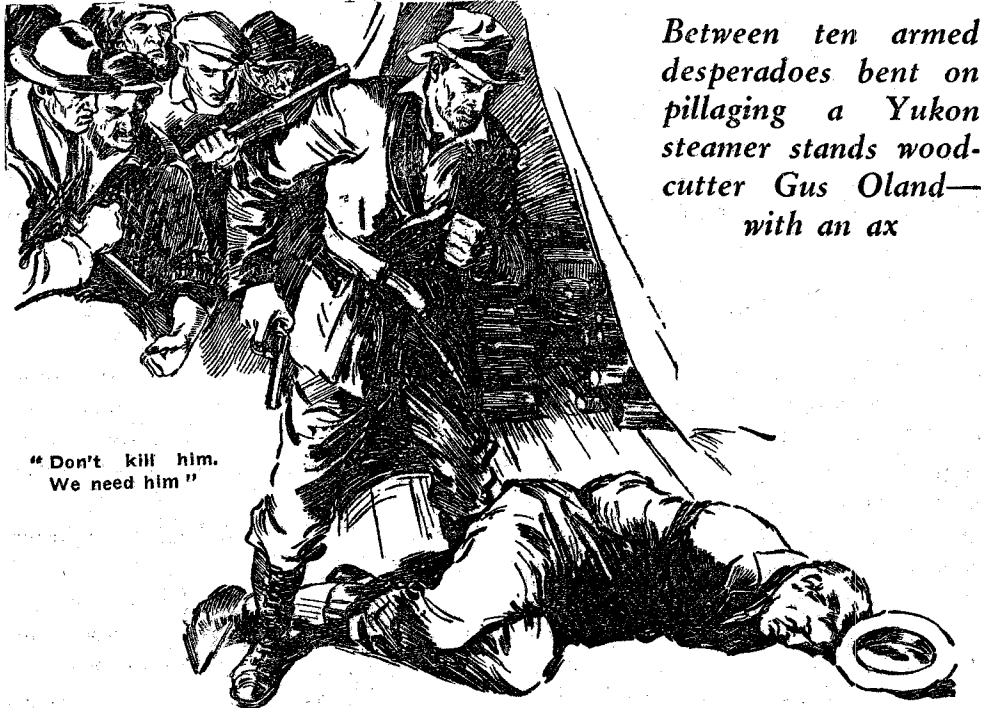


# Big Gus

By CLIFF FARRELL



*Between ten armed desperadoes bent on pillaging a Yukon steamer stands wood-cutter Gus Oland—with an ax*

THE Yukon had roused from its winter hibernation two weeks ahead of schedule, tearing off its fetters like a giant incarnate, and now to celebrate its deliverance, was off on a roaring spree through a thousand miles of its lower length.

Gus Oland stood, contentedly puffing his pipe, in the open flap of his tent which was set up on the narrow deck-space at the down-stream end of two sixty-foot barges that strained at their hawsers. The tops of trees brushed the barges, and there was an eighth of a mile of backwater and ice floes jammed among the submerged trees between him and dry land. Gus had a flatboat moored alongside to give him passage to land when he so desired.

A ceaseless parade of heavy floes wheeled by on the main river, which made a gentle horseshoe curve here and carried the pack well away from the barges, though the current could be felt. That would be the ice run from the Porcupine, which was always the last big tributary to break. It had been on for four days now, and Gus knew that another twenty-four hours or less would see the river open.

And that meant that possibly before sunset to-morrow he, Gus Oland, the Swede, would begin to cash in. About time, too. Alaska and the Klondike had not been kind to Gus. He had been "in" for nearly ten years now, and his pockets were more empty at the moment than the day he had

landed at Dawson, a raw chechako with the blur of dialect in his speech and the power of eager, optimistic youth in his six-foot hulk of a body.

He was older now—not old as men are usually rated, but he looked well beyond his age. His blue eyes had hardened, his blunt face was rugged, and toil, hard trail and bitter winters had taken the fullness from his cheeks and shoulders, and given him muscles of phlegmatic iron toughness in place of quick pliability.

