

THE FINISH.

By BRADFORD DANIELS.



YOU'RE a sneak, Garcyde—a low-down sneak! You come up here and play at lumbering, pretending that you're trying to get a practical knowledge of your father's business; but we all know it's Eve Lovejoy you're after."

Stepney Garcyde gave a final brush to a skating boot that he was polishing, swung leisurely round on the end of a deal bench, and then looked nonchalantly up and down the six feet three inches of rugged manhood that confronted him. "Oh, that's it, is it?" with an amused smile. "I'm going down to pay her the compliments of the season—Christmas eve, you know."

Jake Faulkner drew back a long, sinewy arm, whose bony fist usually settled all differences with his fellow lumbermen; but his blazing black eyes met

on the point of one skate like an exaggerated top.

"Go to — with your company!" springing to his feet and dashing away down stream with great strokes that scored the ice with white outward-curving lines each twenty feet in length, and made the other's eyes open wide in astonishment.

For a half-hour Garcyde merely kept his rival in sight, fighting cautiously for his second wind. That the fool would soon burn his lungs out at that break-neck pace he felt certain. Then, as his heart slowed and the perspiration started freely, he settled down to a long, sinuous roll, which, for a combination of strength, rhythm and grace, was like nothing so much as free-running waves in an open sea.

But before him Faulkner's long legs worked with the even thrust and jerk of two powerful piston-rods, and when the broad back in the blue sweater swept past the forked white birch on Porcupine Ledge it was as far away as ever.



"The great teeth sheared through the tough cloth as easily as though it had been paper."

the steady gray ones of the man on the bench, and the arm dropped awkwardly to his side. Wheeling, he strode across to his bunk, felt under the fir brush with which it was lined, and drew out a pair of clumsy skates with sixteen-inch runners, each forged from an old file. "Two can play at that game!" he jerked out with an oath, struggling into a blue sweater and reaching for his boots.

"Certainly! It's a free country," laughed Garcyde, drawing a porpoise-hide lace about a finely carved ankle with scrupulous care.

A few minutes later, with Faulkner slightly in the lead, the two men made their way in silence down the dung-strewn tote-road to the river. Quickly adjusting his Acmes, Garcyde rose with almost feline grace and, gliding out upon the glassy ice that showed blue-black against the dark waters beneath, cut a faultless figure eight.

"Well, why don't you get on about your business?" growled the big lumberman, tugging at a refractory strap. "I'm not interested in any of them fancy skating-rink stunts."

"Thought perhaps you'd like company," drawled Garcyde, spinning round

A sudden fear that this man could out-skate him seized Garcyde, and so unnerved him that he broke, much as does a pacing horse, and slapped one ankle smartly against the other. But the beautiful tantalizing face of her who had led him such a dance for the last three months rose half-smilingly, half-mockingly before him, and pulling himself together with a humorous little laugh at his senseless panic, he buckled down to what he now fully realized was to be the race of his life.

With body crouched and arms held tightly in front of him, he was whizzing along through an alder swamp, avoiding the wind-ruffled strips of ice that his rival had dashed straight across, and hugging the shore around long bends to shorten the distance where the other had held recklessly to the middle of the channel, when he saw Faulkner pause at the further edge of the flat expanse. "I'll tell Eve you'll be there in time for breakfast!" he roared back between his hands, then wheeled and vanished in a tunnel formed of over-hanging hemlock boughs.

Garcyde flushed, and then smiled that slow smile of his, which, while it masked not a trace of anger, left a peculiar

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