

CEDAR SWAMP

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Illustrations by Henry J. Lee
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The Leading Characters:
EDISON FORBES, a young resident of Scottsdale with an inherent craving for liquor is held for the death of a woman who has been killed by a bootlegging truck. Circumstantial evidence points to Forbes and rather than tell the truth of the episode, he stands trial, which results in a long prison sentence. He is soon pardoned, however, but back in Scottsdale he and

PATSY JANE, his pretty wife, agree that public sentiment against him would warrant their migration up north where Eddie has a quarter section of land. While there they form the acquaintance of

ISALIAH Sealman, a shifty neighbor who is anxious to buy their property. Eddie learns that the back taxes total over eight hundred dollars and must be paid in five months to avert forfeiture. Sealman makes a generous offer which is refused—Eddie thinking the land must have some value unknown to him to warrant his neighbor's interest. Things do not go well. Eddie fails to get work and succumbs to his old yearning by falling in with a bootlegger's gang, getting drunk and being shanghaied to Chicago. Upon his return he discovers that Pat has left him and will not return until he has quit drinking. This he determines to do. He secures work on a nearby ranch, run by Davenant, and after many temptations at last beats his enemy, John Barleycorn. All this time he is slowly earning money but realizes that when the tax is due he can't possibly have enough. Sealman renews his offer and is again refused. One day—

NANCE ENCELL, his former sweetheart calls, finds him alone, offers to pay the deficit but is rebuffed. Then Nance kisses him—and is seen by Patsy who had called to attempt a reconciliation with her husband. Pat leaves without listening to his explanation. Broken-hearted, Eddie tries harder than ever to earn the money and one morning early while berry picking, notices fresh tire marks on his property.

CHAPTER XVI

Unwelcome Visitors
Eddie puzzled resentfully as he drove home. As all of Scottsdale had, Patsy was condemning him without a hearing, on circumstantial evidence. Well, it couldn't be helped. However, the impudent trespassing on their property and the purchase of the tax-title rather absolved him from obligation toward the man who had been with him the night of the accident. He'd seen: perhaps he might tell Patsy Jane, after all.

He filled in the suspenseful week in work about the land; cutting fence-posts and restringing wire. He hurried to the mail-box each forenoon after the rural carrier had rattled along the trail in his little car. But the governor did not write.

The eighth day he could stand it no longer. When the carrier had failed to stop at the box, Eddie drove into town and wired Governor Al-bright. He spent the afternoon in wandering about town, returning at half-hourly intervals to inquire for a message. Finally, at five o'clock, it came:

"Sorry, but Governor is in Europe until Christmas. Duff, secretary."

He summoned a smile to his face and drove to the garage. "They say a man may be down, but he's never out," he thought. "Well, here's where I test the theory." To the garage attendant he said briefly: "Fill her up."

He had resolved to attempt borrowing the money at Scottsdale. He could have appealed to Nance Encell, but that was impossible. Patsy Jane would have to know where the money came from. She would never accept her home at Nance's hands. Furthermore, to borrow from Nance would confirm every mean suspicion. No; he'd win or lose without that.

He bought food and headed south. It was his intention to drive all night and as much of the next day as might be necessary to reach Scottsdale. For the time was getting perilously short. The first of September was but just around the corner.

It had begun to rain at noon of the 31st day of August. Autumn comes early in northern Michigan, and there was the chill of leafless, desolate landscapes over which the wind may prowl untrammelled, in the saturated air. The top of Eddie's car was in bad condition. The spears of rain found the weak places unerringly. Little streams played upon him and soaked through his clothing. His hands were stiff with cold. An endless succession of chuckholes developed, through which the car jolted uncomfortably.

Perhaps he would not have been so responsive to the miserable weather had his mission been successful. He had tramped on his pride and appealed to every likely person for the loan which he needed. All had refused him.

Some would have been willing to advance the money. But they feared the bleak disfavor of their neighbors. The barrens had been a sounding board, apparently, and outstanding incidents of his life there echoed in the town's ears. All favorable angles had been eliminated. Scottsdale heard only the most discouraging.

They knew of his drinking-bouts. But they didn't know that he had conquered liquor. They had heard of his enforced trip to Chicago. They rolled under their tongues the delicious morsel that Patsy had left him, and assured that the separation was final. His fight to oust the motor-tramp and his thrashing of the other trespasser were described as drunken quarrelsomeness. Even his dismissal by Davenant had been distorted into something mysterious and criminal.

