



The Secret of Good Pies

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"BILLY," By W. A. Fraser.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18.

"That's Red," Peloo whispered, leaning his chest against the constable's shoulder.

The heavy voice of Meekins was smothered by the knifelike tones of the Greek.

"We got to rush it! There's somethin' doin'!" Peloo advised.

As they ran forward they heard the clatter of chairs, the shuffling rasp of feet.

Speers, plunging forward, threw his weight against the door. As it smashed inward there was the crash of an overturned table, a sudden blanketing of all light, the clinking note of splintering lamp glass, and then two darting tongues of crimson light, and the rasping bark of a pistol's death voice twice.

As Speers snapped the hood of his lantern and threw the blue barrel of his revolver forward, a man slipped drunkenly from the grasp of another and collapsed like a cloth doll, to sprawl grotesquely in a huddled heap on the floor.

The constable's voice rang out sharp and imperious, "Hands up! The man that makes a break dies!"

Two rifles thrust their lean brown necks into the room.

Red Meekins reeled unsteadily from the centre of the floor, and leaning against the wall drew a heavy hand across his eyes in a dazed way. He was moaning, "My God, fellers!" He stared stupidly at the figure on the floor that had writhed over on its back, a little stream of vermilion red trickling from the hanging jaw. Just beyond, Petri the Greek and his swarthy, evil looking mate stood with uplifted hands, their vicious faces sallow with fear.

"That's Dick Hanson!" Peloo said as he took a step forward and peered at the figure.

"Who shot this man?" Speers demanded.

Neither the Greek nor his companion had anything to say.

"I didn't, boys," Red said in a dazed way. "I ain't got no gun."

"Here, Peloo, keep these two covered while I handcuff 'em!" Speers commanded sharply.

Next instant steel bracelets clicked on the uplifted wrists, and the constable slipped his hand dexterously round the waists and forms of the two men, saying, as he brought forth a revolver and two slim, glittering knives. "I thought so. You swine'll get what's comin' to you for this!"

SOMETHING in this snapped the tension of Red's nerves. He broke down and babbled like a whipped child. Peloo checked him roughly. His speech was profane and calculated to draw Red's attention from the matter of his present trouble.

"We got to get this feller down to the town's quick's we can," Speers declared. "Here, Slack, yank that camp bedstead apart for a stretcher, an' put Hanson on it! Then you an' Peloo an' Red shoulder it while I take care of these."

As Peloo thrust his strong arm beneath the wounded man, lifting him toward the stretcher, a pistol clattered to the floor from the nerveless fingers. "He had a gun right 'nough," Peloo said, thrusting the weapon into his pocket. Then he turned savagely on Meekins, who still clung weakly to the wall. "Take hold of this stretcher, Red, and don't stand there starin' like a blasted idiot!"

Speers cut a loop from a tracking line that hung on the wall and, tying it to the handcuff that joined the whisky men wrist to wrist, said, "Now, move on, you murderin' thieves! If you make a bad break goin' down the trail consider yourselves dead! Come on, now, Peloo.

I'll come back in the mornin' to seize this outfit," and he kicked viciously a heavy wooden box from which protruded the necks of sealed bottles.

Before him Speers drove his prisoners, a turn of the stout cord about his wrist, and behind, with no utterance, awed to silence by the thing they carried, Peloo, Red, and Slack walked, their feet finding the path in the heavy gloom. As they neared the hotel the constable checked, saying:

"I'll take the cusses to my shack an' let Kinney hold 'em down with a gun. I'll be up to the hotel to look into this," and he put his hand on the stretcher.

"We'll go in the back way," Peloo said, "an' take this poor cuss to his room. You slip through the front, Red, an' get Doc Seton. Don't say nothin' to nobody."

THE constable moved off with his prisoners, and again the bearers of the stretcher went forward, circled the sprawling buildings, and through the back entrance carried Hanson to his room.

As they put the limp form on a bed the young doctor entered with Meekins. The three waited in awed silence as Seton laboured over Hanson's inanimate form, the greatest of all verdicts hanging in the balance.

"He can't live," the doctor said presently, straightening up with a deep breath. "He's shot straight through the lungs. Not dead yet; but only a question of a few minutes."

PELOO suddenly sprang toward the door to bar the entrance of some who had clutched its clattering hasp; but he was too late, for the door was pushed with swift violence past his outstretched arm. Billy, with face drawn and white, entered and stood for a second staring wild eyed at the other face so ghastly and wan on the pillow. Peloo put his huge hand gently on the intruder's arm to draw him from the room; but Billy, with a cry of agony, tore loose from Peloo's grasp and, throwing himself on his knees beside the bed, clasped the dying man's face in his hands, crying: "Oh, my God! Dick! Dick! Dick! Speak! Don't die, Dick! It's Jeanette!"

Peloo closed the door and stood heavily against its pine boards, his great shaggy head drooped till the chin rested on his chest.

The doctor, putting his hand on the shoulder of the kneeling form, said softly, "I'm afraid it's no use. Don't—"

He stopped, utterly at a loss. A dead hush fell upon the room; no one spoke. Sobs ticked off the seconds as the sands ran out. Once the doctor took a step toward the kneeling one who wept; but Meekins drew him back. In impotence they kept a silent wait. Then Death must have turned the empty glass; the sobs ceased.

Billy rose and, turning her drawn face toward the men, said brokenly, "This man was my husband. I am—am—" Then her voice broke, choked by sobs.

Peloo coughed and said, "I guess there's nothin' can be did, doctor?" "Nothing, Mr. Trout; not until we—"

"If nothin' can be did," Peloo resumed, "we best all go below an' leave Bil—Mrs. Hanson here. She's kinder shook up, I reckon." He turned toward Billy. "Red'll hang round outside the door, lady, an' when you want anythin' jus' call."

Stepping as though they feared to wake some sleeper, the men passed from the room and closed the door gently. Outside Peloo whispered to Meekins:

"I'll be back in a minute or two. I'm