

THE RIVER MOTOR BOAT BOYS ON THE
YUKON

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The Lost Mine of Rainbow Bend

Author: Harry Gordon

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BOYS ON THE YUKON ***

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[image]

The bear struck the man a powerful blow knocking him into the turbulent waters.

The River Motor Boat Boys on the Yukon

The Lost Mine of Rainbow Bend

Harry Gordon

AUTHOR OF

“The River Motor Boat Boys on the St. Lawrence,”

“The River Motor Boat Boys on the Colorado,”

“The River Motor Boat Boys on the Mississippi,”

“The River Motor Boat Boys on the Amazon,”

“The River Motor Boat Boys on the Columbia,”

“The River Motor Boat Boys on the Ohio”

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[Transcriber's Note: As printed, there was no Chapter XIV and the titles of chapters XXII and XXIII are identical.]

THE RIVER MOTOR BOAT BOYS ON THE YUKON

CHAPTER I INTRODUCING OLD FRIENDS

The motor boat *Rambler* lay moored securely fore and aft to a short pier in the South Branch of Chicago. Great care had been taken in the mooring, for the holding lines where they ran in over the side of the boat were thickly wrapped with soft cloth to prevent chafing and between her side and the dock's rough piling, were placed huge, soft, rope bumpers to prevent the wearing by rubbing between boat and dock. Even in the dim light of the late April evening, the reason for this careful mooring was apparent at a glance. The *Rambler* was gay with a coat of fresh paint from cabin top to keelson. This gay, cleanliness did not stop with the exterior, for down below in the warm cosy cabin, the lights glistened on sides and ceiling freshly enameled in purest white. The four folding bunks along the sides were bordered with gilt and above their folded tops protruded the edges of clean sheets and soft warm blankets. Knobs of mahogany protruding from the lower sides of the wall showed where the occupants, or crew, kept their personal belongings, while in the racks on the ceiling above were suspended three glistening rifles and a large bore shot gun. Everything in the room bore testimony to careful, constant, well planned work. The back end of the room had been partitioned off into a cozy kitchen with an abundance of lockers to hold supplies. Back beyond the kitchen, under the after deck, were the powerful little motors which, when in action, drove the beautiful boat at a rapid pace.

But more interesting than the boat were its occupants gathered around the small table in the cozy cabin. They were three in number. The one at the end of the table was a tall lad with an intelligent, manly face. His name was Clayton Emet, but he was commonly called Clay by his acquaintances. On Clay's right sat a boy of about his own build, but of graver face, whose name, Cornelius Witters, had been shortened to Case. He was plucky and loyal, but gloomily-inclined and accustomed to prophesying the worst in any difficulty. Next to Case sat Alexander Smithwick, or Alex, smaller in size, but whose freckled face and grinning mouth told of a humorous, joking disposition. All three were engaged in a lively debate, Alex darting out every few minutes to stir up a stew which was sending out a savory odor from the tiny kitchen. Hurrying back from one of these trips

he flung himself again into the discussion.

"We have just got to make another trip this summer. Look at all the work and expense we have been to repairing the *Rambler* this winter. We do not want to have all that wasted. Then think of all the fun we have had on our other trips. On the Amazon, the Mississippi, the Ohio, the Columbia, the St. Lawrence, and the Colorado. Why, every one of them has been chock full of fun, adventure and excitement."

"I would like to go," said Case gloomily, "but in the first place, we have explored all the best of the big rivers and, in the second place, we can not afford the time for any more trips. We have helped others to make money but I doubt if all our trips have brought us one thousand dollars. We had ought to keep steadily at work and lay up money for our future careers. You want to remember we are getting old."

"Oh, yes, we are getting old," Alex grinned. "I feel old age creeping upon me day by day, gray hairs amongst the gold, a touch of rheumatism, a gathering weakness in flesh and bone, and often a terrible aching pain in the stomach."

"Those stomach pains are from over-eating," retorted Case.

Alex turned to Clay. "What do you think about it? You are always the clearest headed one of the bunch."

"I agree with what Case has said," Clay declared, gravely. "We are all over seventeen years old and had ought to be beginning to try to get a start in life instead of wasting time and money in these summer trips, however pleasant they may be."

Alex's freckled face took on a look of gloom, while even Case did not look pleased at having his theory indorsed.

Clay smiled at their serious faces. "I have been thinking about this matter seriously all winter," he said, quietly, "and have decided that we will have to give up mere pleasure trips for the future, but I see no reason why we should not go this summer if there is a way to make the trip profitable. How much money have we got altogether?"

"Why we have got that \$1,000.00 in the bank," said Case.

"I've saved \$100.00 this summer," declared Alex, eagerly.

"Oh, for that matter, I've hoarded up \$125.00, if it's needed," Case confessed.

"I've had a pretty good position all winter," Clay said. "I've managed to lay by \$175.00. Let's see what that brings the total up to. Why, \$1,400.00, but I am afraid it will take all of that."

"What is your plan?" demanded Alex, his eyes shining.

Clay hesitated. "It seems a bold one to propose, but I really believe our best chance lies in a trip up the Yukon."

"Whew!" whistled Alex and Case together. "You mean for us to go up there

and hunt for gold? We know nothing about mining,” said Case.

“It would be lots of fun,” Alex insisted, “but it’s some trip up there to the Yukon.”

“I did not mean for us to go merely for gold, although I think we could soon learn enough about it to try it out if we so desired,” Case explained. “My idea was to stock up with beads, trinkets and tobacco—especially tobacco—to trade with the Indians for skins, furs, and specimens of the far North. Even at the worst we could go to work and make big wages, for labor is scarce up there.”

“But will not the expense of such a trip be something fierce?” inquired the gloomy Case.

“It will. We would have to ship the *Rambler* by rail to Seattle and the cost of transportation for her and ourselves would be high. You see it is not so very long since gold was discovered in Alaska and the rush of people to get there enables the steamers to charge almost any price.”

“Keep still a second,” exclaimed Alex. “Isn’t that some one moving about up on deck?”

He darted for the cabin door, followed by his two companions. Coming from the brightly lighted cabin out into the night, they could not see ten feet in the inky darkness, but they could hear the retreat of hurried foot-steps going up the dock.

“No use trying to catch him in this darkness,” Clay remarked. “Probably it’s only a river thief. Let’s go down into the cabin.”

“Call him a river thief if you want to,” Case said, darkly, “but I doubt it. All our trips seem to start with a mystery.”

“All the more fun,” grinned Alex. “They help to make excitement, Gloomy Gus.”

“There will be no mystery this time. No one would want to join a trip like the one we are going to take,” Clay said.

“You’ll see,” Case said darkly.

“Let’s get back to our trip,” said the cheerful Alex. “What will we want to take with us?”

“First we will want to stock up with all the food we can carry, for food prices will be high in Alaska. Our guns are all right, but we had ought to have some warmer clothing and heavier blankets. Our heaviest expense, however, will be a new motor for the *Rambler*.”

“A new motor for the *Rambler*?” cried Case, in dismay. “Why, what’s wrong with our dear little motors? They have carried us thousands of miles without a hitch.”

“That’s just the trouble. They have about worn out their lives in faithful service for us. I have gone over them carefully this winter and I find that the

cylinders have worn thin while the working parts are almost gone. Aside from that we could not carry enough gasoline for the trip and I do not expect we will find much, if any, gasoline on the Yukon.”

“Then what are we going to do?” demanded Alex, anxiously.

“I wish we could put in a wood engine and save the expense for fuel, but a steam engine which would do our work would be too heavy for the *Rambler*. The next best thing is a kerosene engine. They are not much heavier than a gas, and I feel sure we can get kerosene on the Yukon. It always follows closely the movements of civilized man. Well, what do you say? Shall we have a new motor or not?”

His companions recognized the wisdom of his arguments and gave ready assent, although they hated the idea of parting with their loyal little friends.

“If you have finished and all is settled, I would like to offer a few remarks,” said Alex, grinning as he rose from his chair with a twinkle in his eye. He paused for a moment while the other two looked up at him expectantly. “Gentlemen,” he began, “it gives me great pleasure to look over this vast sea of upturned faces. In them I see resolve, a resolution to do or die, a determination to conquer a frozen wilderness and wrench from it its golden treasures. Gentlemen, I propose a toast. Here’s to—”

“Whew! Don’t you smell something?” interrupted Case.

“Smell! Why I can almost hear it,” grinned Clay. “It seems to come from the kitchen.”

Alex, his speech forgotten, flew for the kitchen. In a moment he was back with a sheepish grin on his face. “Most of the coffee has boiled over, but there are two inches of stew which hasn’t stuck onto the pot,” he announced.

“You seem to forget everything else when you get to talking,” commented Case, gloomily.

“Oh! Alex means all right,” Clay said cheerfully. “The only trouble with Alex is that he is like the steamboat Abe Lincoln used to tell about. She had a four-foot engine and a five-foot whistle, so every time she blew the whistle the engine would stop.”

“I suppose your crude sarcasm is meant to imply that when I talk I have to stop everything else. Why, my dear companion, that’s a virtue. A man should not try to do more than one thing at a time,” Alex retorted impudently. “Why, if you two could whistle as well as I, you wouldn’t do anything else. Case does blow his own whistle a good deal, but it generally sounds like a fog horn with a frog in its throat—dismal—dismal—dismal.”

“Away with you and get us something to eat, you little imp,” laughed Case.

“Why, don’t you want to try some of this stew?” asked Alex hopefully. “It’s rich and there’s fully two inches of it that isn’t fast to the pan.”

"No, I don't want to taste it, the smell is enough. Open up a can of beans and a can of salmon for Clay and I. You can keep all the stew for yourself. I don't think there is enough of it for more than one anyway."

"I never care for stews," declared Alex promptly. "I'll give it to Captain Joe. I forgot to cook up anything for him anyway."

He advanced to where a big white bull dog lay asleep in the corner and placed the stew-pan close to his nose. The dog awoke instantly and began sniffing eagerly.

"Look at him. Watch him go to it. Captain Joe knows what's good," Alex exulted.

Captain Joe shoved his nose into the pan and took one good whiff, then gave the pan a shove with his paw and with a sniff of disgust, retired to the opposite corner and lay down again.

"Captain Joe is an intelligent animal," Clay agreed with a grin. But hurry up Alex. Throw that stuff out and bring on the salmon and beans. I am hungry as a wolf."

Alex meekly obeyed and soon all three were seated around the table eating their cold meal and eagerly discussing their proposed trip.

"How soon do you think we can start?" asked Alex eagerly.

"The sooner the better," Clay replied. "It will take a long time to make the trip and the season is short up there. If we divide the labor equally we can soon be ready. Tomorrow, Alex can order the provisions. He's authority on eatables. You, Case, can buy the heavier blankets and warmer clothing we will need, while I will try to find a good kerosene engine and buy the tobacco and trading trinkets. The buying had ought to take us all of tomorrow, for we want to be careful in our purchases. By working hard the next day we had ought to get the old motors out and the new installed. If so, there is no reason why we can not be off in three days from now."

"Hurrah," shouted the excited Alex. "That's going some."

"Keep still," whispered Clay, "I can hear those footsteps right on deck again. His two companions listened.

"We want to catch that fellow this time," Clay said softly. "You fellows just keep right on talking and I'll slip back to the back door. The steps are moving slowly back to the after deck. As soon as they come close to the door, I'll throw it open and grab him, then you all come at once and the job is done."

His two companions nodded assent to the plan and began talking loudly to each other, while Clay crept back to the door at the stern.

The soft muffled foot-steps came slowly nearer until they reached the narrow deck aft.

Clay flung the door open and with a shout sprung upon the dim figure

outside. Alex and Case, with Captain Joe, came dashing out to his assistance. But there was no need of help. The stranger offered no resistance, instead he chuckled.

“Is this the way you always greet visitors?” he asked. “Gee, but you are a hospitable lot.”

“Come on down into the cabin where we can see who you are,” said Clay sternly, still retaining his grip on the stranger’s arm.

The stranger followed him willingly down into the cabin light, where Clay let go his arm as though the coat sleeves was red hot, while his chums howled at him with delight.

“Mr. Clay, but you’re a great detective,” Alex jaunted. “You go out to catch a thief and bring in a friend.”

But his jeers fell on deaf ears, for Clay was gazing at a slender, bright-eyed boy with abashment and recognition. “Why, it’s Ike Levis,” he cried.

“It’s a wonder you recognize him, Clay,” grinned the impudent Alex. “You’ve only known him for ten years.”

“I’ve only known him for five, but I can almost see a likeness,” smiled Case.

The bright-eyed stranger smiled at the joshing, but seemed to think it had gone far enough.

“I stole time to come down and get a look at your wonderful little ship, of which I had heard so much. Won’t you show me around, boys?”

CHAPTER II

A MYSTERY

The boys agreed to Ike’s request with delight. They were proud of the neat little Rambler that had carried them safely and surely over so many thousands of miles of water. They led him all around showing the clever contrivances of lockers, the folding bunks, the cozy kitchen, and how every inch of available space had been arranged for the handy storage of some article.

“You’ve got a daisy little craft, and have got her fixed up dandy,” Ike enthusiastically declared, as soon as they were seated. “Where do you expect to go this summer, and how soon are you going to start?”

“We are going to Alaska up on the Yukon,” Alex exclaimed. “We’re not going for fun exactly this time, although we expect to have a lot of that too. Our

main object is to dig a ton or so of gold, fill up the balance of our cargo with rare and costly furs, and make our way back to the States before the ice sets.”

“There you go, hoodooing the trip before it’s started,” growled Case gloomily. “I was in hopes we might sneak back with a few hundred dollars. But with all the bragging you’ve begun already, I am doubtful if we get back with the boat.

“Now, Gloomy Gus”—a name he bestowed on Case during his gloomy spells—grinned Alex. “Isn’t it better a lot to think you are going to get rich when you start even if you do come back poor? It makes fun in the going anyway. Ain’t I right, Clay?”

“Don’t count your chickens before they are hatched,” quoted Clay with a smile.

“If we did not, there would be no chicken raisers,” Alex retorted with spirit. “They always expect a chicken for every egg until the shells begin to crack.”

“I hate to interrupt so much philosophy,” said Ike with a smile, “but I’m just itching to talk a little myself.”

“Take the floor,” smiled Clay, and his two companions lapsed into silence.

“What I want to say is just this,” began Ike in a brisk, business-like way. “I want to go up the Yukon with you fellows.”

“Hurray,” shouted Alex, “four is lots better than three.”

“Sure, come along,” said Case, cheerfully.

Only Clay did not join in the hearty replies and his two companions eyed him in wonder.

“It is going to be a very expensive trip,” Clay said at last.

“I expect it to be costly,” Ike replied, quietly. “But, boys, you know that little news stand I have been running for so many years has paid pretty well all the time. It paid the expenses of all of us when mother and father and baby brother were alive. Since they were all taken by the white sickness, there has been more money than I could use, you understand, so I put it in the banks. I can put in \$1,000.00 for this trip and then some more if needed.”

“But why do you want to sell such a good paying stand as yours and waste a lot of money on a trip like this which may not bring in a cent?” Clay asked.

“I can put in a boy I know well, a good, honest boy, to run the stand while I am gone. You, Clay, do not understand. Every year you have vacations and have lots of fun. You come back well and happy and eager for work. For ten years I stand behind that little stand. Out in the snow and cold, the slush and rain, the dust and hot sun, and never once a play day. That is not right, that is not well. It makes a young man soon old, makes him look on life wrong. Now I can afford it I would like to have one long play time.”

“But there is but little fun we’ll have on the Yukon! With a \$1,000.00 you

could have all kinds of fun at some hunting or fishing resort closer home,” Clay still urged.

“I tell you another reason why I want most to go to the Yukon,” replied Ike, after a second’s hesitation. “I got uncle up there several years. He makes no good at the mining. I got no other relatives now, so I hunt up uncle and if prices are high we set up fine store. Uncle can sell goods in the store while I go out and trade for furs with the Indians. I think we make good money. But it seems you no want me to go with you, Clay—why?”

“But I do want you to go with us,” Clay declared, heartily, his face lightening. “We all of us want you to go. We start in tomorrow to buy our supplies and when that’s done move your things right down to the boat and become one of us.”

“Sorry, but I can’t do that,” Ike replied. “I’ll have to teach the new boy the business and settle up a few of my affairs. I am afraid I will not be able to come aboard until just before you start. But I will do a fair share of the work as soon as we are off. Call by my stand in the morning and I will hand you that \$1,000.00. Put it into the general fund and get me an outfit just the same as you do for yourselves.”

“But a \$1,000.00 apiece is more than we are putting up,” said Clay, honestly. “We have only \$1,400.00 in cash altogether.”

Ike laughed. “You do not figure it right, my friend. I gets for my money not only a share in outfit and stores, but I get a trip up and down the Yukon which is worth much more than \$500.00. And now, boys, it is getting late and I have to be up early in the morning to attend to my stand.”

Clay turned on the prow light to light up the prow and dock and the three boys followed their friend on deck where they parted with many good-nights and prophecies for the coming trip.

As soon as he had passed out of sight, the three descended to the cabin again, and Alex folding his arms, looked at Clay with as much scorn as his freckled, good-humored face could express. “You’re a fine one,” he grunted. “Why, you cross-questioned Ike as though he was a criminal and you the prosecuting attorney just because he wanted to go on this trip with us. I was afraid he would get disgusted with your questions and give up the notion. There’s no other boy I know who I had rather have go on this trip with us. Ike used to be mighty good to me when I was a little newsie. Ike is all right.”

“Yes,” Case agreed. “I have seen him many a time stop big boys who were abusing little ones, and leave his stand to help feeble old men and old ladies across the street.”

“I know him better than either of you,” Clay said, quietly, ignoring the storm that had burst upon him. “I remember the time when his family was dying of

consumption. Why, all the time they were lingering on between life and death, he was like an angel to them. They had a doctor, a day nurse and any delicacy they thought they wanted. At night he would take the day nurse's place. When at last they were dead and buried, there was little left of Ike but skin and bones, for he had eaten barely enough to keep him alive, so that the others might have more comforts. The money he had saved was all gone and there was little left of the news stand but a few bundles of the best selling newspapers. A boy who acts towards his folks like that simply can't be a bad boy."

"Then why didn't you want him to go with us?" demanded Alex, still unsatisfied.

"I see I have got to tell it all," Clay said wearily. "It isn't so much, but it has made me a little curious. I was passing Ike's stand one evening last fall and stopped to get a paper. Ike was at the other end of the stand talking with two strange-looking men who wore rough clothes and whose faces were covered with big blotches where they had been frost bitten. All three were talking friendly but eagerly, and often I could catch the words, 'Alaska,' 'Yukon,' 'and great wealth,' so I decided that the two men were miners just in from Alaska. Well, I could not hear much of what they said, they talked in such low tones. At last I got tired of waiting and called Ike and gave him the change for the paper and left. Now you all think it was my idea about this Yukon trip; you are wrong. It's Ike's plan. Ever since the day I saw him with those two men he has been trying to enthuse me about this Yukon trip."

"Maybe he had learned something good about the Yukon country and wants that we should get the benefit of it," Alex suggested.

"I thought that myself," Clay said, sadly, "until this afternoon, when I passed Ike's stand on my way home. There stood the two miners I had seen before and they and Ike were having a violent quarrel. In fact, they were coming to the point of blows. One of the men aimed a blow at Ike and I started to run to Ike's assistance, yelling for the police. The yells for the police seemed to scare the two men for they took to their heels. I asked Ike what all the trouble was about and he said they were a couple of roughs who had bought a paper and gave him a nickel. When he gave them their change they had insisted on change for a dollar, which they claimed was the amount given him."

"Great mystery all that," Alex said scornfully. "Have you any more evidence to pile up, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

"Welt, Ike's story rang rather flat to me," Clay replied. "Neither man carried a paper or anything else when they took to their heels. I would not have thought much about these things if Ike had not come down tonight and wanted to go to Alaska with us. That seemed to string all those things together. I felt sure Ike was too much of a business chap to spend \$1,000.00 on a pleasure trip to the Yukon.

But when he said he wanted to go to hunt up his uncle, why that made things look better, for a Jew will go a long ways and do a lot for a relative.”

“Well, what are we going to do about it?” Alex demanded.

“I want him to go with us of course,” answered Clay. “I know Ike’s all right, but I was in hopes that my questions—about which you have been roasting me so—would clear up the things that had been puzzling me.”

“Ike might as well go as not,” Case agreed gloomily. “We always have to carry a nice fat mystery on each of our trips, and I’d rather Ike brought it along with him than to have some uninvited stranger smuggle it aboard.”

“You and Clay make me tired,” snapped Alex. “One of you is just as bad as the other. I guess I’ll have to call one of you Gloomy Gus 1, the other Gloomy Gus 2.”

“All right, you wait and see,” said Case darkly. “It’s only a nice gentle kitten-like mystery we start with on each trip, but before the trip is ended it grows to be as big as a grizzly bear.”

“That reminds me that one of us will have to bring Teddy Bear down to the boat. He’s getting pretty big but we must have him along with us for one more trip anyway.”

Teddy Bear was a grizzly cub the boys had captured on their trip on the Columbia. On their return from their last trip, they had turned him over to the zoo man as he had grown so big and had such a thieving appetite for sugar and other sweet things that they could not trust him in the *Rambler* while they were away at their work. Whenever they had a day of leisure, they would take Captain Joe along with them and go up to see their pet. They would put him through his tricks and slip him in a generous amount of sugar. So they kept themselves fresh in his memory. Teddy and Captain Joe were the greatest comrades and both rejoiced at these meetings. It was comical to see Captain Joe seated on his haunches, look up with one eye cocked as though saying, “Well, Old Chap, how are they treating you down here?” and Teddy Bear would with one eye wink back as though replying, “Pretty well, Joe, but it isn’t anything like life on the *Rambler*.”

Alex declared that he once heard Teddy tell Joe to sneak him down a pail of sugar the next time he came and Joe replied with vast scorn that he would not steal from his masters, but if Teddy had any good meat to exchange for sugar he’d manage it somehow. Clay, on hearing this story, had promptly placed Alex’s head down in an empty flour barrel until he confessed that he might have been mistaken.

When Clay spoke of bringing Teddy Bear down next day, Captain Joe arose in dignity from his corner and wobbled over to his side. Clay patted his head, “Yes, Joe, we are going to bring Teddy Bear tomorrow. Teddy Bear is going to stay on

the boat now. You want Teddy Bear, Captain Joe?”

Captain Joe cocked his eyes and wagged his stump of a tail vigorously. He seemed to be saying, “I guess you’re talking straight, boss, but I don’t believe that guy’s going to leave all the good meat he’s getting if he can help it.” Captain Joe then rubbed his nose across Clay’s ankle, rose sedately, and made the rounds of the table rubbing his nose on each boy’s leg.

“He’s telling us that it is time to go to bed and stop disturbing his sleep with our chatter,” laughed Alex.

“He’s right, too,” Case agreed, “but listen, aren’t those more foot-steps on the dock close to the boat?”

Clay reached over and snapped on the prow light. Instantly there was a scamper of foot-steps up the wharf.

Clay laughed and shut off the light. “We seem to be having our share of visitors tonight,” he remarked, “but I am not anxious to make another capture tonight. I am going to bed and trust to Captain Joe to wake us up if any one tries to get in.”

The boys were all ready for bed and they were soon all asleep, leaving Captain Joe on guard.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

When Alex and Case awoke next morning it was to the savory odor of browned pancakes, fried bacon, and steaming coffee. Clay was just lifting the last pancake from the frying pan to the plate when the two jumped out of their bunks.

“Gee, that breakfast smells good. I really believe I can eat a bit this morning,” Alex announced.

“I never saw the time that you couldn’t,” retorted Clay. “But hurry up you fellows, if you don’t want to eat a cold breakfast. It won’t keep warm forever.”

This announcement brought great haste in the pulling on of clothes and the washing of hands and faces. Breakfast was dispatched amid a chatter of conversation concerning the purchases to be made.

“I have been thinking it over,” said Clay, during one of the lulls in the conversation, “and I do not believe we had ought to leave the *Rambler* with no one on board of her. It was all right to do so in the winter, for then she was frozen

up and no one could make away with her, run her into some slip, paint her and with a few hours of alteration, make her into a different looking boat. Those foot-steps last night prove that the river thieves are beginning to gather around for their summer trade. I think one of us had better be on the *Rambler* all the time.”

His companions' faces became downcast. Each had made a list of the things he was to buy and were eager to be off to their purchasing. Neither wanted to stay idle on board and lose their share of the fun. But Case spoke up manfully.

“I'll stay,” he said, “my list is far the smallest and if neither of you get back in time, I'll do my buying tomorrow.”

“Thanks,” said Clay, gratefully, “I would stay myself, but the new motor will be the first thing needed and I want to see to that myself for I have had some experience with them.”

As soon as the two were gone, Case set about the unpleasant task of washing the dishes and cleanup the cabin. This done, he strolled out on the wharf and sitting down on a box in the warm sunshine chatted with the aged dock tender who had been a sailor until age had compelled him to quit the sea. He could tell many strange tales of queer places and mysterious adventures and he was always willing to relate them to the boys who often on cold, stinging days invited him down into the *Rambler's* cozy cabin to share their warm dinner or drink a cup of scalding hot coffee.

“Yep,” he answered, in reply to Case's questions, “I've been to the Yukon once and once is enough for me. We were hunting seals and run into the river to get out of a gale and afore it moderated enough for us to get out we were froze in solid. Lord! what a winter we had. We had plenty of salt stuff but our potatoes soon went and the scurvy broke out and then came the long winter night, and all the time there was but white all around us. Nothing but white and a great everlasting silence—just like as though the whole world had gone dead never to come to life again. The silence and the whiteness got on our nerves and we got to quarreling with each other. There was a good many killed before the ice broke up. We had left only about half enough able men to work the ship. It wasn't long though before we sighted a steamer and hoisted our distress signal and she stopped for us to board her. She was overloaded with the first bunch of gold seekers. Her captain let us have considerable potatoes, and, by slicing them up thin and chewing them up raw good and fine, what was left of us were nearly well when we got to San Francisco. My, but those raw potatoes tasted better than anything I ever ate,” and the old seaman smacked his lips over the recollection.

“I guess the winters up there are pretty rough?” Case assented, but we intend to be on our way home long before the river freezes over.”

“Sonny,” said the old sailor, earnestly. “You can't calculate on the Yukon.

Old timers and the Indians call it 'The Never Know What' on 'count of its contrary ways. Let me give you some good advice if you are bent on going. Take lots of tallow candles and potatoes with you. Course you can take all the fancy stuff you want, but a good meal of tallow keeps your human furnace running full blast and the taters keep off the scurvy. Look there, sonny, you've got a visitor."

