

The Troubled Life

By
WELDON D. WOODSON
Photos Courtesy Author

*The only fame Annie
was cruel—for*



In most of her numbers Annie Sylvester wore tights, but this one called for a bustle dress, obviously not the ideal attire for easy cycling!

of a Bicyclienne

Sylvester ever knew was atop a spinning unicycle, but the symbolism mankind's oldest instrument of torture was the wheel...

IN 1885 in San Francisco, a 5'1", 105-pound curvaceous young beauty in pink satin tights rode a unicycle, or the one wheel, to the applause and delight of spectators. Until then, no woman had ever attempted it.

Dismounting from her wheel, improvised by removing the backbone from the handlebars of a 48-inch Columbia bicycle, she bowed, smiling graciously. On this occasion she received a diamond-studded gold medal from the San Francisco and Oakland Bicycle Club as the "World's Champion Trick and Fancy Bicyclienne." No girl before or since has approached

her in hazardous acrobatics on the bicycle.

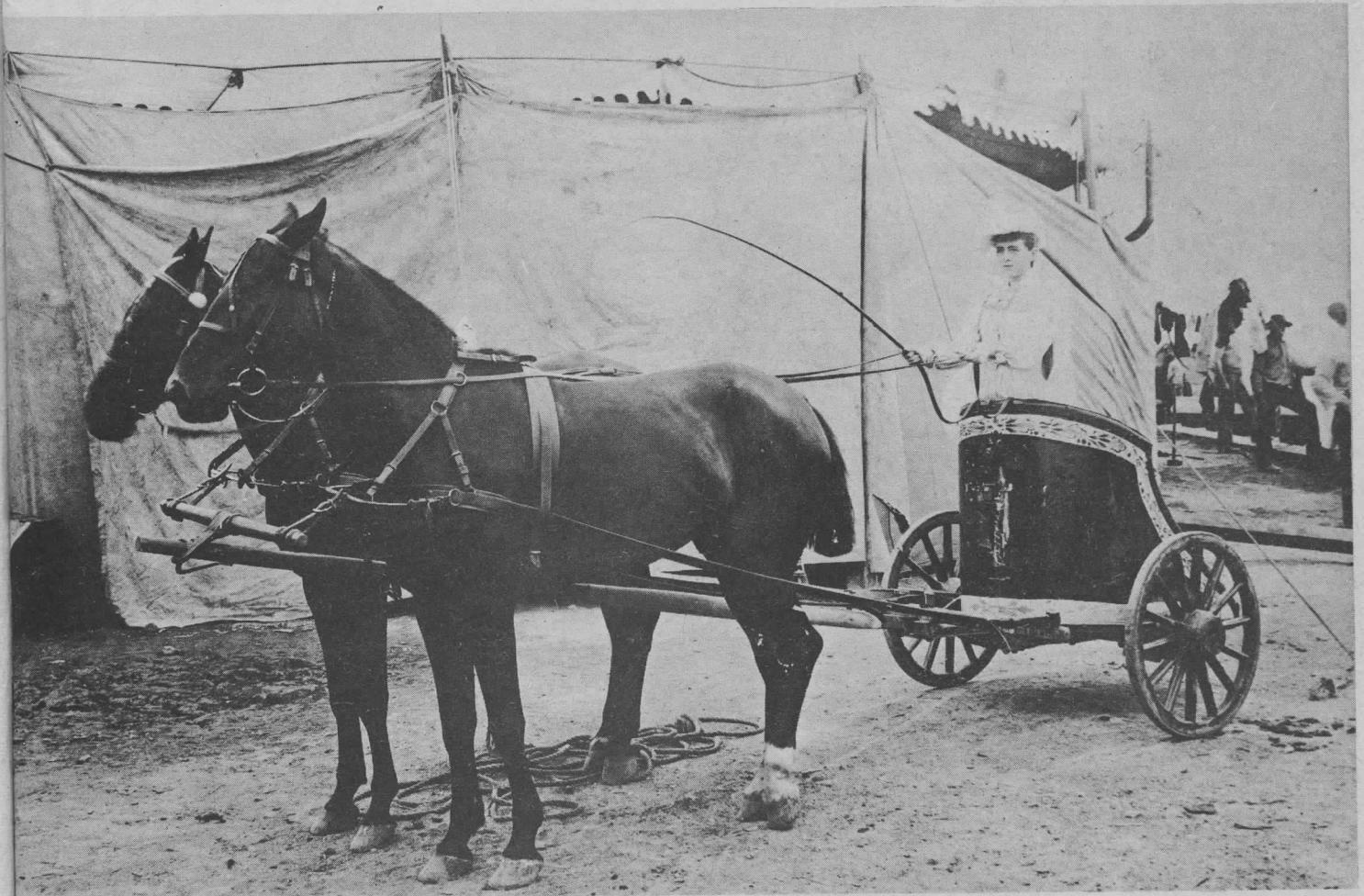
Later her repertoire would include a 12-foot pyramid act, with both feet over the handlebars. One manager, lusting for more sensationalism, encircled her with six lions, the leader of whom, Nero, had killed a man. One misstep and she would have been their meat.