He had lost most of his accent, and *all* of his faith in humanity. He had made gold strikes and had been cheated out of them by crooked commissioners in the Klondike and by double crossing partners at Nome. He had been slugged, rolled, doped and cold-decked of his wages and his pokes in road-houses, dives and bar rooms from Dawson to the sea. He had toiled with steam points and double jack in dismal shafts, digging out the muck that made other men rich, and he had stamped in on a dozen starvation rushes, but he had never found wealth himself.

**B**UT now luck had come his way. He puffed his pipe and estimated the flood. It was at its crest. For the past twelve hours it had remained stationary.

But the river was twenty feet beyond the highest former flood stage in the memory of the oldest sourdoughs in the territory. Gus knew that it had made a clean sweep of every wood chopper's yard on the river for six hundred miles.

He cast a reflective glance at his two barges, which were chained together. They were huge, sixty by thirty feet, and now they floated with scant free-board, for they were topheavy with three hundred cords of wood, cut to

fit a steamer's firebox. Six months of back-breaking toil, with ax and power saw, twelve hours a day with no days off, was represented in that floating woodpile.

Three hundred cords, even in normal times, would be worthwhile, for wood brought forty a cord at the river-side in the early season when the rich and homesick were pouring down to St. Michael. But now, with the flood eliminating competition, wood would be worth almost any price Gus chose to ask for it.

They had laughed at Gus when he leased the two big scows at Tanana the previous fall. The others had established their wood yards as usual on the banks above the normal flood line. But Gus had sensed this flood in the fall. It had been a late freeze-up. The weather had been milder and the snow far heavier. He had gambled on a mild winter, an early thaw and a wet spring, and had loaded his wood on the barges. And now he had won.

"I will charge seventy-five a cord, by yiminy," Gus speculated aloud. Then he weakened. "Nope, I will charge only sixty-five. That will clear me twenty thousand dollars, maybe. Then I will go back to Minnesota, buy me a farm and live easy."

In his heart Gus knew that he could get eighty—and even a hundred from some of the first boats down. The Yukon Gem, for instance. She would be the leader of the run down from Dawson by a full day. She was the fastest of the Yukon boats, and she would be coming out loaded to the texas deck with passengers, freight and gold as usual. Last year the Yukon Gem had brought three million in gold to St. Michael on her first run in the spring, part of the Dawson clean-up. A boat carrying a cargo like

that would not quibble over the cost of fuel.

Gus knocked the heel from his pipe and rowed to shore to inspect his mooring cables that were attached to trees on a point jutting above the flood a hundred yards above his barges. Downstream the river bent sharply in to a low bluff that stood twenty feet above the floodline. A half mile below this bend the river roared through Half a River Cañon.

If the barges were to break loose, nothing could save them from being swept into Half a River, Gus knew. But the hawsers were of three-inch manila and showed no signs of wear.

It was afternoon, and a damp, misty rain was setting in as Gus returned to his flatboat. He was just stepping in when a man stepped from the brush.

GUS had seen few human faces since the previous fall, but even so this one did not appeal to him. The fellow was bearded, and his rough garb had come out second best in a siege with the brush. He carried a rifle in one hand, and the other was thrust deep in the pocket of his mackinaw. Gus knew there was a revolver in that pocket.

"Where yuh goin', square-head?" the stranger asked.

Gus did not like the look in his eyes. "Howdy," he returned uncertainly. "I think I get out of this damn rain. You ban campin' aroun' here, hey?"

"Is yore partner out there?" the bearded man asked with a jerk of his head toward the barges.

"I do not have no—" Gus began. Then sudden suspicion caused him to bite off his words.

"No partner, eh," the other cried. Then he turned his head. "All right, boys. The squarehead is alone."

The brush sprouted more men. They rose in a swarm, it seemed to a man attuned to solitude. There were ten in all.

"Yiminy!" Gus exclaimed. He cast a desperate glance around, the fear rushing upon him that they had come to take his wood.

But they had closed around him. "Take it easy," a chunky man said, stepping up. "You won't get hurt unless you get gay."

He was the leader. His body bulged with muscle. He had a corded neck and thick jaws.

"It'll be a cinch, Juneau," the first man said triumphantly. "All we have to do is hide on the barges an'—"

The chunky man who had been called Juneau turned on him furiously. "You fuzzy-brained lunkhead. I told you not to spout names. Do you want me to give yuh a silencer?"