Case jumped up from his box just in time to see a man entering the *Rambler's* open cabin. He grinned, "Captain Joe will look out for him all right, but I guess I had better go aboard and see what he wants." He sauntered aboard leisurely and entered the cabin. The man was standing close to the opening looking as though he wanted to run but was afraid to turn around, for Captain Joe, with bared fangs and growling lowly, was stealthily advancing from the further end of the cabin."

"Down, Captain Joe, down," Case cried, just as the dog crouched lower for a spring. Captain Joe relaxed and retired sullenly to his corner.

The man whipped out a huge red handkerchief and wiped the beads of sweat from his brow. "Nice, pleasant little pet you've got there," he remarked. "I reckon a biting dog is the only thing I'm afraid of."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" demanded Case, his clear gray eyes on the other's face. The man was dressed roughly and there were rents in his clothing, but his hands and face were clean and his face bore a good humored if determined expression.

The man twirled his hat for a moment before replying. "I had it all fixed in regular order what I wanted to say, but that dog has pretty near scairt it all out of my head. Are you the boss of this outfit?"

"We have no bosses, or rather, we are all bosses?" Clay smiled.

"Well, I guess you will do as well to talk to as any of the rest. I heard that you were going to the Yukon and I want to go along with you—me and my partner."

"Where did you hear we were going to the Yukon?" demanded Case, sharply.

The man produced a soiled morning paper and laid a huge forefinger on an article in one corner.

Clay read it in silence and some bewilderment.

"The *Rambler* boys are soon to start off on another of their famous cruises. This time they have chosen the far-away Yukon as their goal. It's a bold attempt, but they are all Chicago boys and we believe they will make it. At any rate, we wish them the best of good luck."

Case kept his eyes on the paper for a moment after he finished reading the notice, pondering how it had appeared so soon. The paper had been published long before he and his companions had got up. Charley thought it had been

inserted either by Ike or one of the mysterious eavesdroppers of the night before. But for what reason had it been inserted? He gave up the puzzle and looked up at the man who was watching him eagerly.

"Take a seat," he said, pushing forward a stool and taking one himself. "That notice is right," he remarked. I am sorry to say it, but I am sure my companions will agree with me, we can not take you and your partner. We will be four in number besides our pets and we are going to have a very heavy cargo. We'll be overloaded as it is."

"But we can be of lots of help to you," urged the man, eagerly. We are both Old Timers—Sour Dough men. We know the country like a book. You'll need a pilot on the 'You Never Know What.' There's too many bars, hidden rocks, and rapids for a green horn to tackle. Bill can cook for you, an' Bill's a powerful good cook," he said with pride.

Clay shook his head decidedly, although he was sorry for the man. "Why are you so anxious to get up there?" he asked.

"I'll tell you the truth," the man said desperately. "My partner and I had a couple of claims way up the Yukon and last summer we struck it rich. Not much free gold, you understand, such as you wash free with pan and water, but quartz rich enough to make your eyes stand out. But that kind of gold has to have mills, stamps, and all kind of machinery to set it free. So Bill and I gathered all the dust we had and came outside to find capital to develop our claims. We might as well have staid at home, for we could not get any one to put up the money. They just thought we was crazy when we told how rich our claims were. We have slept out in the cold many and many a night, and picked up odd jobs like shoveling snow to keep from starving. We are used to hardships up north but a man is treated like a human up there. It goes against the grain for a truthful, honest man to be hounded on by a policeman when he is only trying to warm himself over a grating."

While the miner had been talking. Case had been looking him steadily in the eyes. He noted the subtle change of the iris which always marks the telling of a lie. He marked the man's allusion to his honesty and thoughtfulness. He had often shrewdly observed in his life in the great city, that it is not the honest man who brags about his truthfulness and honesty. Clearly this fellow was lying in some part of his tale.

"It's no go," said Case, decisively. "We just simply can't take you. We have barely enough money to take us there and bring us back."

The man's face became clouded with disappointment. "Tell you what I'll do," he offered. "We'll give you a sixth interest in our claims. That will pay a dozen times over for the trip."

"We have not the money to handle them even if they are as rich as you

claim. I'll tell you what I'll do though," Case said, pitying the man's tragic face. "I'll talk it over with my chums tonight and see what they have to say. If you and your partner want to take the trouble to come down in the morning, I'll let you know what they decide. I am positive though that they will agree with me."

The man rose and put on his hat. "We'll come down in the morning all right. Sonny, you've treated me square and frank and I am much obliged to you. So long, until tomorrow."

Case watched him out of sight and then began the preparations for dinner to which he intended to invite the aged doctender, for he wanted to learn all the old seaman knew about the country they were going to.

The two were just finishing their supper when a roaring sound steadily growing in volume stole in through the little cabin windows. "I wonder what that noise is," said Case. "Sounds mighty queer."

"Sounds just like waves dashing up on an iceberg," the old seaman agreed. "Let's go up to the end of the dock and take a look."

When they reached the shore the boy and old man doubled up with laughter. It looked as though half of Chicago was crowding the little street, but steadily a wide path opened up and then closed again with jamming people. Down the wide path walked Teddy Bear, paws raised in an attitude of defense. Clay walked behind with a grin on his face.

"Teddy Bear is sure coming down in style," chuckled Case. "He's got a whole procession with him."

The crowd followed the bear down to the boat and when he was led down into the cabin they departed with cheers and laughter.

CHAPTER IV

JUST ODDS AND ENDS

Captain Joe greeted Teddy Bear with delight. He circled around him snapping playfully at his legs and uttering short, joyous barks. Teddy dropped slowly down on all fours and gave Captain Joe a good-humored cuff that sent him clear to the other side of the cabin. This rebuke administered, he made his way over to where the sugar was kept in one of the kitchen lockers and tried hard to open it, but the boys had taken the precaution to add locks to all their lockers and his efforts were unavailing. At last he gave it up and made his way back into the main cabin and stood gazing at the boys reproachfully.

"You've got to stop your thieving, Teddy Bear," said Case with a grin. "Get

over there in your old place in the corner and I'll get you a few lumps of sugar."

Teddy meekly obeyed and quickly received the reward for his obedience.

"Well, I finished the best part of my purchases," Clay remarked, "and I thought I had better come down and spell you for a while. I'll have time to finish up my list tomorrow, for there will be part of the time when it will take only two of us to work on the motors. I've had the dandiest luck in getting a new motor. It's a daisy and will burn either gasoline or kerosene. They promised to deliver it down here early this afternoon. I took Ike with me when I went to see about getting transportation, and let me tell you, that boy's some bargainer. I could never have got as cheap rates as he did out of the freight agent. We are to have a flat car for the *Rambler* and live on board of her until we reach Seattle. But I am keeping you back. Hurry up and get your things before dark if you can."

Case was off like a shot and was soon uptown in the shopping district where he spent a happy afternoon making his purchases. With a grin at his own foolishness, he added to his list a large box of tallow candles. "Of course we will never have to eat such stuff, but they will bring back more than their value, I guess, trading with the Indians," he argued in justification. It was nearly dusk when he finished his list and arrived at the *Rambler* to find that Alex had arrived only just ahead of him.

Alex was excitedly talking to Clay who was busily preparing their evening meal.

"What's all the fuss about?" Case demanded.

"Nothing much," Clay said, calmly. "Alex's just a little excited, that's all. We'll compare experiences while we're eating supper. Wash up and get ready. I've got fried fish and that's best when eaten piping hot."

It was not until the first pangs of his hunger was satisfied, that Alex gave vent to his grievance, and then it was in milder tones. "I guess I'm a little touchy," he confessed, "but it made me sore the way Ike jumped on me this morning, and for nothing too. Just about a little item that appeared in the morning paper about our trip. It took me a long time to convince him that none of us could have put it in, and, by the time I had done it, I was mad myself, while Ike seemed pretty well upset."

"He spoke about that item to me when I went to see him just before noon," Clay remarked, "but all he said was that he wondered who could have given it to the paper. All I could tell him about it was that there had been a couple of fellows prowling around our boat last night and they might have overheard part of our conversation, though why they should give it to the newspapers was more than I could figure out."

"Would you fellows like to own an interest in two rich gold mines?" Case asked when Clay had finished.

“Oh, no,” retorted Alex. “We wouldn’t take one as a gift. Money is the root of all evil and we don’t want to get evil, do we?”

“It would not be exactly a gift,” Case replied, ignoring the irony, and he proceeded to tell them of his morning visitor.

“What kind of looking fellow was he?” Clay inquired, eagerly, when he had finished.

“A big, heavy man, with long, thick whiskers. He was not a bad appearing man. His face was good humored but determined looking. He didn’t impress me as a bad man.”

“Did he have a red scar on his right cheek?” Clay demanded.

“He did,” Case assented. “Looked to me like an old knife cut.”

“Then he is one of those men I told you about last night,” Clay remarked. “He’s the best appearing of the two. The other one could be hung for his looks. Queer how so many little things keep coming up that we can’t explain and which seem to have some connection with each other. First the first meeting between Ike and those men at the news stand, then Ike’s constant suggestions to me all winter about this Yukon trip, then the second meeting at the stand when they had their quarrel, then Ike’s wanting to go with us, then that queer notice in this morning’s paper, and right on top of it, all these men applying for passage. Makes a queer chain, doesn’t it?”

“Our little kitten of a mystery seems to be growing into quite a cub,” observed Case, delighted to feel that his prophecy of trouble seemed to promise to bear fruit.

“Oh, cut it out!” exclaimed Alex. “Let’s forget it all. Don’t let’s spoil our trip at the start by worrying over trifles that do not concern us anyway. Case, you make me tired. You’re one of those guys that are always looking at the hole while the other chaps are watching the doughnut.”

“I don’t know but what you are right,” Case replied shamefacedly. “I soon get rid of that habit when we get started on one of our trips, but the long, gloomy winter in the city seems to bring it back on me again. Just bear with me until we get started and I’ll be all right. But just remember one thing, young man. You have used enough slang the last few days to entitle you to do all the dishwashing from here to the Yukon and back.”

“We have all of us been using too much of it lately,” Clay remarked. “We had ought to make a more determined effort to stop it. It’s catchy, but the way we keep on adding new all the time it will not be so very long before our talk will sound like the chattering of a group of monkeys.”

“Well,” Alex grinned, “we had better stop our chattering right now and get to work. We have got a lot to do before we go to bed.”

Most of their stores had been brought down to the wharf during the after-

noon and lay piled in a big heap beside the *Rambler*. As soon as the boys had hurried through the cleaning up, they turned on the prow light and lighting a couple of lanterns went at the task of stowing their cargo. Boxes and packages were carried below, broken open and their contents stowed in the lockers, while the emptied packages were thrown overboard. As each box was opened it was checked off their lists so as to make certain that they received every thing they had ordered. Although they worked hard and with zest, it was midnight when they got all the stuff, but their new motor, safely stored.

"I don't know what we had better do about that motor," Clay said, looking at it doubtfully. "I hate to put it down in our freshly-painted cabin because there is always such a lot of oil and grease on even a new engine, but we can't risk leaving it up here all night."

Case tried to lift up one side of it and failed. "I guess there is not much danger of any one running away with it," he grinned. "It must weigh five hundred pounds."

"Oh, they couldn't get away with the engine very easily, but there's a whole lot of brass and copper fittings which they could unscrew or wrench off."

"I'll tell you what to do," Alex suggested. "Put a rope on Teddy Bear and tie him up to the engine. There will be no one bother it while he's around. He has grown so big and strong that he's got a punch like a prize fighter."

But Teddy did not take kindly to the idea when they tried to lead him up out of the warm cozy cabin. Alex had to fill a big can with sugar and lead the way with it extended invitingly to induce him to leave the boat. While Clay tied him to the engine, Alex scattered the sugar all around in little piles so that it would take Teddy Bear some time to find and lap it all up.

This last job done the tired but happy boys turned in, agreeing to be up early in the morning.

It seemed as if they had only just fallen asleep when they were suddenly awakened by loud snarling and scuffling on the wharf, followed by a harsh yell.

"Wake up and hustle, you fellows," shouted Clay, as he pulled on his pants and seized his automatic. "Teddy Bear is in trouble." His two companions were beside him when he gained the dock and the three rushed for the place where Teddy had been tied. Alex had switched on the prow light before leaving the cabin and its rays lit up a circle around the engine where they could see Teddy Bear sitting close to the engine holding up his paws and whining pitifully. The boys looked and listened but could see or hear no one near.

"Whoever it was has had plenty of time to get off the dock since we first heard the noise," Clay declared. "Let's see what's the matter with Teddy. I hope he has not been hurt badly."

Teddy extended his left paw with a little whine and Case examined it gently.

“Why, he’s been stabbed clear through the fleshy part,” he exclaimed. “Run down into the cabin, Alex, and get that bottle of peroxide, some cloth for bandages, and the box of salve. Now cheer up, Teddy, this isn’t going to hurt you much. It will heal up in a hurry. You don’t use tobacco or drink liquor, and you chew your food well, so your blood is just as pure and clean as blood can be. In a week you will not know you ever were hurt.”

Teddy put his head sideways and looked at him with a doubtful grin as though trying to understand what was said to him.

“I wish I knew what brute gave him that cut. I’d feel tempted to use my automatic on him,” declared Alex, wrathfully, as he watched Clay, assisted by Case, apply the peroxide until it stopped foaming, follow it up with a liberal application of the healing salve, and then bind up the paw with long strips of white cloth.

“What’s the matter with his other arm?” Case asked. “Look how he keeps it doubled up all the time. I believe he’s holding something in it. I can see a bit of black.”

“So there is,” Alex agreed. “Hold out your other arm, Teddy, and let’s see what you have got.”

But Teddy was reluctant to part with his treasure and it was only after repeated commands that he obeyed.

Alex seized the object and bore it down into the brighter light of the cabin, his companions following. He laid the object on the table and all three boys burst into laughter.

It was an old battered felt hat and across its top were several long rents where the bear’s claws had raked over; to one of the rents clung a generous patch of skin covered on the outside by long, coarse black hair.

“I guess Teddy Bear’s more than evened up things,” grinned Alex. “I am going to bring him down into the cabin and give it to him. It belongs to him. He earned it. That fellow will not prowl in the dark much for awhile.”

So Teddy was led below, and received the return of the hat and scalp lock with much satisfaction.

“It is near day-break so there is not much use of our going to bed again,” Clay said. “I’ll cook breakfast and we will get to work early. I don’t know what we are going to do about Teddy Bear,” he continued. “He is getting too strong for a pet. We can’t control him and he’s liable to hurt some of us even in play. Get out of here!” he ordered, as Teddy slowly worked his way up to the sugar locker. He raised the knife with which he was slicing bacon and pointed it at the bear to emphasize his command.

Teddy fled to the far end of the cabin, whining in fear.

“There’s your answer,” laughed Alex. “We have never punished Teddy like

we ought, but he has learned by experience himself that knives hurt. I guess a little punishment now and then when he has done wrong will keep him under control. We began his education wrong, we should have started with discipline first."

CHAPTER V

STARTING

As soon as the sun was up the boys were at work. The first job was to remove the old motors to make place for the new. This was a dirty, greasy job but not hard. The nuts holding the motors to the solidly-built bed were unscrewed and the motors were carried out and stored in a corner of the big warehouse where the aged doctender had offered to keep an eye on them until the boys got back from their trip.

But the placing of the new motor was more of an undertaking. Strong as they were, the boys could not lift it aboard.

"We will have to have help and plenty of it," Clay declared, after they had twice made the attempt and failed. "Of course we could get a plank and block and tackle and get it aboard, but if the rope or board slipped just a little bit it would go through the bottom of the *Rambler* as though the boards were made of paper. Then I can see now that the engine bed has got to be fixed. It's too narrow for this new motor. Now I've got a few more things to buy, so I'll run up town and get them. I'll stop on my way up and send down a couple of good carpenters with plenty of hard wood to fix up that engine bed right. Then when I come down, I'll bring four or five good husky men along with me and we'll have that motor in its place in no time."

He was not gone long before the two carpenters came down bearing their tools and several blocks of oak. The engine hold was a close place to work in, but they made good progress and soon had fitted in a new bed smooth and level to fit the new engine. They had just finished their job when Clay appeared, followed by a loaded wagon and four big strapping Irishmen.

With the aid of the Irishmen, and the help of the carpenters who had remained to watch, the motor was lowered down onto the new bed. This done, it only remained to fasten it down with six big bolts and connect the engine up with the shaft. A few minutes sufficed for this. Clay paid the Irishmen and the carpenters double wages for the time they had worked and they departed well pleased with their few hours' labor.

The boys then turned to the task of stowing the load the wagon had brought down. Part of this consisted of three barrels of kerosene, two of which they emptied into the *Rambler's* tank, the third was placed up on the forward deck. The boxes and packages were taken below and their contents emptied into the lockers. "We haven't got space for a hundred pounds more stuff," Alex announced when they finished. "We are just about filled up."

"We are ready to start right now," said Clay with satisfaction, "but of course we cannot go until tomorrow's freight, and we can not go without Ike. I saw him this morning and he said he would be down tonight—likely would get down in time for supper. What do you say, boys, if we take a little spin just to try out our new motor and see if there's anything the matter with it. Turn on the oil at the tank, Alex, and then both of you stand by to cast off when I give the word."

The boys obeyed quickly, eager for the test, while Clay went back and fussed with the motor. Case and Alex waited long by the mooring lines for the signal to let go, but it did not come.

"Can't you start it?" Alex at last shouted impatiently.

"Sure," replied Clay, coolly. "I could start it right off, but it would be ruined in ten minutes without petting it up a little first. I've been filling up grease cups, putting oil in the lubricating tanks, and oiling up the working parts. You've got to watch those things closely with this kind of a motor or it will run hot and melt away its bearings. But I am about to start now. As soon as she starts throw off the lines, and you, Case, take the wheel."

In a moment there came a series of sharp explosions from the engine room. The boys cast off the lines and Case jumped back to the wheel. The *Rambler* backed slowly away from the wharf. As soon as she was clear of the pier, Clay reversed the engine and the *Rambler* was headed up stream.

Clay remained in the engine pit tuning up his new charge, trying it out slowly like a new race horse, striving to bring each working part into harmony with its fellows, now turning on a little more oil, or a little more air, again screwing down for less oil and increasing the air; his keen ear attuned to the throb of the exhaust whose varying notes told the story of the changes his tinkering had wrought. It was stuffy in the engine hold and once he raised his head above the coaming for a deep breath of fresh air. He grinned at the scraps of conversation that floated back to him from up forward.

"The *Rambler* don't go like she used to go," Case was saying, gloomily, "every craft on the stream is passing us. Look at that Vixen behind. She is creeping right up on us now and the *Rambler* used to make two miles to her one."

"Yes," Alex agreed, dejectedly. "Clay has handed us a lemon all right. It has turned the *Rambler* into a floating hearse. Well, he meant it for the best and we must not show our disappointment. He'll feel bad enough about it himself when

he finds out the mistake he made.”

“Sure, there’s to be no roasting of Clay,” Case agreed, heartily. “He’s the best one of us three.”

Clay, still grinning, dropped down again into the hold and resumed his tinkering with air and oil tubes. He straightened up at last, and gave a sigh of satisfaction as his ear caught a new note in the throbbing exhaust, a low, mellow throb, throb, throb, regular and even. He had at last secured the right mixture of oil and air for the motor. He filed little notches on the air and oil cocks so that in the future the proper adjustments of air and oil could be made at a moment’s notice. This done, he climbed out of the hold and made his way forward.

“Well, how’s she doing?” he asked of the downcast two.

Alex tried to answer brightly. “She seems to go a wee mite slower than she used to, but maybe she’ll do better when the new engine gets limbered up a bit.”

“It feels dandy to be out in the *Rambler* once more, doesn’t it?” put in Case, hurriedly.

Clay turned aside to hide his grin. “Isn’t that the Dingbat coming down on us from ahead?” Didn’t we used to be able to outrun her?”

“No, she always used to beat us a little,” Alex said, gloomily.

“Well, it’s time we were turning back anyway,” Clay observed. “When she gets past you, Case, turn around and follow her.” He walked back to the hold grinning at the scraps of conversation that followed him.

“Think of him wanting to race the Dingbat, with this one-mule water wagon.”

“And the Dingbat is one of the swiftest motor boats around here.”

“Think of our hoping that he would tumble to his mistake by degrees and not get so rough a jar.”

“Well, he had to know it some time. He isn’t quite blind.”

Clay reached the hold and dropping down into it, stood with head above the hatch coaming watching. He saw the Dingbat sweep past like an arrow, and Case, obedient to order, swing the *Rambler* around in slow, clumsy pursuit. Then he reached down to the motor and shoving over the lever to make a quicker spark, turned on a little more oil and air. He could feel the *Rambler* leap forward as he clambered out of the hold and walked forward.

The boys’ faces were a study. Case, his mouth wide open, was handling the wheel and gazing ahead at the great foamy waves parting away from the bow.

Alex, leaning over the side, was watching the foam slip by while amazement and surprise stood out on his freckled face. “Clay,” he shouted, “pinch me and see if I’m asleep or just plain crazy. Five minutes ago I was in a hearse, and now I’m in a flying machine.”

“Oh, she isn’t flying yet, laughed Clay. “She’s only just getting off the

ground. Face around and have a good look at the Dingbat.”

The *Rambler* swept past the Dingbat like a trolley car past a loaded wagon. The Dingbat’s captain in assumed rage, rose to his feet and shook his fist at them as they swept by.”

“Look here,” he shouted. “I’m willing to race any motor boat around these parts, but I’ll be hanged if I’ll match my boat against a hydroplane.”

“Want more speed, Case?” Clay inquired. “I’ve only got three-fourths of the power turned on.”

“More speed?” yelled Case as he nearly swamped a passing row boat with the high waves which the *Rambler*’s bows sent rolling away from her. “More power?” he repeated, when the curses heaped on him by the row boat’s crew had died away behind. “The balance of the power would drive her under water, loaded as she is.”

“No,” Alex grinned. “It would send all the water in the South Branch clean up into the city in a series of tidal waves.”

Clay prudently set the timer at half speed. They made the run back to the dock in less than half the time it had taken them to go. The boys were jubilant over the motor.

“I’ll bet she made 18 miles an hour on that first sprint,” Alex exulted.

“Under full power and laden light, I am sure we can get twenty-two miles an hour out of her,” Case said, confidently.

They found the two applicants for passage waiting on the wharf. “Hallo,” said the big man heartily. “We come as we said we would. This is my partner. Partner Bill, and a right good partner too he is. Me and him have been partners for a right smart number of years. Ain’t we, Bill?”

“Yes, Jed, but don’t talk too much,” growled Bill, who, though smaller than his partner, was a man of powerful build and heavily muscled, unlike Jed, however, his hands were dirty and his face bore the stamp of every evil passion.

“All right, Bill,” said Jed, good-naturedly. “I guess this chap,” indicating Case, “told you fellows about the talk I had with him yesterday.”

“Haven’t I seen you two somewhere before?” Clay demanded before Alex or Case could reply.

Bill looked startled and Jed shifted his feet uneasily before he answered. “You might have seen us somewhere,” he admitted, slowly. “We have been in Chicago all winter doing odd jobs to keep our bodies and souls together, ’till the spring thaw. Yes, you may have seen us working somewhere.”

“It was last fall at Ike’s news stand on the corner I first saw you,” Clay spoke slowly and watched the two faces. Jed squirmed uneasily but the other came promptly to the rescue.

“That’s where it was,” he exclaimed. “We was strangers to the city and we

stopped there to ask some directions, and had a right pleasant chat with the boy before we left.”

“And I saw you there again,” Clay continued.

“Like as not,” interrupted the other. “We have hung around the stand a good deal this winter and Ike and us got to be real good friends.”

“Yes, you seemed mighty good friends the last time I saw you together,” Clay said, dryly. “It was only a couple of afternoons ago and you two were trying to rough house Ike and you might have done it too, if I hadn’t seen the fracas and called the police.”

Bill seemed at a loss for an answer for a second and then his reckless air came back. “We wasn’t going to hurt him none—just scare him. We asked him for a dime to get a bowl of soup, ’cause we were nearly starved, and that miserable whining Jew—”

“Stop right there,” Alex commanded. “Ike is a Jew but he is not miserable and he is not whining. He is manly and straight. He is one of our best friends and he is coming down this evening to go on this trip with us.”

Clay had shook his head vigorously at Alex but the boy would not be stopped until he said what he had to say.

The effect on the two men was amazing. Anger and evil passions played over Bill’s face like black clouds over a murky sky. Even Jed’s good-humored countenance became downcast and troubled.

“Come on, partner,” he said, plucking at Bill’s sleeve. “They don’t want you an’ me here. Let’s go and try somewhere else.”

Bill, with a string of oaths on his lips, suffered him to lead him off the end of the dock where he turned and shook his clenched fist at the boys on the *Rambler*.

“He would sure be a nice one to have along on a trip,” Alex grinned. “I’d be afraid to go to sleep for fear I’d wake up murdered.”

“I’m sorry you told them Ike was going with us,” Clay said severely. “If he had wanted them to know he would have told them, but he didn’t. You could see that by their faces when you blurted it out. Well, it’s done now and can’t be helped. It’s your turn to cook dinner, Case. After it is over, I’ll show you both how to run the new motor. It’s very simple. You’ll soon be able to handle it.”

CHAPTER VI

A MURDEROUS ASSAULT

As Clay had said, it took but a little while for Alex and Case to learn to handle the new motor and they soon became delighted with its simplicity.

"The only bad feature about it is that it has to be cleaned more frequently than a gas engine," Clay observed. "The kerosene soots up the piston and coats the rings and then the motor does not work well. It ought to be cleaned thoroughly at least once a week. I've been thinking that we had ought to make the cleaning of it a new punishment for slang using. Our present penalty is too light—the dish washing has been tried and found wanting. After a man has spent a day down in that stuffy hold, covered with grease and oil, it will make him careful of his language for a long time."

"All right," agreed his companions, but Alex, with an eye to the present, past and future, added craftily: "Of course this doesn't apply to past offences, nor to future ones. It only goes into effect when we are actually started on our trip up the Yukon?"

"That's about it," assented Clay.

"Then I want to say that we are a lot of boneheads running around wasting our precious oil. We are dippy, all of us. Case has got bats in his belfry, you have a few wheels in your head, and I'm not quite right in my upper story. Let's go in and overhaul our stores instead of casting money."

All the afternoon the boys labored on the more careful repacking of their hastily stored cargo and overhauling their personal belongings. When the afternoon began to wane, Alex betook himself to the kitchen to prepare the supper which they had agreed should be quite a spread in honor of Ike's coming. As the sun went down, Case tied a rope around Teddy Bear and led him up on the dock, followed by Captain Joe. "I'm going up the street a bit and meet Ike," he said. "The animals need exercise and I guess Ike will be pretty tired with his luggage before he gets down here."

Alex, assisted by Clay in the preparation of the feast, took but little notice of the passage of time until the cabin grew so dark that they had to turn on the lights to see.

