

# The Revenge of T. Ross Bowers

By  
C. E. Van Loan

Outside of the fact that this story is true, there is nothing in the world the matter with it. It has to do with the old San Francisco—the city which lives only in the memory of the men who loved it.

There were newspapers in San Francisco in those days—better ones than the dailies of the last ten years. Some of the brilliant young men who helped us to this belief are now middle-aged and gray, and following other callings, some of them are dead and the ones who had no luck are still "chopping copy" in newspaper offices from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Of all the bright young reporters of twenty years ago, T. Ross Bowers was the star. He did not get a "by" line at the head of his stuff and he did not get a star's salary, for in those days there were no evidences of frenzied finance in journalism. A man had to be a star to hold his job, and Mr. Hearst had not yet elevated the scale of wages from \$18 a week to \$25.

T. Ross was like several other eminent newspaper gentlemen. He had one failing. He liked to hang one foot over the bar-rail and rest his elbow on a high ball. As a general thing he could be depended on to keep reasonably sober as long as there was any work to do, but when things dropped to the dead level of monotony, T. Ross would go out and get his feet wet and come back to the office of the Chronicle emitting loud whoops.

There was nothing unusual in this, save for the fact that Horace Hitchkiss, the city editor, was a temperance advocate. There was no water wagon in those days, but had there been one, Horace would have been on the front seat with a megaphone in one hand and a bunch of tracts in the other. T. Ross' lapses into intemperance were severe trials to Horace. Horace's lectures were sore trials to T. Ross, so it was even all around. On a Monday afternoon—Monday being pay day—T. Ross Bowers failed to make his appearance at 1 o'clock. At 4 p. m. he entered the office, stepping high with his left leg and dragging the right in an alarming manner.

"Lo, Horace, ole hoss!" said T. Ross, and proceeded to endear himself still further to his outraged chief by ramming that worthy's stiff hat down over his ears. What followed was painful. Horace discharged T. Ross on the spot and bade him roll his hoop; T. Ross called Horace pet names, and not until the city editor threatened to have him tossed out of the window, did T. Ross Bowers consent to leave the editorial sanctum.

"S-s-s not necess'ry throw me out," said T. Ross, with ponderous gravity. "Goo' by, Horace, ole hoss! I hope—ic—you choke!"

Then he departed, full of dignity and rye whiskey.

Horace went back to his desk and tried to get his hat off without removing his ears also. Horace was a very conservative sort of a city editor, and it galled him to have his new hat rammed down over his ears. He swore that whatever happened, T. Ross Bowers should never darken his pay roll again. Then he sighed heavily, for T. Ross Bowers was the best man he had—good enough to draw twenty a week, and that was a world's record for Horace's pay roll.

The old Chronicle had a peculiar sort of a reportorial staff. There were only four men on the weekly pay roll; the rest worked on assignment. Mr. Hitchkiss preferred to hire impecunious reporters to work by the piece. That is to say, at one o'clock the city room of the Chronicle looked like a mass meeting of sharp-nosed young men. Promptly at one o'clock, old Horace, as he was affectionately called, issued from his den bearing a stack of cards. Each card bore the data con-

cerning a certain assignment. Beginning at the first man in sight, Horace would deal out the cards and the piece-work reporters would fade away. No story, no pay. That was Horace's little plan. For the first assignment, a man received two dollars. For the second he received one-fifty and for the third—but there never was a third. If a man delivered the goods and had a phenomenal run of luck, he might earn fifteen dollars a week. For exclusive stories, Horace paid space rates—twenty cents an inch, and no padding would go. A man had to be a combination bloodhound and buccaneer to get as much as twenty a week. The regular reporters were not paid for delivering exclusive stories. They were fired if they did not bring them in. That was one reason why Horace sighed when T. Ross Bowers went his unsteady way, for T. Ross was a world beater when it came to digging up exclusives and his private pipe lines reached from one end of the city to the other. From the water front to the Cliff House, everybody knew T. Ross and everybody seemed to be his friend.

On the third day after the unfortunate affair, six new men floated into the city room at one o'clock. They did not mingle with the other reporters, nor did they take part in the lively speculation as to which man would draw the ball game at Central Park. They were reserved in their manner and they did not converse among themselves.

Horace's blue eye brightened as it fell on the new men. He was always on the lookout for new material—always hoping to discover a diamond among the pop-bottle Kohinoors daily exhibited before him.

