

Burning Daylight

By JACK LONDON

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"The Call of the Wild," "White Fang," "Martin Eden," Etc.

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SYNOPSIS.

... deed of the Glen Ellen ranch make out a new one in Dede Mason's name. "Who?" Hegan demanded. "Dede Mason," Daylight replied imperturbably—"the phone must be distinct this morning. D-e-d-e M-a-s-o-n. Got it?"

Half an hour later he was flying out to Berkeley. And for the first time the big red car halted directly before the house. Dede offered to receive him in the parlor, but he shook his head and nodded toward her rooms.

"In there," he said. "No other place would suit."

As the door closed, his arms went out and around her. Then he stood with his hands on her shoulders and looking down into her face.

"Dede, if I tell you, flat and straight, that I'm going up to live on that ranch at Glen Ellen, that I ain't taking a cent with me, that I'm going to scratch for every bite I eat, and that I ain't going to play any card at the business game again, will you come along with me?"

She gave a glad little cry, and he nestled her in closely. But the next moment she had thrust herself out from him to the old position at arm's length.

"How is this possible? How can you leave your business? Has anything happened?"

"No, nothing's happened yet, but it's going to, blame quick. I've taken your preaching to heart, and I've come to the penitent form. I've taken my last drink. You're marrying a whisky-soak, but your husband won't be that. He's going to grow into another man so quick you won't know him. A couple of months from now, up there in Glen Ellen, you'll wake up some morning and find you've got a perfect stranger in the house with you, and you'll have to get introduced to him all over again. You'll say, 'I'm Mrs. Harnish, who are you?' And I'll say, 'I'm Elam Harnish's younger brother. I've just arrived from Alaska to attend the funeral.' 'What funeral?' you'll say. And I'll say, 'Why the funeral of that good-for-nothing, gambling, whisky-drinking Burning Daylight—the man that died of fatty degeneration of the heart from sitting in night and day at the business game.' 'Yes, ma'am, I'll say, he's sure a gone 'coon, but I've come to take his place and make you happy. And now, ma'am, if you'll allow me, I'll just meander down to the pasture and milk the cow while you're getting breakfast.'"

"But you haven't answered my questions," she reproached him, as she emerged, rosy and radiant, from the embrace that had accompanied the culmination of his narrative.

"Now just what do you want to know?" he asked.

"I want to know how all this is possible? How you are able to leave your business at a time like this? What you meant by saying that something was going to happen quickly?"

"Let's go and get married," he urged, all the whimsicality of his utterance duplicated in his eyes. "I've been working like forty horses ever since this blamed picnic set in, and all the time some of those ideas you'd given me were getting ready to sprout. Well, they sprouted this morning, that's all. I knew I wanted to ride in the hills with you just about thirty million times more than I wanted to go to the office. And I knew all the time it was impossible. And why? Because of the office. The office wouldn't let me. And then I made up my mind that I was to the dividing of the ways. One way led to the office. The other way led to Berkeley. And I took the Berkeley road. I'm never going to set foot in the office again. That's all gone, finished, over and done with, and I'm letting it slide clean to smash and then some. I'm wiping the slate clean. I'm letting it all go smash. When them thirty million dollars stood up to my face and said I couldn't go out with you in the hills today, I knew the time had come for me to put my foot down. And I'm putting it down. I've got you, and my strength to work for you, and that little ranch in Sonoma. That's all I want, and that's all I'm going to save out, along

CHAPTER XIX.

(Continued.)

Next he remembered Ferguson, the little man who had scuttled into the road like a rabbit, the one-time managing editor of a great newspaper, who was content to live in the chaparral along with his spring of mountain water and his hand-reared and manured fruit trees. Ferguson had solved a problem. A weakling and an alcoholic, he had run away from the doctors and the chicken-coop of a city, and soaked up health like a thirsty sponge. He sat down suddenly on the bed, startled by the greatness of the idea that had come to him. He did not sit long. His mind, working in its customary way, like a steel trap, compassed the idea in all its bearings. It was big—bigger than anything he had ficked before. And he faced it squarely, picked it up in his two hands and turned it over and around and looked at it. The simplicity of it delighted him. He chuckled over it, reached his decision, and began to dress. Midway in the dressing he stopped in order to use the telephone.