"Gee, I wonder what's keeping Ike so long," Alex exclaimed. "If he doesn't come pretty soon the supper will be spoilt."

"Strange Case doesn't come back," Clay said uneasily. "He's been gone over an hour. I hope he didn't take Teddy up town. If he did, he's liable to have got into trouble and Ike may be trying to help him out. One of us had better go up and see what's the matter."

He had scarcely spoken when there came the sound of slow foot-steps on the dock and Alex snapped on the prow light.

The first to come inside of the half circle of light was Teddy and Captain Joe, then followed Case, half carrying, half supporting a limp form.

Alex and Clay leaped to the wharf to receive the strange possession.

"It's Ike," said Case, as he stopped, and stood panting, but still supporting his heavy burden. "Give me a hand to get him down into the cabin. I'm about played out."

The three carried him down into the cabin and laid him in a clean bunk, just taking off his shoes and loosening up his clothing so that he might rest easier. In the bright light, he looked ghastly, his face pale and many blood stained handkerchiefs around his head.

"Don't look so scared," said Case with a smile. "He is not going to die. He will be all right in a day or two. Let's have supper and I'll tell you all about it. The supper was placed upon the table and all three fell to eating while Case told his story. "I waited up the street a little ways until I began to feel uneasy and restless, then I moved further up the street, almost opposite that lumber yard. It was almost dark when I saw Ike coming. He was carrying a suitcase and walking fast. Just as he came to the other end of the lumber yard, two men sprang out on him. One hit him over the head and he went down like a stone. The other grabbed the suit case out of Ike's hand, tore it open as though it was paper and dumped the contents out on the street. While he was pawing it over, the other fellow went through Ike's pockets. For a full moment I was helpless with surprise, then I ran for the spot. Teddy and Captain Joe right behind me. The men saw me coming, but they stood their ground until I was about one hundred feet away. They evidently wanted to make a thorough search. When I got that close they ran and turned off the street into an alley."

"Did you see their faces?" questioned Clay eagerly.

"I did," Case replied. "They were the two men who wanted to take passage with us. Well, I did not follow them up. I got Ike laid out as comfortable as I could and called for the ambulance and then ran back to Ike. The ambulance got to him as quickly as I did. He soon came to under the doctor's treatment. The doctor shaved his head, put ointment and sticking plaster on it, and bound it up. To save him a bad night of pain, the doctor gave him some sleeping, quieting dope, and then he ordered the driver to bring us down to the pier and pick him up on the way back. Well, the horses refused to go out over the water and we took Ike out of the wagon. I told the driver that I had a job on my hands. I guess the dope had taken good effect for he was unconscious and breathing heavily. I fairly had to carry him to the boat."

"Did you notify the police?" Clay asked.

"No, Ike was conscious all right until the doctor gave him that dope and he begged me not to tell the police, for we might be held as witnesses so long that our trip would be spoilt."

"Well," said Alex. "I'll be glad when we are off at last."

“And that will be tonight,” Clay said. “I’m going to run the *Rambler* around tonight and anchor her close to the railroad dock. We start in the morning and it will be best to have her on hand. Besides I want to get out of here. There’s too much trouble going on around this pier. Do you think the noise of the motor would wake Ike, Chase?”

“You would have to hit him again with another pair of brass knucks—that’s what the doctor said was used on him—to wake him up,” laughed Case.

So the moorings were cast off. And the *Rambler* was run around close to the big railroad dock and anchored, while the boys, deciding that they had had enough excitement for one day, at once turned in. At daylight they were up again and tied up to the railroad dock. Here they passed strong ropes under the *Rambler* and fastening them above the boat had a strong, well-fixed sling, which would lift equally on all parts of the heavily-laden boat, when the dock hoist was attached. This done there was nothing to do but wait until their train backed down to take them on.

Ike had been awakened by the noise on deck and, when the boys descended into the cabin, they found him sitting up on the edge of his bunk swinging his legs. “No, I ain’t sick, you understand,” he said in answer to their inquiries. “That low-life what hit me over the head he don’t do nothing but make my head ache some. Did them loafers steal anything from me when I no got my senses?”

“They broke open your suit case and scattered your things all over the pavement,” Case said. “I picked up all I could find but of course I did not know whether anything was missing.”

“Give me my clothes first,” Ike demanded. He examined the pockets of pants and coat and grinned. “They gets nothing here,” he said, “except a Canadian quarter, a lead half dollar, and a dime with a hole in it. I have a false lining here on the inside and it makes a dandy place to carry money, you understand.” He slapped the seat of his trousers and it gave back a crisp rustling as of stiff new bills. A careful examination of the torn suit case discovered nothing missing and Ike, feeling better in mind and spirit, declared he would like a bite to eat.

While Clay hustled around to cook him a slice of toast, some soft boiled eggs, and a cup of coffee, Alex ran up town and was soon back with a couple of morning papers.

They contained only a brief notice of the assault on Ike, probably given out by the ambulance surgeon, but flaring across on the first front page was:

“Chicago’s open season for hold-ups and murders has begun.” Then below the head lines followed.

“Mr. Austin, a rather prominent retail merchant, was on his way home last night when he was attacked by foot-pads who darted out on him from the old lumber yard on L street. Mr. Austin had been unable to get to the bank during

the day and carried in a wallet in his breast pocket, over \$1,000. While one man held him and choked him, the other relieved him of his money, and of the fat wallet. Then they tripped him up and took to their heels, escaping, as there are no policemen and few pedestrians on this lonely street. Mr. Austin describes the two as being very big, roughly clothed men, one of them having a red scar on one cheek. Of course they got away. Even if Mr. Austin had been able to obtain a good photograph of each it is doubtful if our bone-headed police would recognize the men if they accidentally met them.”

Just then came the rumble of a train coming down the dock. Clay pushed his head out of the window. “It’s our train,” he shouted. “Take those dishes off the table and set the pots off the stove. She may list a bit when they go to hoist her.”

A huge crane swung slowly over the *Rambler* and from it a huge hook attached to a chain was gently lowered. The boys quickly caught the hook in the sling. The chain slowly tightened and the *Rambler* was lifted bodily and lowered gently onto a flat car, where she was quickly shored up with timbers to keep her on an even keel.

It was only a few minutes before the train backed off the docks, switched onto the main track and began to crawl slowly out of the dingy city.

“Hurrah!” cried Alex in his joy. “We are off, off at last.” And the others joined him in his jubilation.

CHAPTER VII

THE GOLD FEVER

Four travel-weary looking boys stood on the hurricane deck of the steamer *Arctic* just landed at St. Michael’s Island which lies somewhat below the Arctic circle and close to the mouth of the great river Yukon. We spoke of the boys as standing, but that was incorrect, rather they were sitting, with legs swinging, on the deck of the motor boat *Rambler*, looking down at the strange scene going on below them. From one gang plank the *Arctic*’s passengers were pushing out eagerly to reach the shore, while up the other gang plank was struggling a line of curious humanity.

“Whew, if that’s what the gold-seeker gets to be like, then I don’t want to be one,” declared a boy gloomy looking, unless something exciting was going

on around him. "Gee, they are a ghastly looking sight. See how some faces are disfigured by frost bites, and those others at the foot of the plank, notice how pale and wan their faces are, and notice the lines of suffering on them. Famine all winter I'll bet caused that. See those three fellows coming up now, two with only one arm and one with one leg, been frozen or broken in accidents on the ice. Right behind them are two nearly dead with the scurvy; you can see the marks from here."

"Well, maybe they have been well paid for their sufferings, Case," observed Alex, whose good-humored, freckled face was always cheerful. "They'll most of them get well quick as soon as they get to the States and get proper food and medicine."

"They don't look as though they make much money," observed Ike, the Jew boy, dubiously. "Most of them has on rags and the best of them I could fit out better in a cheap second-hand shop."

"You can't tell a man by his clothes," said Clay, the fourth boy, who was looking over at the distant town of Nome, a cluster of tents and rough shanties on the mainland.

"You're right there," said a voice behind them and the four wheeled around to find the captain of the steamer standing behind them. "No, you can't judge those men by their looks or clothes. That fellow in rags has a claim up near Dawson that has turned him out over two million already. He wants a change. His folks have a kind of a farm up in the States. He'll go there and lay around under the trees for a while and then drift back. That big man next to him is one of the richest miners in the north. He'll go out for a month perhaps, spend a quarter of a million having what he calls a good time, then he'll drift back. Maybe more than half of that crowd coming on board have made good stakes. Of the balance most are tenderfeet, who have simply got cold feet and have given up the game. But, boys, three-fourths of that crowd will be back in a year. I can't understand it myself, but there is a lure to this Northland that seems to draw men back to her in spite of the awful punishments she gives. But all this isn't what I came to see you about, boys. I wanted to say that we can lower your boat down any time, but its pretty rough now so I would advise you to wait until tomorrow."

"Thank you, Captain," said Clay, after a questioning glance at his companions. "We thank you very much, but we have been delayed so much on the journey that we have got to hustle to see much of the Yukon before the ice sets in. We want to see Nome this afternoon, and tomorrow begins our trip up the Yukon. I am sure the *Rambler* can ride those waves—she has gone over much bigger ones in her time. If the slings are placed right so that she will hit the water evenly, she will be all right."

"All right, boys," smiled the Captain. "Have your own way about it. Good-

bye, and I hope it will be our fortune to go back on the same boat in the fall. I'll send the boatswain right up to fix the slings. He's an artist at that kind of work. We will have your boat in the water in a jiffy."

He was gone but a moment when the boatswain appeared and with deft fingers adjusted the slings. At a signal the steamer's big crane, hoisted high, swung in over their heads. The boys clambered aboard the *Rambler* and took their places—Case at the wheel, Clay at the motors, and Alex and Ike at the slings ready to cast off when the time came.

The big crane lifted them over the rail, held them poised for a minute, then lowered them gently down into the rough water below. The moment the slings slacked, Ike and Alex cast off the iron hooks that connected them to the crane. Clay started the motors, Case swung the wheel around, and the *Rambler*—like a bird freed from captivity—darted away, followed by the cheers of the steamer's crew.

Alex danced up and down the deck, while the others could hardly refrain from joining him in their joy at being once more afloat on their beloved craft.

Case headed the *Rambler* for the straggling village. The little motor boat rode the sea valiantly and by mid-afternoon they were safely moored in the lea of a short pier running out from the beach. "Alex, you and Case run out and take in the sights while Ike and I stay by the boat," Clay said. "We had not ought to leave the *Rambler* alone with all her valuable cargo. As soon as you get through with your sight-seeing, come back again and give Ike and me a chance. Better take Captain Joe and Teddy Bear with you. They need a walk after their long confinement. The two eagerly obeyed and Alex led Teddy away with Captain Joe at his heels.

An ancient looking prospector who had been sitting on a wharf post and who had been listening to the boys' conversation with unabashed interest, got up and strolled over to where they were sitting.

"Chekakos, ain't you?" He questioned laconically. "Young ones, too, at that."

"We're young, all right," Clay admitted with a smile, "but we don't exactly know what you mean by 'chekakos.'"

"Old timers' name for a greenhorn or tenderfoot. I knowed you was greenhorns from the States as soon as I laid eyes on you," he continued. "Your faces haven't been painted with lines and scars yet by old North now; then, too, I heard you talk, and that showed you didn't know the region around the Arctic. You can leave your boat alone with the cabin unlocked at any miner's camp and nothing will be touched. We hang thieves on mighty slim evidence up here. It's a worse crime here than killing. Run on and see the town if you want to. No one will bother your boat."

Clay was convinced by the rugged honesty of the miner's face.

"Come on, Ike," he called. "Let's go and stretch our legs for a while and see what Nome looks like. Slip your automatic in your pocket. One always needs one when they haven't got it. Hurry up, perhaps we can catch up with the boys. They haven't been gone long." But although they hastened their pace, they could not catch sight of Alex and Case. At last they gave up the attempt to find them and turned their attention to the busy scene around them. Everywhere upon little plots of ground heaps of dirt were being reared skyward from holes in which brawny men in their short-sleeves toiled with shovels and hoisting-pails; the whole place looked like a grouping of ant hills.

The boys paused beside several of these holes and watched the steady labor of digging and hoisting. Every man appeared to be working so against time that the boys did not want to butt in with questions. At one hole, however, they found a great giant of a man clad in overalls who was handling a bucket. He greeted them cordially with a demand for the latest news from the States.

"Yes, these claims are rich, but gold ain't all in life," he said in answer to Clay's questions. "I used to figure out if I was only rich I'd be happy, but that thar hole holds a million dollars apiece for me and my partners and I don't feel happy. Seem like I'd give it all now to think that I'd been kinder to mother and sister when they were alive or had tried to help dear old dad when he was struggling to find clothes and food for us all. Hold on a minute," he said, as the boys started to bid him good-bye. "I never let a stranger off my claim without a souvenir, so to speak." He gathered up a miner's pan almost full of the fresh gravel and taking it down to a little running stream and filling the pan, tipped it up on edge, and gave it a peculiar whirling motion which sent the sand and gravel out over the edge. This was repeated several times and then he extended the pan out for their view. In its bottom lay fine flakes of yellow and resting upon them as upon a bed glistened eight nuggets varying in size from a grain of corn to a small marble. "Take them and you can have them made into scarf pins as a reminder of the trip when you get back home. No, no, thanks. Just take them and run along. I've got to get to work."

Ike eyed the gold with a calculating eye. "I bet that gold's worth \$20.00 he said. Suppose we stop and talk to some of the other men what hoists the buckets. Perhaps they give souvenirs too."

"Not much, I guess," laughed Clay. "That man's an exception; all are too busy to waste time on strangers." He stopped at the next claim to inquire if anything had been seen of two boys, a dog and a grizzly. The man scratched his gravel splashed hair. "Yep, I did see a bear some time ago. He was licking it for town in a hurry. He had a rope dragging behind him so I reckon he was some one's pet. A little after a boy, all covered with gravel and mud, passed a-running,

an' I made up my mind he was the bear's owner. Didn't see no dog or other boy."

"Let's make for town as fast as our legs will carry us," Clay said. "Alex has had trouble with Teddy and no telling how it will end. I wonder how he got separated from Case. I never intended for him to be on shore alone. He always gets into trouble."

A few minutes of running brought them to the edge of the town, which consisted of one main street bordered on each side by long ramshackle buildings or dug-outs. Every building seemed to be a dance hall, saloon, or gambling den; often one building seemed to combine all three. The din of pianos and the harsh discord floated out on the street, disgusting the two boys who had carefully kept away from unclean things.

They hurried down one side of the street and back on the other side without catching sight of either of the missing ones. "I wonder what could have become of them," Clay repeated for the twentieth time. He stopped by a man sitting in a doorway and inquired of him if he had seen anything of the boy and bear.

"Sure, they are both in the Golden Nugget, that saloon over there, where so much noise comes from. It's a tough place and y'd better get your partner out of there right away. Wait a second till I get my belt and gun an I'll walk over there with you. I know most of the fellows and may be able to save you trouble." It took the man but a moment to buckle on his heavy belt, laden with cartridges and two long barreled Colts. Then he led the way across to the cheaply-gaudy saloon. As he flung open the door a curious sight greeted the boys' eyes. Leaning against the bar with the air of an old toper, his head tipped to one side and his mouth parted in a silly grin, was Teddy, his eyes fixed on a pail of beer the bartender had drawn and which, when full, he set before the bear.

Alex, in the far corner, tears of sheer rage in his eyes, was pulling with all his strength and repeating commands for him to come away. He had not noticed the entrance of the boys. Suddenly he dropped the rope and his hand sought his coat pocket.

"Look here, you fellows," he called, his eyes flashing through his tears. "That's my bear and I want you to leave him alone. Don't give him another drink; why, he's getting as drunk as some of these men and he hasn't got much more sense than they have when he's this way. He would not be in here if you hadn't coaxed him in with sugar and got him to boxing and drinking beer. Now stop it, cut it out and cut it out quick."

"What are you going to do about it, my young bantam," sneered the bartender.

"That's simple," said Alex, in steady tones. "I'm going to shatter that mirror. I've heard one was worth \$2,500.00 up here. Then those rows of bottles on the shelves—I've seen you sell some at \$10.00 per bottle—that I think will about pay

for Teddy.”

“What do you think I’ll be doing all that time,” sneered the bartender.

“You’ll be smiling sweetly and holding up your hands as high as you can get them,” came the cool retort; “otherwise I might take you for an enlarged whiskey bottle and make a mistake in my shooting. Stop!” he cried, as the bartender reached under the bar.

“It’s time to interfere,” said the stranger by Clay’s side.

CHAPTER VIII

AN EXCITING TIME

The low ceilinged room was filled with roughly dressed miners and a few women gaudily attired. Alex’s voice had rang out so seriously and deadly that a wide lane had opened up between him and the bartender. Clay and Ike, with the stranger in the lead, pushed forward to where Teddy, a leering grin on his face, was waiting for another round of beer. The bartender was striving to secure his long-barreled pistol, which lay on a shelf underneath the bar, but Alex was on the watch and the ping of the automatic sent a steel-nosed bullet crashing through the bar close to the bartender’s hands, which he promptly elevated on high. “Now for your insults and threats and the way you have abused Teddy,” Alex cried, anger taking full possession of him. He sent two bullets in the mirror which cracked it from top to bottom, then he began to shoot slowly and carefully, at the four tiers of bottles behind the bar. Each bullet brought forth the tinkling sound of splintered glass and the gushing forth of escaping liquor. The bartender’s face grew paler with each sound of breaking glass, for liquor was liquid gold at Nome.

But this state of things could not last. The shots brought the reserve force of bartenders and bouncers from other parts of the building, some pulling out their long-barreled revolvers as they ran to their chief’s assistance. The first appeared behind the bar just as the stranger, with the boys at his side, struggled into the open lane that ran from Alex to the bar. Alex had emptied his pistol and was calmly reloading it with deliberate care, although he could not but realize the peril in which he stood. His face brightened as he saw his two friends.

“Get out while you’ve got the chance,” he shouted.

But Clay only smiled as he whipped out his automatic and leveled it at the newcomer behind the bar, who was cocking a heavy 44 Colts.

"Hold on a minute, you gunmen," rang out the stranger's voice, cool and crisp. The constantly augmented group of bartenders and bouncers hesitated for a moment at the determined tones of authority, and Alex finished his reloading.

"I reckon you all know me," went on the cool drawling voice, "if some of you don't know me, I'm the Yukon Kid an' you may have heard the name before." A murmur swept over the crowd.

"I never thought much of Nome, with her gambling dens, dance halls and dives like this, but I never thought one of the places I have mentioned would descend so low as to hector and make desperate a boy, just a stripling, and a chekako (tenderfoot), at that." His clear voice swept the assembled miners and the group of hesitating bartenders. His two heavy revolvers seemed to leap from their holsters. One steel muzzle described a rapidly slanting arc back and forth before the saloon men, while the other whirled rapidly in a circle with a finger pressed gently on the trigger, seemed to cover the whole crowd at once to their evident uneasiness.

"Boys, go and get your bear out in the street. Don't be too hard on him," said the Yukon Kid, with a grin. "Remember it's his first offense and likely his last, for he'll be a sick bear tomorrow."

Alex came forward from his corner and Ike and Clay moved up to Teddy. "Come on, Teddy, and no foolishness about it," Clay commanded. But Teddy, a maudlin insane glint in his eyes, squared off angrily to fight.

Clay snatched out his sheaf knife and made a downward sweep with it. Teddy's eyes lost their look of insanity, and whining, he dropped on all fours and made for the door, followed by the boys. Once outside Teddy tried to arise to his hind feet but found his legs too weak and wobbly, so dropped back on all fours.

"Take him right down to the boat and tie him up to the snubbing block in the prow, Alex," Clay ordered. "You go with him, Ike. I'm going to look for Case and Captain Joe. I am worried about them. Where did you see him last, Alex?"

"We got separated soon after we left the boat, I was trying to hunt him up when that brute gave me a shove down into one of those worked out mines and bolted. By the time I got out I was not thinking about anything but finding Teddy before he got into mischief. I don't know what became of Case."

"Stop a minute, Clay," shouted Ike, as they were moving off. "Don't forget if a man insists on our taking souvenirs, there's eight of us in the crew, you understand."

"But there are only six of us," said Clay, puzzled.

"You forget the dog and bear," replied Ike solemnly. "Don't you think animals have some feelings and don't like to be slighted? If they don't want them we can take care of them for them."

Clay turned back into the saloon with a smile on his face.

It was quite a different sight that met his eyes when he stepped inside. The Yukon Kid was the center of the crowd of miners, who, pressing around him, were loudly demanding news of the upper Yukon. Two bartenders were, with forced smiles on their faces, serving the crowd with drinks on the house. The others were mopping up the spilled liquor from the broken bottles.

The crowd was so dense that Clay could not force his way in so he stood on its edge striving to signal the Kid. "Great man, the Kid," volunteered a miner next him. "Came into this country just a kid and hasn't been outside since. Carries the mail back and forth as far as Dawson. Never misses a trip, and let me tell you that's a trip but few dare to make in the middle of winter. Don't reckon he's so very rich—gives away too much. But, I reckon, he's known better and trusted more than any man in the North. He's a good man to tie to for he's always reliable in peace or trouble."

Clay studied the Kid's face closely as the man talked. In spite of the roughness and scars placed there by Mother North, it was a young, comely, strong face, and set off with twinkling steel gray eyes. Their eyes met and the Kid pushed through the crowd to his side.

"Hello," he said. "You back?"

"I wanted to thank you for what you have done for us," Clay said gratefully.

"Bosh!" exclaimed the Kid, the red mounting to his face. "What little I did for you I'd do for any chekako who was staked up against odds," he chuckled. "That's a fire-eating little partner you've got. He'll make a sour dough all right if he doesn't get killed in the making."

"I have got another partner just as gamey," Clay said proudly. "He is not as quick tempered as Alex but he's all right. I wanted to ask you if you had heard or seen anything of him. The two left the boat at the same time, but soon got separated. He had a big white bull dog with him. I am afraid something has happened to him."

"No, I haven't seen or heard anything of him, but wait a bit, some of this crowd may have heard of him. I'll inquire."

"He was gone but a moment then returned to Clay. "I've found out where he was an hour ago, but Lord only knows where he is now. Wait! I'll go with you. You couldn't find the place alone." He moved up to the bar and called for drinks, taking a glass of root beer for himself. "My parting round, boys," he said friendly. "Have something yourself, Charley," to the white-clad bartender. "What I'm trying to figure out is who's going to pay for that mirror and the wasted liquor—about \$3,000, I calculate," scoffed the bartender.

"It's your own fault, Charley," said the Kid, lightly. "You can't collect it out of the boys—they are minors any way. Better charge it up as advertising."

"Say," he continued, as he noted the black frown on the other's face. "I'll

take responsibility for that bill. Just send it up to my cabin, and then come up and try to collect it.”

The frown disappeared from the fellow’s face and he tried to force a grin.

“Guess I’d better charge it to advertising,” he said.

“Sure, advertising pays,” agreed the Kid cordially, and turning, he strode for the door where Clay was awaiting him. As they stepped outside, a strong wind smote their faces so as to almost prevent conversation. The Kid turned, his hand against his mouth. “Keep close to me,” he shouted “and no matter what trouble comes up, don’t pull your gun unless I give the word.”

Clay obeyed and kept close at the Kid’s heels. A half hour’s walk brought them to the fringe of the town, where they could see the *Rambler* dancing at her dock about a mile distant.

“We’re nearly there,” said the Kid, “and remember, you’re to let me handle this thing, in my own way. Just keep still and let me do the talking. He had reached a group of tents which were pitched in a kind of circle leaving a round plot of ground inclosed within. From this court yard came the sounds of laughter, hoots and cries. The Yukon Kid picked his way in between the ropes of two tents, Clay following. At this entrance they paused a minute to review the scene.

The courtyard was about one-fourth of an acre in extent. All around its sides were packed a dense crowd of men offering and taking big bets on the outcome of the battle that raged in the center.

Here, within another circle, a curious battle was going on. Ranged around in a silent circle, according to their usual code, were a dozen or more wolf-dogs, more wolf than dog, squatted on their haunches, their eyes eager, and their long white fangs dripping saliva, for to them belonged the spoils of the battle that was going on now within this inner circle. When one of the combatants died, it was their privilege to drag it outside of the circle and satisfy their hunger-warped souls on its flesh and bones. They cared not which died, only that he died quickly. Theirs was the sentiment of aching bellies.”

The Kid kicked a way through the circle of dogs and Clay followed him. Inside two men, seated on a log, were evidently refereeing the fight while on the other end of the log sat Case, tightly bound hand and foot, his face a picture of anger and helplessness.

The Kid took a seat on the log by the side of the one who appeared chief in authority and who shifted uneasily. He did not like the Yukon Kid. The Kid knew too much and had an uncanny way of learning hidden things.

“Having a good match, Major?” enquired the Kid pleasantly, as he glanced at the desperate battle for life Captain Joe was putting up against a gaunt, husky wolf dog that towered way above him. Both dogs were fighting desperately and silently as became their breed, the husky darting in and out, snapping viciously,

and Captain Joe whirling to meet the attack on his short, stumpy legs with surprising quickness, always trying to reach the enemy's throat.

"Yes, it's some match," agreed the other, cautiously. "A good many thousands of dollars of gold dust changed hands on the first match alone."

"You don't mean you've been fighting that bull dog against more than one husky?" the Kid cried in amazement.

"He's killed two, this is the third one," said the Major: "By jove! there goes the third." Captain Joe had found his goal at last. The husky, eager to kill, had bent too low and Captain Joe's teeth were buried in his throat in a death-like grip, which, rear and plunge as he might, the husky could not shake off. In a few moments it was all over and the dead husky was dragged away by his ravenous comrades, while Captain Joe painfully limped over to Case and Clay, his sides heaving and his white body bleeding from countless wounds. Clay picked him up and wiped his poor punctured body. "He's fought like a hero without a whine," Case said with dim eyes. "I tried to stop the first fight when it started, but a dozen of the crowd grabbed me and tied me up. All I've been able to do is to sit here and see them make him fight one husky after another. He's got four more to fight before they'll let him go. He can't finish those four. He is getting too weak. I doubt if he can go through another round, he has lost so much blood." The voice of the referee interrupted: "Captain Joe still alive and on his feet. Next match, Captain Joe against Birch Bark."

At the other end of the log the Yukon Kid was talking sweetly and coolly to the man in authority.

CHAPTER IX

THE VISITORS

"Do you think it quite fair to make one little brute fight seven big huskies, worked until they are as hard as iron, Major?"

"He's got to do it or die," said the Major. The Kid, however, seemed to have lost all interest in the dog fight. "Remember that murder up on the Stewart when some one did up Old Joe and made off with the whole of the gold dust that the old man had cleared up? Remember it, Major?"

