

THE MUCKER

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS
AUTHOR OF THE
TARZAN AND MARS
STORIES

jealous of the sanctity of their own territory. Outsiders do not trespass with impunity.

From Halsted to Robey, and from Lake to Grand, lay the broad hunting preserves of Kelly's gang, to which Billy had been almost born, one might say. Kelly owned the feed store back of which the gang had loafed for years, and though himself a respectable business man, his name had been attached to the back of hoodlums who held forth at his back door as the easiest means of locating and identifying its members.

The police and citizenry of this great territory were the natural enemies and prey of Kelly's gang, but as the kings of old protected the deer of their great forests from poachers, so Kelly's gang felt it incumbent upon them to safeguard for themselves the lives and property which they considered theirs by divine right. It is doubtful that they thought of the matter in just this way, but the effect was the same.

And so it was that as Billy Byrne wended homeward alone in the wee hours of the morning after emptying the cash drawer of old Schneider's saloon and locking the wearying Schneider into his own ice box, he was deeply grieved and angered to see rank outsiders from Twelfth Street beating Patrolman Stanley Laskey with his own baton, while they simultaneously strove to kick in his ribs with their heavy boots.

Now, Laskey was no friend of Billy Byrne, but the officer had been bona fide raised in the district and was attached to the Twenty-eighth precinct station on Lake Street near Ashland Avenue, and so was part and parcel of the moral posture of the gang. Billy felt that it was entirely ethical to beat up a cop, provided you confined your efforts to those of your own district, but for a bunch of years from south of Twelfth Street to attempt to pull off any such coarse work in his bailiwick—why, it was unthinkable!

A hero and rescuer of less experience than Billy Byrne would have rushed melodramatically into the midst of the fray, and in all probability have had his face pushed completely through the back of his head, for the guys from Twelfth Street were not of the rah-rah-boy type of hoodlum—they were bad men, with an upper case B.

So Bill crept stealthily along in the shadows until he was quite close to them, and behind them. On the way he had gathered up a sizeable granite paving block from which there is nothing in the world harder, not even a Twelfth Street saloon.

He was quite close now to one of the men—who was wielding the officer's club to such excellent disadvantage for the officer. He raised the paving block only to lower it silently and suddenly upon the back of that unsuspecting head—and then there were two.

Before the man's companions had realized what had happened Billy had possessed himself of the fallen club and struck one of them a blinding, staggering blow across the eye.

Then number three pulled his gun and fired pointblank at Billy. The bullet tore through his left shoulder.

It would have sent a more highly organized and nervously inclined man to the pavement, but Billy was neither highly organized nor nervously inclined, so that about the only immediate effect it had upon him was to make him mad. Before he had been beat or peevish—peevish at the rank crust that had permitted these cheap slugs to go some to make your getaway now—every guy in the neighborhood was after him.

From a long line of burly ancestors he had inherited the physique of a prize bull. From earliest childhood he had fought, always unfairly, so that he knew all the tricks of street fighting. During the last year there had been added to Billy's natural fighting ability and instinct a knowledge of the scientific end of the sport.

The result was something appalling—to the gang from Twelfth Street.

Before that gink could pull the trigger again his gun had been wrenched from his hand and flung across the street, and he was down on the granite, with a hand as hard as the paving block scrambling his facial attractions beyond hope of repair.

By this time Patrolman Laskey had staggered to his feet, and most opportunely at that, for the man whom Billy had dazed with the club was reaching Laskey. Laskey promptly put him to sleep with the butt of the gun that he had been unable to draw when first attacked, then he turned to assist Billy.