Triumphant as this girl was at the moment, however, her life would be marred by repeated tragedy. She would be in the worst circus train wreck on this continent, in which cries of dying men mingled with roars of escaped jun-

gle animals. She was to be wed four times, three of the marriages ending in bitter divorce; one, when she killed her husband with a Colt .45 she kept cached under her pillow.

In 1885, Annie already had tasted the dregs of marital strife. Growing up on a farm near Florissant, Missouri, a suburb of St. Louis, at sixteen she married Fred Baltz, a local German youth her own age. She had a twelve-pound son by him, but the baby died when a year old. With his death went whatever affection she had for Baltz. Other than her accusation, "He was cruel to me," she

Annie brandishes the whip from her chariot while with Walter L. Main's circus.



never divulged the cause of their estrangement.

Divorced, Annie boarded a train for Chicago to hunt a job. Scanning the want ads, she spotted an insertion by Captain Frank E. Yates in which he wanted to hire three girls "of fine form and fine physique" to ride a bicycle. They were to apply at the Leland Hotel.

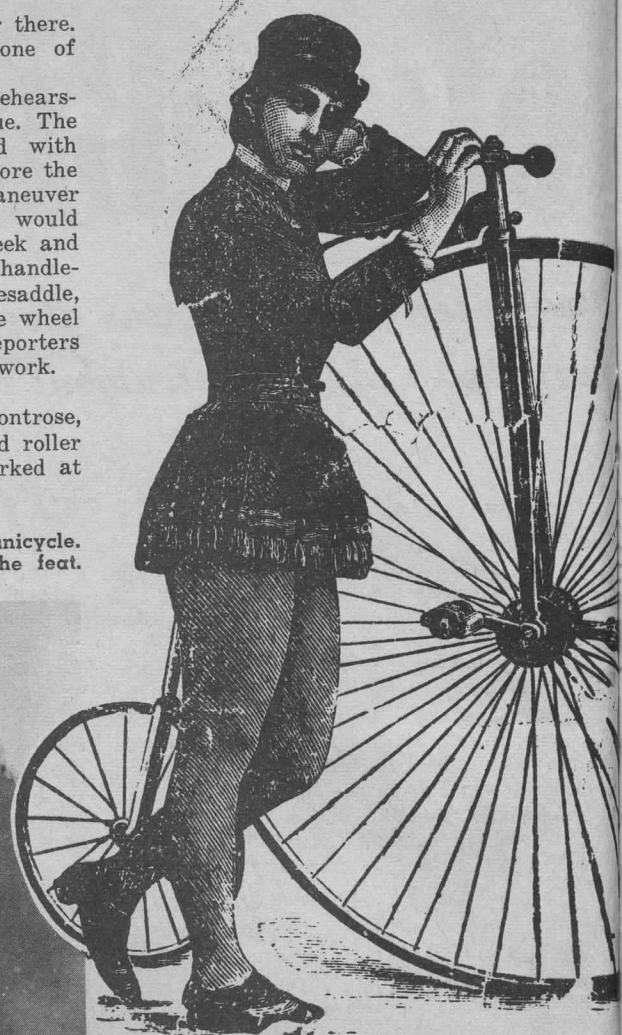
Annie puzzled over the requisite of "fine form," though she knew the meaning of "fine physique." She was full-breasted; her thighs and legs proportionately contoured. Perhaps that was what he meant, she naively reasoned. As for riding a bicycle, she had never seen one, let alone performed on one. But the need of a job drove her to the hotel. Already, scores of girls milled in the lobby; short-

ly, several hundred would throng there. Captain Yates winnowed two, one of whom was Annie.

He put them to work at once rehearsing in a hall on Wabash Avenue. The practice room was interspersed with large, round, feather pillows. Before the week ended, Annie could maneuver around the pillows; her pedals would just graze the floor. Another week and she could throw one foot over the handlebars, then both feet; do a sidesaddle, then swing on the side while the wheel spun full speed. Newspaper reporters came, watched, drooled over her work.

ANNIE first appeared in Montrose, Pennsylvania, at the fair and roller skating rink. Returning, she worked at

Below, in 1885 Annie Sylvester was acclaimed the first female to master the unicycle. She is shown wearing the diamond-studded gold medal awarded her for the feat.