"I don't exactly remember it," said the Major, uneasily.

"Course you remember it," said the Kid softly. "I met you just south of the

Stewart and you were driving as though the devil was after you. Queer, ain't it?" he continued, "that the police could not find out who the murderer was, while I knew in less than a week. Strange tales from the Indians reached my ears and one of them brought me a lot of things he had found around the cabin before the mounted police came. There was a mitten, an empty 45-50 shell, and a handkerchief with a man's name on it, and, well, there were a lot of other things. But what's the use of bringing up old scores. Joe was so mean that the poison in his heart would have killed him pretty soon anyway. Look here," he said abruptly. "I reckon this dog fight has gone about far enough. That white bull is dead game, but he can't go another battle."

"You want the fight called off?" the Major asked with head bent.

"I reckon that's about it," said the Kid cheerfully, "and you might as well untie that youngster's hands and feet. It ain't no ways comfortable for a boy to be trussed up that way."

"All right," said the Major listlessly, and he walked over to the referee and spoke a few words.

"All right," the referee replied sullenly, "you're the boss. Match declared off for personal reasons," he shouted to the crowd outside. "All bets on this fight declared off." There was an angry murmur from the crowd outside. The Kid slashed away Case's bindings. "Bring your dog and keep close to me. There's no telling how that crowd will act. There are some bad men amongst them." A hundred men surrounded them with angry threats as they broke out of the circle. The Kid took Captain Joe and held him up to the view of the crowd. "Here's a poor, little four-legged American citizen," he said. "He's game, if he is a chekako. He's killed three of your trail-hardened huskies. That ought to be enough, but now you want him to tackle four more. Is that a square deal? Is that the American spirit of fair play?"

"You Americans are always boasting about what you do," sneered an Englishman. "Why, that dog isn't an American. It's an English bull dog."

"I will admit his ancestors came from England and that he has inherited his awful looking mug from them, but he isn't to blame for that. He's got the true American spirit."

The Americans in the crowd laughed at the Kid's retort, and one of them shouted: "Hurrah for the stars and stripes."

"You blooming braggers," shouted the Englishman. "You'll never stand straight up and fight fair with odds even."

"We, as a nation, never get the chance," retorted the Kid. "We always have had to give odds of five to one at least. Remember the wars of 1776 and 1812?"

The cheering over the Englishman's discomfiture rose uproariously until a big Swede stilled it by raising up his brawny arms above the crowd as a signal

for silence.

“Ay tank day United States ban all right. Ay tank day American dog with the ugly face ban all right too. How you all like to fight four more mens after you already lick three? Ay tank we better let the dog and boys go.”

The air rang with applause from the now good-natured crowd. “Let ’em go,” shouted a hundred voices, and the two boys worked their way through the ropes into the open once more, followed by the Yukon Kid.

Once distant from the circle of tents, the Kid stopped. “I guess you can find the boat all right,” he said. “I’m going to take a short cut home. I’ve traveled fifty miles today and only eaten one meal. I’ll rest a bit and then get something to eat.”

“I wish you would take your rest and then come down to the boat and have supper with us,” Clay said earnestly. “We have got a lot of dainties, and we brought up loads of books and magazines.”

“I’ll go you,” said the Kid boyishly. “I have been living on bacon and beans all winter—and magazines and books! Have you really got them? I had almost forgotten that there were such things in the world. Why, I got hold of a New York paper last winter and I read it and read it until I wore it out. Sure, I’ll be down just as soon as I can catch a couple of hours’ rest. So long, boys, till supper.”

Clay and Case made their way down to the Rambler without any difficulty. The ancient mariner was still sitting on the post, watching, with delight, Ike and Alex pouring pail after pail of water on Teddy Bear, who, up in the prow in the sunshine, was snoring loudly. The only effect the water seemed to have upon him was to make him roll over on the other side and resume his loud snoring.

The veteran prospector beckoned to Clay to approach him. “Say,” he said in a hoarse whisper. “There’s been strange goings on in your boat since you left. I never expected to see anything like it around here. Just after you left, two men came down the dock and went aboard your boat. I didn’t take much notice of them, ’cause the latch string is always hangin’ out in the North and I could see that they were sour dough boys and reckoned they were some friends of yours. But they staid down in the cabin so long that I made up my mind that I’d step down and tell ’em that you-alls wouldn’t be back for a couple of hours. Soon as I peeked into the cabin, I saw what they was up to. There they was with all the lockers pulled out looking through your things and throwing your clothes out on the floor. One of them was just putting a battered silver watch in his pocket. I got a bead on him with my old 44 and let out a yell. He dropped the watch like it was red hot. I marched ’em out of the cabin and up on the dock. Then I says to ’em, ‘Hike for shore and don’t be long getting there, for my fingers are getting shaky with old age and might press the trigger too hard, any minute.’”

“Did they run?” questioned Clay, with a grin.

“I could not have caught them if I had been forty years younger, and, believe

me, I used to be some runner,” said the old prospector with open admiration at the speed the two fugitives had displayed. “But the further they got the madder I got to thinking old sour doughs would act meaner than a chekako. One of them was marked with a red scar across one cheek, and, just as they made the shore, I decided I’d mark the other one so I’d be sure to know him the next time I saw him.”

“Did you hit him?” asked Clay, still grinning.

“I reckon I’m getting an old fellow. I aimed for the lobe of his ear and only just nicked it.”

“We’re mighty grateful to you for defending our property,” Clay said. “Stay and have supper with us,” he urged. “We are fixing to have quite a spread.”

“No, thankee,” refused the old man. “I’ve got a pot of bacon and beans cooked up down at my cabin. I’ve eaten them and pertatoes and now and then a piece of moose meat for forty years, and I’ve got so a meal don’t taste right without ’em.”

“We have got beans, plenty of them,” urged Clay.

“I know the kind,” said the man, scornfully. “Come in a can with a little slice of bacon on top that you can see through, it’s so thin, and the beans below ’em are so weak and pale that they always color ’em up with tomato juice to make ’em look healthy and deceive you. No, no such kind of beans for me; just the raw kind. Put ’em in a pot with at least a third of their bulk in sizable cubes of bacon. Then fill the pot plumb full of water and sit on the fire to simmer. When they are done you have got beans what is beans. Come right handy on the trail in winter, too. You can freeze them into sticks an’ pack ’em on your sled an’ when you want to cook dinner, just chop off as much as you want and thaw it out in the frying pan. Well, good-night. Reckon I’ll see you afore you leave.”

Clay turned back to his friends, a gentle smile on his lips, for the quaint, honest Old Timer. He found his three companions washing and doing up Captain Joe’s numerous wounds, while the dog licked their hands in dumb gratitude.

“It does not need all three of you to fix up Captain Joe,” he observed. “Someone got into our cabin while we were gone and messed up things a good bit, though I don’t believe they got away with anything. I should like Ike to put things back in their place. All I can see that he’s doing is to look at Captain Joe’s teeth to see if there are any gold fillings. When you get through with Joe, both of you come up and help me for we are going to have the biggest feast we ever have had in the *Rambler*, tonight. We are going to have a visitor to supper.”

“Who?” Alex asked, smearing ointment over one of Captain Joe’s wounds while Case applied a clean white bandage to another.

“The Yukon Kid,” said Clay. “I invited him down and he accepted.”

“Hurrah,” shouted all three boys, and Ike added thoughtfully: “That Kid, he

knows a lot about the country; you understand, maybe he can tell us where there be more miners what like to give away souvenirs.”

Ike’s face went deathly pale when he caught sight of the scattered things that littered the cabin. He rushed to the pile near his bunk and pawed it out pantingly. The battered old silver watch lay near the pile and Ike pounced on it with delight. “I don’t care so much about the rest, but this my uncle gave me. I wish I had a good safe place to put it.”

“We fixed up a safe place to put our valuables while we had spare time this winter. Come here and I’ll show it to you.” Clay lifted up a square of flooring right behind the stove, disclosing a cavity about a foot square and the same in depth, the whole carefully lined with moisture-proof oil cloth. “That’s a mighty good place,” said Ike with satisfaction. “Soon’s I get time, you understand, I wraps up my watch, that nugget, and them bills I’ve got in the seat of my pants and put them here.” Clay replaced the bit of flooring. It fitted so carefully that the cracks could only be discovered with a close scrutiny. “We always put a couple of old sacks or an old piece of carpet over it and Captain Joe sleeps there most of the time, so you see there is but little chance of its being discovered. By the way, one of the chaps that raided the *Rambler* had a red scar on his face, and the other one had a face that would hang him without a trial.”

Ike’s face grew downcast. “Dem must have been them two low-lifes that tried to rob me in Chicago. I wonder how they gets here. They had no money.”

“I guess I know how they managed it,” said Clay, thoughtfully. “I’ll show you something when I get the time. We have talked too long now. Let’s get to work.”

Ike with deft fingers folded and replaced the scattered things in their lockers, while Clay started a fire in the stove and began preparations for the grand feast. He was soon joined by Case and Alex followed by Captain Joe. Alex was grinning. “You had ought to have seen Captain Joe,” he said, “the minute we turned him loose: he made for Teddy Bear, I guess, to tell him his trouble and gain a little sympathy. He looked puzzled when he found he could not rouse him. He walked all around him sniffing until he got to Teddy’s head, then he caught a good smell of Teddy’s breath. He turned away and came with us with such a comical look of disgust on his face, that it would have made you laugh.

Captain Joe lay down behind the stove on the secret hiding place, while Case and Alex hastened to Clay’s assistance. The boys had brought along with them a small stock of dainties with which to help celebrate on special days, and this they broke into with rude hands. Soon the table, covered with a white cloth, was laden with cream cheese, jars of preserves, jellies, a fruity fruit cake, jams, and even a jar of anchovy paste. A plate heaped with nuts, figs and raisins, stood in the middle, while at each individual plate was one each of their precious stock

of oranges and apples.

Over the stove Clay labored, steaming sausages and frying canned beefsteak with onions, while big, mealy potatoes already cooked were placed on the back corner of the stove to keep warm.

“He’s coming now,” said Alex, as a light, vigorous step rang on the dock, and a moment later the Kid’s cheery face appeared in the cabin door. He looked more like a man who had slept fifty hours and traveled two miles, than like one who had just traveled fifty miles and slept two hours. His brief rest had removed all weariness from his face.

His keen eyes swept from the boys to the laden table. “Gee! boys,” he said, boyishly. “This isn’t a supper. It’s a banquet, and me here without my dress suit on.”

CHAPTER X

THE YUKON

The boys were delighted with the way their visitor ate. “I am ashamed of myself,” he said as he passed his plate a third time, “but everything tastes so good. Especially after a man has been eating his own poorly-cooked grub for a year. We do not do much cooking on the trail. One cannot carry great quantities of food on sleds and make much progress. It’s the curse of the North that one is always possessed of a gnawing hunger without the means of satisfying it. Men seem to thrive under it, though. Few of them carry an extra ounce of flesh on them, but they are as hard as iron. One of them can do as much hard labor in a day as three well-fed chekakos. And while I am talking, son,” addressing Alex, “let me warn you not to pull your gun in this region unless you mean to kill or be killed. Mere bluff does not go in this country without a bad reputation to back it, and sometimes not even then. You’re a pretty fair shot, boy, I noticed that today, but lad, there are old timers who can give a good hair cut at twenty paces without breaking the skin. Better not draw your gun unless you have to. Pluckiness is all right, but it’s suicide to try to stack up against too heavy odds. Don’t think I am trying to lecture,” he added apologetically. “It’s just good advice I got hammered into me when I first hit this country. If you’ll excuse me, I’ll take a look at that pile of magazines and books I see over there. They stack up like a heap of gold dust to me.”

The five of them clustered around, while the Kid handled the books with reverent fingers. He laid a few books and a couple of magazines one side. The boys looked at them with surprise. They consisted of a book on surgery and two law books, which belonged to Clay, whose private ambition was to be a lawyer. Clay glanced at the titles, "Chitty on Pleadings" and "Bishop on Contracts."

"Gee!" he said. "You've chosen some heavy stuff. Why, it took me a year to get all of 'Chitty on Pleadings' through my head."

"Light reading is all right for summer," said the Kid, "but for winter give me the heavy books like these that keep your mind so busy that you do not think of the long darkness, the great silence, and the everlasting whiteness. Besides, I need that book on surgery. I meet so many injured men on the trail and there isn't a doctor between Nome and Dawson. As to the law books, well, this is going to be a great country some day, I guess, and the man on the ground who knows the miners as well as the laws will stand a good chance of making good—anyway it will beat traveling the long trail, and I'm for it."

Case brought out some cigars which they had brought along with them for just some like occasion.

"Take a handful," he said, hospitably, but the Kid only took one. "I have sorter got used to my old pipe and cut plug," he apologized. "Say, don't none of you boys smoke?"

"No," said Clay, but don't stop for that. Light up."

"No," said the Kid decidedly. "I am not going to stink up this dainty little cabin of yours with stale tobacco fumes. Let's go up on deck if you don't mind. It's the finest hour in the twenty-four, according to my notion."

The five seated themselves on the edge of the cabin, silent for the moment. Twilight had set in and the day's work was over. Outside the shanties small fires were blazing from which came the savory odor of frying bacon and boiling coffee. A keen, clear wind fanned their faces, while from the huddled settlement came to their ears, faintly, the weird, soul-stirring wail of the wolf dogs. But, because they were well fed, and happy, and young—above all, young—they began to sing. Clay first, by some hidden chord, had been touched by that soul-touching wail and dearly his fresh young voice rang out, softly at first, but gradually growing in volume.

"Back in the dear dead days beyond recall,
When on the earth the mists began to fall,
Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng,
Low to our hearts love sang an old sweet song."

"Know any more of it?" asked the Kid, eagerly.

“Sure, a part of it,” Clay said with a glance at his companions. None of the boys had cultivated voices but they were clear and ringing and bore the thrilling note of youth. They had often sang together on their long trips and when Clay started again the other three joined in harmoniously.

“And in the even when fell the firelight gleam,
Slowly it wove itself into our dreams.”

A shanty door slammed, another and another until it seemed to Clay as if all Nome was banging doors. He stopped. “We’re going to be mobbed,” he said, “and it’s your fault, Ike. That golden note in your voice is starting a stampede.”

“Go on,” commanded the Kid, who was lying back on the cabin top, his face upturned to the stars.

Clay hurried to the end filled with apprehension at the sight of many dim forms filing out on the dock, but in spite of his fears he sang on to the end, the words ringing out sweetly over the water.

“And in the end when earth’s dim shadows fall.
Love will be found the sweetest song of all.”

Uproarious applause came from the now densely packed crowd on the dock.

Clay sat down in amazement. “An audience! and I thought it was a mob!” he gasped.

“You green, green chekako,” grinned the Kid. “Don’t you realize that most of these men have been up here for years without hearing any music but the tin pan din of the saloons and dance halls. Sing to them, boys, not cheap rag time, but some of the old, old songs they sang in the States years and years ago.

Clay grasped the cue and one after the other, followed by his companions, sang all the old familiar songs he could remember, the crowd on the dock occasionally joining in on some old time favorite. When they had finished, he sought in his mind for something that would appeal to them all. As he looked down for a moment upon the rough faces, marked with scurvy, frost bite and famine, there came to him a realization of what it was that drove these men to endure the cruelties of the Northland. It was not gold, alone, but shining above the brilliant metal, the face of some woman; wife, mother or sweetheart. He closed his eyes for a second and the vision was strong upon him of a slender girl in a white dress with a blue sash, seated at a piano, her soft white fingers wandering over the keys and her gentle voice singing—what was she singing forty years ago, what was she singing today? What did that girl in Chicago in the white dress and blue sash always sing to him when he called? He had it, but that first verse he never

could remember, so he softly sang the second.

“Her brow is like the snow drift.
 And her throat is like the swan’s.
 Her face it is the fairest that
 E’er th’ sun shon’ on.”

When the final—

“An’ for Bonnie Annie Laurie
 I’d lay me down an’ dee”

died away the crowd stood quiet and silent for a minute.

“Now’s the best time to pass the hat, Clay, you understand,” whispered the commercial Ike. “That song was too sad-like—it sends them all home. You should have sung them something pretty, like the Hebrew Lovers’ Dream.”

“They’re dreaming enough about gold already,” retorted Clay, tartly, as he noted a man moving in and out amongst the crowd. He divined his intention. “Friend,” he called. “We don’t want a collection. If we have given a little diversion for a couple of hours, we are pleased and want no money,” but the crowd was not listening. They were now talking amongst themselves. “Can’t hear that song without thinking of my girl in Florida that’s waiting for me to make good. One of those slim little gals what wears white dresses with a blue sash and a bunch of orange blossoms stuck in it.” “Just like my wife,” assented a rough bearded miner, “only she lives in Connecticut, an’ we don’t have orange blossoms, but she’s always got something catchy pinned on her dress.”

“Case, for goodness sake, start some parting song,” whispered Clay. I can’t think of a thing, and that man keeps on taking up a collection.”

Case promptly stepped into the breach and his mellow tenor voice rang out the good old parting hymn:

“God be with us ’till we meet again,
 By His counsel guide, uphold you,
 With His sheep securely fold you,
 God be with you ’till we meet again.”

“Hanged if I just like that,” grumbled a miner whose bowed legs told of a cow-boy life. “I don’t want to be folded up with no sheep. If it was cattle now I wouldn’t kick so much.”

The crowd departed slowly, and as silently as they had come, only one,

a little, energetic man with a spade-like beard remained. He approached the boat slowly and the boys thought he was coming on board, but just as he came opposite the cabin, he flung some heavy object up on it and ran for shore like a rabbit.

“Look out,” cried Clay, as the Kid reached out to pick it up. “It may be a bomb.”

The Kid chuckled. “We ain’t civilized enough for bombs up here yet. I would be glad to stand up and let a man throw bombs like this at me all day long. Why, little chekako, this is a miner’s poke, and if I am any judge of gold dust weight, it must be worth \$400.00. I reckon that Annie Laurie business got them in a soft spot. That little spade-bearded man is Cook, the richest man in Nome and mighty generous when his mean old cat of a wife isn’t around. Reckon he didn’t marry his Annie Laurie.”

“I guess we done better than if we had taken up a collection. I guess maybe you got a good business head on you after all, Clay,” said Ike happily.

“But we don’t want all that money for doing such a little thing,” Clay stormed. “Let’s give it back to them.”

“Don’t get excited, son, just keep it. It belongs to you. Everyone knew what he gave and could afford it too. Why, half the wealthy of Nome were here tonight. Well, I’m too short of dust tonight but maybe I can put you wise to a few things. I don’t generally give advice to chekakos for this is a country where every man has got to play his own game, but you all seem clean, gritty chaps and I like you, so I’m going to put you wise to a few things. I understand that you are going up the Yukon to trade for pelts with the Indians. The idea is all right, but you’ve come too late. All the furs got last summer were traded out during the winter and spring and there won’t be but a few to be got until just after the hunters come in from their big hunt just before the big cold.”

The boys’ faces were a picture of disappointment.

“We hate to go back now,” Case said gloomily. “We’ve put all the money we had in on this trip, and I, for one, hate to go back and to be laughed at too.”

“I am not advising you what to do. But I know what I would do myself in like case,” said the Kid slowly. “I wouldn’t give up. A thing not worth pushing through is not worth starting. I’d go on up as far as Dawson maybe, kinder going along easy and learning the ways of the Yukon and having as much sport as I could, and buying more supplies when I could get them cheap. As soon as it started to get cold at Dawson, I’d start down the river, stopping only at a few big settlements to trade. I would try to get close to the lower Yukon before the river froze up. I wouldn’t take any chances. As soon as floating ice began to form, I’d run my boat in some cozy cove, pull her out on shore, and make myself cozy for the winter. Then I’d find me a sled and dogs and hit for the nearest settlement. I’d

be pretty liberal with my first buying and it wouldn't be long before the Indians would be coming from hundreds of miles to exchange their pelts for tobacco, beads and trinkets. Tobacco tempts them most, tobacco and cheap watches. Did you bring any of those cheap watches?"

"We've got a case of the kind that is making the dollar infamous," grinned Alex.

"Them's the kind," grinned back the Kid. "Just show them how to keep them wound up and ticking and they will fall for them all right. They think the ticking inside is a spirit and they back it up to keep the evil spirit of the Yukon from bothering them. But to go on, by spring I would have my boat loaded with valuable furs and when the ice went out, I would make Nome and hike back for the States with the satisfaction of knowing that I had cleaned up a few thousand dollars on the trip."

"But a winter on the Yukon!" gasped Case.

"A winter on the Yukon is largely what a man makes of it, as in all things," said the Kid gently. "If a man is strong of soul, he will thaw out with ice a still stronger man. If he's a weakling, it's just as well for him to find it out early in life. You boys are fixed comfortable for the winter and had ought to go through it all right. The main thing is to keep busy and cheerful. Remember, boys, I am not advising you boys to do this, for you might come to grief and I would always blame myself. I am merely telling you what I would do in your case."

"Thanks for what you have told us," said Clay, gravely. "We know that you know what you are talking about, but it knocks the wind out of us for the moment. We had built so on the plans made in our ignorance that, now they are all shattered, we don't just know what to do until we have slept over it and talked it over. Now, I have got a question to ask you," he said abruptly. "Do you know or have you ever seen two men that fit this description," and he described Jud and Bill.

"I've crossed their trail many a time, and Jud is one of the most powerful men on the Yukon and a right gentle good man when you get him away from his partner, but Bill is as full of poison as a rattlesnake. Don't know why Jud sticks to him, but he does. Bill seems to have some hold on him. You seldom see them apart. Don't know as any serious crime could be proved against them, but the Injins have brought me some ugly stories and I believe they are true. Anyway, they are men I want nothing to do with."

"Say, Mr. Kid," Ike asked, eagerly. "How far up the Yukon is Rainbow Bend?"

"Don't know of any such place," replied the Kid, promptly. "And I know the Yukon like a book. Yet the name has a familiar sound. I'll try and think it up. I will remember in time what it is, for I never really forget anything. Well,

so long, boys. It's time for all of us to go to bed. I expect to go up on the steamer tomorrow afternoon. I make my trip by water when the ice is out. If you start early, I reckon we'll catch you at the mouth of the Yukon and you can keep in our wake as long as you can see us.

"What time does the steamer make?" inquired Case.

"Ten miles an hour against the current," said the Kid, proudly.

"Then we'll see you on the Yukon," promised Case with a grin.

As soon as the Kid was gone, the tired boys sought their bunks and sleep.

CHAPTER XI

TRAPPED

"Gee, Case, what's the matter?" and Alex reached over and flung a hard pillow at his sleeping companion. Through the little cabin window came the first grey light of dawn.

"What's the matter?" inquired Case, sleepily.

"That's just what I'm asking you," snapped Alex, tartly. "Goodness, man, don't you feel the boat wallowing in the trough of the sea? She wouldn't do that if she was moored to the pier. She must have broken away. "Hey, rouse up, you, Clay and Ike," he called. "The *Rambler* is adrift in a heavy sea."

Eight feet struck the floor and the four boys began hustling into their clothes.

"I don't understand how she broke loose," Clay said, as he pulled on his shirt. "I looked at her moorings just before I turned in, but loose she certainly is. Otherwise she would be pitching fore and aft instead of rolling in this sickening way. Come up, I am going out now and see what's the matter. He twisted on the knob of the cabin door and tried to open it, but it resisted his efforts. He turned sharply around. "Who came in last night, you, wasn't it, Ike?"

"Yes, I sits up on deck a little while, thinking over things," Ike confessed.

"Did you change the key and lock the cabin door?"

"I don't remember it," Ike confessed, miserably. "I was thinking hard of other things, you understand."

"You'll understand some things more in a few minutes," Clay said crisply, as he snapped on the cabin lights. He pounced upon a small dark object by the stove behind which Captain Joe lay in a sort of stupor. "That's why Captain Joe

didn't warn us. They threw him a piece of poisoned meat through the window. I guess he won't die. He only bit off a small chunk and he spit most of that out. Wise old owl, Captain Joe."

"Whew," whistled Alex. "Look, they have taken the rifle and shot gun."

Each boy darted to his bunk, for they all kept their automatics under their pillows at night. They found them all safe.

"I wonder who did it," Alex said.

"Ike's friends, Bill and Jud, of course," said Case in a tone that caused the little Jew to wince wretchedly.

"The thing to think about is to get out of here," Clay said. "I don't believe those fellows can start the engine up. They are almost a new invention. Now, if the wind is blowing from the same direction as it was when we turned in, we are bound to hit the rocks somehow between Nome and Cape Nome. This sea will break her up in no time and will drown us like rats in a trap. I would rather put up a fight against any kind of odds than to die that way."

"Hallo," hailed a voice from the aft window. "We want to talk peaceable with one of you, no shooting."

It was Jud's voice and Case stepped forward before any of the others could act.

"What do you want?" he asked, as he threw open the window, disclosing Jud's face.

"We want one of you to come up and start this darned motor," he said. "We can't make it go. 'Pears like we can't do it. Reckon you boys must have almost filled up your tank with kerosene by mistake. The engine is fairly dripping with it."

"If you want the engine started, unlock the door and let us all up," Case said.

A low-toned conversation ensued between Jud and his companions, then Jud's face reappeared at the window.

"Bill says it can't be done," he said dejectedly, "an' Bill generally knows what's right."

"It's all of us or none," Case said, decidedly.

"Don't say that," begged Jud. "We're driving on shore an' it ain't more than 500 yards away. You don't want to be drowned like rats in a trap, do you?"

"What are you going to do if one of us does come up and fix the motor?" Case questioned.

"We will not harm you boys," said the other earnestly. "All we want is that little Jew. He's done us out of something that belongs to us. First thing is to get the boat off this shore, then we want you to steer straight for the mouth of the Yukon. We have got boats there. The one of you on deck can put us and the

Jew on shore and then come back and free the rest an' go on about your own business."

"Nothing doing," Case said decidedly. "We never desert a comrade. Might as well go back to your motor."

The boys in the cabin had heard all the conversation and their faces were grave. In one corner sat Ike, a huddled heap of woe with something of the persecuted pathos of his race in his dark eyes.

"They lie," he cried. "I have got nothing what belongs to them loafers. I am honest and steals nothing. But I am sorry I bring trouble on you boys. Do as that low-life says and save your lives while you can. I'm sorry I got you boys into trouble."

"No, Ike," Clay said firmly. "The *Rambler* boys always stick together in time of trouble. If something doesn't happen pretty soon we'll break down the door and make a fight for it."

A light stole over Alex's freckled face. "I've got an idea. It may work and it may not. Do you remember that hatchway up forward in the prow, Case?"

Case nodded quickly.