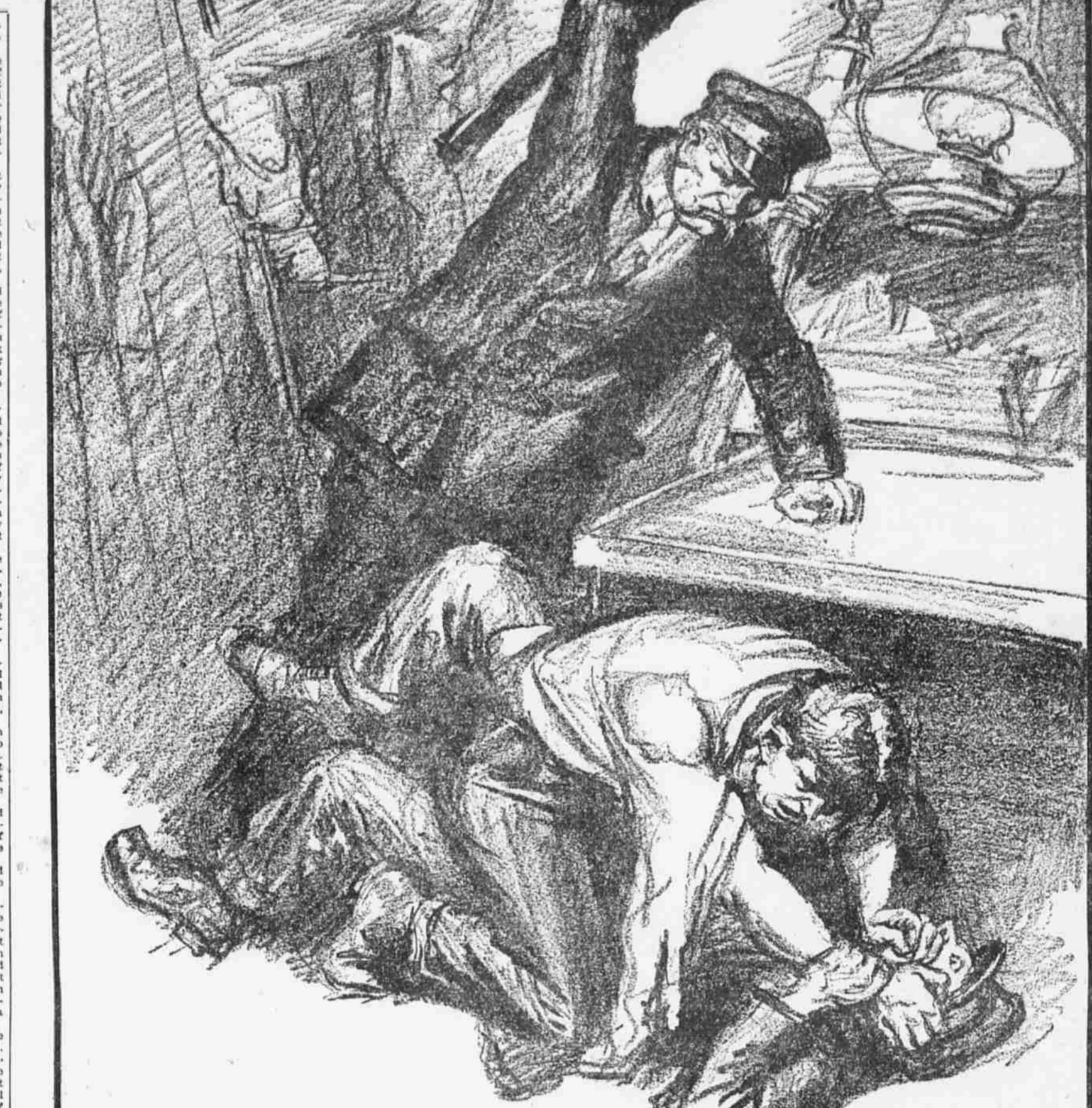
But it was not Billy who needed assistance—it was the gentleman from Bohemia. With difficulty Laskey dragged Billy from the scene.

"Leave enough of him for the inquest," pleaded Laskey.

When the wagon arrived Billy had disappeared, but Laskey had recognized him, and thereafter the two nodded pleasantly to one another upon such occasions as they chanced to meet upon the street.

Two years elapsed before the event transpired which proved a crisis in Billy's life. During this period his existence had been much the same as before.

He had collected what was coming to him from careless and less muscular citizens. He had helped stick up a half dozen saloons. He had robbed the night men in two elevated stations, and for a while had been upon the payroll of a certain ward boss and done strong-arm work for \$25 a week.



HANLON

"Aavast, there," cried the captain, and he swung the heavy stick he usually carried full upon the back of Billy's head.

under the protection of the powerful politician who owned the place were commencing to get on their feet. Billy knew them all, and nodded to them as they passed him.

He noted surprise in the faces of several as they saw him standing there. He wondered what it meant and determined to ask the next man who evinced even mute wonderment at his presence what was eating him.

Then Billy saw a harness bull strolling toward him from the east. It was Laskey. When Laskey saw Billy he, too, opened his eyes in surprise, and when he came quite close to the mucker he whispered something to him, though he kept his eyes straight ahead as though he had not seen Billy at all.

In deference to the whispered request Billy presently strolled around the corner toward Walnut street, but at the alley back of the saloon he turned suddenly in.

A hundred yards up the alley he found Laskey in the shadow of a telephone pole.

"Wotlner are you doin' around here?" asked the patrolman. "Didn't you know that Sheehan had peached?"

Two nights before old man Schneider, goaded to desperation by the repeated raids upon his cash drawer, had shown light when he had again been invited to elevate his

Orders is out to get you, and if I were you I'd beat it, and beat it quick. I don't have to tell you I'm handing you this, but it's all I can do for you. Now, take my tip and slide, though you'll have to go some to make your getaway now—every guy on the force has got your pedigree."

Billy turned without a word and walked east in the alley toward Lincoln street. In Lincoln street Billy walked north to Kinzie. Here he entered the railroad yards.

An hour later he was bumping out of town toward the West on a fast freight. Three weeks later he found himself in Frisco.

He had no money, but the methods that had so often replenished his depleted exchequer at home he felt would serve the same purpose here.

Being unfamiliar with Frisco, Billy did not know where best to work. But when, by accident, he stumbled upon a street where there were many saloons whose patrons were obviously strolling in, he was distinctly attracted.