Dede was the first he called up.

"Don't come to the office this morning," he said. "I'm coming out to see you for a moment."

He called up others. He ordered his motor-car. To Jones he gave instructions for the forwarding of Bob and Wolf to Glen Ellen. Hegan he surprised by asking him to look up



His Arms Went Out and Around Her.

with Bob and Wolf, a suit case and a hundred and forty hair bridles. All the rest goes, and good riddance. It's that much junk."

A knock at the door interrupted him, and he was left to stare delightedly at the Crouched Venus and on around the room at Dede's dainty possessions, while she answered the telephone.

"It is Mr. Hegan," she said, on returning. "He is holding the line. He says it is important."

Daylight shook his head and smiled. "Please tell Mr. Hegan to hang up. I'm done with the office and I don't want to hear anything about anything."

A minute later she was back again. "He refuses to hang up. He told me to tell you that Unwin is in the office now, waiting to see you, and Harrison, too. Mr. Hegan said that Grimshaw and Hodgkins are in trouble. That it looks as if they are going to break. And he said something about protection."

It was startling information. Both Unwin and Harrison represented big banking corporations, and Daylight knew that if the house of Grimshaw and Hodgkins went it would precipitate a number of failures and start a flurry of serious dimensions. But Daylight smiled, and shook his head.

He caught her by the hand and drew her to him.

"You let Hegan hang on to that line till he's tired. We can't be wasting a second on him on a day like this."

"But I know something of the fight you have been making," Dede contended. "If you stop now, all the work you have done, everything, will be destroyed. You have no right to do it. You can't do it."

Daylight was obdurate. He shook his head and smiled tantalizingly.

"Nothing will be destroyed, Dede, nothing. You don't understand this business game. It's done on paper. All I stand for is paper. I've got the paper for thousands of acres of land. All right. Burn up the paper, and burn me along with it. The land remains, don't it? Nothing is going to be lost—not one pile out of the docks, not one railroad spike, not one ounce



"Use a Different Tone of Voice, or You'll Be Heading for a Hospital."

of steam out of the gauge of a ferry-boat. The cars will go on running, whether I hold the paper or somebody else holds it."

By this time Hegan had arrived in an automobile. The honk of it came in through the open window, and they saw it stop alongside the big red machine. In the car were Unwin and Harrison, while Jones sat with the chauffeur.

"I'll see Hegan," Daylight told Dede. "There's no need for the rest. They can wait in the machine."

"Is he drunk?" Hegan whispered to Dede at the door.

She shook her head and showed him in.

"Good morning, Larry," was Daylight's greeting. "Sit down and rest your feet. You sure seem to be in a flutter."

"I am," the little Irishman snapped back. "Grimshaw and Hodgkins are going to smash if something isn't done quick. Why didn't you come to the office? What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing," Daylight drawled lazily. "Except let them smash, I guess. I've had no dealings with Grimshaw and Hodgkins. I don't owe them anything. Besides, I'm going to smash myself. Look here, Larry, you know me. You know when I make up my mind I mean it. Well, I've sure made up my mind. I'm tired of the whole game. I'm letting go of it as fast as I can, and a smash is the quickest way to let go. All you've got to do is to protect yourself and all our friends. Now you listen to me while I tell you what to do. Everything is in good shape to do it. Nobody must get hurt. Everybody that stood by me must come through without damage. All the back wages and salaries must be paid pronto. All the money I've switched away from the water company, the street cars, and the ferries must be switched back. And you won't get hurt yourself none. Every company you got stock in will come through—"

"What have you done to him?" Hegan snarled at Dede.

