

## In the Grip of the Law

by H. Mortimer Batten.

THE worst camp in the West! Such was the reputation Outlaw City had won for itself, and Berwick's was recognized the worst saloon in the camp—a little inferno which the iron hand of the law strove in vain to quench. Why Shal Morris went to Berwick's that night he could not have told you. He was a young man, grey-eyed and of powerful build, and though, as far as dress was concerned there was nothing to distinguish him, he was obviously not one of the gathering he found there.

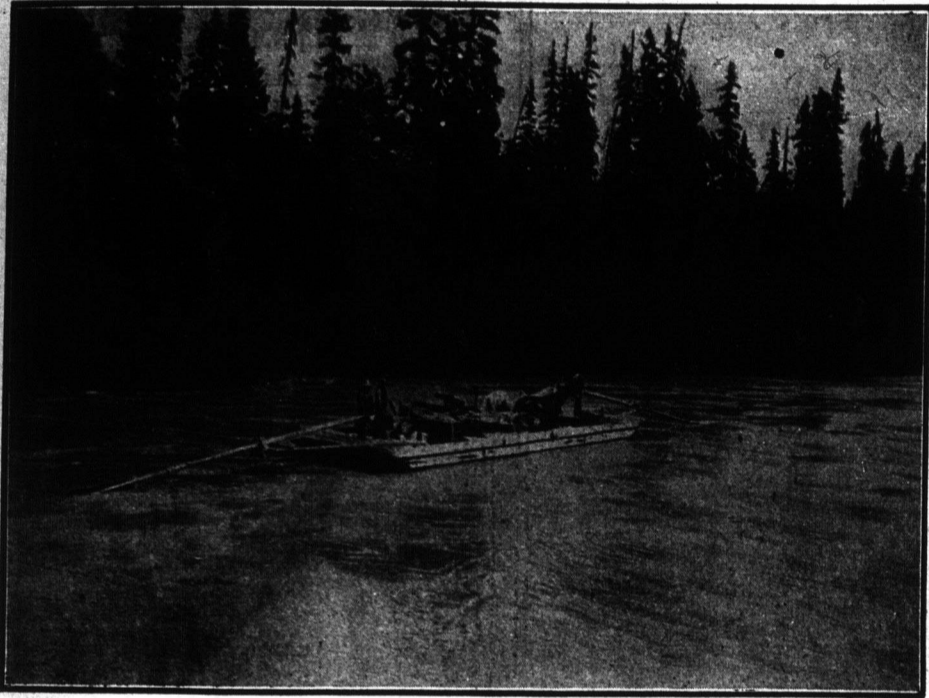
A son of the plains Shal visited the city seldom. The glare and glamor appealed to him. He went from saloon to saloon, from one den to another, and thus found himself at Berwick's.

The saloon and the dancing hall beyond, from which issued the raucous strains of a gramophone, were crowded. The air was foul with tobacco smoke, and

It was unfortunate that Tim Carson should fumble one of his reserve cards at that moment. The card fluttered to the floor. With a quick movement the sharper tried to cover it with his foot, but it evaded him. The situation was not yet lost, however—or would not have been, had not the child pounced upon the card and restored it face upwards to the table.

One of the young easterners rose to his feet, an oath of accusation on his lips. With the eyes of a panther Carson stared at the child, then he snatched the revolver from his holster.

Someone shouted—"Stop him! Save the kid!" A woman screamed, and darted forward to clutch the boy, but too late. With a movement quick as the strike of a rattlesnake Carson struck the little fellow in the face with his revolver—sent him spinning to the floor in a way



The old-fashioned ferry boat.

the fumes of strong liquor. There was but one man Shal recognized as he glanced round the tables—Tim Carson, the sharper.

Carson was playing with two men, evidently from the east. They were buying their experience dearly. That Carson was cheating was obvious to everyone except those with whom he played. Held in position under the table by means of a crack in the boards, were three cards, from which he drew as it happened to suit his purpose.

No one interfered. Shal watched the game for a time, as he watched the other scenes around him. He drained his glass and was about to leave the place when he saw, standing by one of the tables, an incongruous little figure.

Shal rubbed his eyes and looked again. There, in the midst of this scene of vice and debauchery, was a child—a fair-haired, bright-eyed boy, of perhaps five. In spite of his neglected clothing the youngster bore some evidence of decent breeding, for his features were strikingly refined in contrast to those of the men and women about him.

"Who's the kiddy?" asked Shal, turning to the bar tender.

The latter shook his head gravely. "Tim Carson's youngster," he replied, indicating the card sharper. "Nice life for a decent kid like that, eh? His mother was a lady from Florida. She married Tim when he was decent. Later he began to go the pace, and I fancy it finished her. Anyway, Tim was left a widower with the kiddy. He takes him the round each night. The boys are decent enough about it, but—it's an all-fired shame."

Evidently the boy took after his mother, Shal contemplated, for there was little of Tim Carson stamp about him, and at that moment the child strode towards the table at which his father was playing.

that made men cover their eyes and turn aside.

Shal Morris had already seen enough to make him sick. He was a man of hasty moods, and had made more than one bad enemy through the promptness of his actions. Next moment he had Carson by the throat, heedless of the fusillade of blows showered upon his face and head.

Someone was picking up the child and carrying him away. Carson's revolver clattered to the floor, his body became limp. Shal Morris hurled him backwards among the tables. In an instant Carson was at his feet again—stooping to regain his weapon. Shal kicked it aside. Carson was upon him like a tiger.

They say that Shal Morris hit the man once, and that he went down like a tree.

Had Tim Carson been in a normal state of health he would have come round in five minutes, not much the worse, but his constitution was undermined by years of dissipation and heavy drinking. Shal enquired about the kid, and was told that the woman had taken him. Several women were stooping over Carson; the two easterners were taking their losings from his belt.

Presently the bar tender touched Shal on the arm. "You'd best get out o' this, sonny," he whispered. "You've finished him, and the sheriff don't allow us quarter at this establishment. It's a life for a life every time. Anyway, I reckon you ain't known, and you stand a chance of pulling out."

Ten minutes later Shal was riding along the trail towards his home at Tamarac Cape. Daylight found him at Wolf Ford. He crossed the river and ascended the trail towards a wooden shanty on the breeze-swept slope.

A young girl was chopping firewood behind the hut. Shal dismounted and

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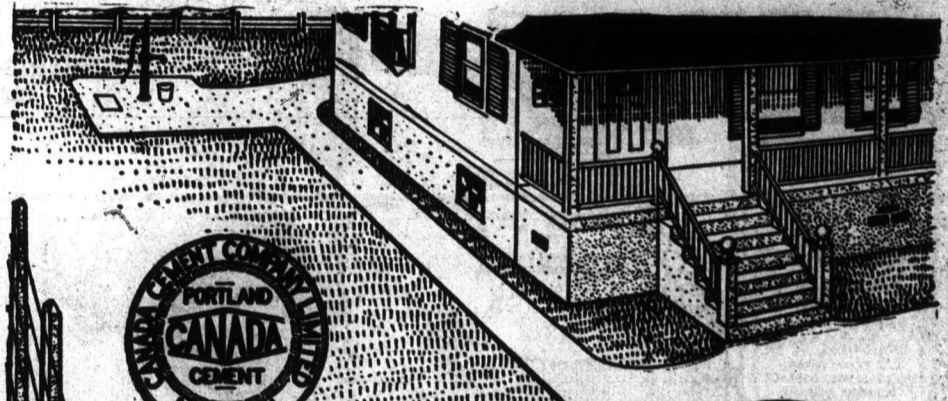
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