Above, a line cut from an advertisement featuring Annie's act.

Pullman, Illinois at the Regetta. Then it was back to Chicago at the GAR Reunion, followed by a stint at the state fair and roller skating rink in Des Moines. She repeated this pattern until her performance in 1885 in San Francisco.

Annie's parents were devout Catholics, who raised twelve children; six their own, a like number adopted. Her religious heritage influenced her choice of stage names. Born Annie Elizabeth James, she changed it to Sylvester, after the saint by that name.

After the San Francisco show, she again worked the Midwest, where for street dress she wore a beaver-trimmed suit, a beaver cape and a beaver muff. For protection she carried a hair-trigger, Colt .45 hidden in the muff, a silk handkerchief over the muzzle. Prior to appearing in the ring, Annie would hand her gun to her manager. After the show he would pay her forty silver dollars which she scooped into her muff. The manager would then hand her the Colt before a lobby full of gaping men. Annie would position the gun in her muff in the usual manner.

When she could, at night, she would hail a carriage for transportation to her hotel. Often none was available; she would walk alone. Annie hugged the middle of the road, tensed to shoot should a passerby make a threatening gesture. But knowledge of her and her arsenal disseminated so widely that no one dared molest her.

saved him from death. Annie threatened to sue the railroad company but didn't.

In Atlanta she performed in a show being put on in a city park. Each day at 4 p.m. prior to her bicycle act, she paraded through the streets in a chariot with an inscription in boxcar letters: "Harry Silverman Cigar Store." She thus advertised both the show and Mr. Silverman's tobacco business.

Some months later a letter arrived lamenting the ignominious demise of the snake. Mrs. Ready wrote that one day she and her husband had quarreled about who owned him. With the wife holding on to the head-end, the husband, the tail section, they continued their tug of war for several minutes. Suddenly Mr. Ready grabbed his straight-edge razor from the dresser and sliced the snake half in two—two-and-a-half-foot portions for each. Annie never learned who got the rattles.



Above, Annie performing.

George Clayton, conductor on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, knew of her and her bicycle act, but he did not know that she went armed with a .45. Once she boarded his train and he failed to call her station, throwing her more than a hundred miles out of her way. She was furious. They argued over this and he, cursing and demanding to see her ticket, grabbed her arm. She drew her .45 and pulled the trigger. At that instant he flung his hand under the hammer, which

Although her mainstay was her bicycle riding, Annie had broadened her act to embrace almost anything linked with entertainment, including snake charming. A five-foot rattlesnake with fifteen rattles, whose fangs she personally extracted, was permitted to wrap himself around her neck. When Annie left Atlanta she sold the snake to a Mr. and Mrs. Ready for their museum. She graciously explained to Mrs. Ready how to remove the fangs.

FROM the roller skating rinks, fairs and GAR reunions, Annie progressed to circuses, then vaudeville, playing the leading theaters in the United States. While with Walter L. Main's Circus she enjoyed her peak moments—but also suffered shock and became bedridden.

Not only did she do her bicycle act under the Big Top, she drove in the two- and four-horse chariot races, the three-horse tandem race, and the flat races. As a bonus she did fire-eating in the concerts and worked some of the wild animals, including the lions.

On May 29, 1893 the show put on a performance at Houtzdale, Pennsylvania. At two o'clock the following morning, the circus train left for Lewiston, where it had scheduled an exhibit for Decoration Day. As Annie recalled, the train consisted of ten flat cars, three stock cars, a combination car, and three sleepers. The flat cars contained the wagons, calliope, other vehicles with the caged animals, the combination car, and a lunch counter. On board were over 300 people, all associated with the circus.

"The run was made without incident," Annie recounted, "until in the vicinity of McCann's Crossing, four miles north of Tyrone on the Tyrone and Clearfield branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad. At 5:30 a.m., there was a terrific crash and the forward cars left the track, those in the rear with their heavy freight piling rapidly upon and around them."

The engine became detached from the train, Annie said, and did not leave the track. The heavily laden combination car swung around and directly across the track, forming a barrier against which the sleepers came to a standstill, the occupants receiving a severe jolt but suffering no further injury.

"Not so well, however, fared those who occupied the flat and stock cars," Annie recalled. "These cars, wagons, stock, wild animals and men were thrown in all directions. An awful silence followed the crash, then we heard the cries of the wounded, the rush of the unrestrained animals and the crackling of timbers."

Donning her robe over her nightgown, she plunged out of the sleeper barefoot. Her feet hardly touched ground before she saw through the haze a crowd that shrouded the ticket wagon where Frank Train, the treasurer, had been sleeping when the train crashed. Annie joined them.