"Hold on there, Larry." For the first time Daylight's voice was sharp, while all the old lines of cruelty in his face stood forth. "Miss Mason is going to be my wife, and while I don't mind your talking to her all you want, you've got to use a different tone of voice or you'll be heading for a hospital, which will sure be an unexpected sort of smash. And let me tell you one other thing. This—all is my doing. She says I'm crazy, too."

Dede stepped forward where she confronted the two men.

"Wait," she said. "I want to say something. Elam, if you do this insane thing, I won't marry you. I refuse to marry you."

Hegan, in spite of his misery, gave her a quick, grateful look.

"I'll take my chance on that," Daylight said. "And now, Larry, you'd better be going. I'll be at the hotel in a little while, and since I'm not going to step into the office again, bring all papers to sign and the rest over to my rooms. And you can get me on the phone there any time. This smash is going through. Save? I'm quit and done."

He turned to Dede as soon as Hegan was gone, and took her by the hand.

"And now, little woman, you needn't come to the office any more. Consider yourself discharged."

"I'd cry, if I thought it would do any good," she threatened.

"In which case I reckon I'd have to hold you in my arms some more and sort of soothe you down," he threatened back.

As he stood at the top of the steps, leaving, she said:—

"You needn't send those men. There will be no packing, because I am not going to marry you."

"I'm not a bit scared," he answered, and went down the steps.

CHAPTER XX.

Three days later, Daylight rode to Berkeley in his red car. It was for the last time, for on the morrow the big machine passed into another's possession. It had been a strenuous three days, for his smash had been the biggest the panic had precipitated in California. The papers had been filled with it, and a great cry of indignation had gone up from the very men who later found that Daylight had fully protected their interests. It was these facts, coming slowly to light, that gave rise to the widely repeated charge that Daylight had gone insane. It was the unanimous conviction among business men that no sane man could possibly behave in such fashion. On the other hand, neither his prolonged steady drinking nor his affair with Dede became public, so the only conclusion attainable was that the wild financier from Alaska had gone lunatic. And Daylight had grinned and confirmed the suspicion by refusing to see the reporter. He halted the automobile before Dede's door, and met her with his same rushing tactics, enclosing her in his arms before a word could be uttered.

"I've done it," he announced.

"You've seen the newspapers, of course. I'm plumb cleaned out, and I've just called around to find out what day you feel like starting for Glen Ellen. It'll have to be soon, for it's real expensive living in Oakland these days. My board at the hotel is only paid to the end of the week, and I can't afford to stay on after that. And beginning with tomorrow I've got to use the street cars, and they sure eat up the nickels."

He paused, and waited, and looked at her. Indecision and trouble showed on her face. Then the smile he knew so well began to grow on her lips and in her eyes, until she threw back her head and laughed in the old forthright boyish way.

"When are those men coming to pack for me?" she asked.

And again she laughed and stimulated a vain attempt to escape his bear-like arms.

"Dear Elam," she whispered; "dear Elam." And of herself, for the first time, she kissed him.

"Now, I've got an idea," Daylight said. "We're running away from cities, and you have no kith nor kin, so it don't seem exactly right that we should start off by getting married in a city. So here's the idea: I'll run up to the ranch and get things in shape around the house and give the caretaker his walking-papers. You follow me in a couple of days, coming on the morning train. I'll have the preacher fixed and waiting. And here's another idea. You bring your riding togs in a suit case. And as soon as the ceremony's over, you can go to the hotel and change. Then out you come, and you find me waiting with a couple of horses, and we'll ride over the landscape so as you can see the prettiest parts of the ranch the first thing. And she's sure pretty, that ranch. And now that it's settled, I'll be waiting for you at the morning train day after tomorrow."

Dede blushed as she spoke.

"You are such a hurricane."

"Well, ma'am," he drawled, "I sure hate to burn daylight. And you and I have burned a heap of daylight. We've been scandalously extravagant. We might have been married years ago."

Two days later, Daylight stood waiting outside the little Glen Ellen hotel.