"Well," went on Alex, hurriedly. "I believe we can work our way up over the cargo to the hatch. If Teddy Bear is sleeping on it we will not be able to lift it up. If not, we will crawl out. The men will likely be working on the motor and we stand a good chance of catching them napping. Two of us is enough. The other two had better stay in the cabin talking all the time. If the cabin got quiet all of a sudden, they might get suspicious and be on the watch."

"All right, you and Ike stay here, and Clay and I will try it," said Case.

"You will not, you big stiff," declared Alex excitedly. "It's my plan, and I'm going to run it. Anyhow, how could you big chaps wiggle through that small space between the deck and cargo. No, Ike's going with me if he will."

"Sure, I will," said Ike delightedly, as he felt in his pockets to see that his automatic was safe. "I ain't afraid of them loafers, you understand. Alex and I do the trick all right."

Alex threw open the door at the front end of the cabin and the two wiggled into the inky void beyond.

"Well, they have gone," said Case despondently. "The best thing we can do is to stand by the cabin door and break it down the second we hear trouble on the deck."

"Yes," Clay agreed, and they took up their positions. Case on one side ready to swing the axe while on the other side Clay held an automatic in either hand ready for action.

Alex and Ike pushed steadily if slowly forward. Their position was one of extreme peril. Their cargo had been well stowed but the violent rolling was

shaking it loose and as they crawled, they were often hit by rolling casks and shifting boxes. This cargo was part of their trading outfit for which they had been unable to find room in the lockers. Every now and then the two boys received painful bruises from shifting boxes. It was easy to see that the cargo was fast breaking up and that they would not be able to return the way they came. At last, battered and bruised, they reached the hatch. Alex gave it a tentative push upward and it yielded easily. Evidently Teddy was not sleeping on it. He raised it to its full height and the two boys clambered up on deck. It was now broad daylight and only a glance was needed to show them their peril. The *Rambler* was wallowing in a heavy sea, dipping her decks under with every roll, but what was worse, not less than two hundred yards away to leeward, lay a rock-strewn shore dashed upon by the huge surges. The cabin hid the boys from the two men and Alex raising his head, shot a swift glance over its top.

It was as he expected, the two men were working over the motor, or, rather, Jud was working while Bill was cursing him volubly for not being able to make it go, to which Jud replied gently:

“Be patient, Bill. “I’ll get her going. I nearly got her that last time.”

Alex dropped down, an anxious look on his face. “It’s Teddy,” he whispered, “he’s crawling aft over the cabin top. I’m afraid they will see him and kill him. Why can’t that bear keep out of trouble?”

But it was not Teddy Bear’s intention to avoid trouble, rather he was seeking it.

The rolling of the boat had wakened him slowly to a realization of an aching head and foul taste in his mouth and a stomach that revolted at the thought even of sugar. A feeling of enmity to all men was strong within him. Dimly he recalled the drinks, the liquid which the man in the white jacket had sweetened with sugar. Clearly it was that liquid that had made him so sick. His uptilted nose caught a faint scent that reminded him of the odor of the unwashed bodies that had crowded around him the day before. Clearly they were some of his enemies who had made him so sick and had turned his blood to water. He clambered clumsily on to the cabin top just as the boys reached the hatch. His padded feet made too little noise to be heard above the sound of wind and water. He reached the other end of the cabin and dropped off on the deck below where he reared up on his hind feet. The first intimation the men had of his presence was the vision of a raising arm and a heavy smack on the side of the vicious looking Bill’s head, which sent that worthy ten feet over the stern.

Jud, with a cry of “My God, Bill can’t swim!” dived over the side to his partner’s assistance.

Alex and Ike came running aft just as the cabin door splintered under a lusty blow from Case.

“Stop,” shouted Alex. “The key is on the outside. I will let you out.”

The imprisoned boys sprang out as soon as the door yielded. Both took in the situation at a glance. Clay sprang for the motor, while Case ran forward to the wheel.

“Lower the anchor,” Clay shouted despairingly, a moment later. “Run the cable out until she is close to the breakers. These fools have flooded the engine and it is going to take some time before I can succeed in working it all out.”

The three boys rushed to the bow and heaved the heavy anchor over. Alex took a turn around the snubbing block, paying the cable out, rapidly at first, then slowly tightening up on it until the *Rambler's* bow swung up into the wind. Instead of rolling and wallowing, she met the seas with a steady, easy pitching. Just keeping the cable taut enough to hold the boat up to the wind, Alex continued to pay it out slowly until the *Rambler's* stern was within forty feet of the breakers. Then he fastened the big hempen rope tightly to the snubbing post. The three boys stood tense awaiting results. Slowly the *Rambler* drifted back, dragging the huge anchor with its long cable with it. “No holding bottom,” Alex shouted. “She’s going on the rocks. Get ready to jump.”

But when her stern swung within a dozen feet of the foaming breakers, the *Rambler* brought up with a jerk, that threw the boys to the deck. The anchor had caught on a hidden rock. Their first act on regaining their feet was to assure themselves of their own safety, then to look around for their late captors. At first they could see neither of them in the long rolling waves. It was Alex who spied them first. “Good heavens!” he cried, “look there. Did you ever see a man like that in your life?”

Following his pointing finger, his two companions caught a glimpse of a sight, startling but inspiring. Jud, with one hand was holding not only Bill’s head, but half of his body, above the high waves, while with the other hand he was keeping his own head above water and swimming powerfully for the breaker-racked shore. The boys gained some idea of the man’s magnificent strength in the way he sustained the weight of his partner’s body aloft and still kept his own head high above the water. They caught one more glimpse of the two just before they entered the boiling breakers. Jud had turned on his back and had drawn the limp form from above, holding it tight with one arm thrown around his waist, while with the other he was still desperately battling to win through the rock-strewn smother to the sandy shore beyond. “Look at a man, boys,” Alex cried in admiration, “using his own body to protect his partner’s body from the rocks. That’s some man, I’m telling you.” In a few moments the two bodies were rolled up on the beach by a mighty wave. Jud stooped and picked Bill up as though he were a sleeping child, and laying him down on the dry, warm sand, thrust a bunch of dry sea moss under his head for a pillow.

The boys were close to the shore and could see the eyes of Jud clearly. They were eloquent with tenderness and woe. He was bleeding from a dozen gaping wounds, made by the cruel, ragged rocks, but he did not seem to notice them. Kneeling down by Bill's side, he applied the first aids to the drowned, such as raising and lowering the arms and depressing the chest. The boys stood and watched him anxiously.

Suddenly Jud lifted a beaming face. "He's coming to all right," he shouted joyously. "Reckon that bear knocked him senseless so that he didn't swallow much water."

"Strange how the Northland brings such different characters together in such strong partnership," said Case, musingly. "I wonder if Bill would have done as much for Jud. I doubt it."

A cry from Alex brought him back from his musings. The little lad's freckled face was pale. "The cable's parted. We are going on the rocks. Start her up, Clay. For the love of heaven, start her up."

CHAPTER XII

A CLOSE CALL

Clay had just finished working the oil out of the engine and was examining it to see if the vandals had broken anything, when Alex called. With calm quickness, he threw on the switch, rocked the fly wheel over, and shoved the timer over to full speed. At the first throb of the motor. Case had sprung to the wheel and ground it hard over. The *Rambler* trembled like an overworked race horse. She hung in the trough of a sea that threatened to swamp her for a moment, then gallantly she swung around, meeting the next sea bow on, plunging bow under and sending great showers of spray over the cabin, she leaped away into the teeth of the wind.

"For goodness sake. Clay, shut down that motor some," Alex begged. "She will bury herself in some of the big waves."

"I thought you wanted speed from the yell you let out a minute ago."

"I did," Alex retorted. "Then I was afraid of going on the rocks. Now I'm afraid of going down in a submarine."

Clay shoved the timer over to half speed and the *Rambler* rode the high swells more easily. On looking at their watches, the boys were surprised to find

that all their terrifying experience which had occurred had taken place in less than an hour, during which time they had drifted about a mile from Nome. It took the speedy little launch but a short time to cover the distance and they soon moored securely again to the little pier.

The boys were all hungry, and Case immediately began frying eggs and bacon and making coffee while the other boys hung around saying little and even breakfast was eaten without the usual clatter of conversation.

"Boys," said Clay when the meal was finished, "we each of us know why the others are so silent. We have to decide a most important question today. A man who has lived in this country for years, and whose word I believe can be trusted, gave us some important advice. You have had time to think it over and arrive at a decision. Let each one speak up for himself. I'll have my say last, so as not to influence any one. Go ahead and speak and let each one think of it as a matter concerning himself only."

"I did my thinking last night," said Ike quickly, before any of the others could reply. "I thinks so hard, I forgot to lock the door. I says to myself. 'Ike, you come up here to see your uncle and you don't want to go back to the States until you do see him. But there are those boys what you talked into coming up here and who have all been good friends of yours. What are you going to do about that?' Then I thinks some more. I got plenty of money here," slapping the seat of his pants dramatically, "so I says to myself, 'If Alex goes back I pay his fare and the money for his share of the cargo. If Case wants to go home, I do the same. If Clay wants to go, also, I do the same.' Course if all go, it take pretty near all my money, but I will own the stock, you understand, but I thinks uncle and I make good money on it. Of course I don't own the boat, but if you go back I give you a bill of sale for my news stand for the boat. We trade back again news stand for *Rambler* if I bring back boat all right. And I tell you, boys, that news stand is worth more than that boat. She burn up money all the time while the news stand makes money always, but most of all in the winter, when folks are cold and in a hurry. They give you a nickel or a dime for a penny paper. If they don't get their change quick, they hurry on without it. I make change very slowly in the winter time," he added shrewdly. "Well, what you says, boys?"

For a moment they sat appalled at the heroic pluck of the little fellow who was willing to go through the perils of an Arctic winter all alone. It was Alex who spoke first.

"I made up my mind when the Kid was talking last night. I believe in what he says, 'that a thing not worth finishing, it not worth starting.'"

"You can't ship me back home to be laughed at by a lot of sapheads who have never been ten miles from Chicago in their lives. It's me for the great silence and all the rest rather than that."

“Can’t drive me back with a club, either,” announced Clay.

Ike danced up and down in glee. “I meant my proposal, you understand, but all the time my heart was like lead for fear you all go home.”

“I felt so sure of what you fellows would decide,” smiled Clay, “that I’ve made out a little list of things we had ought to buy here at Nome. They are mostly things we will not need until winter, but I’m sure that we can buy them cheaper here than up the river. They have larger stocks here and we will not have to pay the heavy river freights and the big profits to the dealer at the other end.”

“That’s good business, Clay,” said Ike admiringly. “Let me do the bargaining.”

“All right,” agreed Clay. “Case had better go with you. I can’t trust you and Alex together, you’d be sure to get into trouble right off.”

The boys were off at the word and while Alex tidied up the cabin, Clay toiled over the motor to correct small derangements the vandals had caused.

Alex and Ike were back long before they were expected, and three sleds followed them bearing their purchases. On the first was tied a small light canoe. “It was not on your list, but I thought it would be handy to go ashore in at places where we could not run the *Rambler* in. It will save a lot of wet feet.”

“Good idea, Case,” Clay approved.

The other two sleds contained more warm blankets, snow shoes, fur-lined parkas, a kind of cape with a monk-like hood, moccasins and clothing of furs. Besides all of which Case had thoughtfully bought another sack of potatoes and one of onions.

In a few minutes they had all the stuff aboard and stacked up in a pile to wait until they had more time to stow it. Then Alex cast off the moorings, Clay started up the motor and Case took up his usual place at the wheel, and the *Rambler*, swinging around the end of the pier, headed her sharp bow straight for the mouth of Father Yukon, nearly one hundred miles away.

“Good bye, Nome!” said Case, waving his hat.

“So long, ’till next spring,” shouted Alex, throwing up his hat and catching it.

The old prospector, sitting on his usual post, taking the farewell for himself, rose painfully and after waving his red bandana handkerchief in the air, fired a parting volley from his heavy pistol.

Ike was not to be outdone. He intended to make his farewell dramatic and impressive. He mounted the rail and threw out his arms as if to embrace the whole straggling town. “Good-bye, Nome the golden,” he cried. Good-bye golden city, what gives four boys \$420.00 in one day for doing nothing, but though we will leave you now, Nome, the golden, we will come back.”

Clay, down by the motor, heard nothing of the banter going on above deck. From the gentle motion of the boat, he decided that the sea had gone down. In fact, it had subsided greatly before they had left the dock. He wanted to reach the Yukon long before the river steamer did, so he pushed the timer over to full speed. The *Rambler* responded with a forward leap which caught Ike just as he was concluding his eloquent farewell. He struggled to retain his footing, but with arms waving, disappeared over the stern.

Alex ran to the motor hold. "Man overboard," he yelled. "Stop her and back up." Case had been laughing over the joke on Ike, but his face grew suddenly pale as Ike's head appeared above the surface, his arms grasping at the air.

"Why, he can't swim a stroke," he cried.

But Alex had realized that fact more quickly. In a flash he had slashed away the laces of his shoes and kicking them off his feet, dived far out over the rail. Just after he leaped, he saw a white flash passing above him. As he came to the surface, he saw Captain Joe, loyal and faithful, though wounded and weak, swimming twenty feet in front of him. It was Captain Joe also who first saw the black head and seizing the long hair in his teeth, strove valiantly to hold it above the surface. A few strokes brought Alex to their side, and with the quickness that he had learned by desperate experience, he relieved the panting animal of his burden. Ike, after the manner of drowning people, strove to drag Alex down with him to the depths below, but Alex was expecting that and clinching his little freckled fist he drove it with all the force he could summon, just under the drowning lad's jaw. Ike loosed his grip and hung limp as a rag. Alex gave a sigh of relief, and rolling over on his back, drew the other up over him so that Ike's head was raised above the water. In this position he could not swim. It took all his strength to sustain their bodies above the water. He knew his companions would come to their assistance but would they be in time. The icy cold water was striking a chill to his blood. Could he last that long? He dreaded the cold that was boring into his very bones.

His friends were loyal to his faith in them. The moment Alex spoke Clay threw off the switch shutting off the power, but the *Rambler's* momentum was so great that he did not dare to reverse the engine immediately; to do so would have stripped the gears and made the engine helpless. So soon as he dared, however, he threw on the switch and shoved forward the reverse lever. The *Rambler* stopped suddenly and under full speed tore her way backwards to where the three, fighting for their lives, lay 400 feet astern. As the *Rambler* backed swiftly down upon them. Clay gradually shut down the power and finally stopped her short twenty feet from the straggling, drowning ones. Calling to Case to leave the wheel and come to his assistance, Clay sprang out of the motor hold and snatching up the stern line, flung an end of it over Alex's face. Alex, by exerting

all his strength, managed to shift so as to pass a couple of turns around Ike's body just below the arm pits. "Hoist him up and then take Captain Joe up. He's about all in." Alex rolled over again on his back to float, floating took so little exertion. He was surprised to find how warm and comfortable he was becoming. True, his feet were sinking and would soon drag his head under water, but what did he care. He was warm and comfy and was getting deliciously sleepy. Something hit him across the face and he brushed it off dreamily. As his head slowly sank beneath the surface, something fastened in his hair and dragged his mouth above water. He opened his eyes dreamingly to look into Captain Joe's loyal, loving eyes. In one corner of his mouth Joe carried the end of the rope. With the last bit of reserve of his strength, he twisted the rope around one arm and with the other clasped Captain Joe around his thick neck. He felt himself being pulled violently forward—then came darkness and a void.

When he came to he was lying in his own bunk with warm blankets piled over him and Clay trying to force a cup of hot coffee down his throat, while Case and Ike stood near with a suspicious moisture on their eye lashes.

"What are you sniffing for?" he demanded crossly of Case and Ike, for his whole body was sick and aching.

"We're not sniffing," replied Case, hotly, with a boy's disgust at being caught in a display of sentiment "We are just sweating from working over you so hard."

"My noble preserver," said Ike, dramatically, "I owe my life to you but how can I reward you? How can I ever repay you for your so nobly risking your life for mine? This lump on my jaw that you gave me will always remind me of your noble action."

But Alex had had all the sentiment he could bear. "Shut up," he snapped. "I didn't go after you. I went after Captain Joe. He's a valuable dog. If you want any more souvenirs of your little wetting, I'll give you one on the other jaw, and as soon as they go down I'll give you fresh ones. Oh, I'll keep your memory fresh and green. Gee, I'll give you the other one now," he declared, throwing off his blankets, but Ike had fled at the first signs of war. Alex chanted after him, with a grin:

"Mush, mush, mush,
Always to be taken with
A tablespoon of gush.
Mush in the morning
Slush at night
If I don't get my mush
I'm bound to get tight."

“What are you waiting for, Case?” he interrupted his chant to demand.

“Just to tell you that you have got to keep quiet until tomorrow morning. Clay is going to start up the motor now. We let the *Rambler* drift while we were working over you and Ike. One of us will stay down in the cabin with you all the time ready to get you anything you want.”

“So I’m to be made to stay here and miss the last glimpse of Nome,” Alex growled. “Miss seeing the *Rambler* tearing through the water at over twenty miles an hour. Miss seeing Michael’s Island and the river steam boat, and worst of all, miss the first glimpse of Father Yukon. What are you going to do if I refuse to be in this old bunk?” he demanded.

“Then I’ll have to tie your hands and feet, lash you down to the bunk, take all your clothes away from you, lock them up in your locker, and keep the key,” Case said firmly.

Alex laid back and closed his eyes.

“Well, which shall it be?” demanded Case, as Alex still lay quiet with closed eyes. “Will you promise to lay quiet or will I have to tie you up?”

“Don’t disturb me, Case,” Alex murmured rapturously. “I’m having a vision, such a touching vision. Maybe I’m only delirious, but it’s touching, touching. Let me tell it to you, Case. It seems like it was the Sunday before we left Chicago and I am sitting on a bench looking at the couples strolling around, when I see a fellow I know walking with a red-headed, freckled-faced girl.

“Her hair isn’t red, it’s auburn, and she isn’t freckled,” Case said, indignantly.

“Keep still,” said Alex. “This is only a vision and I’ve got to tell it as I saw it. They didn’t notice me, they were so taken up with each other. Pretty soon they sit down on the bench close to me, only a clump of bushes between them and me, and the fellow talked so funny you would have laughed to have heard it, Case, honestly you would have, and then they got up to go, Case,” and Alex’s voice lowered. “He kissed her, Case, and said, ‘I’ll be back in the fall, darling.’”

Case had reddened to the roots of his hair. “I am not ashamed of what I said or did,” he said, desperately, but a great fear was in his heart as he foresaw the ridicule and banter he would have to endure if Alex told the story.

“Does she play ‘Annie Laurie?’” inquired Alex, who had been writing rapidly on a scrap of paper.

“Of course,” said Case stoutly. “She can do anything any girl in Chicago can do, and do it better.” “I just made up another verse that you two might like to sing together when you get back.”

Case took the scrap of paper and read:

“An’ her hair was like the red bird’s

Her neck scraggly like the crane's
An' her feet they were the biggest
I'll ever see again."

Case surrendered. "Sit still for two hours and I'll fix a place in the sunshine on deck for you. And you won't tell any of the boys about your vision?" he inquired anxiously.

"Nary a tell," Alex promised, solemnly, "and I say. Case, I was just joshing about her. She's pretty and a good appearing girl."

"She's both," said Case, happily, as he turned to go on deck.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE YUKON

Case had hardly disappeared when Ike came rushing down into the cabin in a panic. "My pants, my pants," he cried.

"Is this the proper way to invade a sick man's room?" demanded Alex with a grin.

"But my pants," Ike said excitedly; "the wet ones."

"Want to put them on and imagine you're drowning again?" grinned the invalid.

"All my money is in the seat of them pants, you understand," Ike explained. "Maybe it's no good now."

"I think your pants are in that wet heap over in the corner," Alex said, roused to interest.

Ike pounced upon the wet heap and quickly finding the valuable garment ripped the seat open with his knife. "It's all right," he cried in joy. "It is all wet, you understand, I'll spread it out on the floor and it soon be dry."

Alex watched him curiously as Ike separated the wet bills and spread them out to dry. He was amazed at the amount the little Jew had been carrying about his person. Idly, he figured up the amount as Ike spread out each bill. When Ike spread out the last one with a sigh of satisfaction, Alex lay back and did some mental figuring. He repeated the operation again. The result was the same. If they had all taken up the offer the little Jew had made and all have gone home, Ike would have been left alone in this strange, fearsome land with less than ten

dollars in his pocket. Alex felt a fresh respect for the pluck and determination of this lad no bigger than himself. He would have liked to express this sentiment but he detested open displays of emotion, so he merely growled.

"I'm sorry I hit you so hard on the jaw."

"That's all right," said Ike, cheerfully, as he felt tenderly of the lump. "Some day when we both feel better we fight it out with fists, you understand?"

Alex's stout little heart warmed to him. Who had said a Jew would not fight, he wondered.

"I say, Ike," he said softly. "I didn't want to hit you. I just had to. I grabbed you just the right way but you twisted and caught me tight. We would have both been drowned if I hadn't lammed you so hard as to knock you loose." Feeling that he had spoken too softly, he said severely: "I never expected to see a Chicago kid of your age that couldn't swim."

"You see," Ike explained. "I went to a swimming teacher once to learn to swim good, you understand. He try me for awhile then he tell me I can't never learn, my race is too much against me."

"How's that?" Alex asked, sympathetically.

"He said I would always work my hands palms up instead of palms down."

Alex, grinning, got out of his bunk and began slipping on his clothes as he saw Case descending the cabin steps. "Ike," he said, "you're a cheerful liar but all the same I believe we are going to be great pals."

It was when he started for the door that Alex realized his weakness. His legs wobbled under him and his head began to swim. Case caught him tenderly as he reeled and supported him up to where a blanket spread in the sun awaited him. "Say, Case," he said, as the other tried to make him comfortable, "what makes me so blamed weak?"

"You were farther gone than any of the rest," Case replied. "Ike got off the lightest of you three, Captain Joe had most of his wounds open with the exertion and he is in pretty bad shape. We thought you were dead when we palled you in over the side. We had to roll you over a barrel and do a lot of other things to get the water out of you."

"Why, I didn't swallow much water," Alex protested.

"You did not notice it because you were so cold and numb. When you were floating on your back you were taking in water all the time."

"But I felt warm, comfortable and sleepy."

"Which meant you were mighty near the end," Case said firmly. "If it had not been for Captain Joe's catching you before you got too deep down, I don't believe you would ever have come up again. We threw the rope to you and when you brushed it off we knew what the trouble was. We kicked off our shoes and were going over after you when we saw Captain Joe come to your rescue." He

lowered his voice anxiously. "Remember you're not going to tell about that vision of yours?"

Alex smiled blissfully. "No, it's just our own little secret, Case. Maybe bye and bye I'll make up some more nice verses and we will sing them over until you catch the words and then when we are alone we can have some nice talks about her."

Case departed groaning in spirit, realizing that if he had disposed of two possible tormentors, there still remained a third, the worst of all.

Clay climbed out of the engine hold to greet the invalid. "Well, how's the boy?"

"Fine and dandy," Alex smiled back. "Feel as though I could set up and take some nourishment now."

"I'll have Ike start up the fire and make you a bowl of oyster soup. It isn't good for one to eat much after swallowing so much salt water. Well, you missed the last glimpse of Nome."

Alex grinned, "I don't mind that so much. I guess I saw enough of Nome that first day to last me."

"We'll soon be getting in sight of St. Michael's Island," Clay continued. "I'm going to slow down going past the island. I want to punish the Yukon Kid for bragging over that clumsy old river tub he calls a steamboat. After we get well past we'll speed up and run up the river 'till well along in the afternoon. Then we can anchor in some cozy nook and get a good night's rest. I don't believe that steamer will pass us before morning. Look. Alex, you can see the island now. That blot of green straight ahead of the bow. Now I'm going to let her out to the last notch. Watch her go."

Clay shoved the timer over to the last notch and the *Rambler*, raising a still higher wave at her bow, ploughed like a shark through the small billows.

"Going some, isn't she son?" exulted Clay, wiping his hands on a bit of waste.

Alex raised on one elbow and gazed at the foam flying past with a sigh of satisfaction. "She goes like a blow fly to the fish market. She must be making twenty-two miles an hour."

"One cannot tell without running a boat around a staked course what time it will make, but I figure the *Rambler* is making twenty-four miles an hour right now. I've got her tinkered up like a watch and she's running like a railroad train.

St. Michael's rose quickly on the horizon and when within about half a mile of it, Clay slowed the engine down and the *Rambler* ambled past at a sedate rate of speed. As they passed the island, the boys saw the river steamboat lying at her pier, a thin trickle of white smoke trickling out of her funnels.

"Only just beginning to get up steam, it will take them a full two hours to

get up a full head, and the Yukon Kid expected to pass us at the mouth of the Yukon," said Clay scornfully.

As soon as they were well clear of the island, Clay shoved over the timer again and the *Rambler* leaped ahead like a sword fish.

The distance between the island and the famous river was not great and they soon headed up its broad bosom. Case had a chart of the lower Yukon and a box compass by which to steer, and they made steady progress up the great river. Long before twilight they ran the *Rambler* slowly into a tiny cove where they found the water deep enough to run her bow clear up on shore. An anchor was thrown on shore and another heaved as far as they could heave it and its cable tautened up so as to prevent the *Rambler* slewing in on the beach.

"I'm going to be boss for the rest of the day," Clay declared, pleasantly, when the work was done. "First of all, I want that young monkey," indicating Alex, "to go right to bed. I'll make him a bowl of hot broth and he'll be asleep in ten minutes after he drinks it."

"Me for the broth and the blankets," agreed Alex willingly, for he was coming to a realization of his weak state.

"Teddy Bear has got into better humor this afternoon, I believe, Case, if you would take him ashore and lead him around a bit he would eat a big supper and be his own good-humored self tomorrow."

"I'll go," said Case, eagerly, for he was eager to explore the forest that stretched away back of the cove.

"Good," approved Clay, "while you are gone Ike and I will cook up a big supper. We have been on rather short rations today."

"Ike," he said, as soon as the meal was well started, "come on up on deck with me, I want to talk with you a little."

"Now, Ike," he said as soon as they were seated close together on the cabin top. "I don't want to pry into your personal secrets, but I do want to know something about those two men and why they are following us so closely. They nearly finished us off today. Next time they may be more successful. Now we want to know all we can about these men so as to know how to deal with them when we meet them again, as I feel sure we will. Wait a minute and I'll read you something." He took out a slip of the papers they had bought the morning they left Chicago and read the account of the holdup and robbery. "Pretty desperate men I should call them," he commented. "Highway men, burglars, and almost murderers, in our case, at least. I think you had ought to tell us all about them."

Ike's face filled with trouble and anxiety and it was a full minute before he replied. "You are a man, may own a secret and be so bound by promise laid on him by some one else, that he is not free to tell it, you understand, but all I am free to tell you, I'll tell you, Clay, tell it to you honestly."