It was dark when he approached Long Portage. He was shivering violently from cold and rain. He was very hungry. But he felt he could not bear the looks which would be turned on him in either of the town's restaurants. His telegraphic appeal to the governor for funds and the reply were public property by now. There were too many lounging in and out of the railroad office who could see the message on the open file, even were the agent silent and discreet—which he was not.

Long Portage knew his attempts to get money there had failed. It would read in his face that his journey to the south had been a failure, also. So he squashed through the mud of the uneven main street and left the yellow lights in the store building behind.

Somehow, it seemed friendly out in the barrens, though the night was black. The rain whispered companionably among the jackpines. The twisting track was firm and free from standing water. He saw no person but a pair of fiery eyes stared upon him from a bend in the road, and as the car rushed past, he could see the mild and shaggy head of a bear, who was standing on his hind legs in a patch of blackberries.

When the last ridge had been surmounted he gave a start of surprise. A light was shining from the windows of his cabin. He shut off the power and brought the car to a stop some distance away. The thought of the motor-tramp came into his mind and he went forward cautiously to reconnoiter. He crept stoopingly, keeping out of range of the windows until he could peer into one of them from the corner. Two small panes had been broken out so that the unbidden guests might unloose the sash-bolts. After a single glance he went to the back door and thrust it open.

The three occupants of the cabin, Jake, Culley and Oscar, looked up in surprise. They were quite at their ease, as much so as in their own homes, or a stable. They had eaten a bountiful meal from his provisions, as the disordered table showed. A plate had been broken, and the pieces carelessly kicked aside. Now Culley was chewing tobacco, as the brown splotches where he had spat on the floor showed. The others were smoking. There was a blazing fire in the fireplace. And a tall black bottle partly full, stood in the center of the table.

They had removed their outer clothing. Caps and mackinaws were thrown on one of the bunks. Across them lay three belts to which were attached holsters, each holster containing a large calibre automatic.

"Hello, kid!" greeted Culley, jovially. "Didn't find you home, so we came in."

"So I see," returned Eddie. "This rain'll hold up the ship maybe till noon tomorrow," volunteered Oscar, "so we thought we'd eat under cover. Good grub you got here." He began idly to roll a cigarette.

Eddie's self-control was suddenly broken. He snatched a shotgun from its pegs over the door. The barrels were loaded only with birdshot, it is true. But birdshot will serve admirably at three feet.

"You hogs!" he growled. "You lazy filthy crooks! Get out of here—quick!"

Men who live by violence are usefully educated. They know when an adversary is bluffing and when he is dangerous. They have the courage of their careers, and they will take ruthless steps against the bluffer. But they bow to the dangerous man. So the trio rose. Here was danger personified. A false move would mean the discharge of the shotgun, and two dead men. They had no desire to speculate as to who might be spared.

Keeping them covered, Eddie stepped back until he secured the belts. He removed the pistols with one hand and threw the belts to the floor. Backing again, he pulled open the front door. They saw his intention.

"Aw, say, kid," remonstrated Culley, his voice between a whine and a

snarl, "don't throw them gats away." His answer was to hurl the pistols, one by one, out into the darkness, and Culley spoke again: "What's the big idea, anyway? You claim to be a friend—"

The bulky guard happened to be nearest. Eddie thrust the gun against his flabby stomach so that the twin muzzle dented deeply the soft tissue. "Shut up and get out!" he commanded.

Culley obeyed, carrying his coat and belt with him. Eddie shepherded them along the path. He kept his flashlight spraying on the trio to prevent a surprise attack. The booze-truck, headed north, stood by the side of the road. They clambered into the seat, after Oscar had kindled the lights, and thundered away. They hurled back curses and threats from a safe distance. Eddie smiled into the darkness after them before turning back to the house.

"I wanted them to think I was a simp and easy mark till something fell on them," he mused. "But I guess the shock of finding out wasn't less unkind tonight than it would have been later. Now for a bite to eat. And then it's a case of back to town again."

CHAPTER XXII

At the Office
Eight trucks, bull-nosed and immensely powerful, stood humped under their tarpaulins like strange prehistoric animals. Their guards and drivers walked restlessly up and down or huddled under protecting canvas aprons. Three skiffs floated by the dock in the bootleggers' cove. There was an attitude of expectancy and impatient waiting over the score of men making up the expedition.

It was well past noon of the first of September. Yesterday's rain persisted, although the large drops had now dissolved into many smaller ones, and a thick white mist threw a blanket over them. It was impossible to see farther than a short distance. Bad weather, fog and a high sea had delayed the Canadian run-runner. She was hours overdue.

As the men stamped their feet and talked incessantly the atmosphere became lighter. The mist, little by little, began to dissolve. A cold wind came up and swept away the remnants. The clouds turned from a dreary dark gray to a lighter shade. They became fleecy; patches of blue sky appeared. The rain stopped.