The ceremony was over, and he had left Dede to go inside and change into her riding-habit while he brought the horses. He held them now, Bob and Mab, and in the shadow of the watering-trough Wolf lay and looked on. Already two days of ardent California sun and touched with new fires the ancient bronze in Daylight's face. But warmer still was the glow that came into his cheeks and burned in his eyes as he saw Dede coming out the door, riding-whip in hand, clad in the familiar corduroy skirt and leggings of the old Piedmont days. There was warmth and glow in her own face as she answered his gaze and glanced on past him to the horses. Then she saw Mab. But her gaze leaped back to the man.

"Oh, Elam!" she breathed.

Many persons, themselves city-bred, and city reared, have fled to the soil and succeeded in winning great happiness. In such cases they have succeeded only by going

through a process of savage civilization. But with Dede and Daylight it was different. They had both been born on the soil, and they knew its naked simplicities and rawer ways. They were like two persons, after far wandering, who had merely come home again. There was less of the unexpected in their dealings with nature, while theirs was all the delight of reminiscence. What might appear sordid and squalid to the fastidiously reared, was to them eminently wholesome and natural. The commerce of nature was to them no unknown and untried trade. They made fewer mistakes. They already knew, and it was a joy to remember what they had forgotten.

And another thing they learned was that it was easier for one who has gorged at the flesh-pots to content himself with the meagreness of a crust, than for one who has known only the crust. Not that their life was meagre. It was that they found keener delights and deeper satisfactions in little things. Daylight had played the game of chance and most fantastic aspects, found that here, on the slopes of Sonoma Mountain, it was still the same old game. Man had still work to perform, forces to combat, obstacles to overcome. When he experimented in a small way at raising a few pigeons for market, he found no less zest in calculating in squabs than formerly when he had calculated in millions. Achievement was no less achievement, while the process of it seemed more rational and received the sanction of his reason.

The domestic cat that had gone wild and that preyed on his pigeons, he found, by the comparative standard, to be of no less paramount menace than a Charles Klinkner in the field of finance, trying to raid him for several millions. The hawks and weasels and 'coons were so many Dowsetts, Lettons, and Guggenhammers that struck at him secretly. The sea of wild vegetation that tossed its surf against the boundaries of all his clearings and that sometimes crept in and flooded in a single week was no mean enemy to contend with and subdue. His fat-solled vegetable-garden in the nook of hills that failed of its best was a problem of engrossing importance, and when he had solved it by putting in drain tiles, the joy of the achievement was ever with him. He never worked in it and found the soil unpacked and tractable without experiencing the thrill of accomplishment.

There was the matter of the plumbing. He was enabled to purchase the materials through a lucky sale of a number of his hair bridles. The work he did himself, though more than once he was forced to call in Dede to hold tight with a pipe-wrench. And in the end, when the bath-tub and the stationary tubs were installed and in working order, he could scarcely tear himself away from the contemplation of what his hands had wrought. The first evening, missing him, Dede sought and found him, lamp in hand, staring with silent glee at the tubs. He rubbed his hand over their smooth wooden lips and laughed aloud, and was as shame-faced as any boy when she caught him thus secretly exulting in his own prowess.

It was this adventure in wood-working and plumbing that brought about the building of the little workshop, where he slowly gathered a collection of loved tools. And he, who in the old days, out of his millions, could purchase immediately whatever he might desire, learned the new joy of the possession that follows upon rigid economy and desire long delayed. He waited three months before daring the extravagance of a Yankee screw-driver, and his glee in the marvelous little mechanism was so keen that Dede conceived forthright a great idea. For six months she saved her egg-money, which was hers by right of allotment, and on his birthday presented him with a turning-lathe of wonderful simplicity and multifarious efficiencies. And their mutual delight in the lathe, which was his, was only equalled by their delight in Mab's first foal, which was Dede's special private property.

Daylight had made no assertion of total abstinence, though he had not taken a drink for months after the

new goes, whisky for mine.

