

ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 272

CONTENTS FOR MAY 1, 1937

Number 5

- Grand National—*First of five parts*.....Judson P. Philips 6
A blue-ribbon novel of the Sport of Kings
- Burnout—*Short Story*.....James Stevens 29
The be-wolf of the big woods prowls for the last time
- The Faith Unfaithful—*Complete Novelet*.....William Corcoran 40
O'Shaughnessy, soldier of fortune, once had a thing to die for
- War for Sale—*Second of four parts*.....Max Brand 71
A Yankee playboy spies on the spies of Europe
- Arctic Justice—*Verse*.....Harold Willard Gleason 95
The spoiler's doom—la longue traverse
- Revolution—with Pictures—*Four of five parts*..Eustace L. Adams 96
Mobs in the street and rebellion rampant
- Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 112
Judges Parker and Bean—Frontier Heroes
- Camera Tells a Lie—*Short Story*.....Dale Clark 114
A forty dollar camera snaps a twelve thousand dollar picture
- Doomed Liner—*Conclusion*.....Garnett Radcliffe 125
What final doom awaits the Queen of the Atlantic?

- Argonotes 141
- Looking Ahead! 144

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Arctic Justice

By HAROLD WILLARD GLEASON

I. The Crime

Five snowbound moons of shuddering loneliness
The Arctic trapper fought with ruthless foes:
With winter, swift to strike at man's distress;
With gnawing hunger haunting all repose;
With prowling wolf and keen-fanged carcajou
That stalked him, slavering, savage, on the trail;
With fear—the howl of phantom loup-garou
Shrill in the shadows round his wangan frail.
Then, with the crash and roar of shattering ice,
The slithering hush of snow from bush and tree,
Came March—reprieve! To him no common vice
Beckoned . . . But God! *five months of fish and tea!*
He robbed a cache—the mark H. B* it bore—
And wolfed till, glutted, he could gorge no more . . .

II. The Punishment

Back at the Post he scanned each face . . . No eye
Of those grim fur-clad factors gathered there
Showed pity . . . Downward pressed the leaden sky;
Chill stinging sleet with menace filled the air.
No mercy . . . Woe betide the waster rash,
The selfish fool who, unassailed by need,
Dare violate a cairn-protected cache,
Stern sacred symbol of the Arctic creed!
Dogs snapped and snarled . . . He slung upon his back
The futile thong-bound pouch of food allowed
(Ironic touch!) to stay his lonely track
Into the dread white void; then, shoulders bowed,
Lurched outward, racquettes creaking, with a curse,
To face a spoiler's doom—*la longue traverse* . . .

III. Retribution

“Come soon! Come soon!” Through crusted lips the prayer
Wailed eerily across the frozen waste . . .
With broken back the outcast huddled there
(Already miles away, with clumsy haste
Shuffling, taxed racquettes groaning, toward the Post
A chance-met *courrier* braved bleak wilderness
For help . . .) Before the exile like a ghost
Black gathering storm-clouds mocked his sore distress.
Each move sheer sweating agony, he fed
The blaze beside him from a scanty store
Of jack-pine branches . . . Faint, afar, the dread
Howl of a wolf rose shrill . . . He knew no more . . .
Ere gale-torn scud revealed a baleful moon,
His piteous plea was answered—*death came soon* . . .

*Hudson's Bay