

Tapeticker chooses to consider that the money is all what you have saved yourself, I think I might stretch a point and allow him to think so.

"The young man's gratitude was quite touching. I really did feel sorry for him and his friends. Of course, I renewed my caution of secrecy, and he promised to respect my confidence in any negotiations he might make. We made an appointment for the morning, but he didn't show up. I sat in that nine-by-twelve sweat box with cramps in my spine and one ear stretching out to catch his gentle footstep, wasting all the fleeting moments between ten in the morning and three in the afternoon. At three o'clock a scrubby little messenger-boy brought in a note. It was from Henry, and said that he had been prevented from calling, but that he hoped to be on deck with the meretricious mazuma the day following. No time specified, mind you. I was to sit there and cut out paper-dolls or something until he got good and ready to allow me to shower wealth on him. (Gall! Well, I should remark! I don't know any better company than I am, but I get tired of myself sometimes and I want a change, and here I had fooled away three precious days on this graft as it was—72 golden hours, set with four thousand three hundred and twenty diamond minutes.

"Winnie quit me cold. There wasn't enough excitement about it for her. I had a notion to drop it myself, as patient as I am.

"I saw clearly then that I ought to have waltzed him over to the bank the first day, acquired his stuff, and faded away, but I got stuck on myself in the character of Jim Tapeticker's dough disseminator, and my artistic vanity threw me off my base. I've lost money more than once from my sensitive

aversion to sandpaper methods. I foresaw complications now. Still, the only thing I could do was to play it out, so I went down to the office next day and put in a busy afternoon shaking dice with myself.

"I went down to Cary's at noon and snatched a hasty bite, and then hustled back to find the door unlocked and Frankfurter Steggs fumigating the premises with a stockyards zephyr. He wanted to unfold a scheme he had for organising a lottery. He had found an engraver who would do the essential part of the organisation for a rake-off, and the remaining task of distributing tickets and receiving proceeds of the sales, less the sellers' commissions, he proposed to undertake with my assistance. I put him out and opened all the windows and just got the shop aired when Henry came.

"Well," he announced gleefully, "I've got £500! I was afraid I wouldn't be able to raise any more than I had because the friends I went to didn't like to lend without knowing exactly what I was going to do with it, although I told them I would certainly return it within a week or two."

"It's a distrustful world," I sighed. "Even my mother objected to letting me have it," he prattled artlessly. "I don't blame her so much, because it's about all she has, and as I'm expecting to get married pretty soon, of course I can't be expected to live with her then and pay board."

"Of course not," I agreed. "But I talked her over," he resumed. "I told her I'd give her £10 for the use of it if things went the way I expected. I said that, of course, because it wouldn't be fair for me to oblige myself to pay her anything if her money didn't bring me in something extra."

"Certainly not," I said. At the same time, I couldn't help gagging. He was certainly a luluette. I wanted to open the windows again. I had taken him for a fairly decent boy at first—nothing worse about him than an undue desire for easy money which I had supposed to check by a wholesome little chunk of experience.

"Now I found myself up against it. I couldn't get his hide without flaying the old lady as well. I ain't sentimental. People have to have something hard to cut their wisdom teeth on, and I've been pretty rough on the gums of society at times; but I've got a weakness for mothers, never having had one of my own, to my knowledge, and it seemed pretty tough to me to hear Henry figuring on how little he could put the old lady off with and speculating on the chances that she'd have a pretty tough time of it when he quit her.

"I looked at him to size him up. He was a husky guy, however. I could see that, and I gave up my first idea, which was to take him by the neck and drop him gently down the elevator shaft. Then the thought of the bunch of money qualified my righteous indignation. It was too late to make any further play about Tapeticker. It would have quered the whole thing. I made up my mind that I'd take the pot and restitute to the old lady, with a note advising her not to let Henry darling get his hooks on the wad again. I don't say that I would have done it, mind you. I just made up my mind that I would do it.

"I'll write you a receipt for it," I said. It was hard work to smile, but I smiled.

"By the way," I added, "is your mother's address the same as the one you've given me?"

"He smiled, too, and to my amaze-

ment he pulled a swell silver and morocco cigarette-case from his pocket, lit a cigarette, and blew a puff of smoke over my way.

"What do you want to know for?" he asked. "You needn't think you can do her any good with Mr Tapeticker. She can work him to the queen's taste without any assistance from anyone."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "He grinned, and dug into his breast pocket again. This time he fished out a cardcase, and taking out a card, spun it dexterously with his finger and thumb so that it alighted on my desk right side up. It read:

"Mr James Poole Tapeticker, Jr."  
"The office clock ticked several times.

"Will you give me one of those collie-nibs?" I asked faintly. "I don't quite understand, and I might think better if I smoked."