But such a drink meant no death for a second. It made no impression. He was too profoundly strong to be affected by a thimbleful. As he had prophesied to Dede, Burning Daylight, the city financier, had died a quiet death on the ranch, and his younger brother, the Daylight from Alaska, had taken his place. The Christianization of fat had subsided, and all his old-time Indian seamanship and litheness of muscle had returned. He likewise, did the old slight hollow in his cheeks come back. For him the pink indicated the pink of physical condition. He became the acknowledged strong man of Sonoma Valley, the heaviest lifter and hardest worker among a husky race of farmer folk.

At first, when in need of ready cash, he had followed Ferguson's example of working at day's labor; but he was not long in gravitating to a form of work that was more stimulating and more satisfying, and that allowed him even more time for Dede and the ranch and the perpetual riding through the hills. Having been challenged by the blacksmith, in a spirit of honor, to attempt the breaking of a vicious, incorrigible colt, he succeeded in signalling as to earn quite a reputation as a horse-breaker. And soon he was able to earn whatever money he wished at this, to him, agreeable work. His life was eminently wholesome and natural. Early to bed, he slept like an infant and was up with the dawn. Always with something to do, and with a thousand little things that enticed but did not clamor, he was himself never overdone. Nevertheless, there were times when both he and Dede were not above confessing weakness at bedtime after seventy or eighty miles in the saddle. Sometimes, when he had accumulated a little money, and when the season favored, the would mount their horses, with saddle-bags behind, and ride away over the wall of the valley and down into the other valleys.

One day, stopping to mail a letter at the Glen Ellen postoffice, they were halted by the blacksmith.

"Say, Daylight," he said, "a young fellow named Slosson sends you his regards. He came through in as usual on the way to Santa Rosa. He wanted to know if you didn't live hereabouts, but the crowd with him was in a hurry. So he sent you his regards and said to tell you he'd taken your advice and was still going on breaking his own record."

Daylight had long since told Dede of the incident.

"Slosson?" he meditated. "Slosson! That must be the hammer-thrower. He put my hand down twice, the



"Say," He Called Out, "I'd Like to Tackle You Again."

young scamp." He turned suddenly to Dede. "Say, it's only twelve miles to Santa Rosa, and the horses are fresh."

She divined what was in his mind, of which his twinkling eyes and adroit, boyish grin gave sufficient advertisement, and she smiled and nodded acquiescence.

"Well cut across by Bennett Valley," he said. "It's nearer that way. There was little difficulty, once to Santa Rosa, and finding Slosson. He and his party had registered at the Oberlin Hotel, and Daylight encountered the young hammer-thrower himself in the office.

"Look here, son," Daylight announced, as soon as he had introduced Dede. "I've come to go you another fluster at that hand game. Here's a little place."

Slosson smiled and accepted.

The two men faced each other, the elbows of their right arms on the counter, their hands clasped. Slosson's hand quickly forced backward and down.

"You're the first man that ever succeeded in doing it," he said. "Let me try it again."

"Sure," Daylight answered. "I don't forget, son, that you're the man that put mine down. That's what I lit out after you today."

Again they clasped hands, and again Slosson's hand went down. He was a broad-shouldered, heavy-set, middle-aged young giant, at least half a head taller than Daylight, and he frankly expressed his chagrin and asked for a third trial. This time he steered himself to the effort, and with flashing face and set teeth he met the other's strength till his cracking muscles failed him. The air exploded sharply from his tensed lungs, as he relaxed in surrender, and the hand dropped limply down.

"You're too many for me," he confessed. "I only hope you'll keep on of the hammer-throwing game."

Daylight laughed and shook his head.



"Dear Elam," She Whispered, "Dear Elam."

day he resolved to let his business go to smash. Soon he proved himself strong enough to dare to take a drink without taking a second. On the other hand, with his coming to live in the country, had passed all desire and need for drink. He felt no yearning for it, and even forgot that it existed. Yet he refused to be afraid of it, and in town, on occasion, when invited by the storekeeper, would reply: "All right, son. If my taking a drink will make you happy

(TO BE CONTINUED.)