There was respectful silence. The chunky man jerked a thumb at the flatboat. "Climb in, squarehead," he snapped at Gus. "Yo're entertainin' company."

Gus's fists had closed into knots that were as hard as mallets, and as deadly. This was the last straw. A winter's slavery and these pirates were aiming to take it away from him.

"You do not rob *me*," Gus gritted, and suddenly he went into action. Juneau, with a startled curse, gave a quick step backward, and that probably saved his life. Even so, Gus's fist reached his jaw, and the force of it hurled his body back over the end of the boat. He landed in the ice margin of the flood.

*Spat!* Gus had got in a second short jab at another before many arms unfolded him. He went down under the weight of four or five cursing men. He felt fists and boots beating on him,

but their numbers protected him. A babel of panting voices arose.

"Kill 'im! Lemme at him with this knife! Grab that leg! Git his arm! Shoot him, somebody!"

Gus fought like a demon with powerful legs and fists that found targets of flesh and bone. Then dimly through the drum of his laboring heart he heard Juneau's roar of command.

"Sap him, Munk. But don't kill him. We need him."

*Bam!* The barrel of a forty-four struck his skull, sending a numb wave of agony over his body. Though he tried to fight it off, he lapsed into a daze.

His last conscious emotion was of bitterness at the fate that had dealt him this final scurvy trick. Six months of toil gone. It was hard to bear.

**I**T was nightfall before Gus emerged from the daze far enough to be surprised that he was still alive. After a time his head cleared enough to realize that he was aboard his barge. He lay in the tent. His arms were bound. A candle was burning, and the tent was packed with the ten hijackers.

Juneau saw Gus stir, and arose to stand over him. Juneau's left jaw was puffed and discolored. There was malice in his hard eyes.

"Yuh know yuh earned a bullet through yer thick head," Juneau said. "Yuh'll get it too 'less yuh use what brains there are in that chunk o' wood."

Gus said nothing. "How'd yuh like to make five thousand dollars, square-head?" Juneau went on. "Easy money, too."

Gus scowled. "Go to hell," he mumbled. "If you think I sell you this wood for that you ban crazy."

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Juneau gave a guffaw. "He thinks we jumped him to snatch his stack of kindlin'," he said, looking at the others. "Shows how dumb them Swedes are."

Gus became suddenly hopeful, but puzzled. "Listen, squarehead," Juneau said, stooping close and pointing a thick finger, "we're not after chicken-feed. We don't want your wood. We've got bigger plans than that. I'm askin' again. Do you want to earn five thousand in dust? Say yes—or no."

"If I say no, then what, hey?" Gus asked.

Juneau jerked his thumb significantly. The grind of floes and the purl of water around the barge was answer enough.

Gus grimaced wryly. "What I have to do?"

"Nothin' much—nothin' at all. I'm overlookin' that clout on the jaw yuh gave me. One of the boys has a busted rib, an' we're forgettin' that too, if you pull with us. Listen! The Yukon Gem will be pullin' in here for wood soon—to-morrow maybe. The ice is about run, an' the Gem will be a day ahead of any other tub in gettin' down this far. She won't waste time. Pete Sundvahl knows you, don't he? He's a squarehead like you, ain't he?"

"Pete knows me," Gus admitted. The Pete Sundvahl referred to was captain of the Yukon Gem. Gus and Pete had stampeded in over Chilkoot as partners in the big rush years ago.

Juneau arose and rolled a cigarette slowly. "All yuh have to do is act like yuh would if us boys hadn't never showed up," he said, eying Gus sharply. "Just stand out in the open, an' let the Gem come alongside the barge without lettin' on that we're around. That's all. Easy, ain't it?"

Gus drew a long, slow breath. So that was it. They meant to rob the

Yukon Gem! It was a tremendous stake they were playing for. Gus knew now why there were so many in on it with Juneau. The steamer would be crowded with passengers. There would be a gun squad guarding the treasure room. It was a hold-up that required man-power and gun-power for its success. Not only that, but the mere matter of transporting that much gold away from the scene would need many hands.

**T**HE enormity of the thing stunned Gus. He knew that attempts had been made in the past to hold up river boats carrying treasure. One or two had succeeded. The rest had failed, for it was no easy thing.

