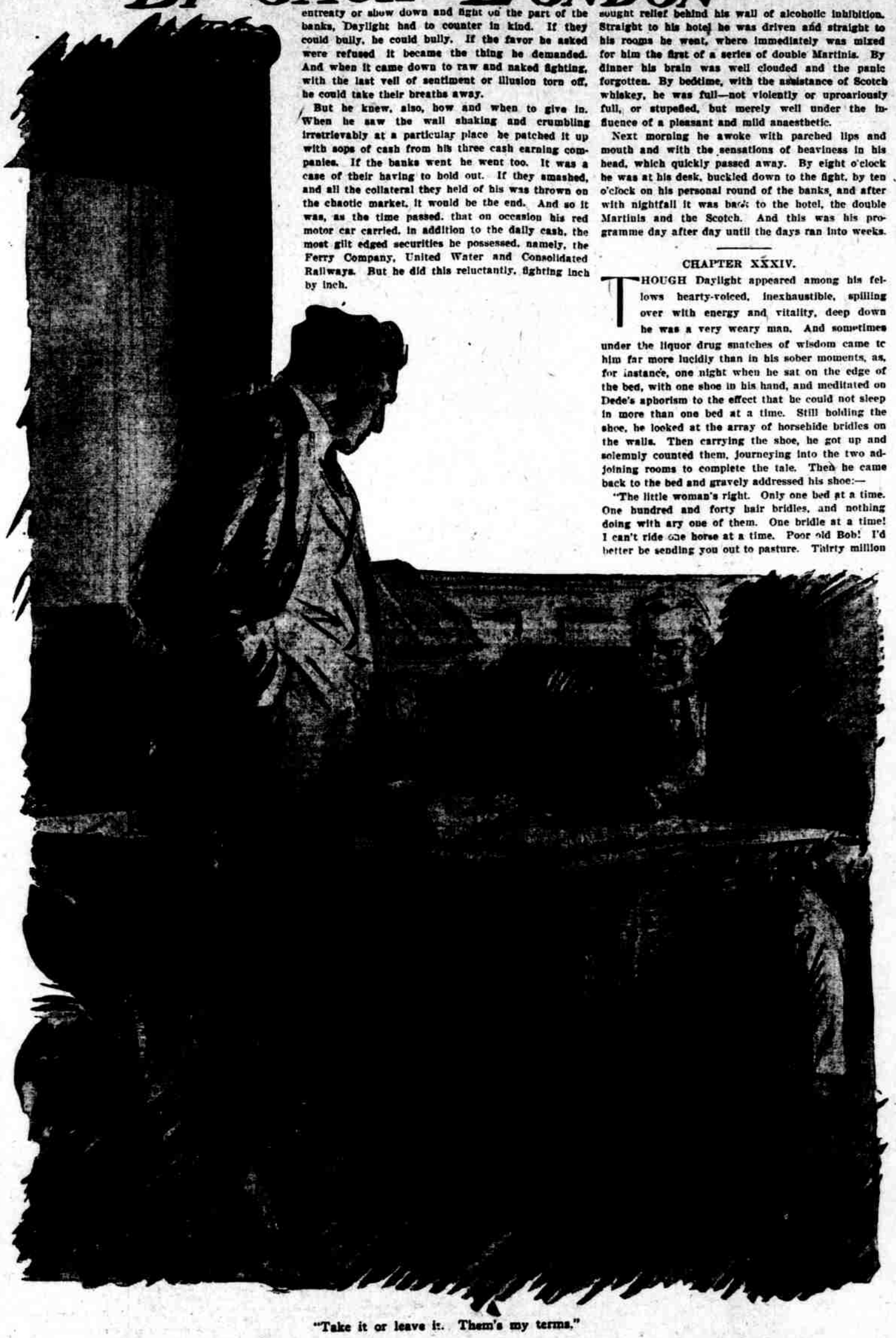
And to Wilkinson:—

"Take off that owl boat. Let the public roar and come home early to its wife. And there's that last car that connects with the 12:45 boat at Twenty-second and Hastings. Cut it out. I can't run it for two or three passengers. Let them take an earlier boat home or walk. This is no time for philanthropy. And you might as well take off a few more cars in the rush hours. Let the strap-hangers pay. It's the strap-hangers that'll keep us from going under."