"I'll believe you, Ike," said Clay quietly.

"Well, you hear me speak often of my uncle. My uncle was a great man in the old country, a student and a scientist. He was rich, too, very rich, but instead of spending his time at court, he was all the time going amongst the poor, teaching, helping, and giving money where it was needed most. It's a crime in Russia for a Jew to do like that, so the Little Father pretty soon takes away all his moneys and sends him to the mines in Siberia to work all his life, but, after eight years, they let him go, and we sent him the money to come to us in good America. But, after he come, he was not content. He wanted so bad to work, but his fingers were twisted and stiff from handling pick and shovel in the cold, so he could not get work in the sweat shops. That made him sad. Then one day comes the news of gold in Alaska and next morning uncle was gone, just leaving a little note saying that he was not going to be a burden on us any longer." There was a dry sob in the lad's throat at the recollection of the note, but he bravely conquered his emotion and went on. "About eight months later, we got a letter saying he had got to the Yukon and would send us some money in the spring, soon as the mining commenced. About every six months after that there comes a kind, cheery letter, but no money. Uncle's not what you call a business man, he all the time dreams big dreams about helping the people, you understand. I believe he finds but little gold and much suffering on the Yukon."

"But where do those two men come in?" asked Clay.

"They bring me a letter from him last fall. The moment they gave it to me I see it had been opened, but I kept quiet, and reads it while they keeps telling me they were my uncle's partners and what a good friend they were of his. Then they ask me what was in the letter and I tells them I can't say until I see my uncle and that I don't understand it plain because there was a big piece torn off the bottom. All that winter they keep at me about that letter and all the time I tell them the same thing.

"I did some worrying that winter and I gets to thinking about the long trips you boys take every summer and makes no money, and I thinks that there's a good chance for them boys to make a little money and a good chance for me to go too. So I kept at you about going till I gits you interested and you decided to go. I'm sorry now. Clay, honestly, Clay, I'm sorry."

"I'm not," said Clay cheerily. "Jump down into the kitchen and stir up that stew and set the coffee back. I can smell it boiling."

Ike was back in a moment and resumed his tale.

"That's all that I know about them fellers, excepting what you fellows know. I wish I could tell you what was in the letter, but uncle told me to tell nobody till I see him, besides I don't understand all of it myself, there's so much of it torn off."

"It's all right, Ike," Clay said absently. "I believe you and the boys will too. Stick by us and we'll stick by you. I wonder what has become of Case."

CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER MISHAP

As it drew still nearer to twilight, the boys grew more and more uneasy about Case, until at last Ike got out the rifle and fired four shots in quick succession, the distress signal they had agreed upon, but there was no response.

"I'm going to go ashore and look for him," Clay announced. "Turn on the prow light and signal with the rifle every half hour. I cannot understand what trouble Case has got into—but he has sure got into trouble of some kind."

"I'll go with you." Ike offered eagerly, but Clay shook his head decidedly. "No, I am much taller and can travel faster than you. Besides, some one had ought to stay by the boat and keep watch. This is a strange country to us and we don't know what danger may be around us, and then it needs some one to look after Alex. He is pretty weak yet."

"I'll stay then, Clay," said Ike willingly.

"Good, so long," said Clay, as he plunged into the group of cottonwoods.

Ike got out his automatic and paroled the deck back and forth with a delicious sense of his responsibility as defender of the *Rambler* and her sick crew of one. Occasionally he relaxed his vigilance long enough to dart down into the cabin to see if the meal was keeping warm and also to take a look at Alex, who was snoring peacefully in his bunk. As the minutes went on, however, his anxiety over his comrades, more than overcame the novelty of his position. Not a sound came from the cottonwood thicket. The only noise that came to his ears was the soft murmur of the flowing river as it lapped the stones of the shore. At the end of the half hour, he brought out the rifle and fired the four quick shots. He was delighted to hear in return the sharp crack of Clay's automatic. It sounded not far away, but it was long before a rustling arose from the cottonwood trees and Clay emerged into the dim twilight bearing a limp body in his arms. "Come on and give me some help here," he cried, as soon as he spied the boat, but Ike was already hastening to his assistance. "Is he dead?" inquired Ike in an awed whisper as he gathered up the dangling legs.

"I don't know," said Clay, wearily. "It is dark in the cottonwoods so I could

not see, but his heart was beating all right when I found him. I stumbled over him by accident or else I would not have found him until morning. I found him lying all in a heap at the foot of a big cottonwood. I don't know what happened to him. Let's get him down into the cabin where we can see what's the matter with him."

Between them they managed to get him on deck and down into the cabin's bright light.

"I'll hold him while you get a blanket and spread it out on the floor," Clay said. "He's dripping with blood so it would ruin his bunk to put him in it. Now put some water on to heat and then come back and help me get his clothes off. I guess we will have to cut them off him."

Together the two worked away at Case's clothing, removing it bit by bit, being careful not to cut into skin or flesh. Each piece they removed was stained with blood. When the last piece had been cut away Clay arose and got the now hot water. "Get the medicine chest, Ike, while I wash off some of this blood," he directed.

When the dried blood was washed away, the boys stood appalled at the sight that met their eyes. From head to feet Case's body was a mass of cuts and bruises. Clay looked puzzled. "His heart action is good, and all his wounds, though there are a multitude of them, are not deep. If he has not been injured internally, I believe he will pull through. I think that lump on the head there is what has made him unconscious. Well, let's get to work and fix him up as best we can."

For a full hour the two boys labored over their wounded companion. First cleansing the wounds with warm water made antiseptic by the addition of a little carbolic acid, they applied a healing salve, and bound clean bandages to the parts until the unfortunate lad's body looked like a checker-board. Along towards the last, Case began to show signs of returning consciousness and as they lifted him into his bunk he opened his eyes.

"I knew you fellows would come and find me," he murmured weakly. "That, I guess, was the last thing I thought of before I hit that cottonwood tree."

"Who hurt you?" inquired Clay eagerly.

Case tried to grin but groaned at the effort.

"It was Teddy Bear," he said faintly. "As soon as we got amongst the cottonwoods, he bolted. I, like a fool, wrapped the end of the rope around my waist three or four times and tried to check him, but the first jerk threw me down, and away he went dragging me over logs and roots and bumping me up against the trees. I saw that big cottonwood tree coming and tried to throw myself one side, but couldn't do it. I felt a smash on the head and that's the last I remember."

"Teddy must have pulled loose after you hit the tree," Clay mused. "Feel

any pain inside of you. Case?"

"No, but I feel mighty weak, loss of blood, I guess. If you'll fix me up a bowl of broth, I'll drink it and see if I can't sleep off this weak feeling."

Hot water was already on the stove and the addition of a full jar of beef extract quickly made a bowl of strong broth. Soon after he swallowed it, Case was sound asleep. His first deep breathing was the signal for the two boys to partake of their own supper, which had suffered greatly through neglect. Little was said as they ate, only Ike remarked.

"I don't think Case is bad off. See how soundly he is sleeping. Those wounds don't seem to hurt him a bit."

"They will by tomorrow," Clay prophesied, grimly. "Every inch of his body will be filled with aches and pains. Flesh wounds do not hurt much at first. If we keep on at this rate we'll soon all be disabled," he added gloomily. "Only one day out from Nome and two laid up beside Captain Joe. We will not go far at this rate."

But Ike's spirits had risen with the assurance of Case's being in no immediate danger. "Oh, Alex, he will be all right," he declared, as Alex's loud snores filled the cabin. "Case, take longer maybe, but his blood is strong and clean an' he'll be all right in no time. Captain Joe, I am not so sure about, you understand, but I think maybe he die."

"He certainly will if you do not quit stuffing food into him every half hour. When an animal or man is in Joe's condition, the less you give them to eat the better until their wounds are mending. Captain Joe would stand more chance of getting well if he only had a bowl of broth with a few crackers broken up in it, three or four times a day, but we had better be getting into our bunks for we have to get an early start in the morning. If you'll wash up the dishes, I'll overhaul Captain Joe's wounds again, and then turn in."

Much to his surprise, Clay found Captain Joe's cuts in much better condition than he had expected. "It must be that long soaking in the cold salt water has drawn a good deal of the fever out of them," he said. "It looks to me as though the old fellow was going to get well."

It was with the cheering thought that both their companions were in no danger of death that they fell into a sound sleep, exhausted by the eventful day they had been through.

So soundly they slept that they did not hear Case awaken just after midnight and groan to himself softly as he waited through the dreary hours for daylight to come and his chums to awake.

It was Ike who was the first to awake, and by the unwritten law of the cruise, he it was to whom the lot fell of cooking breakfast. He lay quiet for a minute, blinking the sleep out of his eyes, then slipped softly out of his bunk so

as not to awaken his companions. He stopped at Case's bunk with joyful greeting to find him conscious, if in pain.

Case tried to smile at the little Jew's joyous greeting, but it was all he could do to stifle a groan.

"I'll fix you up a cup of coffee and some broth, good broth, right away," Ike said. "They no stop the hurt you understand. They just make you more strong to fight the hurts." He was as good as his word and was back in a few minutes with the coffee and broth prepared over the electric stove while breakfast was cooking over the other one. It was not long before he was able to call "Grub's ready," which brought Clay and Alex tumbling from their bunks, Alex apparently none the worse from his experience of the day before. They both greeted Case with joy, but while the mystified Alex was learning what had happened to put his chum in such a condition, Clay slipped out to the point and looked up and down the river. Far down toward the mouth of the Yukon he saw a thin streamer of smoke and he grinned with satisfaction.

"We've got plenty of time to linger over our breakfast," he announced gleefully. "That steamer is eleven or twelve miles down the river yet. Come on all, let's eat."

Over the meal Case's accident was discussed. Alex was worst hurt of all, for Teddy Bear had been his dearest pet.

"I think if he comes back before we go we had ought to shoot him," Ike declared, savagely.

"No, don't hurt him," growled Case from his bunk. "He didn't mean to hurt me, I am sure. He was just wild for a run on shore."

"I am the one to blame for this," said Clay, regretfully. "I saw Ted's trouble coming days ago. I ought to have insisted on leaving him at Nome. We were bound to lose him sooner or later, but I never thought he would do so much damage in his leave taking."

"How did you know that Teddy was going to run away?" demanded Alex, scornfully. "Bears don't think out loud and, if they did, I fancy it would take you some time to pick up their lingo."

"Alex," said Clay, thoughtfully. "Did you ever stop to think how good it seems when we get back to Chicago from one of our long trips? Everything looks fine and fresh to us. The shop windows are wonderful, the noise and bustle thrill one and even the smell of the asphalt is pleasant."

"And there are the movies and the shows and all the excitement going on all the time," murmured Alex, half regretfully.

"Well, that was what was the matter with Teddy," Clay continued. "He was born in the Northland and its lure is one of the strongest instincts in him. As soon as we touched St. Michael's he began to get uneasy. The trees and the smell of

the earth was in his nostrils, and the whole lure of the Northland, handed down from a long line of savage ancestors, was stirring deep down within him and he had to go. He just had to go."

"Bosh," Alex said. "You're weak in your comparisons. Aren't we dead sick of Chicago early in the spring and eager to be off on another trip? Besides, Teddy is an educated bear with a taste for sugar that he will not soon forget. I'll bet you we will see him again."

"I hope not," Clay said, arising. "Well, I guess we had better be getting under way. That old water wagon must be within three or four miles from here now. Ike, will you wash the dishes and tidy up the cabin? I hate to ask you to do it so often, but with Case laid up, I'll have to have Alex do the steering."

"That's all right, Clay," Ike replied cheerfully. "I can run a news stand all right, you understand, but I can't run a motor boat yet, so why should I not make myself useful at something else? I didn't come as a passenger. I came as one of the crew."

The *Rambler* was backed slowly out of the little cove into the open river.

About two miles down the river the river steamboat was making slow progress against the current.

Alex headed out for the channel, the *Rambler* ambling lazily along under third speed. As soon as Alex reached the channel, he headed up stream so that the steamboat's bow was headed directly for the *Rambler's* stern.

Clay came forward to hold a conference with the wheelsman. "I am going to keep slowed down until we are within a couple of hundred yards of her, then swing around in a broad curve and come alongside, but be careful to keep far enough away, we don't want any smash-up."

He walked back to the motor, wishing he had Case, cool, cautious reliable Case, who was always alert to run no more risks than could be avoided. Alex was a skillful wheelsman but daring and reckless at times.

The big steamboat came up on them slowly but surely. When she was within about 200 yards of the *Rambler*, Alex twirled the wheel over and the *Rambler* swung around in a graceful curve, while Clay bent to his motor, shoved the timer up a few more notches and turned on a little more oil and air. A great yelling from the steamboat drew his attention away from the motor. Most of the passengers were on their feet waving their arms excitedly, while an officer on the upper deck was cursing volubly in the most approved Yukon style, for the *Rambler* was driving down on the steamer as if bound to cut her in two. Unmindful of the curses of the officer, Alex held on until it seemed that only a miracle could save the tiny *Rambler* from being smashed to pieces against her big sister. Alex jammed the wheel hard up and the *Rambler*, spinning around like a top, ranged alongside of the big boat, their sides almost touching. A swift glance upward

showed him that he had hit where he had aimed for; on the deck above sat the Yukon Kid and close beside him was a wonderfully pretty girl.

The danger over, Clay was busy at the motor closing the timer down until the *Rambler* was running even with the steamer.

Ike had come out of the cabin and stood looking up at the Kid with a delightful grin on his face.

"Hallo, Ikey," greeted the Kid, in good-natured banter. "Have you decided to set up that secondhand store in Nome yet?"

"No. Mr. Kid," replied Ike politely. "It wouldn't pay. There's got to be more nice ladies come there first. It takes the ladies to make the men dress up fine. My, Mr. Kid," he added innocently, "you sure are fixed up fine today."

The Kid's face grew red to the roots of his hair, while on the girl's face a smile struggled for mastery over a blush.

Alex, up at the wheel, felt a thrill of joy for the quickness of the witty retort. "Ike's sure my partner for this trip," he promised himself.

CHAPTER XVI

ESQUIMAUX

"Hallo," shouted Clay from the motor. "Good morning to you."

"Same to you," called down the Kid. "Say, that little tub of yours makes better time than I thought she would. I thought we passed you during the night. By the way. I've got something for you fellows. I'll lower it down to you on a string."

"Come down yourself," Clay invited. "Just fasten a rope to the rail and shin down. I want to ask you a lot of questions and I can't hear you well above the din of the motor, and the thrashing of the paddle wheels."

The Kid hesitated. "I'm afraid you can't get me back alongside again," he shouted, "and I've got to be there with the mail on time."

"We'll get you aboard all right," Clay promised. "That is, if you are not afraid. It's a little risky for a tenderfoot."

No live young man could stand such a taunt to his courage before a pretty girl, and the Kid surrendered. "All right," he called down. "I'll see the captain and see if he'll promise to slow up a bit if we get too far behind." He looked around at the crowd on deck and finally beckoned to an old sour-dough to take his chair.

The old-timer obeyed, although he nevertheless seemed in his nervousness, to experience great trouble in disposing of his hands and feet.

Clay smiled at the Kid's maneuvers. Evidently he was taking no chances.

Alex, up forward, secure in the fact that he could not be reached, was taking an impish delight in bantering the officer who had cursed so fluently. "Say, you snapping turtle of a log rider," he hailed. "What do you mean by using such language when a real sure enough boat comes alongside your old mud scow? Afraid we were going to smash your old hulk to pieces? Where did you learn that sort of language, anyway? I'll bet you used to raise mules down in Missouri."

"I did handle mules for a while," said the other with evident pride of his accomplishment. "That helped some. Then I mushed dog teams up here on the Yukon trail for four years and that sure taught me a lot. The rest is mostly Spanish I picked up here and there."

"Why, you can't swear at all," scoffed Alex.

"You're only an amateur. You just repeat words you have heard others use. You had ought to coin your words, have them nice and fresh and new all the time."

"That's a hard thing to do," said the officer, gloomily.

"Pshaw, it's easy," Alex declared. "Just buy an automobile and run it yourself for six months and you'll be a different man."

The roar of laughter from the crowd above was as incense to Alex's soul.

"The lad's right," said a serious-minded little man. "I used to own one in the States and I would hate to say half the things I used to think when I used to have to lay on my back under the car in maybe six inches of mud, wrestling away with a monkey wrench."

Just then the Kid slid nimbly down a rope to the *Rambler's* deck. Clay shouted to Alex to steer off from the steamer and as soon as he saw the order was obeyed, he moved the timer ahead at full speed and the *Rambler* shot away from her big, clumsy sister.

"Good-bye," shouted Alex to the officer. "We hate to leave you but we got tired of staying in one place all the time. We'll see you at Dawson if you're lucky enough to get up there before the river freezes over." But the officer was standing speechless, his mouth agape at the *Rambler's* wonderful burst of speed.

As for the Yukon Kid, he slipped down on the deck and grabbed the funnel with both hands as though afraid the boat would slip out from under him. Gradually the startled look died out of his eyes to be replaced by a glint of humor. "This is one on me, boys," he acknowledged. "It's more than one, it's a full baker's dozen," he grinned. "Just think of my begging the captain to slow up until I got safe back aboard. And me being so sure that we must have passed you during the night. I never dreamed a boat so small could run so fast, but I must go

back on the steamer. I've got the mail locked up in my cabin, but I am supposed to guard it all the time."

"Was that some mail you was guarding so close up there, Mr. Kid?" asked Ike, innocently.

The Kid ignored the question though he blushed deeply. "I've got something to give you that may be some use to you. I've got a copy of it at Nome so you needn't hesitate about taking it. It's pretty well thumbed and torn, but I guess you can make it out all right." He unrolled a stiff paper and spread it out on the deck. It was a complete map of the Yukon. "I made it and it's true to a hair," said the Kid with pride. "Take it and keep it. It can be trusted where the government charts can't. I've marked in red ink where the best Indian villages are."

Clay thanked him and bent over the chart thoughtfully. "Look's like clear water for a couple of hundred miles up." The Kid nodded. "Pretty smooth sailing until we get to the Upper Yukon. Then it's rapids after rapids, and some of them pretty fierce."

"I see an Indian village marked down about 110 miles above here," Clay remarked. "I believe we will run ahead and camp there tonight. We haven't seen a native village yet."

"This one is rather small. Most of its inhabitants died of famine last winter, and all the able bodied men and squaws are off on the long hunt now. You'll likely find only old men and old women there now. Well, I'll have a look at Friend Case and then I'll have to get back aboard. I've been gone too long already."

"Getting afraid your old-timer cannot hold down that chair?" smiled Clay with freedom of their quickly born liking for each other.

"Oh, Olson will keep that seat reserved all right," said the Kid confidently. "He's gun shy on women folks. What I am afraid of is that some chekako may try to take it away from him. If that happens there will sure be some blood spilled on deck, an' I don't reckon she's used to sights like that. Don't get me wrong. It's no case of spoons or anything like it. She's just an innocent girl with an old father and mother, and the poor innocents have got an idea that they are going to make a fortune by opening up a restaurant in Dawson. Think of it, boys. Those three poor innocents trying to stack up such a game in Dawson of all places on earth. They have brought in no supplies either, and even flour will be nearly worth its weight in gold dust before the winter is over. The chekakos are pouring in faster than the supplies. That's what makes me want to get back to the steamer quick. There is a crowd of greenhorns on board and some of them think they are mashers. If any of them try to get gay there will sure be something doing. Well, I'll just run down and see the invalid while you run me back to the steamer."

Case, suffering intently in his bunk, greeted the Kid with delight. His firm,

friendly hand shake seemed to lessen his intense pains.

The air of strength, energy and power radiating from the Kid seemed to enthuse his own battered body with new strength. The Kid sat down on the edge of the bunk and with a touch as tender as a woman's, examined the deeper wounds. "You'll be fit as a fiddle in no time," he declared, cheerfully. The wounds are beginning to heal already. That's the reason they hurt so. I'll see you again tomorrow maybe. I've got to go now. Good-bye, keep as quiet as you can and don't fret."

Case, soothed and strangely comforted by the mighty magnetism of the man, snuggled down in his bunk and dropped off to sleep.

"He'll be all right if you take good care of him and fever does not set in," said the Kid as he came to deck. "But have one of you down with him all the time so as to keep him entertained and to wait on him. Just a simple little thing like his getting up to get a drink of water for himself might prove fatal to him in his present condition. At the best though, it will be a long long time before he will be completely well."

"I should have stayed right by him," Ike exclaimed with contrition. "I go right down now to him." He paused on the steps to add shyly, "I got so interested to see if that mail was still well guarded that I forgot. It's all right, Mr. Kid."

A playful kick from the Kid sent him tumbling down the balance of the stairs.

As they swept alongside the steamer, Clay noted with a grin that Olson was still holding down the chair, a heavy long-barreled revolver resting across his knees, while two of the detestable breed of mashers stood a ways off eyeing the coveted chair with glances in which desire and temerity were equally blended. Whatever of womanly shyness Olson had ever possessed must have melted away, for his wrinkled face was smiling and with evident enjoyment. "Yes, he was admitting, reluctantly, "It does get a wee bit cold up here now and then, say around December, but Lord, man, what a country she is."

The Kid grabbed the swinging rope and clambered up it like a monkey.

Olson gave up his seat with evident reluctance.

"Say, Kid," he whispered. "She's gold, pure gold, right down to bed rock."

"I knew it," replied the Kid, briefly. "Go and tell those two fresh young chekakos I want to see them in half an hour in my cabin on important business. I'm going to spank them both like their mothers used to do, only more so."

Olson departed well pleased with his errand and sought out the two offenders, taking great pleasure in impressing upon them the dire evil that always followed disobedience to the Yukon Kid's commands.

Later on he listened gleefully at a locked door from the other side of which came the sound of steady smacks laid on with a heavy hand. The heavy smacking

was broken occasionally by subdued sobs.

While this little scene was being enacted, the *Rambler* was miles away, headed for the Indian village. Once clear of the steamer, Clay shut down the hatch cover over the motor and joined Alex in the bow. "Let me take the wheel for a while," he offered kindly. "Take a rest while you can, you'll want to look over the village when we get there. You haven't got back your full strength yet. You look all played out. That motor will run itself now."

Alex meekly surrendered the wheel. "I do feel slim," he confessed. "I guess I'll stretch out and rest for a little while. But here comes Ike with some dinner for us. I guess I'll tuck some of that inside me first."

Ike stood beaming upon them while the two boys ate the dinner he had so thoughtfully prepared. As soon as they had finished he bore the empty dishes below while Alex stretched out on a seat and was soon asleep.

As the *Rambler* dashed through the water. Clay frequently consulted the chart and compared it with the passing shores. It was accurate as the Kid had stated. Near the middle of the afternoon, he sighted the tall cliff just beyond which the Kid had said lay the little Indian village. He awakened Alex, and turning the wheel over to him, went back to the motor. As they passed the cliff they come into sight of the village, a miserable collection of anthill-like huts. As they eased the *Rambler* to shore, their noses were greeted by a multitude of odors blended into one malodorous whole—the usual odor of an Esquimaux village. "You and Alex can go ashore and look around," Clay said. "I'll stay and look out for Case. I've got a hunch that there's fish lurking in this little cove and I'm going to have a try for them. Taste good for a change, wouldn't it?"

The village lay back a ways from the river on a high bank and this the boys scrambled up, to find themselves in the middle of the settlement. It was almost deserted, only a few old men and old women crouched in the warm sunshine in front of their wretched buildings. Only a very few children played solemnly in the sun and they looked wan and haggard. None of the faces looked attractive. They were broad, flat and stupid.

Ike, with true trader's instinct, had brought a pack with him and a glint of interest shone in the eyes of the old men. It might contain tobacco of which they had none in many weary moons. The one who seemed in authority, approached Alex. "How," he said.

"How yourself?" replied Alex. "Who is your chief?"

"I am a great man amongst my people," said the native. "I am Shaman, the medicine man. I protect my people from sickness and guard them from the evil spirits of the Yukon."

"Guess you got the wrong hunch last winter or else the Yukon spirit's out-wrestled you," said Alex lightly, as he glanced around at the empty huts. "Say,

who's that chap with a face like an Indian's?"

The Shaman glanced at the still impassive face that Alex pointed out.

"Him Nichols, the story teller. He is a great man in the tribe. He keeps the people contented in the long winter's darkness by telling them wondrous tales about when the Northland was always green and the sun shone every day warm, and game was plenty in the land. Not like now when the cold pierces to the marrow and hunger gnaws always at the empty belly."

Alex was not taken much by the Shaman's looks, so leaving him to the tender mercies of Ike, who was undoing his pack, he strolled on through the little village, thrusting his little freckled face in here and there and noting everything with keen eyes.

There was little to be seen, however, and he soon returned to Ike, who was exultant over his bargain, conducted on both sides by many words and protests of being robbed. It ended by Ike becoming possessed of a silver fox skin worth many dollars—while the Shaman, smiling broadly over getting the best of the white man, was now the possessor of a one dollar watch, two plugs of tobacco, a ten cent looking glass, and a pair of green goggles.

CHAPTER XVII

ABE

"Come on, Ike," said Alex. "Let's go back to the boat. There won't be anything worth seeing and I'm getting sick of this smelly place. Better fun to go down and fish with Clay.

"All right," agreed Ike, willingly. "I got the only good fur in camp, so I guess we don't need to stay. Understand me, though, that Shaman is a thief and a robber. We got a bargain all fixed up once and then he backed out and wants one more plug of tobacco. My, but he is a rascal."

"You poor fellow," said Alex in mock pity. "I don't believe you made over 1000 per cent on that deal."

Ike grinned joyously. "There is some little profit," he admitted. "Enough to help pay the expenses. I wish we could find more Shamans with pretty fox skins."

"He has got something prettier than a fur skin," exclaimed Alex, as they paused by the Shaman's igloo. "Say, did you ever see anything like that team of dogs?"

Inexperienced as they were with the toilers of the North, the two lads recognized that these dogs were no common breed of huskies like those they had seen at Nome. They were bigger and lacked much of the wolf-like features of the usual husky, nor was there the usual husky's bearing of white fangs at their approach. They were lean and gaunt, as scantily-fed Indian dogs always are, but there was strength and endurance written on their broad chest and lithe muscles. Even their coats of thick, black, glossy hair did not resemble a husky's in the least. They were stretched out in a line basking in the sun. One, apparently the leader, for he was by far the biggest and most powerful of the lot, attracted Alex strangely. The large, noble head and big eloquent eyes seemed strongly familiar to the boy. He approached the magnificent animal cautiously and held out his hand warily, ready to snatch it back if he was greeted by the silent snap of the wolf-bred dog. Instead, he was met by a wag of the bushy tail and the dog reached out and smelt of the extended hand. A second smell, and Alex felt the soft, warm caress of a licking tongue. The boy stooped and patted the dog's head and the dog responded with a short, joyous bark and lifted up his eyes, eloquent with love and reverence. Alex was now examining him closely. "Ike," he cried. "He's Newfoundland, clear bred Newfoundland."