But this gang had a plan that placed the odds in their favor. By hiding among the ricks of wood on the barge they could suddenly pour aboard the steamer and have the crew and gun guards at their mercy before it was realized that the ship was in a trap.

The scheme probably would work—if Gus acted as the bait. Gus opened his mouth to boom forth an outraged refusal. He saw Juneau's eyes harden as though reading his thoughts. There was the menace of death in the river pirate's heavy face.

"Five thousand," Gus ruminated aloud. "That ban mighty little. You fallers will make much more. I lose my wood, for I could not stay afterwards, hey."

"We'll give yuh half a share," Juneau countered at once. "That's worth more than all the wood yuh could chop the rest of yer life, Swede."

Gus brightened. "I would be rich, by yiminy," he cried.

Juneau grinned, and glanced at his pals. Their expressions did not change, but Gus sensed the ironic smirks they

were masking. The dumb Swede really believed they would split up with him instead of presenting him with a bullet in the back as soon as he had done his part.

"We're all set, then," Juneau said, unbending. "Might as well take the ropes off him, boys. I knew he'd come in with us. He's smart, even if he is a Swede."

Then, as Gus arose, Juneau's face became deadly again, and he pushed it nearer the tall Swede. "Remember, there will be ten guns pointed at yuh when it starts," he said. "And if yuh try to double cross us you'll never live to know what struck yuh."

Gus lay all night, unstirring but sleepless, squeezed in among them in the tent. He was glad when dawn came, for it had been the longest night of his life. He knew now how condemned men felt, and what they thought, on the eve of execution.

When he came out of the tent, he saw that the river had fallen a foot during the night, and that the ice run was over.

They were a tense, nervous lot as they breakfasted from Gus's grub box. They had their guns at their sides. All carried a brace of six-shooters in addition to a rifle, a carbine or a buck-shot gun. In addition Gus saw a half a case of dynamite with caps and short fuses already set. That was to blow the safe, no doubt.

After a hasty breakfast, two of the gang slipped ashore in the flatboat, and Gus heard dogs barking back in the brush. They were equipped to move the gold back from the river, then. Even so, Gus knew they could not hope to move it any great distance at this season of the year with the snow nearly gone, and the interior a soaked morass.



Three million in gold would weigh five tons. Their only hope would be to cache most of it and scatter until it was safe to return. There would be pursuit, though it would be perhaps a week in organizing, because of the flood and difficult communication. That would give them ample time to hide the loot and scatter.

Gus doubted if they would ever succeed in getting the gold out of the country. But that did not matter now. Gus's concern was far more immediate. Just as the pair returned aboard, after taking care of the dogs, every man suddenly went rigid in an attitude of listening. Drifting to them from a distance came a deep, hoarse, mechanical sound.

A steamboat whistle!

**J**UNEAU broke the spell. "It's her—the Yukon Gem," he said tersely. "All right, boys. Stow yerselves in the wood. Yuh've got plenty of time. She's a couple miles up the river yet."

He turned to Gus. The muscles in his cheeks were set so that white spots formed at the points of his jaws. "We're goin' through with it," he said. "How 'bout you, squarehead?"

"I ban a leetle shaky in the knees," Gus countered.

"Hell, we're all that way," Juneau admitted. "But we're goin' through with it, understand. Get busy an' shoot up yer flag."

Gus tied a white flour sack to the halyard of a twenty foot peeled pole he had set up on the stern, and ran it aloft.

The ten were donning masks made of burlap sacks, fitted with arm holes and slits for their eyes. Then they concealed themselves among the ricks of wood on the barges. Juneau chose

a place just below the deck, piling up a few sticks of wood on the coaming to give him concealment and between which he could peer and watch the river. He was only six feet from Gus, who remained in plain view.

Again came the growl of the steamer's siren—nearer this time. Gus saw her smoke beyond the bend upstream.

Gus found himself quivering all over. The Yukon Gem hove in sight three quarters of a mile away. Gus saw the flutter of skirts, and the glint of ribbons on her decks. There were women aboard—mostly dance hall girls outbound to Seattle, probably.