And to another chief, who broke down under the excessive strain of retrenchment:—

"You say I can't do that and can't do this. I'll just show you a few of the latest patterns in the can-and-can't line. You'll be compelled to resign? All right, if you think so. I never saw the man yet that I was hard up for. And when any man thinks I can't get along without him I just show him the latest pattern in that line of goods and give him his walking papers."

And so he fought and drove and bullied and even wheedled his way along. It was fight, fight, fight, and no let-up, from the first thing in the morning till nightfall. His private office saw throngs every day. All men came to see him, or were ordered to come. Now it was an optimistic opinion on the panic, a funny story, a serious business talk, or a straight take-it-or-leave-it blow from the shoulder. And there was nobody to relieve him. It was a case of drive, drive, drive, and he alone could do the driving. And this went on day after day, while the whole business world rocked around him and house after house crashed to the ground.



"Take it or leave it. Them's my terms."

"It's all right, old man," he told Hegan every morning, and it was the same cheerful word that he passed out all day long, except at such times when he was in the thick of fighting to have his will with persons and things.

Eight o'clock saw him at his desk each morning. By ten o'clock it was into the machine and away for a round of the banks. And usually in the machine with him was the ten thousand and more dollars that had been earned by his ferries and railways the day before. This was for the weakest spot in the financial dike. And with one bank president after another similar scenes were enacted. They were paralyzed with fear, and first of all he played his rôle of the big vital optimist. Times were improving. Of course they were. The signs were already in the air. All that anybody had to do was to sit tight a little longer and hold on. That was all. Money was already more active in the East. Look at the trading in Wall street of the last twenty-four hours. That was the straw that showed the wind. Hadn't Ryan said so and so? And wasn't it reported that Morgan was preparing to do this and that?

As for himself, weren't the street railway earnings increasing steadily? In spite of the panic more and more people were coming to Oakland right along. Movements were already beginning in real estate. He was dickering even then to sell over a thousand of his suburban acres. Of course it was at a sacrifice, but it would ease the strain on all concerned and bolster up the faint hearted. That was the point—the faint hearts. Had there been no faint hearts there would have been no panic. There was [illegible] syndicate negotiating with him now to take over the majority of the stock in the Sierra and Salvador Power Company off his hands. That showed confidence. Confidence was what was at hand.

And if it was not cheery [illegible]

As he told the president of the Merchants' San Antonio, who made the plea of carrying so many others:—

"They're small fry. Let them smash. I'm the king pin here. You've got more money to make out of me than them. Of course, you're carrying too much, and you've got to choose, that's all. It's root hog or die for you or them. I'm too strong to smash. You could only embarrass me and get yourself tangled up. Your way out is to let the small fry go, and I'll lend you a hand to do it."

And it was Daylight also, in this time of financial anarchy, who sized up Simon Dolliver's affairs and lent the hand that sent that rival down in utter failure. The Golden Gate National was the keystone of Dolliver's strength, and to the president of that institution Daylight said:—

"Here I've been lending you a hand and you are now in the last ditch, with Dolliver riding on you and me all the time. It don't go. You hear me, it don't go. Dolliver couldn't cough up eleven dollars to save you. Let him get off and walk and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you the railway nickels for four days—that's forty thousand cash. And on the sixth of the month you can count on twenty thousand more from the water company." He shrugged his shoulders. "Take it or leave it. Them's my terms."

"It's dog eat dog and I ain't overlooking any meat that's floating around," Daylight proclaimed that afternoon to Hegan, and Simon Dolliver went the way of the unfortunates in the Great Panic who were caught with plenty of paper and no money.

Daylight's shifts and devices were amazing. Nothing, however large or small, passed his keen sight unobserved. The strain he was under was terrible. He ate lunch at his desk. The days were too short and his nerves, nerve and his will were as steadfast as at any other time. In the end, [illegible] he never faltered. He never faltered. He never faltered. He