A beam against Train's chest pinned him underneath the wreck. Conscious, he gasped to those removing the timbers

that he would not survive. Just as they lifted the beam from him he died. Also dead were William Heverly, brakeman, and three laborers. Another laborer, Louie Champaign, received internal injuries and was taken to a hospital, where he died June 1.

Tyrone physicians arrived early. They asked the women to assist, but only Annie and two friends, Inez Palmer and Mrs. James Stowe, volunteered. The others shunned the sight of blood. Annie carried the injured out of the sun and laid them under the shade of trees. She secured water to moisten their parched mouths.

Besides the human carnage, sixteen animal cages had broken open, and the released beasts were killed, maimed or had escaped to the fields and woods. As Annie administered to the wounded, three lions she had trained stood by her side

like family dogs, and remained there for two hours before wandering into the forest back of her. One of these subsequently was killed; the other two, captured.

A Bengal tiger was also captured, but another made his way to the farm of Alfred Thomas where he killed a cow and was himself shot by Thomas. A silver tip panther remained at large until the night of May 31, when he was shot. One of two elephants was injured; the other safely withstood the wreck.

Main owned 180 head of horses, 52 of which were killed, including the pair of black beauties Annie drove in the two-horse chariot race. Snowflake, valued at \$20,000, the intelligent leader of Joseph Berris' six-horse team, died from injuries, as did all the horses used by Tony Lowande, the principal rider.

The tracks were cleared by mid-afternoon, when a special train carried the wounded to a hospital in Altoona. At 5 p.m., a relief train took the survivors to Tyrone. The strain had been so much on Annie that she was hospitalized there for two weeks.

IN ALL, Annie Sylvester played with fifteen large and small circuses, beginning with the W. W. Cole Circus out of Cleveland. Others were the Main Company, Miles Orton's Circus, Adam Forepaugh's Circus and A. Gardener's Circus. While with Gardner, Annie sailed to South America, where she performed in Caracas, Venezuela.

Wherever she worked, she was not without beaux. One, Charles Bachtel, a cornetist who led the band of the circus with which she traveled, coaxed her into

(Continued on page 39)

Annie poses on her high speed bicycle.



patch, where they stayed all night. They say they would not go back there again with fifty men. I could write all day about the many things that have been seen around the McDow hole. Forty years ago it was a real beauty spot. It is surrounded by immense pecan trees, as I said before. The place is now a fine swimming hole and many people go there these hot days, but few let the sun go down while they are in the shadow of its trees.

The Troubled Life of a Bicycienne

(Continued from page 20)

marrying him. She showered him with gifts, including a cornet with his name inscribed on it. But this marriage, as had her first, went on the rocks. There was incessant haggling over how much each should contribute to household expenses.

Annie, in a huff, packed her bags and vacationed with her parents in Florissant. Her mother had taken in twenty-five-year-old Louis W. Holladay as a boarder. Holladay immediately fell for Annie. He pleaded that they get married at once; threatened to commit suicide if they did not. Annie pointed out that that was impossible for, after all, she was still married to Bachtel.

As he courted her, Annie learned that his father, Jesse W. Holladay, was a Chicago millionaire. His mother, Louvine, was from the fabulously rich Ewing family. The father administered the Ewing estate in his office at 26 North Clark Street. Louis had two brothers, Ben and Tom, and a sister Maude, familiarly called Babe. The family lived lavishly

in their mansion at 536 Dearborn Avenue. Marrying into such wealth could mean retirement for Annie, although she attempted not to let that fact influence her.

Playing in Chicago she met his sister Maude backstage. When Maude presented her with a bouquet of American beauty roses, whose attached card read: "With love, Mother and Babe," it did not take much persuasion for Annie to accept young Holladay's proposal.

Louis, marshaling his money, obtained top legal counsel, and Annie's divorce from Bachtel was granted in Boston in October 1897. That same day, she and Louis married in St. Louis.

Within less than a week, the new Mrs. Holladay discovered that her husband was an alcoholic, in disfavor with his parents due to a long train of dissipations. Although the distaff side of Louis' family had encouraged the marriage, his father unbeknownst to Annie had fought this mesalliance with a "variety actress."

The elder Holladay cut Louis off from the family and divested him of any competence. But his mother supplied him with clothes and set up a monthly allowance of \$40, to be paid him by Alexander Young, a St. Louis attorney. The money came directly to Louis, who spent it for liquor to the last cent. Not only that, he took to morphine and began drinking absinthe.

Resignedly, Annie went on the road with her bicycle, to support both of them. Wherever they went, it was the same story—his getting crazy drunk upon receipt of his remittance. At such times he would spew out to her the vilest names. Once he advanced upon her with a razor, swearing that he would kill her. She escaped only by flight.