Juneau saw them too. "A flock of gals on board, boys," he called. "That'll make it easy. Once we board 'em they won't do much shootin', with them women all around."

The steamer's whistle acknowledged sight of the fuel barges, and she began veering across the current, picking her way among the driftwood and heavier floes. Gus saw Pete Sundvahl's blond head leaning from the pilot house. He was helping the man at the wheel in the task of watching the ice and driftwood.

Pete waved an arm in greeting as the steamer came around in midstream, and began quartering in, her wheel slapping the water in spurts as she balanced her own power against that of the current. Pete Sundvahl was a crack skipper, and he would lay the three-hundred-foot sternwheeler alongside the barge without scraping a splinter.

Gus saw two leathernecked men, with shotguns slung under their arms and guns belted about their mackinaws, standing aft on the second deck in a little roped off space. They were part of the squad of gold guards. They eyed Gus, and then one set his gun

against the rail and began rolling a cigarette. They were unsuspecting.

"There's a pair of gun slingers on the second deck," Juneau called softly to his hidden gang. "Get 'em first."

The steamer was two hundred yards away and nearly abeam, her prow upstream as she worked against the current.

Pete Sundvahl lifted his voice from the pilot house. "How much a cord, Gus?"

Gus cupped his hands. He was doubtful if Pete could hear him against the throb of the engine and the splash of the paddles.

"One hun'ed dollar!" Gus bawled.

Pete Sundvahl leaped down to the deck of the texas and danced up and down like a madman. "You tammed fish-eatin' robber," he howled furiously. "You ban holdin' me up."

Gus still had his hands cupped to his mouth. He knew now that Pete could hear him plainly.

GUS drew a deep breath, and took a short step nearer the side of the barge.

Then he kicked the sticks of wood overside behind which Juneau was crouching—exposing the desperado to view of the steamer.

"Robbers! A trap! Sheer off!" Gus howled the words at the same instant.

Then he dove overside. He heard Juneau's frantic curse, and the crash of the rifle that was fired at him before he struck the chocolate-hued surface. But his move had been too fast for Juneau, and the bullet missed him.

He went down, down, down into the numbing water, and then turned to claw his way under the flat-bottom of the barge. He knew that to appear on the river-side was sure death.

The barge was thirty feet wide, and drew five feet of water, Gus was only a fair swimmer, but he had a mighty lung capacity. Even so, bright lights were flaring before his eyes, and his lungs and eardrums were throbbing before he finally found the far edge of that interminable flat bottom beneath which he had thrashed his way. He pushed his head gratefully above the surface, and gasped for air. He clung to a big bolt head as the current tugged at him, and threatened to carry him beyond the stern which overhung a few feet.

Through his pounding ear drums he heard the roar of gunfire from the barge above.

"Riddle that pilot house! Git them gun toters!" It was Juneau howling orders. "We ain't licked yet! We'll wreck her if we have to. Damn that double crossin' Swede. He never came up tuh get the bullet I had ready fer him."

Gus heard the distant tinkle of smashed glass amid the steady roar of guns. There were only a few scattered return shots fired from the steamer.

Then came a crackle of treetops downstream. Gus turned and saw an amazing sight. The Yukon Gem, her wheel still ploughing the muddy water, was careening wildly shoreward only two hundred feet astern of the barges.

Gus saw the smashed glass in the pilot house. No head appeared above the window line, and the wheel was whirling madly. The pilot and Pete Sundvahl must be lying in there dead or wounded, and in the confusion none of the crew had manned the auxiliary steering apparatus below. The engineer had also failed to act.

Women were screaming hysterically, and men were shouting. Panic had

swept the crowded boat, and evidently the crew had been overwhelmed by the confusion.

The boat, looking huge and clumsy now that there was no brain controlling her, veered again, emerged from the trees, and was caught by the full sweep of the swifter current where it coursed in to the base of the low bluff below.

Her wheel went into reverse eventually—but too late. Gus saw the boat swing drunkenly in as though bent on dashing herself on the rocky base of the cliff. Then, suddenly she heeled over, and came to an abrupt halt, only fifty feet short of total destruction.

The steamer had grounded on a submerged knoll!

There was a sudden rush of feet above. Gus ducked under the surface, and worked his way beneath the overhang of the stern just in time. Juneau and his nine men were tumbling into the flatboat. They sculled frantically toward shore.