He entered one of the saloons and stood watching a game of cards, or thus he seemed to be occupied. As a matter of fact, his eyes were constantly upon the alert, roving about the room to wherever a man was in the act of paying for a round of drinks, that a fat wallet might be located.

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It was that blow that saved the mate's life, for when Billy came to be found himself in a dark and smelly hole, chained and padlocked at a stanchion.

They kept Billy there for a week, but every day the captain visited him in an attempt to show him the error of his way. The medium used by the skipper for impressing his ideas of discipline upon Billy was the large, hard stick.

As the hour drew lay still it was necessary to carry Billy above to keep the rats from devouring him, for the continued beatings and starvation had reduced him to little more than an unconscious mass of raw bleeding meat.

"There," remarked the skipper, as he viewed his work by the light of day, "guess that fellow'll know his place next time an officer an' a gentleman speaks to him."

That Billy survived is one of the hitherto unrecorded miracles of the power of matter over mind. A man of intellect, of imagination—a being of nerves—would have succumbed to shock alone, but Billy was not as these. He stood still and thoughtful, except for half-formed ideas of revenge, until nature, unaided, built up what the captain had so ruthlessly torn down.

Ten days after they brought him up from the hold Billy was limping about the deck of the Halfmoon doing light manual labor. From the others' point of view he was a man that he was not the only member of the crew who had been shanghaied.

Aids from a half dozen reckless men from the criminal classes who had signed voluntarily, either because they could not get a berth upon a decent ship or desired to fit as quietly from the law zone of the United States as possible, now manning the vessel had been signed regularly.

They were as tough and vicious a lot as fate had ever forgotten in one forecastle, and with them Billy Byrne felt perfectly at home. His early threats of awful vengeance to be wreaked upon the mate and skipper had subsided with the rough but sensible advice of the captain that he was to harbor the assault that Billy had made upon him other than to assign the most dangerous or disagreeable duties of the ship to the mucker whenever it was possible to do so, but the result of this was to hasten Billy's nautical education, and keep him in excellent physical trim.

All traces of alcohol had long since vanished from the young man's system. His face showed the effects of his enforced abstinence in a marked degree. Simms, the red, puffy, blotchy complexion had given way to clear, tanned skin; bright eyes supplanted the heavy, bloodshot things that had given the bestial expression to his face in the past.

His features, always regular and strong, had taken on a peculiarly refined dignity from the salt air, the clean life, and the dangerous occupation of a deep-sea sailor, that would have put Kelly's gang to a pinch to have recognized their erstwhile crony had he suddenly appeared in their midst in the alley back of the feed store on Grand avenue.

With the new life Billy found himself taking on a new character. He surprised himself smiling at his work—the work whose chief life up until now had been devoted to dodging honest labor, whose motto had been: "The world owes me a living, and it's up to me to collect it."

Also, he was surprised to discover that he liked to work, that he took keen pride in striving to outdo the men who worked with him, and that, since he had no business to do, he would do anything to get on, which the captain entertained of Billy since the episode of the forecastle, went far to making his life more endurable on board the Halfmoon.

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Enjoying his work, the life was not an unpleasant one for the mucker. The men of the forecastle were in a marked degree, Simms and the other members of the crew, of any other ilk, so he handled them roughly, using his horny fist and the short, heavy stick that he had with the exception of an argument or a banter with the skipper. Billy had had served before the mast in the past, so that a ship's discipline was to a certain measure ingrained in them all.

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CHAPTER II The Halfmoon

WHEN Billy opened his eyes again he could not recall, for the instant, very much of his immediate past. At last he remembered, with painful regret, the drunken sailor it had been his intention to roll.

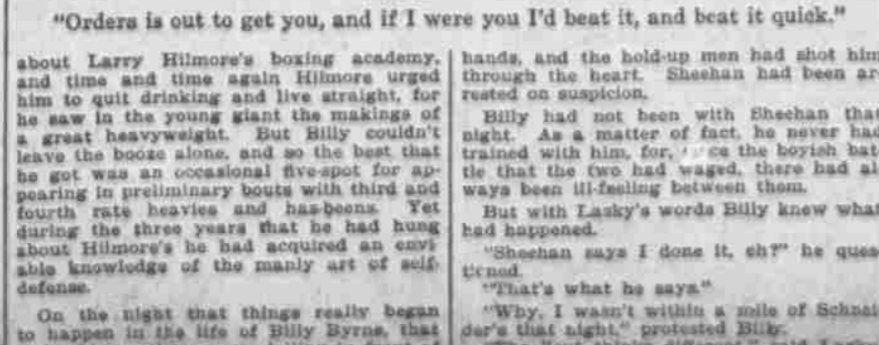
He felt deeply chagrined that his rightful prey should have escaped him. He couldn't understand how it had happened.

"That's what he says."

"Why, I wasn't within a mile of Schneider's that night," protested Billy.

"The fleet thinks different," said Laskey. "If he only tried to work you, you'd always been too sick to get kicked."

"I looked about the room in which he



"Orders is out to get you, and if I were you I'd beat it, and beat it quick."

Continued in
Monday's
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