"Well," said Ike, indifferently. "What of that? He's just a dog, ain't he?"

"But just think of it," Alex cried, angered by his friend's lack of interest. "A dog from God's country up in these desolate wastes." A recollection of a dog of whom he had read, in "The Call of the Wild," swept into his memory. "Buck," he called softly, "Buck." The animal with one magnificent leap covered the space between them, while the rest of the pack crowded around him, wagging their tails and looking at him with curious eyes.

The Shaman seeing his interest in the dogs, approached him to be greeted by a volley of questions by Alex.

"Yes," he admitted. "They were his dogs." "Would he sell? Perhaps, but the price must be large for they were the best dogs on the Yukon. Yes. they were the best dogs in all Alaska. They could go faster and further than any other dogs in the country. Yes, he knew where they came from but the big one, the leader, was no doubt a gift of the good spirits sent to him, the Shaman, for his great goodness and virtue. He, the big dog, had come into their camp one stormy night in the blackness of winter and had made it his home. He, the Shaman, had with his own hands, harnessed him with the other sled dogs, but, at first, there had been trouble. The new dog was a born leader. One by one he had fought and whipped the other huskies for he had ways of fighting new to the North and he always won. Lastly, he had whipped the leader and become by the law of the North, the leader himself. Later he had mated with a huge husky and there had been five puppies. The strange dog had trained them himself in the ways and laws

of the trail. No, they were not bad dogs. Never did they snarl or fight amongst themselves like the huskies. But one thing one must never do. He must never lift a stick to the big dog. One man had done so and like a flash the big dog's teeth had met in his throat.

Buck's eyes, now mistily wistful, met Alex's. "Good Lord, Buck, you can almost talk," Alex said reverently. "I understand what you are trying to say. You got sick of running with the wolves, their ways were not your ways. So you sought out your own kind again. They are not like the white gods you used to serve, though you have served them faithfully. But you want to leave them. Your sensitive nostrils that can catch the faintest odor in the air are sick of the scent of blubber, seal oil, and stinking furs and you want to be gone from it all serving men with white bodies, clean from much washing, big men who will smile at you kindly and like you because you are brave, strong and fearless." Buck wagged his tail as if to show that he was understood.

"Lord," said Alex, again reverently. "You can do all but talk. Say," he demanded of the Shaman, "how much do you want for that team, leader and all?"

"Nine hundred dollars, said the Shaman firmly.

"We can't buy them," Alex said sadly. "We haven't got that much money. Besides, it would be an awful expense to feed them the balance of the summer. I sure would like to own that Buck dog though."

"We get him when we come back," Ike whispered. "I trade for him and get him cheap. I talk to that robber, now, so he will not sell him 'till we get back."

"We go up the river 'You Never Know What' in our steamer that travels by fire," he explained, with many gestures of his hands. "Before the big cold we come back to trade with our new friends. Our hearts are big and we pay big for everything we buy. The eyes of the Indians have never beheld such wondrous things as we have on board our fire boat. Cloth like fresh gold from the ground, warm like the blue of the sky in summer, and others so rich of color that they dazzle the eye. Of tobacco we will have hundreds of plugs. Of the ice that never melts and shows a man his face like still clear water, we will have great quantities. And of many other things new and strange we will have a plentiful supply. We have a little box filled with spirits that talk or sing or laugh as it's owner commands."

"All white men are liars," said the Shaman calmly. "How do I know you have such a wonderful box?"

"Come down and see it tonight," Ike invited.

"I will," accepted the Shaman, "but it will be much better if I come alone. It is bad for the people to know too much about spirits."

"Your dog team is as good as yours already," whispered Ike as they turned away. "He will hold that team for you if he has to wait all winter, you understand.

Once he hears that spirit box he's going to want it badly."

Alex grinned. "Put me next," he begged. "I'm not wise to that spirit box stunt."

"Say, you remember that cheap phonograph you boys bought for one of your trips and the heap of old cracked up records too? In Chicago the lot might be worth \$5.00, but I doubt it. Here it's worth a dog team, which costs nine hundred dollars, if you boys let me do the bargaining, you understand," Ike enlightened him.

"Go to it," exclaimed Alex joyously. "Hello, there's something going on around that ant-hill over there. Let's run over and see what the trouble is. Maybe it's a fight."

The two boys pushed through the little circle in front of the igloo just in time to see a litter carried by old men pass up from the burrow-like entrance. On the litter lay a skeleton-like figure of a young boy. His large, mournful-looking eyes looking out of a face on which the skin was pulled tightly over the bones.

"What's the matter?" Alex demanded of a native, who happened to be Nicholas, the story teller.

"He plenty sick," Nicholas replies. "He die pretty soon."

"But why don't they leave him in the hut?" Alex persisted.

"Esquimaux no stay in house where one has died," said Nicholas.

"What are they going to do with him?" the boy insisted.

"Put him in a thicket and stuff moss in his mouth so he make no noise to keep people awake," said Nicholas calmly. "By and by Luna come and get him spirit."

"What's Luna?" Alex demanded.

"Him the great spirit of the Yukon," said Nicholas with a shiver. He live down under the ice. Him the greatest spirit of the Yukon."

"What are we going to do about it, Ike?" Alex asked, helplessly. "It's their law and custom. Has been for hundreds of centuries, I guess, but we can't let that little fellow die like that. Of course we could pick him up and carry him off but it might mean a fight with these old men and old women and we might kill some of them. It wouldn't be right to kill a live person for the sake of saving one who is dying. I don't know what to do."

"I'll fix it up all right," said Ike. "Don't you worry your head none."

"Him got father?" he demanded of Nicholas. "Father him die. Winter famine catch him." "Mother," Ike questioned.

"She die too—famine."

"Ain't he got no relations at all?" Ike inquired. An old man, shaky with age, stepped out from the group. "I'm his uncle," he quavered.

"Now we are getting down to business, you understand," said Ike with sat-

isfaction. "Your nephew no good to you now?" The old man shook his palsied head. "Him dead plenty soon," he said stolidly.

"You no want nephew then?" Ike persisted, and the old man shook his head decidedly.

"Then I buy him," Ike said promptly. "For him I give two plugs of tobacco, of red cloth 20 yards, and of big tallow candles three. Does the uncle accept?" The uncle did with eagerness. It was more than the boy was worth when well. He was little and it would be many seasons before he could become a skillful hunter. Clearly these pale faces, not yet the size of men, were crazy, crazy as wolf-dogs when the moon is full. A fear seized him that this crazy young pale-face, who waved his hands so wildly when he talked, might repent of his bargain and demand all this wealth back. He was starting for his igloo as fast as his shaky legs would carry him, when Ike sternly commanded him to stop. "Take me to where you put the boy," he said, "and explain to him that hereafter I am his father, mother and uncle, and when I speak he is to obey."

They found the little fellow in the middle of a bunch of willows, a handful of dirty moss stuck in his mouth. He was lying perfectly quiet looking up at the skies with his black, beady eyes. He was only a child, but he knew the laws and custom of his people, many had he seen during the great cold, dragged out to die alone in the deep snow.

Alex pulled out the gag of dirty moss and threw it away, while the old man in quavering tones, told him what Ike had directed him to say.

The child looked up at Ike with grateful eyes. "All right, fadder, me do what you say."

Ike strove to hide his pity for the sick, deserted little fellow. He bent down and put his arms around the shrunken shoulders. "Put your arms around my neck and hang on as tight as you can," he commanded sternly. "Here, Alex, grab him around the legs and we will have him down to the boat in no time, you understand."

Clay was still fishing contentedly, a number of large salmon flapping helplessly on the deck around him.

"For goodness sakes, what have you there?" he cried as he spied the limp burden.

"This is my son," said Ike, solemnly. "He is sick, very sick. Come help us with him, Clay."

A bunk was hastily made up on the floor, and on this the little Esquimau was placed.

"He's got no fever," Clay said, after examining the little thermometer he had been holding under the lad's tongue. The way I size it up is that he starved so long last winter that his stomach rejected the greasy heavy blubber with which

they broke their long fast in the spring. I believe that he will come out all right with careful feeding and good care. The first thing to do is to take off those filthy furs he has got on, give him a good bath, and find something clean and warm for him to wear.”

“I find him some clothes what gets too small for me, but which I can pin up a little for him,” said Ike. “Say, I think I call him after a good friend of mine, a fellow named Abe. I think Abe a pretty name for him.”

When the last of the mangy furs were removed from the little lad, the boys stood back and viewed him pitifully, wondering how the spark of life had managed to keep alight in such a wasted and shrunken skeleton. Abe objected as much as his feeble strength would permit, to the awful bath, but when he was, at last, rubbed clean and dressed in a suit of Ike’s pajamas, he drank a bowl of warm soup greedily and in a few minutes was sound asleep. Alex had been cooking supper while his chums had labored over the lad and they now sat down to a meal of delicious fried salmon, coffee, and mealy potatoes. They had but finished, when the Shaman appeared, slipping in softly like a cat. The boys had had no time to separate the good records from the bad. All they could do was to wind up the wheezy old machine, start it going, and trust to luck, which proved to be in their favor, for the Shaman listened like one entranced, to songs, minstrel jokes and music.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRADE

The records could hardly have been worse and the machine was suffering badly from the asthma, but the Shaman could not have shown more appreciation had it been the grandest combination in existence. “Won’t you come Home, Bill Bailey?” seemed to give him complete satisfaction, but “Ain’t It Funny When You’re Out of Money That the Only Thing You Get Is Sympathy?” brought forth an expressive grunt, while “If You Ain’t Got No Money, Why You Needn’t Come Around,” appeared to afford him great pleasure. Then Alex made the mistake he had been dreading all the evening. After winding up the machine he slipped in a fresh record and started it going. At the first snappy, scratching, breaking sounds, Alex and Ike looked at each other in dismay. It was the worst record in the lot because it had been their favorite and had been played over and over

again until it was only a battered wreck, seamed with scratches and disfigured by cracks. Of the former Battle Hymn of the Republic there remained only a few unintelligible words and a discordant discord.

The boys glanced at the Shaman fearfully and were surprised to find him grinning with delight at the awful discord.

"I know that spirit," he declared, proudly, as the record ended with one last abrupt crash, "It's the voice of Luna, the great Yukon spirit. It is his voice. I know it. Many seasons I have heard it when he was breaking up the ice in the spring. Have you more of the spirits to put into the box?"

But Alex was not going to risk another mistake. It might not turn out so fortunately next time. "There are dozens more of them," he said, "but we are getting tired of calling them forth. It is enough for tonight. We have proved that all white men are not liars."

"It is true," agreed the Shaman, "but," he added, thoughtfully, "you are not grown to man's size yet."

"Maybe we trade it to the Shaman in the next village," Ike suggested with a guileless face.

But the Shaman protested violently. "They were not all good Shamans like himself in the other villages. They would certainly cheat and rob him. Why did he not trade with him? He had a big heart. He always gave more than he received. Then, too, he was losing power over his people. There were the priests that traveled summer and winter through the land, treating the sick for nothing and always talking against the medicine men and forever preaching a new faith that might be all right in another land, but which would not work in the Northland, where life was cruel and no man could love his brother like himself. Many of his own tribe had embraced the faith and openly laughed at his power. And soon he, the Shaman, whose father had been a Shaman, and whose father's father had been a Shaman, would be regarded as only a common man in the tribe. The wondrous box would help him to regain his power. His people would be convinced of his greatness when he summoned the spirits to talk and sing to them, but to give up the finest team in Alaska, that was too much."

This was Ike's cue, and the bargaining that ensued was a thing worth remembering. From the lockers, Ike brought out some of all the things they had brought to barter, while the Shaman viewed the head with eyes of cupidity.

Ike selected a dozen plugs of tobacco and laid them out in a row.

The Shaman eyed them with envy, but controlled himself with an effort.

"More," he grunted.

Ike wrung his hands and declared he was being robbed, but he added four more plugs of tobacco to the row. After all it was only the beginning of the battle and he had decided in the first place to give thirty plugs if he had to do so. For two

hours the battle raged, the pile of trinkets before the Shaman growing steadily. Often the boys turned their heads aside to hide their grins at Ike who, with tears in his eyes, protested that he was being robbed, that he was a poor man with a sick child to support, and he was taking the bread from his child's mouth to give to a stranger, but Ike's wildest outbursts were met by the Esquimau, with a steady demand of:

"More, more."

But it was not in the law of things for a Jew to be worsted by a mere Esquimau, so when Ike decided that the pile had grown big enough, he reached out and gathered it up in his arms. "We can not trade," he shouted angrily. "Here I offer you gifts worthy of a prince, besides a box full of spirits, and all you say is 'More, more,' all the time. All these things I offer you for a few mangy dogs, so poor you can see their ribs and so old and worn out that they do not snap and bite like real huskies do. Go. Perhaps in the next village we will find a Shaman who is not a robber."

"Wait," protested the Shaman, startled at all the rich treasure he was about to lose. "Let not a trifle upset a trade between friends. Just give me of those shiny things a few and our trade will be complete." The shiny things were a box of coffin trimmings which Clay had brought as a venture because, though made of tin, they were cheap and bright and stamped out in the shape of birds, fruits and flowers.

Alex measured out a quart of them with a reluctant hand. "Now you must keep the dogs for us till we come back in the fall. Not starve 'em, you understand, make them sleek and fat."

"It will take many salmon," said the Shaman. For that there should be two more measures of the shiny birds and flowers."

Ike hastened to dole out the two measures, for he had expected to pay much more for the dogs' keep.

Business concluded, the boys showed the Shaman how to run the phonograph, and the wily savage departed as silently as he had come, all his newly gained treasure tightly rolled up in his dirty, greasy parka.

"How much did the team cost us?" Alex inquired.

Ike grinned. "Not so bad, you understand. Fifty dollars as near as I can tell and that includes their board."

"Why, that's highway robbery," Clay exclaimed. "Fifty dollars for a nine hundred dollar team of dogs is as bad as stealing."

"It's business," said Ike, placidly. "If he was smart enough, don't you think he would take everything we have got? Besides," he continued. "You needn't worry about him. He will get plenty of furs with the things we gave him. I expect he make them coffin trimmings bring him in a fur for each trimming."

"Then the poor people of the villages have to pay for our bargain," Alex said.

"That is business also," Ike remarked. "But I think the same as you, Clay. We get a good trade. When we come back let's give them poor people plenty of good things to eat, so that they will not suffer from hunger this winter. Say we give five hundred dollars' worth of rice, sugar, beans and flour. You see, we still have made a good trade for the team, the Shaman makes plenty of money off his coffin trimmings, and the box, and the poor people are contented because the hunger does not gnaw at their bellies."

"I am too sleepy to point it out," yawned Clay, "but there's a flaw some where in your reasoning. We beat a man out of his dogs for a few worthless trinkets. We gain, don't we?" The man who owns the dogs gains, the people gain also. Nobody loses. Looks to me like high finance."

"High finance," snorted Ike, indignantly. "Who ever heard of high finance giving back food to the people—a library or an institute, perhaps, but food, no. We might give them \$500.00 worth of books," he added thoughtfully, "on condition, you understand, that they raise another \$500.00. The Shaman could be the librarian."

"You idiot," grinned Clay, as he crawled into his bunk. "What do the Esquimaux want with books? They are too hungry, weary, and hopeless for books."

"Maybe," admitted Ike, as he climbed into his own bunk, "but say, it would make us one splendid advertisement."

When they crowded up on deck after a hearty breakfast next morning, there curled up on the bank was Buck, surrounded by his family. At sight of Alex, he barked joyously, and the boy went ashore to bid the noble animal farewell. "Good-bye, Buck," he whispered. "We will come back for you soon. Be patient, for it will only be a short time. Very soon we come and get you."

Buck wagged his tail mournfully at thought of the delay, but beamed with joy over Alex's parting head patting.

As they backed out of the cove, Alex glanced back. Buck was leading his family back to the settlement, but the big leader's tail drooped mournfully and every few paces he would stop and gaze back at the retreating boat.

The boys found that the steamer was some five miles ahead of them, but under full speed it took but a short time to range alongside the clumsy craft. The Kid, without waiting for an invitation, came sliding aboard. "Well, how did you like the village?" was his first query.

"All right, except for the people, the huts and the smells," Clay grinned and he proceeded to relate the story of their experiences.

"Sure you're going some for chekakos," the Kid commented. "I've heard of that dog team. All the Yukon has for that matter, but few have seen it. I saw them

once on the trail and I'd been glad to have traded my team for them and given two hundred dollars to boot, which is going some, for I've got one of the best teams on the Yukon." The kid will be a lot of help too, if you can raise him. The Pymauts live not far from the Holy Cross Mission and the fathers have taught many of them to speak English and have converted many. He'll come handy interpreting for you when you get down to trading with the tribes. I reckon I'll step below and see how both of those chaps are making out," he said.

He was back soon with a smile on his face. "They are both sound asleep," he said and I wouldn't disturb them. "Sleep's the best healer there is. I'll see them again after they are awake," he said.

"Do you think your party would like to take a spin on the *Rambler* today," Clay asked, thoughtfully. "I mean of course, Miss—er—"

"Ethel Mason," supplied the Kid promptly. "Miss Ethel Mason and her parents, I mean, of course," Clay said. "It would be a change from that slow, lumbering steamboat. They could troll for salmon—there are lots of them around here and we could have a fish dinner and maybe they would like the change from the steamer for even a day."

"They would," exclaimed the Kid, brightly.

"It's rough on them—being only two women amongst such a raft of men. 'Course the men don't, many of them, mean anything wrong but they haven't seen anything but ugly Indian squaws for so long that they can't help but stare when they see a pretty face peeping up like a flower out of the snow. Sure, they will come. I'll get one of the crew to fix up a boatswain's chair and lower them all three down easy."

"I'm so sorry you can't come, Mr. Kid," said Ike, regretfully.

"But I am coming," declared the Kid emphatically. "Why not?"

"I thought you had to stay on board and guard that mail," said Ike, innocently.

The Kid reddened. "I'll go up and tell them and see about getting that chair ready," he said, hurriedly, as he clambered up the rope.

"In a few minutes the chair was ready and the two old folks, followed by the girl, were lowered to the *Rambler's* decks.

Clay immediately decided that he liked all three of the visitors. The girl had a frank, boyish-looking face, charming in its gentleness and firmness. Her father was a great giant of a man with the quaintly gentle air of authority that one comes to associate with country storekeepers or local postmasters, while his wife was a kind-faced, motherly-looking woman. Clay decided that the Kid was right. These three gentle folks were not of the kind to meet the rough, lawless element of gold-mad Dawson.

Mrs. Mason at once declared her desire to see the sick boys, of whom the

Yukon Kid had told her.

Ike led her below, having already informed the invalids of her coming. Case ground his teeth to shut out the groans. He was feeling worse than usual that morning. His wounds were knitting and the tortured nerves were crying out for mercy. He looked up suddenly to see a kindly face with tear-filled eyes bending over him and to hear a quite motherly voice saying, "You poor, poor boy; how you must be suffering." A few deft pats to the pillow and a rearrangement of the blankets gave Case unspeakable relief. "Now, boy, just keep still and try to go to sleep," commanded the gentle voice. "As soon as I look at that other poor boy. I'm going to come back and read to you for a while."

The little Esquimau met Mrs. Mason's eyes with the dark mournful gaze bred by the untold suffering of hundreds of generations of hunger, suffering ancestors. The good woman groaned at the sight of the skin-covered bones. "You speak English?" she inquired with lips that trembled with emotion.

"Yes, I speak the English," he said weakly. "Learn it at Holy Cross Mission. Here all the same as Holy Cross, all clean and white and every one good and kind."

"You must lie still and get well," commanded the lady, "so you can tell me much about the Holy Cross, and, always, eat of the things I send you. They will make you well and strong. Good-bye, I'll see you again soon," and the tender-hearted woman stumbled up the cabin stairs with eyes that could scarcely see through the tears that blinded them.

"Go right back to the steamer," she commanded Clay. "You boys have done your best for your sick companions, but there are some things you lack and I am going back to get them."

Clay signalled to Alex to turn around and in a few minutes the *Rambler* was tearing her way back to the steamer.

CHAPTER XIX

WINTER QUARTERS

"Slow her down, Clay, slow her down," pleaded Case. "Slow her down," shouted Alex from the bow. "I can't do much with her going so fast."

It was a different scene from that, in which we last saw the boys. Long gone were the golden days when they had journeyed leisurely up the river with

Mrs. Mason nursing Case and the Esquimau lad back to speedy health. Gone also were that exhilaration of shooting the rapids, and gone were the pleasant nights when, with a bad stretch of water ahead of them, the steamer and the *Rambler* had tied up together at the bank and all had made merry by the light of big fires, singing, talking, and even dancing on the rough, uneven ground. Gone were the pleasant loitering days in gold-mad Dawson, mingling with the old timers, eager to lend a hand wherever needed and gaining in return many new quaint facts of the country and the trail. They had hardly noted the growing keenness in the air until the Kid, anxious still in his love affair, whispered to them that it was time for them to go, that much ice was already bubbling up in the smaller streams, and, knowing the Kid as they did, they had followed his advice. It was an exciting race with winter at their heels, but the *Rambler* driving ahead with the current at a speed of from twenty-five to twenty-eight miles an hour, kept ahead of the big cold.

At the Indian village they had stopped to get their dogs and buy furs from the Shaman who, fat and sleek, by artful trading, had acquired nearly all the furs from the hunters who were drifting in from the long hunt one by one. To the hunger-pinched poor folks, they gave the provisions Ike had suggested. They also gave them freely of their trinkets that they might not be tempted to trade off the precious food for the Shaman's worthless baubles.

Short as their stay had been, they were surprised at the change in the river. Much ice was bubbling to the surface like yeast. It was not the same Yukon upon which they had ridden up so pleasantly in summer. It was tempestuous with white-capped waves that battered against the *Rambler's* bow and sent icy showers of spray aft. By midday the fierce wind had died away and thin cakes of ice were floating on the surface.

Slow her down, Clay," Alex begged. "I can't help much at the rate she's going." He was leaning over the bow, boat hook in hand, trying vainly to thrust to one side the blocks of ice that impeded the *Rambler's* progress. While Case, well once more, was standing at the wheel, his alert eyes picking out the channels of open water freed from ice throes.

Down in the cabin, Ike was already beginning the evening meal and talking gravely to Abe, whose wan face had filled out amazingly and who was clumsily trying to help fadder with the cooking.

"Slow her down, can't you?" Alex yelled again.

Clay left the motor and made his way forward. "Do you see that mountain ahead where the river seems to make a bend? I noticed it when we were going up. Just beyond it is a snug little cove with a shelving beach. Just the place to winter in, it struck me. Now the shores here are not fit for a winter camp. They are too wind-swept. We have just got to make that cove. We simply can't stop. The

river will be frozen over by morning and when the ice breaks up in the spring, the *Rambler* would be crushed into splinters between the floes. At this rate we can not make the cove before night. I don't want the responsibility all on myself. But I think now is the time to make a break for it. The ice is thin yet and the *Rambler* has got plenty of power and we know she has not got an unsound plank in her. I vote to try for the cove. What do you fellows say?"

"I'm for it," said Case, knocking his ice-cold hands against his body to take away the numbness. "Anything is better than this."

"The cove or bust," Alex exclaimed, as he threw the boat hook up on the cabin top. "This spearing off ice floes is like bobbing for apples, only more so. One just gets wet and tired without getting any apples."

"All right," Clay agreed. "Pick out the smoothest course you can, Case, and hold her to it."

He went back to the motor and slowly shoved the timer ahead. The *Rambler*, which before had been barely moving, suddenly gathered speed and leaped forward at the ice field ahead. She struck with a crash, and, scarcely pausing, darted forward to meet the next, leaving behind a rapidly closing wake filled with shattered ice.

Clay, leaning out of her motor hold, grinned with delight. "She eats them, eats them up alive," he exulted.

But it was a dearly bought victory for the little boat, for when at last she reached the cove, her bow post was a mass of splinters, while long streamers of wood hung from her bruised sides, and showed where the sharp ice had torn streaks out of her oak planking.

"Another victory like that would be a defeat," remarked Case, as from the shore he viewed her wrecked appearance.

A portion of the brief Arctic day remained, and it's dim twilight glow was too precious to be wasted. Alex cut down a dead cottonwood tree and chopped it up for the Yukon stove, which they had bought at Dawson, on the Kid's advice. While he was thus engaged, Ike, leaving Abe to look out for the cooking supper, came on deck to render his assistance. A thick layer of spruce boughs were cut and laid ahead of the boat, and, by use of rollers and block and tackle, the three managed to pull the *Rambler* out on her springy bed.

"That will help to keep her warmer inside in winter," Clay said with satisfaction. "We could never have kept her warm with her bottom resting on the ice. Now the next thing is to fix up the sides and cabin top so as to protect them from the stinging cold."

Long poles were cut and placed rafterwise from the peak of the pitched cabin roof to the ground. On these rafters they piled layer upon layer of small spruce boughs and banked up around the sides with a generous supply of the

fragrant limbs. It was almost dark when their task was completed and they stood back and viewed the result with satisfaction. "A house inside a house," Case said. "All it needs is a good fall of snow to fill up the chinks and we will be as snug as a bug in a rug."

They were all tired, cold, and hungry and it was a joy to descend into the brightly lit cabin where a merry fire crackled in the Yukon stove and a savory supper fresh from the fire, steamed on the table.

"I wonder when we will see the Yukon Kid again," said Case musingly, during a lull in the supper chatter. "He was due to leave St. Michael's yesterday and I bet he started on time, for he's fairly crazy to get back to his lady fair in Dawson."

Alex snorted in disgust. "Looks like all you fellows can think of is girls," he sneered, and his companions shifted sheepishly in their chairs, expecting and dreading a storm of ridicule from his sharp little tongue. But Alex remained silent after his outburst. In truth, he was picturing for himself a dull and sombre future. As the others wandered on to other topics he sat thinking gloomily. Here was the Yukon Kid, mightiest of the mighty men of the North, hanging to the apron strings of a mere slip of a girl. Clay and Case both had girls in Chicago, he knew; they would soon be getting old enough to marry and then the fine long cruises would stop, for their wives would not let them go unless they went with them. Case's red headed girl wouldn't, he was certain. There would be no more trips. Only he and Ike would be left to talk over alone the glory of this trip. A horrible suspicion flashed into his mind, perhaps even Ike had a girl.

"Ike," he demanded, suddenly. "Where does Rebecca work?"

"She works in a shirt waist factory. By and by she be forewoman," Ike said proudly, caught unawares.

A roar of laughter from the boys awoke him to the slip he had made. His face reddened and he resolutely closed his mouth and refused to commit himself further in reply to Alex's adroit question.