"Where you from?" he said to the first man.

"Louisville Courier-Journal," said the man, easily. "Worked for Marse Henry for ten years. Out here for my health. I thought!"

"Fine!" said Horace. "Go out and see what you can do with this!"

The man from the Louisville Courier-Journal drew a card, glanced at it and departed.

"And you?" said Horace to the next new man. Horace always favored the new men. He knew about the others.

"Oh, me?" said that worthy. "I've worked on the World."

The man from the World drew a card and edged out of the room.

Another was an old Sun man; the fourth had been on the Chicago Tribune. Horace gave the six new men the pick of the assignments, dealt out the rest of the cards and retired to await results.

At four o'clock the Sun man came in. He brought with him a neat, well written article—this was before the day of the typewriter—and an exclusive which made Horace's eyes bulge. He chuckled as he read the story.

"Th's is a darn sight better than anything that drunken Bowers ever wrote," said he. "A darn sight. Wait a minute there! I've got a night assignment for you." One by one the new men drifted in, delivered the goods and drew night assignments. Three of them brought exclusive stories. Horace went out and told the news editor that he had discovered some new talent.

"Wonderful how those fellows have got on to local conditions," said Horace. "They're real reporters."

For a week the six men drew the cream of all the assignment and carried the town. One of them drew something like \$26, and not one of them was under \$20. Two of them declined to go on general reporting at a weekly salary. They said they might not stay long and preferred to work when it pleased them. Horace boasted

about his discoveries, but somehow the other men on the paper found them hard to approach. They spent no time in the office, bringing in their stories already written. During the second week the Sun man was told to cover a murder trial in Sacramento. He did not turn up in Sacramento, and Horace tore his hair and then laid it to strong drink.

"Went and got drunk on me," said he, sadly. "I might have known HE was too good to last."

T. Ross Bowers reappeared on the highways, wearing new clothes and costly cravats. He said that he was not anxious to go to work, and thought that he would take a rest for a few weeks. The Sun renegade was replaced by a newspaper man from St. Louis who turned out to be a gem, and Horace took comfort once more. The old-time piece-workers, their noses out of joint, found the rich pickings taken away from them. The new men drew all the good stories and handled them in such manner that one after another they were offered positions on the rival papers. They declined, stating that Horace had been kind to them.

"Loyal!" chuckled Horace to himself. "That's the stuff."

One cold Monday night the six new men were waiting for their assignments. The telephone tinkled and Horace barked into it and glued his ear to the receiver. Then he beckoned to the two men nearest him.

"Big fire over in Chinatown in Oakland!" he said. "You two get the next boat and cover it. Perkins, you write the story, and you, Hennessey, pick up all the human interest stuff you can find. Chinks fleeing for their lives, slaves released—all that sort of stuff. Hurry back with the stuff!"

The two men looked at each other for a few seconds and then clattered downstairs.

The telephone rang again.

"What's THAT?" bawled Horace. "You don't say so! Hey, tell me that again!"

Two more men were called to the desk.

"Martin, you and Carter dig out to the Cliff House as soon as you can. A powder schooner drifted in there, hit the Seal Rock and blew up. Everybody lost and Cliff House partly wrecked. Great story. Martin, you get the facts and let Carter take care of the other stuff! Hurry back!"

The last couple had not long to wait. The telephone rang a third time, sharp and insistent.

Horace combed his gray moustache as he hung up the receiver.

"Police Sergeant Casey has just been murdered in Chinatown!" he said. "Hurry up and get all you can on it. Phillips, you look for the highbinder end of the story, and Doane, you cover the murder itself. Beats the devil how everything broke loose tonight all in a bunch!"

Then, congratulating himself that he had the six best reporters in San Francisco on three big news stories, Horace lit a stogy, put his feet on the desk and gave thanks for the eagle eye and the noble brain that had made it possible for him to discover such great reporters.

Before Horace's stogy singed his white moustache, something was happening down in the back room at Dan's place on Montgomery street. Four young men were joined by two more young men, slightly out of breath.

"Why, where's Bowers?" said the new comers. "I ain't seen him since four this afternoon," said the one called Hennessey. "He was pretty well started then."

"I knew he'd get his pots on some day," said the great reporter named Perkins. "Darned shame, too, just when things was workin' so nice."

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