"Help yourself," he said, "and when you feel better I'll buy you a drink. I meant to have prolonged the pleasures of anticipation for you a day or two longer, but I've got to leave town to-night. Say, I don't know whether you can appreciate this as much as I do. Do you know whom I gave my seat to in the car?"

"Don't ask me anything," I protested.

"It was father," he giggled. "A man of forbidding exterior, but with a wealth of kindness, and a generosity almost amounting to prodigality." Oh! I told him about it! Oh, dear!

"He choked, and the cigarette smoke got into his lungs and strangled him. He got out of that spasm and went into another.

"I pulled down the cover of my desk put on my hat, and touched him on the shoulder.

"If you're pretty near through," I said, "I'd like to lock up the office."

# THE DUEL ON THE TRAIL

By Charles G. D. Roberts

WHITE and soft over the wide, sloping upland lay the snow, marked across with the zig-zag, gray lines of the fences, and spotted here and there with little clumps of woods or patches of bushy pasture. The sky above was as white as the earth below, being mantled with snow-laden cloud not yet ready to spill its feathery burden on the world. One little farmhouse, far down the valley, served but to emphasize the spacious emptiness of the silent winter landscape.

Out from one of the snow-streaked thickets jumped a white rabbit, its long ears waving nervously, and paused for a second to look back with a frightened air. It had realised that some enemy was on its trail, but what that enemy was it did not know. After this moment of perilous hesitation, it went leaping forward across the open, leaving a vivid track in the soft surface snow. The little animal's discreet alarm, however, was dangerously corrupted by its curiosity; and at the lower edge of the field, before going through a snake fence and entering another thicket, it stopped, stood up as erect as possible on its strong hind quarters and again looked back. As it did so the unknown enemy revealed himself, just emerging, a slender and sinister black shape, from the upper thicket. A quiver of fear passed over the rabbit's nerves. Its curiosity all effaced it, it went through the fence with an elongated leap and plunged into the bushes in a panic. Here it doubled upon itself twice in a short circle, trusting by this well-worn device to confuse the unswerving pursuer. Then, breaking out upon the lower side of the thicket, it resumed its headlong flight across the fields.

Meanwhile the enemy, a large mink, was following the trail with the dogged persistence of a sleuth-hound. Sure of his methods, he did not pause to see what the quarry was doing, but kept his eyes and nose occupied with the fresh tracks. His speed was not less than that of the rabbit, and his endurance vastly greater. Being very long in the body, and extremely short in the legs, he ran in a most peculiar fashion,

arching his lithe back almost like a measuring-worm and straightening out like a steel spring suddenly released. These sinuous bounds were grotesque enough in appearance, but singularly

effective. The trail they made, overlapping that of the rabbit, but quite distinct from it, varied according to the depth of the surface snow. Where the snow lay thin, just deep enough to receive

an imprint, the mink's small feet left a series of delicate, innocent-looking marks, much less formidable in appearance than those of the padded fugitive. But where the loose snow had gathered deeper the mink's long body and sinewy tail from time to time stamped themselves unmistakably.

When the mink reached the second thicket, his keen and experienced craft penetrated at once the poor ruses of the fugitive. Cutting across the circlings of the trail, he picked it up again with implacable precision, making almost a straight line through the underbrush. When he emerged again into the open the rabbit was in full view ahead.

The next strip of woodland in the fugitive's path was narrow and dense. Below it, in a patch of hillocky pasture-ground sloping to a pond of steel-bright ice, a red fox was diligently hunting. He ran hither and thither, furtive but seemingly erratic, poking his nose into half-covered moss-tufts and under the roots of dead stumps, looking for mice or shrews. He found a couple of the latter, but these were small satisfaction to his vigorous winter appetite. Presently he paused, lifted his narrow cunning nose toward the woods and appeared to ponder the advisability of going on a rabbit hunt. His fine tawny ample bush of a tail gently swept the light snow behind him as he stood undecided.

All at once he crouched flat upon the snow quivering with excitement, like a puppy about to jump at a wind-blown leaf. He had seen the rabbit emerging from the woods. Absolutely motionless he lay, so still that in spite of his warm colouring he might have been taken for a fragment of dead wood. And as he watched, tense with anticipation, he saw the rabbit run into a long, hollow log, which lay half veiled in a cluster of dead weeds. Instantly he darted forward, ran at top speed, and crouched before the lower end of the log, where he knew the rabbit must come out.

Within a dozen seconds the mink arrived, and followed the fugitive straight into his ineffectual retreat. Such narrow quarters were just what the mink loved. The next instant the rabbit shot forth—to be caught in mid-air by the



As the mink darted out of the log he stopped short and stared at the intruder.

Continued on page 13.