"There she is!" several voices cried at once. Only a few hundred yards away, heading straight inshore, was a squat, broad-beamed fishing tug. She was low in the water; there was a bone in her teeth and spray dashed over her square bows.

A plume of steam arose from the craft, and a single inquiring note of her siren rolled over the water. One of the men raised a long bamboo pole in which was a square of white cloth, and waved it vigorously. It was the "all clear" signal!

For everything was all clear, of course. The runners would be unmolested up here in this jumping-off place in the barrens. The tug drove on. The canvas which swathed her sides to a height of ten feet was being stripped off. It could be seen that the deck was piled high with pine boxes of handy size. They were cases of Canadian liquor, hundreds of them, retailing at current quotations at one hundred and twenty-five dollars per case. The cargo was worth a fortune.

The skiffs put out from the dock, rowed briskly by two men in each. A man in the bow of the tug raised his hand and shouted. She had come inshore as far as it was safe and, with the reversal of her engines, the forward motion ceased. The crew gathered at the rail, removing the final lashings. As the skiffs came alongside and were made fast, they handed down the cases.

The small boats came back cautiously to the dock, laden to the water's edge. The waiting group formed a chain. The cases were passed from hand to hand until they were piled up on the nearest truck. In a few minutes the skiffs were empty, and were rowed to the tug again.

Two motorboats shot out from a notch in the shoreline, just above the cove. High banks on either side of the shelter and thick, overhanging vegetation had effectually concealed them before. The boats were long, high in the bow and equipped with roaring engines that sent them flying through the water at racing speed. Each was manned by a half dozen young men, in the forest-green uniform of the Michigan state police. Every man was armed, and a machine-gun thrust an ominous snout forward from the bow.

All hands went up on the tug and the skiffs. There was no hope. The tugs were too slow to run away and her crew could not hope to stand off this superior armament. The completeness of the surprise made the

thought of organizing resistance out of the question.

The crowd on shore looked on the flying craft with horrified amazement. The jig was up—up most emphatically. It was every man for himself. The trucks furnished them with a means of escape and they turned frantically to the waiting vehicles.

They faced a skirmish line of forest green. More troopers had arisen from among the sand dunes. These were armed with rifles and automatics. And each held a dark metal object, about the size and shape of a goose-egg, in his right hand. The line was a fearsome one. Over each head was drawn a dull cloth bag that fitted tightly around the neck and ended in front in a sort of elephant's trunk. Two great staring glass disks were turned forward like merciless eyes.

Only one man was not so equipped, but his mask rested on his head, ready for adjustment. He stepped forward toward the huddled, doubtful booze-runners. "Gas-bombs, boys," he announced quietly, holding up his own goose-egg. "No false moves, or—" He drew back his arms slightly. "And it's a painful way to die."

The truck crews were made up mainly of men who had dodged service in the great war. They had abundant courage, and would have shot it out with the troopers. But they knew nothing of gas, and they feared it with a panicky fear. Every hand clutched at the sky, including the plump, tapering figure of a rotund person with silky brown beard who stood in the foreground.

Every hand? Not quite. A man on the wharf, protected in part by the trucks above, raised his automatic with a desperate gesture and fired at the leader of the troopers. He missed. But the sergeant who answered it did not. The man on the dock clasped his arms about his stomach and fell into the shallow water.

"Steady!" commanded the leader. "He's done. Don't throw, men."

Eddie Forbes ran from among the troopers, throwing aside his gas mask as he came. "I'll get him out!" he cried. For the runner who had fallen was too valuable to be drowned. It was Scots Libbey, whose mishandling of a liquor truck months before had started all his trouble.

It was within a few minutes of five o'clock, closing time in the county offices, when Eddie mounted the steps of the new brick building wearily. A sense of responsibility had kept him with the state police until the prisoners could be lodged in the county jail. For it had been his

telephone call of the night before which had precipitated the most successful liquor raid in the state's history.

Fortunately, a troop of the state police, working on shore with motor-cars and horses, and on the water with their fast motor cruisers, had been beating the north for run-runners, and were stationed only a few miles away. Orders from Lansing had started them during the night to the rendezvous he had selected. The rain had helped them to establish themselves undetected in position to spring their coup.

Now there was a let-down, a despairing sense of loss and failure. He was conscious that he had eaten only sketchily for two days, that he was not shaven, and that his misshapen, wrinkled clothing had been wet by the rain, had dried upon him, and had been wet again to dry again. He wondered rather stupidly why he was going to the courthouse at all, he had no money to meet the taxes.