In December 1898, she was playing in Houston; Louis had gotten his stipend. As usual, he boozed it away. Cursing uncontrollably Louis pommelled Annie with his fists until she slumped unconscious.

Louis Holladay sobered up in jail and begged his wife to get him out. Despite her efforts, however, the court bound him over to the grand jury. Annie caught a train to Chicago and pleaded with his mother to help, who in turn appealed to the father. Through his influence, buttered with money, the father finally was able to free his son.

WITH ANNIE trapped under the roof of the Holladay mansion, the mother reproved her, saying that the family felt her nomadic theatrical career created part of the trouble. If Annie would accommodate herself to some other occupation, then things would better. Annie remonstrated that there was nothing she could do but ride a wheel.

At last, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law came to terms. Annie agreed to relinquish acting, and operate a theatrical hotel. She and Louis leased a boarding house in the extreme west edge of St. Louis adjacent to the suburb of Wellston. The lease contract showed the front porch and dining room located in St. Louis County; their bedroom in the city. The hotel sat on a terrace across from streetcar tracks fronting the back gate of Suburban Garden, a swank theater specializing in minstrel shows.

Annie pawned her jewelry to pay for the lease. For Louis' contribution, his mother in his behalf ordered seven large dry goods boxes from Marshall Field heaped with the finest linen—sheets, pillow cases, napkins, tablecloths, bed-

In Atlanta, Georgia, Annie drove this chariot down the streets, advertising both the show and a sponsoring cigar business.



spreads, towels and throws for the dressers and washstands.

After hiring two Negro servant girls, Bessie Lewis and her sister, the Holladays opened for business in mid-May 1899. By nightfall of the first day their place was full. This auspicious beginning, however, gave little encouragement to Annie, for Louis never relinquished the bottle. On one occasion he brandished a razor, which Bessie witnessed; he frequently bickered with the tenants.

On Friday night, July 14, Annie, distraught, sat on the rail of the porch; Louis, having received his check that morning, had anchored himself on a stool at the corner saloon. She pensively stared down into the myriad of lights at the Garden, and became melancholy at the sound of its music. Dropping to her feet, Annie retreated to her bedroom, undressed, slipped into a new flannelette Mother Hubbard nightgown and turned her night lamp low. She crawled under a sheet and lay there, brooding.

Within a few moments, Bessie bounded into her room and warned, "Oh, Mrs. Holladay, Mr. Holladay's coming and he's awful drunk. Will we give him his supper?"

"Haven't you got his supper in the warming oven?"

"Yes, ma'm, I have."

"Then put it on the table. If he speaks to you and your sister, answer him. Then go to your room."

Later Annie could hear him talking to them, since the dining room opened into her bedroom. Louis repeatedly cursed her by name.

At the earliest opportunity, Bessie's sister withdrew to her room, next to Annie's. Bessie would have followed, but she remembered she had not taken the breakfast order. With pad and pencil, she stole into Annie's room.

Having gorged his fill, Louis groped to his feet and clattered dishes against the floor; banged furniture against furniture. Terrified, and not having a phone in the house, Annie told Bessie to tell her sister to run to the back gate of the Suburban Garden and call the police.

In a few minutes the sister darted back and sobbed to Bessie that the guard at the gate refused to come; neither would he call any of several policemen stationed about the Garden. He barred her from going through the gate, for the theater drew the color-line. Informed of this Annie instructed Bessie to tell her sister to hurry to Wellston for help.

By this time, Annie heard Louis' heavy footsteps lurching toward her room. She held him back at the door, saying, "Louis, I'm awful sick. Lie down in another room."

"I want blood; I want to see blood. I want to kill some s-o-b," he answered, flinging his arms around her neck.

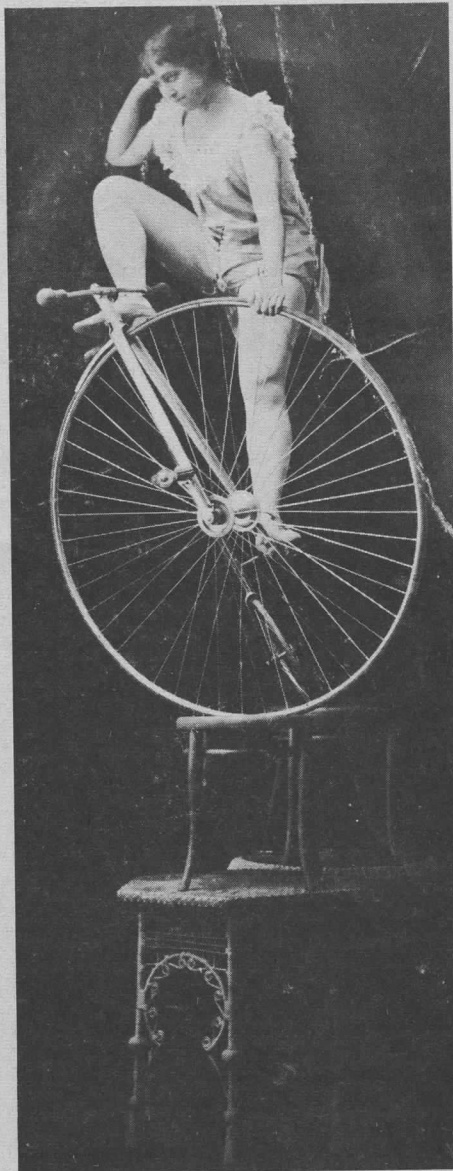
Bessie sprang upon a chair by the bed and screamed. This brought no one, for the tenants were at the theater. Annie and Louis wrestled; he clawed her throat and began to choke her. If only