**D**OWNSTREAM, some one had taken charge of the Yukon Gem, and her wheel was flailing at the water at full reverse speed. But she did not budge. She was fast on the bar, and with a falling river beneath her she seemed likely to stay there forever.

Gus, numb from the icy water, worked his way to the ladder, and pulled himself dripping to the deck of the barge. The heavily loaded flatboat had reached dry land now, and the river pirates were racing along the curve of the flood toward the ascent to the low bluff. They had to skirt a mile of backwater to reach it. Juneau had a case of dynamite in his arms.

Gus was swearing in a hoarse, cracked voice, but he did not know it. A sick, appalled chill was upon him,

for he saw the helplessness of the steamer. Her stacks were just on a level with the crown of the bluff, and it was only a biscuit toss to her texas. From the bluff the pirates would have the craft at their mercy. And they had the dynamite to force surrender.

Gus raged around, seeking a weapon, but all he found was his double-bitted ax.

He thought of Pete Sundvahl. Pete probably was dead, shot down at his post. Gus blamed himself for that. He thought with horror of the slaughter one stick of dynamite would cause on those crowded decks.

The gang was now racing up the ascent to the bluff. One, faster than the others, was already on top, and crawling to the edge to look down on the steamer. A gun cracked, and Gus saw a man leap from the pilot house, stagger and fall as the gun cracked a second time, and then drag himself down a companionway.

The paddles continued to churn futilely. All of the gang had now manned the rocky lip of the bluff. They were shouting.

Suddenly Gus went racing back over the ricks of wood. He leaped the space separating the two barges, and sped on to the upstream end where the three thick hawsers were taut as they held the loaded barges against the drag of the current.

Gus gave a final glance downstream, estimating the current. Then his ax swung in a glistening arc and bit sharp and clear. A hawser parted with a pop. He raced to the next bollard, and cut it also with one powerful swing.

The third and last went a few seconds later. The upper barge immediately began to swing out into the main current. The river caught it gleefully. It dragged its chained mate



around with it ponderously. Gus went speeding back over the wood, leaping like a kangaroo, his ax in one big fist.

A bullet whistled past him before he reached the decked stern again. The robbers had sighted him, and evidently Juneau had guessed his plan.

A storm of lead lashed the water at the stern, and bit chunks from the deck as he poised above the bollard around which the single inshore line was made fast. A bullet glanced off the ax head as he lifted it, and nearly knocked it from his grasp.

But he balanced himself and brought it down. The hawser dropped apart. The trees began to brush the side. The two barges with their top-heavy cargo of wood were floating down the river toward the stranded steamer.

Gus leaped among the wood, and the bullets could not reach him. After a moment he chanced a peek. Some one in a white cap was waving a white rag on the deserted topside of the steamer in token of surrender. But the gang on the bluff was ignoring the steamer now and pumping bullets wildly at the approaching barges.

**G**US estimated the course of his drifting, ungainly craft. Then he gave a groan. He had hoped that his barges would drift into the steamer and that their weight might force her loose from the bar. But the outward swing of the upper barge had carried both of the craft too far out into the current. They were being whirled in nearer the steamer, but Gus saw that the barges would clear the ship—by only a few yards, and that was enough to wreck his plan.

Gus's mind revolved rapidly. Suddenly he dove beneath the planked end. A big coil of spare hawser, some four hundred feet of it, was stowed there.

Gus cut its lashings with quick strokes of the ax, and madly hauled out fifty feet of the bighted end.

He gave a quick glance over the deck edge again. The barges were swinging broadside downstream, with the outer one gradually gaining as it was in the full grip of the current.

The superstructure of the Yukon Gem was looming up, and it soon protected Gus from the guns on the bluff.

He threw the end of the hawser on deck, and followed it at a leap.

A huddle of passengers and deckhands jammed the freight deck where they had protection from bullets fired from the bluff.

"Ahoy," Gus bellowed as he was swept to within a scant twenty feet of the stranded steamer. "Stand by a tow line for. Make it fast. We vill drag you off the bar, yah, maybe."