Peter Whimple, had company, Eddie found. There was the youth he had beaten up for trespass. He was sitting on a straight-backed pine chair, and Nance Encell was beside him. A keen young man in city clothes was tilted against the wainscoting of the side wall.

Eddie advanced a few steps and paused uncertainly. The stranger lowered the front legs of his chair and prepared to rise. His late adversary scowled, but Nance smiled and said cheerily, "Hello, Eddie. Well, I see you made it, after all."

Made it? He had made nothing but a mess of it. Why had he come here to be laughed at by Nance Encell and her companions, of all people? And why was this other chap staring at him so curiously?

(Continued Next Week)

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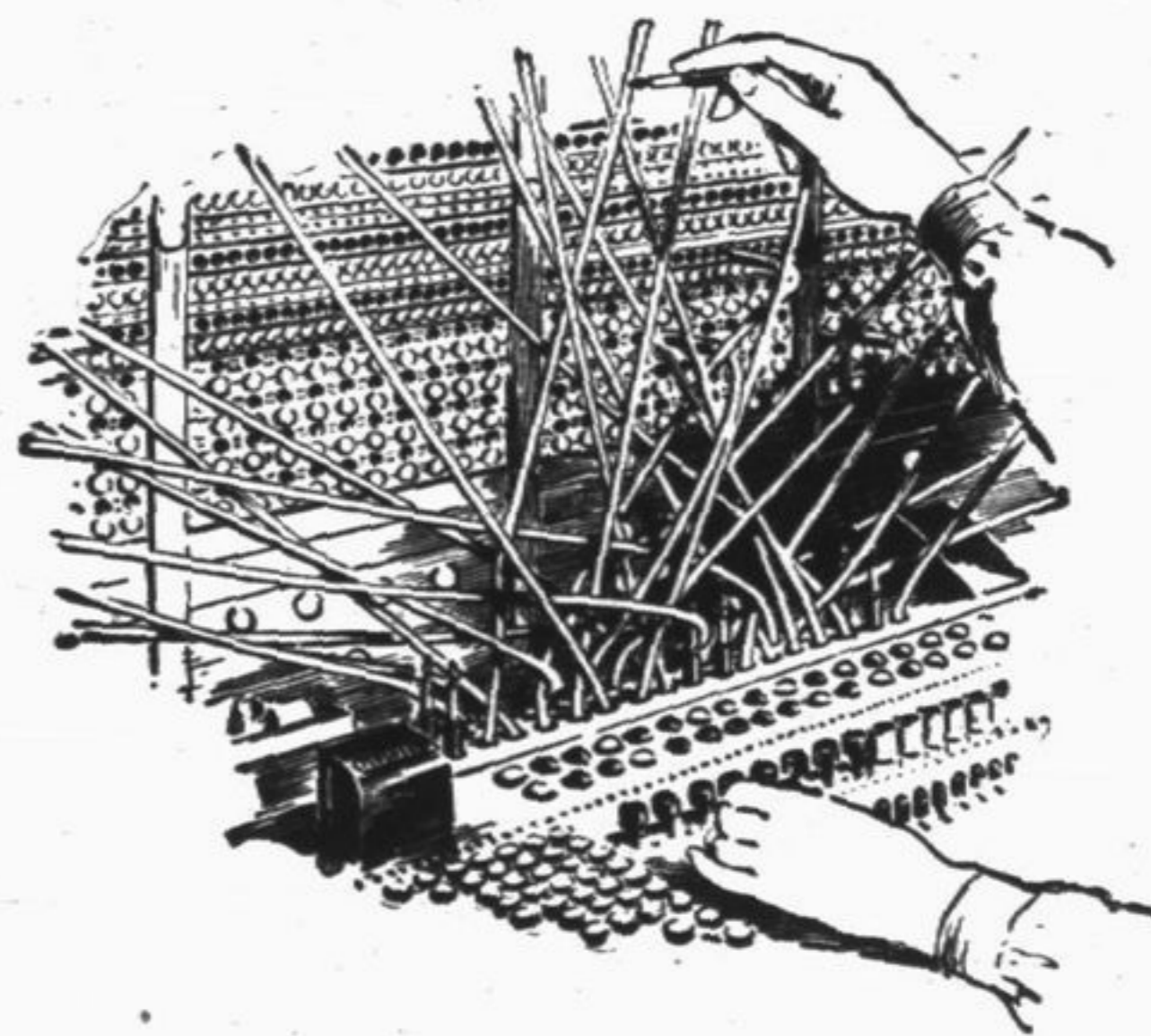
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