the Negro girl would return with the police, she prayed.

Bessie's sister had started down the cinder path between the streetcar rails, as there were no sidewalks. It was 9:30, and pitch dark. Soon she encountered a young man on his way to Annie's place to borrow a lamp, his sister suddenly having taken sick, which necessitated extra light. He accompanied the maid to Wellston, but they were unable to find a policeman. Frantically he phoned Brad Station on Easton Avenue. "Send a patrol as quick as you can; a man's murdering his wife and will have her dead!"

In the meantime, Louis and Annie continued to struggle. When he threw her on the bed, half conscious, she fumbled under her pillow and found the Colt .45 she had concealed there. Dragging her again to her feet Louis embedded his fingers in her throat; it was then Annie pulled the trigger.

The bullet passed through the flannel nightgown, igniting it. Bessie put out the fire. The bullet had coursed under



Above, Annie performing one of her stunts, a 12-foot pyramid act.

her breast and through her left sleeve, grazing her heart. It tore through Louis' midriff and the gaping wound was exposed to Annie's view.

"I'm shot!" Louis cried, careening to the porch. "Annie, please come help me," he pleaded.

And she went and held his head, sobbing as his mind cleared from the fog of liquor and he begged forgiveness. "The fault was mine. Don't worry, dear; don't worry. And don't leave me."

Bessie's sister and the police arrived, but they saw they were too late. One dashed to the Garden and phoned for Dr. G. W. Thompson.

Hearing the shooting, the show at the Garden closed for the night. The cast swarmed up the hill. In the vanguard were Al Blanchard, a singer, and Walter Abeling, an actor. They overheard Louis absolve Annie of guilt, first to her, then to Dr. Thompson.

It was decided to take Louis to the Baptist Sanitarium, the nearest hospital. A streetcar was chartered. To reach it from the terrace home, Louis, on a cot, had to be taken down steep steps.

He clung to Annie's hand. "Louis, turn loose. I can't walk by your side; there's no room," she implored. So he hung his arm over his head and gripped her hand as she trailed behind him. When those bearing him reached the streetcar, they attempted to thrust the cot through the door, but it was too narrow. The cot would have to be shoved through a wide window. Louis still squeezed Annie's hand. "Louis, turn loose. I can't climb in here. I'll come right in and fix your head on the pillow."

Annie got on the car; so did Dr. Thompson and several consulting physicians he had summoned. Reporters, now on the scene, also scrambled on.

For the first time, Annie, blushing and ashamed, realized that nothing but a nightgown clothed her. Louis again grasped her hand; begged her to accompany him to the sanitarium.

"I can't, Louis. I'm in my nightgown and barefoot."

"Don't mind these doctors and reporters. Come with me; you're my wife."

"I just can't. I'll come to the sanitarium as soon as I get dressed."

The conductor started the car and had gone three blocks before she could pull loose. Annie walked back on the cinder path in her bare feet.

She found the hotel packed with people, mostly strangers. A policeman elbowed an aisle for her to get to her bedroom. After she dressed, he allowed her to cross to the Garden and apprise her mother-in-law of the shooting by telegraph. He then placed her in a patrol wagon. Annie spent the rest of the night as a prisoner at the Sixth Street Police Station.

WHEN the papers hit the street that day, they were all for her. Typically began the story in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*:

"Louis W. Holladay, profligate son of a millionaire, is slowly dying at the Baptist Sanitarium; dying as he lived, a prodigal away from his family, estranged

from relatives, unmindful of his dependents and reckless of his own life.

"Holladay is dying from a gunshot wound inflicted by his young wife, who fired in self-defense. The bullet that ploughed its way through Holladay's vitals prevented him from being a murderer, if the threats made by his whiskey-soaked brain at the time can be believed. So it may be that death at the wife's hands prevented his death on the gibbet."