He whirled once like a hammer thrower, and sent the heavy coil sailing across the short space. It knocked down a fat miner as it fell among the crowd. But a deckhand, grasping the idea, dove for it and caught it before its end slipped overboard. A moment later the bight was around a bollard on the freight deck.

Something sputtered in an arc above Gus. Then a concussion nearly broke his ear drums. Wood and splinters erupted from the outstream end of the barge. Juneau had tossed a stick of giant aboard, but the ricks of wood had protected the hull.

Gus frantically began dragging out the hawser by hand as it played out. The barges were drifting clear of the steamer, and in another second or two he knew he would be under direct fire. He needed slack to take a turn around the towing post on the stern of the barge, and the hawser was clumsy and heavy.

The current became swifter. The barge grated on rocks then swung free.

A rifle bullet struck between Gus's mukluks as he stooped to pick up the slack. A second bullet broke his shoulder as he threw a coil over the bollard. Another clipped a button from the front of his wool shirt as he squeezed the end through the coil in a hitch that would not slip. He felt the burn of still another bullet in the flesh of his thigh as he crouched down behind the bollard.

Then the cable lifted from the water and went taut with a snap.

The barge halted with a jerk, and the muddy water of the river came piling over the deck, submerging Gus to his knees. A bullet scorched his ribs as he rose and dove overboard.

His first barge was already swamping, and the wood was floating from it as he left it.

"Six months work to hell gone," Gus muttered thickly as the water enclosed him.

**H**E came weakly to the surface. Then he saw the Yukon Gem, her wheel spinning the brown water under her flat bottom, backing away from the shoal.

The weight of the drifting barges had jerked her free. She was no longer at the mercy of the desperadoes on the bluff.

A sudden ripping chatter of gunfire arose from the steamer. A blocky figure rose from behind a bowlder on the lip of the bluff took a step, then reeled backwards, and fell down over the steep rocks into the boiling margin of the flood. It was Juneau.

Gus saw two more of the gang fall as they began a wild retreat from their exposed position. The passengers had

joined in with the guards in blasting the pirates out of existence, and they did nearly a complete job of it before the gang could reach cover farther back, for as the steamer backed out into the river, the guns aboard commanded the sloping top of the bluff for two hundred yards.

Gus saw a deckhand leap to the hawser and cut it, for the steamer could not maneuver with the weight of the barges dragging it downstream.

Gus kept himself afloat until they picked him up. His swamped barge struck the base of the bluff not far below and turned over, spilling the last of its wood into the river. After they had pulled him aboard the steamer he pushed them aside, and stared downstream until the second barge shot into Half a River Cañon, upended and capsized also. The rapids became dark with floating wood.

"Ay slaved six month for it," Gus muttered. "Twenty thousand dollar it would have brought me, yah."

"Hell," a miner who had struck it rich, exclaimed. "I'm payin' for that kindlin' wood myself. An' I reckon there's some other jiggers on this boat that will pay yuh for it too. There's four million in dust aboard this scow—but it wouldn't be aboard now if you hadn't been a hell of a smart Swede. What did you say the price was? Two hundred a cord? That's plenty cheap."

Gus blinked. "I only say one hundred," he protested. "But I was only kiddin', yah. Sixty-five. That was the price."

"Did you hear him, boys," the miner bellowed. "Two hundred a cord. It's cheap at the price, I say. He's a smart Swede—when he's got time to think."

THE END



There was neither satisfaction nor regret on the killer's face

# West of Apache Pass\*

By CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER

Author of "Breath of the Desert," "Clear the Trail," etc.

*To Tennessee Bob, stage coach guard, there was little to choose between Apache massacres and raids from Arizona's roving outlaw bands*

## LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PERHAPS it was her first glimpse of Tennessee Bob Randall, chief guard of the new Arizona stage line, that made Anne Pritchard want to take a journey by stage coach. Born and bred upon the plains, she had never seen a large town, had seen little of life. And so her rancher father, Dean Pritchard, agreed to

let her travel from Tucson to El Paso, where Pritchard's sister was ill. Tennessee Bob, as Anne came to know him better during her journey, was even more appealing because she knew that he had other grave duties. For he served as judge in the Vigilante trials in Tucson, where the lawless element had gone beyond control.

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This story began in the Argosy for August 4