Annie's brother, David James, visited her on Saturday morning. He introduced her to John I. Martin, an attorney he had hired to represent her. Martin briefly conferred with his client.

All day Saturday Annie sat in the little cell at the station house and mourned over her deed. She lashed herself unsparingly for shooting her husband, even though she did it in a moment of panic when he was on the verge of killing her.

Louis' mother telegraphed Dr. Wickes at the sanitarium that she would be unable to come to St. Louis, but asked that she be kept posted of her son's condition. She was informed that Dr. Paul Y. Tupper, attending him, was doing everything known to surgical science to save his life.

That night a storm, which had been brewing over the city all day, broke. Lightning flashed across the great clouds that lowered close to the earth. Louis, in the sanitarium, was told someone was there to see him. It was his brother Ben, accompanied by attorney Alexander Young. Ben had been summoned from Cape Girardeau, Missouri, by the news of the shooting.

Louis looked up at him and forced a smile. Ten minutes later, he was writhing in agony. "Goodbye, Ben," he whispered, "I'm dying, but Annie was not to blame." With that, Louis Holladay died—a few minutes before 9 p.m. Ben, steadied by Young, left.

The *Post Dispatch's* night editor sent a man to interview Annie at the jail. He told her, as gently as possible, of her husband's death.

Putting her head down on her knee, Annie wept softly. "Oh, if they had only let me see him! I asked and asked to be allowed to see him today, but I suppose it was against the rules.

"Did his mother come? I hope she did. She should have come. He would have liked to have seen her so much. I sent her a telegram last night so that she might get here as soon as possible."

Annie sobbed a long time. "I suppose they will take him to Chicago to bury him. They won't consult me. I would like him to be buried where I could be buried beside him when I die.

"Oh, if I had only let him kill me! If I had only known, when he wanted to kill me, how I would feel after I had killed him, I would have let him kill me. It would have been better."

NOW A WIDOW, the impact of her own peril surged upon her. She feared what the Holladays would do; felt nervous over the action the court would take.

To be sure, nothing that the mother and the sister had done warranted this

unease. In one of several telegrams, Annie's mother-in-law wired: "In my great sorrow, I cannot forget your suffering. You have my sympathy and forgiveness."

Later, she wrote Annie that she must always feel as welcome as a mother or sister to visit the grave. But Annie never did; she always suspected that the family thought she didn't care. She was afraid of Ben. He threatened to kill her. Mrs. Holladay had requested him to accompany his brother's corpse to Chicago to the family burial ground, but he shifted this chore to another brother, Tom, and tarried in St. Louis, hoping to influence the coroner's court to mete out a murder charge against Annie.

She was uncomfortable, too, because of the antagonism shown by the father, although he had not publicly vented his feelings since his son's death. On Saturday morning, in his North Clark Street office, he had told a reporter: "I know nothing of the affair. I have had nothing to do with my son for several years. He is what you might call the 'black sheep' of the family. I would rather not even talk of him, but now that the unfortunate thing has occurred, I suppose something will be said anyway.

"Yes, his marriage was one of the things which persuaded me to give him up. His conduct generally, though, had been bad. I know nothing of his wife. I do not care to discuss her or him."

The coroner's inquest began at 9:45 a.m. on Tuesday, and lasted an hour. With her attorney, John Martin, Annie sat inside the railing, attired in widow's weeds provided by her brother.

Dr. Thompson told how he had attended Louis and of Louis' telling him Annie was not to blame. Al Blanchard, the Suburban Garden singer, and Walter Abeling, the actor, each testified of going up to the house and hearing Louis affirm her innocence. Several other tenants detailed his quarrelsome ways. Letters from his mother exonerating Annie were read.

The key witness was Bessie Lewis, the Negro servant. She told of the razor Louis once had tried to use. She described the trouble before the shooting and the killing itself; identified Annie's nightgown, powder-burned and bloody.

When Annie was told that she could take the stand if she wished she said, "At the advice of my attorney, I have decided to make no statement."

Not a word against her had been uttered. The jury went out and in ten minutes returned with its verdict: "Justifiable homicide."

Attorney John Martin shook hands with her; the crowd that filled the space inside the railing did likewise. A larger group outside the railing pushed and shoved, craning necks to see the widow. Annie appeared pale; the heavy black veil almost hid her face; her raiment, tirely of black, accentuated the paleness.

Then Officer Kickham tapped her on the shoulder. Heading a procession of the curious, she went back to the Four Courts, while her attorney moved for, and won, bail for his client. The next

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logical step in this case would have been the refusal of Colonel Dick Johnson, warrant officer, to issue a warrant, which would have given Annie the freedom *de jure* that she now had *de facto*. But, mysteriously, Bessie Lewis went to Colonel Johnson and conferred with him. On hearing her statement, he said: "I shall issue a warrant holding Mrs. Holladay for murder in the second degree."

Just what the girl said he would not repeat, nor could she be found. Even her motive for going to him was obscure, for her testimony at the inquest was really what cleared Annie. Bewildered and worried, Annie questioned if Ben could have instigated Bessie's seeming double-cross.

At mid-afternoon, Colonel Johnson announced that after perusal of the testimony at the coroner's inquest, he had decided that there were no grounds for prosecution. (In October, the grand jury received the evidence, but it declined to issue an indictment.)

ANNIE decided she would not return to the stage, but would remain in private life and try to live down the notoriety which the murder had brought her. She spent a while in Florissant with her parents, to refresh herself and get her moorings. She hoped to obtain a dower, as Louis had told her that should he die first, he wanted her to have his part of the estate. So Annie waited, anticipating that her mother-in-law would institute measures in her behalf.

Arrayed against her, however, loomed truculent Ben, who brought attorney Alexander Young to Chicago to induce his father to prosecute Annie, although God only knows what the charge could have been. The senior Holladay, having better sense, turned Young down flat. Now reconciled toward Annie, he maintained that Louis would have desired that her trouble cease, and that she had been a "good wife."

Annie needed more than beneficent words, however, to feed her stomach, and since no money was forthcoming from the Holladay side, she went back to pedaling a bicycle.

The zest and fire, that in Annie's heyday had zoomed her to the crest of her profession, was lacking. The long years passed, and in 1935 she was living alone in a little seaside cottage she owned in Redondo Beach, California.

Victor Frank Cody, as he was known professionally, had courted Annie when they both traveled with Miles Orton's Circus in 1895. When they met again, he proposed. Annie asked if he still thought the same of her as in days gone by. He said he did, so she agreed to marry him. In Pasadena they got a license and waited out the required five days.

To accompany them as a witness, they picked up a "thick-lipped, ignoramus of a woman," as Annie later depicted her. This woman bought a tie and put it on Cody; threw her arms around his neck and kissed him after the wedding ceremony. Annie thought nothing of it, though avowedly annoyed. But when the

woman offered Cody a car she had in storage, together with a quarterly income of \$100 she received, Annie realized a rival warred against her. Four days after their marriage, Cody, whom she upbraided as "skunk" and "devil," left his wife and she never saw him again.

Three years later, Annie, her face furrowed from age and heartaches, was still living in the Redondo Beach Cottage and was still alone. An assortment of ailments plagued her, including a condition of her hands which induced excruciating pain that awakened her at night; she barely could write legibly. On September 13, 1938 she died.

Life had mercilessly robbed her of lasting happiness. And yet, through all the strife, Annie held to the thought that at her zenith she stood as the world's foremost female trick and fancy bicycle rider. Most of all, she was the first woman to ride the unicycle.

"And," as Annie would remind her listener with a smile, "there can be only one 'first'."

Mystery Tablet of the Big Bend

(Continued from page 15)

deep his boots could sink in the mud, and finding the water's temperature when flipped with a stick!)

All persons were now present and accounted for. Ten people, loaded with briefcases, notebooks, cameras, pebbles, sticks, and other necessary paraphernalia, cluttered the muddy creek-bottom. Our prime objective for that day was to relocate, examine and record the find-site.

IT WAS HOPED that when Donald had removed the tablet from its resting place, small fragments and residue from its weathered edges might still remain on the cave floor, thus adding more proof of the tablet's being found where they claimed. With the loss of the tablet, we had nothing to analyze in determining its composition, leaving open to question: Was the tablet made here, from material native to the Hot Springs area, or was it made elsewhere, and brought here?

Testing the cave-floor residue against samples of surrounding soil deposits would provide one of the answers we were seeking.

Until this morning we had no idea of how far the find-site might be in relationship to the Rio Grande. But now seeing Donald work his way back and forth along the ledges, we knew it would be closer than we had dared hope.

While most of us waited nervously in the creek-bed below, Charles, Ro, and Jack McGee began making anxious searches of their own. A half-hour had passed with no sign from Donald that he recognized the discovery cave. Of course, it hadn't occurred to any of us that he might not be able to find it again. Unless you were there to see what damage four men's feet were doing to the frail network of ledges, you would fail to understand just how possible it was for Donald's cave to have slipped off into the creek below.

Sixteen hands and feet were causing that many landslides per second, in quick avalanches only equaled in the snowbound Alps. Loose sand and thin slabs of shale came pouring off the cliff in a waterfall of noise and danger. For each step gained, the men slid back two, each slide

Hot Springs motor court, Big Bend National Park, Texas.