"It's all right, Alex," he said stoutly. "Maybe you got one little laugh on me now, you understand. But some day I get big laugh on you because I laugh last."

"Fadder," interrupted Abe, "you better put mukluks by the fire to dry."

It was a rule of the trail, the Kid had tried to impress upon them, to always dry out their footwear after the day's work, but it needed the grave voice of the child to recall it to them. Abe was born on the trail and he was learned in its dangers.

"If Abe says so we had better do it and turn in," Clay remarked, and soon five sets of footwear were ranged around the stock and the five boys were sound asleep in their bunks.

It was Clay's cheery "Get up, grub's ready," that awakened his sleeping

companions.

"What do you mean by having breakfast at such an unearthly hour?" grumbled Alex, tumbling out of his bunk and fumbling for his trousers. "Why, the cabin's as dark as pitch."

Clay snapped on the electric lights. "We are late getting up this morning. Remember, young man, this is the season when the days grow short and we've got to make every minute of daylight count. Get up and thank your lucky star that you've got a partner good enough to get up before you, warm the cabin up, fry ham and eggs, and cook coffee for you."

The mention of food sent Alex tumbling into his clothes, an example his companions were not slow to follow.

By the time they had finished eating, a wan light was stealing into the cabin windows. The last mouthful swallowed, they hurried up for a look at the river. It was a sheet of solid white from shore to shore. They all felt a feeling of gratitude that they had won to the little cove and were not penned up out there in that desolate waste exposed to the full fury of every gale. They now had time to note more closely the place in which their winter was to be passed. It was a tiny cove well protected from wintry blasts. On one side of them rose the big mountain; on the other side lofty crumbling cliffs protected them from the raw west winds, while back of them the ground rose in a gradual slope, densely covered by cottonwoods and spruces.

"The first thing to do is to get out our snow shoes and practice breaking trails," Clay declared. "We have got to harden our muscles and get used to it before we start out on the trading trips."

All of the boys, but Ike, had had on snow shoes before, but this task of breaking trail for the dogs was a new trick to them and they could not quite get the hang of it until the little Esquimau lad gravely strapped on a pair and showed them how the big webbed shoe must be lifted carefully up, straight up, until it cleared the surface, so that no snow should be tumbled into the packed place, then how it must be shoved cautiously ahead while the same careful uplifting must be repeated by the other foot. Ike's first experiment plunged him into a snow drift, leaving only his big snow shoes waving madly above the surface.

"Fadder, fadder," cried Abe in delight. "If you want to walk on your hands tie the shoes on them."

Clay and Case grinned at each other. It was the first time either of them had heard the lad laugh. Clearly, under the nourishing food and kind treatment he was receiving, Abe was certainly picking up.

The unaccustomed trail breaking brought into play muscles the boys never dreamed they possessed, and after a few hours' practice, Clay called a halt. "We don't want to try it too long at a time. Tomorrow we will do a little more and

keep it up that way until we can do an all-day stunt. Then we will be fit to start out on our trading trips.”

About noon the Yukon Kid hove in sight and with but little pressure, was induced to stay to dinner and rest up his tired dogs, which he had evidently been pushing hard.

“I’ve got a bit of news for you,” he said between mouthfuls. “Got the true story of Bill and Jud. Got it straight from an old timer who lived in the same part of Ohio that Bill came from. Bill and Jud are brothers, but no more alike than a rotten egg is like a fresh laid one. Jud, he stuck to the farm and grew up big, strong, and honest, though I guess he would have done that anywhere. Bill hit for the city, and the village folks said they hoped he would never come back for he’d always been mean, lying and thieving, although Jud was always mighty fond of him and was always making excuses for him and claiming that it was only Bill’s high spirits that got him into mischief. Well, Bill got a job in a store and mighty proud of it Jud was, always telling people that Bill was getting along fine in the city. Pretty soon the store people found out that their cash was turning up short every night and they traced it to Bill. He confessed and Jud put a mortgage on the farm and went up and settled with the store folks so that Bill wouldn’t be prosecuted, but the lesson didn’t do Bill any good, he kept getting lower and lower until he got to be a common holdup man and burglar. Then Jud up and sold his interest in the farm, and bid good-bye to the village folks, telling them that he was going to get Bill away from the bad fellows who were always leading him into trouble all the time. He made good his word evidently, for here they are up here on the Yukon with Jud looking out for Bill and keeping him as straight as he can. Funny ain’t it, how a good man like Jud will let himself be forced into bad ways just to keep a worse man from doing worse things. I reckon Jud would kill any one who tried to hurt his brother. Reckon that’s what the Good Book calls brotherly love, but I don’t take much stock in that kind of love myself, it’s too one-sided.”

The Kid did not pause for much more conversation and the boys did not attempt to detain him, for they knew he was eager to be off for Dawson.

“I’ll have more time to stay with you on my way back,” he shouted back to them as his rested team swung into line. “Oh! by the way. Bill and Jud are on the Yukon now somewhere. Heard they left Nome with two boats and a small outfit,

but I haven't passed them on the river."

CHAPTER XX

THE VISION

It was not until they had practiced a week at the mock trail work that Clay decided they were in shape to tackle the real work of the trail. The week had wrought changes in them. It had been real work. Everything they had learned of the work from the old timers they had put into practice again and again until they had learned to do the thing with neatness and despatch. They were astonished at the miracle the week had wrought in themselves. Their bodies were stripped of every ounce of fat and new unknown muscles had sprung into notice while the old prominent ones had become as things of elastic steel. Their hunger was of the order of famished wolves and they grew to understand the look of knowing hunger in the eyes of their dogs as they wistfully watched them eat breakfast and supper, of which two meals the animals were not allowed to partake, but could only look on in wretched misery at their masters eating with such relish.

Before leaving Dawson the boys had cleared out the forehold and had filled it with a great store of dried salmon. Of this, they gave their dogs more than double the quantity usually given by dog drivers. But they gave it to them only at night, according to the iron law of the trail, whose motto was that a full dog travels slow. Their first real trip was to the nearest of the Indian villages which seemed to inclose the Catholic Mission of the Holy Cross in a kind of semi-circle. They started with the usual trail traveler's pack, containing only the things absolutely necessary, such as frying pan and a big kettle to cook in, a change of footgear and clothing for each, an axe and a fair amount of the staple food of the trail, beans, pork, coffee, flour and sugar. A smaller pack contained the supply of dried salmon for the dogs, and another of trading trinkets, while over all was strapped down tightly over the load a large square of waterproofed canvas, another of the Kid's suggestions. It being the first trip and a novelty, all were eager to go, but none liked to leave the *Rambler* alone. For, although well protected from view, there was the possible chance that some traveler might stumble upon the tiny cove and relieve the *Rambler* of some of her already diminishing stock of provisions. So it was decided that one should be left to guard the boat, that one to be decided by the drawing of straws. The short straw fell to Case to his

intense disgust.

“Just my luck,” he grumbled, “to be left behind on a day like this when the snow has just got a crust an elephant could not break through, and everything seems to promise the finest kind of weather. When I get a chance to go the snow will be five feet deep and we will have to pack trail every foot of the way right in the teeth of a sixty-mile gale.”

What Case said about the conditions for traveling were true. They could hardly have selected a better time. The start was made long before daylight, Clay running side by side with the leader and striving to keep to the due south course by his pocket compass, but he soon realized that Buck sensed their destination and, like one on familiar ground, was picking his way toward a certain goal. Now and then he would swerve to one side to avoid a clump of trees or a steep gully, but always swinging back again and ever bearing back again to the south.

“No use trying to guide that dog,” Clay panted as he fell back to join his companions who were half running to keep up with the flying sled. “He knows where we are going and the best way of getting there far better than I do myself. I don’t believe there’s another team like this in the world. Look how they run in perfect harmony with each other.”

Their admiration for their team was further increased when, upon the rising of the sun, they looked back at the distant mountain from whose base they started only a few hours before. All the boys were feeling the tremendous pace at which they had traveled and Clay called a brief halt for them all to gain their breath. The dogs, obedient to his commands, dropped down in their traces and instantly curled up in the hard snow.

“Look how much trail wisdom they’ve got,” said Alex in admiration. “They go like the wind, by they don’t waste a second when they get a chance to rest.”

“We have got to borrow a little of their wisdom,” Clay observed. “If we don’t we will all of us be tired to death and have to camp long before the day is over. We had better take turns in riding on the sled, one at a time. That will give each man thirty minutes of running and fifteen minutes to rest up in. We ought to be able to hold on at that.”

Even under this liberal arrangement, the boys were well pleased when the whole team stopped and curled up in their traces, close beside a bunch of cottonwood trees.

“Get up! Push on there!” shouted Clay, surprised at the sudden action, but Buck only gave him a reproachful look.

Alex grinned with delight. “Don’t disgust Buck right at the start by letting him know that you are a blamed chekako,” he advised. “He knows that it’s dinner time and that this is a mighty good place to cook with all the dead cottonwood lying around.”

The boys fell to the work of getting dinner with the system of old timers. While Clay cut dead cottonwood, Ike built a fire and melted snow for coffee. Alex brought out a frozen sausage-like length of beans, ready cooked with a generous mixture of cubes of pork, from which he hacked short pieces and placed them into the frying pan to heat, continuing the operation until the pan was full. Then in a short time dinner was ready and the boys sat down to it with keen appetites. A short rest after, and they were off again. Before daylight ended, they swept around a high bluff into full sight of the village they sought. Buck, in his knowledge of the country, had brought them straight to their destination. Barking dogs and a crowd of natives met them at the village limits. The dogs' barking ceased at sight of Buck who, with hair raised and teeth bared, gave utterance to one low ominous growl at which the dogs in front shrank back silently, leaving a path through their midst for the sled. Down it Buck walked in state with never a glance to left or right, moving like a king before his subjects.

"He's grand," Clay exclaimed. "He's the Yukon Kid of the dog trails."

It was evident that the natives thought so too, for they crowded around with grunts of envy and admiration.

"Sell him?" queried one native, but Clay shook his head.

"No sell."

"Trade?"

"No trade for dogs. Trade for furs plenty. Got a pack full of wonderful things."

The crowd of Esquimaux greeted this announcement with grunts of satisfaction. No trader had come their way as yet and their igloos were crowded with furs of the finest. Would the strangers come and look and be convinced? But Clay declined the invitation. He had learned too much of the stuffiness and smells of the average Esquimau dwelling to care to enter one again. "No," he announced, "they would camp in the open. When the night fires were lit all who had fine furs could come and exchange them for many wonderful things."

The preparations for the night were simple and speedily made. While one cut wood, another put on a huge pot of bacon and beans to boil and the third cut poles and drove them down in the snow, then all three joined in stretching the big square canvas over the poles, bringing it down to the snow on one side and raising it at the side nearest the fire so the heat would radiate downwards.

The whole village gathered around the fire and watched the boys as they cooked and ate; they were of a far superior class to any the boys had yet seen, due, perhaps, to the efforts of the priests from the not far distant mission, who labored constantly to teach and help all within their reach. Nearly all had brought valuable furs with them and the trading was quickly concluded, for Clay frowned down all of Ike's attempts to drive long, close bargains and their customers de-

parted well pleased at having received for their furs much more than they had intended to demand.

While the village was yet asleep the boys struck camp next morning and headed back for the *Rambler*, for they knew Case would worry until they returned. They reached the boat shortly after midday to find Case sitting in the cabin gloomily playing solitaire. He greeted them with joy, and, as they had not stopped for dinner on the trail, he flew around and got them a hasty lunch while he listened to the story of their trip. The first time he could do so unnoticed by Alex and Abe and Ike, he gave Clay a signal that he wanted to see him alone. Clay, quick to note the anxiety in his partner's face, quickly finished his dinner and turned to the others.

"Will you two clean up and pack away the furs when you get through?" he inquired. "Case and I want to take a hunt and see if we can not get a few squirrels or something else fresh to eat."

The two were quick to agree. Their feet and legs were aching from their long, hard run and they were thinking longingly, of a nice long rest in their bunks after the simple tasks were performed.

Taking the rifle and shot gun with them, Clay and Case made their way out on the ice.

"What's the matter, old chap?" Clay asked as soon as they were beyond the hearing of those on board the *Rambler*.

"First, I want you to keep your eye on that mountain," Case replied. "It's due to come at any minute now. I noted the time it came yesterday by my watch, and it is nearly it now."

Mystified, Clay gazed up at the lofty mountain. Being so early in the winter and still in the midst of the windy season, the mountain was free from snow, save where it nestled in the pockets and crevices, and the main part of it lay naked and exposed to the eye. It was like a huge cake packed layer after layer, each layer getting smaller and smaller until the apex was hidden in eternal snows. Each layer was made of a different strata of which the mountain was composed. Here was a dull-red streak indicating the presence of iron ore, above it the dull grey of granite, and below that a curious blend of green. As Clay stood looking up, the miracle happened. The low slanting sun lingered on the mountain's face for a minute and it became as a thing transformed, all its varying hues stood out blended softly together by the sun's lingering rays. Pink, red, lavender and green blended for a moment in one harmonious whole, then the sun's rays passed on and—the vision of beauty was gone.

Clay drew in a breath of keenest pleasure. "Glorious," he exclaimed.

"Don't it suggest anything to you?" questioned Case.

"A great big, beautiful rainbow seen close to, of course," Clay replied

promptly.

“Nothing more?” Case suggested.

Clay thought for a moment. “I’ve got it,” he suddenly exclaimed. “That mountain marks the bend in the river, and that rainbow furnishes the rest. It’s Rainbow Bend, the place Ike’s uncle lives. He must have a camp in the next cove. Funny that we should be neighbors so long and never know it.”

“I wouldn’t say anything to Ike about it, not just now at any rate,” Clay said slowly. “I—well, I did a little exploring myself after I saw that rainbow yesterday and I found a little cabin of logs in that next cove. The door was open a bit and the cabin was partly full of snow, but in one corner, back behind the door, was a sight that made me hustle out into the open air with my legs shaking a bit, I guess, Clay,” and the lad’s voice lowered. “It was the skeleton of a man, a big man with bent shoulders. His skull was smashed to pieces and an axe lay close by with some grayish hairs sticking to it.”

Clay turned back for the *Rambler*. “Let’s be getting back,” he said quietly, “we will slip away tomorrow and bury the body and say nothing to the boys until winter is over. This country is no place to brood in over anything.”

“But I haven’t told you the worst yet, Clay,” Case blurted out. “Our potatoes are all gone, and part of our provisions also.”

Clay stopped in his tracks, his face paling. This was the last straw. “When did it happen. Who did it?” he said, bewilderedly.

“Goodness knows,” Case said despairingly. “It may have happened a week ago. You see we have been light on the potatoes because we did not have more than enough to last until spring anyway. We have kept a supply in the kitchen locker so as not to have to burrow around in the hold for them every time we wanted a mess. I guess I was the last one to fill the locker, about a week ago. I went to fill it again yesterday but could only find a handful scattered in the hold. Part of our flour, beans and bacon is gone too.”

“It must have been done when we were getting in that week of practice work with the snow shoes and team,” said Clay, thoughtfully. “There were hours at a time when all of us would be out of sight of the *Rambler*. It strikes me something like this,” he continued, after another pause. “It looks like the work of those two wretches. Bill and Jud, from beginning to end. They knew Ike’s uncle well enough so that he trusted them to carry a letter to Ike. He may have let out a hint to them that he had found something of value. Likely they demanded to have a share in it. A quarrel arose over it and the old man was killed without their learning his secret. But they had the letter to Ike. They opened it but apparently could not make out its meaning. They tore off a corner of it, however, so that Ike could not make out its meaning either, without their help. Then they came to the States and delivered it to Ike. We all know how they pestered Ike all winter

and in the end how they tried to kill or rob him. When we get up here, we find them here ahead of us and ready to do us harm at the first opportunity. They know of Rainbow Bend. They likely reasoned that Ike knew its whereabouts too and would land here sooner or later and they proposed to be not far off when he came. We know from what the Kid said that they are up the river somewhere. I believe that it is they who have stolen our stuff. I believe that their main plan is to get Ike and torture him until he reveals the secret in his uncle's letter. Well, there is a lot of theory in what I've been saying, but it fits in nicely with the facts."

"What are we going to do?" asked Case hopelessly.

"Do," said Clay, straightening up. "We are going to face it like men. Trust in the Lord, and do our best."

CHAPTER XXI

THE MYSTERY

Alex and Ike had to be told of the loss of food and also that Bill and Jud were likely lurking in the neighborhood. No mention was made to them, however, of the discoveries Case had made.

It was a gloomy little group after Clay had finished his tale. A winter in the Arctic was to be dreaded at its best, but with little food on hand and no potatoes, it was a horrible thing to meet. It was Clay who tried to enthuse a little cheerfulness into the grim situation. "We've got to face it, boys," he said, "and it's going to be hard to do, but we are going to make bad matters worse if we just sit and brood on it. I believe that we are going to come out of this all right. The main thing to do is to keep cheerful and keep busy. Let's go on with our trading just as if nothing had happened, except that we will not only buy furs, but also meat whenever we get the chance. Perhaps we may be able to get a few potatoes at the Catholic Mission. They may have laid enough in to spare us a few. Alex, you and Ike had better, in the morning, overhaul all the stores and see just what we have left and how best to portion it off so as to make it last. Case and I have a little job on of our own to attend to. We will tell you about it later on. Now let's turn in and go to sleep, each one determining that he is never going to worry over anything until it actually happens to him. Half the time the things we fear never happen. Long brooding over fears makes a coward and I believe even the Lord himself despises a coward. Good night, you fellows. I'm going to sleep."

He and Case were early astir in the morning and stole out of the cabin softly so as not to awaken the sleepers. It was still dark, but the stars were shining like glimmering lanterns hung far above their heads and the black mass of the towering mountain rose dimly from its white carpeted base to serve them as a mighty guide post pointing out their way. By the time the two boys rounded the mountain's base and entered the cove beyond, the dim twilight had driven the darkness to flight and they easily found the little cabin nestling up against the mountain side. Theirs was a gruesome task and they went to work at it with reluctant hands. The ground was too firmly frozen to dig a grave so they did the best they could. They carried the gruesome object up to the foot of a big wide-spread spruce and laid it down. Then they covered it with a thick layer of fragrant spruce boughs; upon this mound they leaned up some loose planks and around the whole built up a mound of stones to protect the one beneath from hunger-maddened wolves. This task done they skirted the edge of the cove, looking for any trace of other human habitation along its shore. Both had felt that their enemies might be camped in this very cove but their search pretty well convinced them that this was not so likely. "There's no telling where they may be now," Case said. "To look for them in this great, desolate frozen country would be like looking for a needle in a hay stack. They may be camped within a mile of us, or, again, they may be hundreds of miles away by now. Our trouble is that we do not know just when the stuff was taken and we can find no tracks that tell which way the thieves went. Better give it up. We have got a lot to do before the real winter sets in. We ought to start in tomorrow and begin our trading in earnest. We want a lot more furs and most of all we need meat, all we can get of it. It will keep all winter. We may not be fit to work later on," he concluded significantly.

"You're right," Clay agreed reluctantly. "We will start out tomorrow for the next village. But all the same," he added, "I have a feeling that those fellows are near us now just waiting for a good chance to get at Ike. One of us two must always stay behind. Two are enough to go with the team anyway. The other two, with Captain Joe on watch, had ought to take care of themselves and the boat all right. Well, we can do nothing more here. We had better get back to the *Rambler* before the boys get too curious and come hunting us up."

They found a hot breakfast awaiting them and the boys finished the computing of the *Rambler's* stores, a process which Ike with pencil and paper in hand, was enjoying hugely.

"This committee finds," he announced, "that if we all eats like Alex here there is plenty of food for two months yet. If we eats only enough to live on there be food for four months, maybe. If we feed the dogs Indian fashion, just a little at a time, you understand, there will be quite a lot of salmon left for us. That is all, I think, gentlemen, except the dogs. But Alex here says he will shoot

any one who touches Buck and I do the same for Captain Joe, for he helps save my life one time, you understand.”

Clay laughed. “Why, we are not near so bad off as I expected,” he said, brightly. “Almost anything can happen in two months. I’ve got a hunch boys, that everything is going to turn out all right. Let’s keep on full rations for two weeks more, then we can cut down gradually if we see we need to. We had better give the dogs their double rations while they are working and cut it down to the usual feed when they are idle. Now let’s put the stores back where they belong and wash up the dishes and then go out and cut up firewood. This fine weather is not going to last forever. There are going to be days when no one will hanker to go out in the cold and chop wood. Better get up a good pile now when we have the time.” The boys knocked off work at sunset, and after they had finished their evening meal, Clay brought out from his locker a pack of cards, a checker board, and a chess board with its queens and pawns. “Lucky I thought to bring these,” he said. “They will help to pass the time. Let’s have a game and then turn in, for Case and Ike will have to get an early start in the morning.” The boys made merry over the game that followed, but deep down in each young heart was the creeping dread of that scourge of the Northland, scurvy. Clay expressed it when he said, thoughtlessly, “We had ought to save those few potatoes for Christmas. We want to have a special feast Christmas day.”

Case and Ike were gone for three days, but they came back with a pack of fine furs and over a half of a frozen moose.

The next trip, made by Clay and Alex, was more daring. They were gone ten days and brought back all the meat the sled could carry. But their faces were grave. At Holy Cross there was not a potato—which had been their real object in making the trip. Forty were helpless with the disease and more coming down every day with it. Indians who had come down from Dawson lately, reported that their weight in gold dust was being offered for potatoes with no takers. From St. Michael’s came like reports. At Nome there were plenty, but no one could cross the heaving seas of ice floes that separate it from St. Michael’s.

That was the team’s last trip. For news of the boy traders, who paid so liberally for what they bought, spread from village to village and they did not have to seek trade. It came to them. Hardly a day passed without seeing at the *Rambler’s* door a sled load of meat or furs. The boys erected a scaffolding near the *Rambler* up above the reach of the dogs and it was soon full of frozen meat, while the packs of furs in the *Rambler* were fast filling up the cabin to the point of inconvenience. All the traders brought stories of the ravages of the scurvy in the villages they had come from the secret dread in the boys’ hearts grew.

One morning, after two days of steady snow, they awoke to find the earth deeply covered with white. Their thermometer hung outside, registering sixty

degrees below zero, while over river and land was the quietness of death.

The Great White Silence, about which they had heard so much, had come. It seemed almost evil to speak aloud in the breathlessness of this death-like quietness. As the days passed, it bore down on the lads' souls until they sat silent for hours at a time. But deeper than the fear of the White Silence was that deeper menace hanging over them and daily growing closer.

"What's the use of our trying to hide it?" Case demanded one morning. "We have all got it, I guess, and each one is trying to keep it from the others. Open up your mouth, Clay," Clay silently obeyed. His gums, palate, and tongue were black and swollen. "Humph," got it hard," Case grunted. "Abe, you next." The lad obeyed, and showed a mouth pink and clean as a baby's. "You're all right," Case announced. "Now for you, Alex." "Worse than Clay's," Case said, frankly. "Ike, step up and let me see your tongue. Why, you have only got the first symptoms," he said, "just a touch of white on your gums and palate." His own condition he did not need to state. His blackened, swollen lips told the tale. By some whim of nature, the disease had chosen the strongest for its first victims, and, having chosen, it proceeded with hideous rapidity. Within a week Clay, Alex and Case were helpless in their bunks. Ike was also breaking down, not from the disease, which seemed to take but slight hold of him, but from the groans and sufferings of his chums which he was powerless to relieve. Weary and sick at heart, one morning he left Abe in charge of the sufferers and skirting the edge of the ice with aimless steps, rounded the base of the mountain. Here he stopped with a look of interest. A curl of smoke was filtering up from a thick clump of cottonwoods. He stared at it thoughtfully for a minute, then wheeling suddenly, hastened back to the boat from which, presently, emerged Abe clothed in parka and snow shoes and bearing something white, tightly clenched in one small hand, as he skimmed over the crusted snow.

Black night had fallen when the Yukon Kid caught sight of the *Rambler's* lights glimmering in the cove. They meant warmth, light, food and a bed for the night for him, and he spurred his weary dogs on to a fresh burst of speed which soon landed them in the lee of the *Rambler*. Hastily unhitching, he flung a fish from his pack to each of the hungry animals. Then clambering aboard, he flung open the cabin door with boisterous words of greeting on his lips, but they died unspoken as his keen eyes swept the little room, taking in everything in one glance, the three muttering boys in their bunks, and the little Esquimau busy making up raw potatoes into juicy pulp. The lad's face was marked by tears as he looked at the Kid.

"Plenty sick?" asked the Kid, pointing to the muttering lads.

“Yes. Heap scurvy.”

The Kid glanced at the vacant bunk.

“Fadder dead?”

“No dead,” said the boy. “Get potatoes this afternoon. Big men come. He and fadder trade. Fadder gets potatoes. Big man get fadder. All in paper there,” pointing to a folded note beside the heap of potatoes.

The Kid grabbed it up and opening it with ruthless hands, read:

“Dear boys:—I hope these potatoes help you all to get well quick. I gets them off them two loafers, Jud and Bill. I sent Abe as messenger to them this morning and Bill he comes over and talks it over with me, and we trade. A bushel of potatoes for me. I think he’s a robber, you understand. I don’t think he brings more than three pecks of the potatoes. I goes back with him. I expect I no see you any more, so good-bye boys. I’m sorry I make you so much trouble. With love, Ike.”

“I wants my share of the furs to go to Rebecca, you understand. Abe, he shall have the news stand. Tell him lots of love from fadder. Ike.”

“If you don’t let them dealers in Seattle rob you, you should get \$10,000 at least for them furs. Ike.”

The Kid’s eyes raced over this farewell will and testament.

“You know where they take fadder?” he demanded of the mourning lad.

Abe nodded.

“Then get on your snow shoes and come with me,” the Kid commanded.

In a minute they were on the trail, the little Esquimau lad leading. A scant half mile of rapid traveling carried them into the cove and in sight of the gleaming light of the fire amongst the cottonwoods. Now they advanced more cautiously, trying to stop the creak of their snow shoes on the sugar-like snow. Luckily those around the campfire were too busy with their own affairs to notice the stealthy approach. Close to the fire lay Ike tightly bound while beside him knelt the evil-faced Bill applying a smoking iron to the lad’s bare feet. A sickening odor of burnt skin was filling the air, while the torturer was snarling: “Tell, you brat, or I’ll burn you to the bone.”

The Yukon Kid raised his heavy revolver and took steady aim, but something was quicker than he. A giant form leaped out from the cottonwoods upon the kneeling man. He was lifted up like a feather and dashed with the snap of breaking bones against a near-by tree.

“The b’ar. He’s killed Bill,” roared Jud’s mighty voice, as he leaped forward with drawn knife. The bear met him half-way with extended arms. Once the upraised knife was buried in the bear’s white side, then man and beast, locked in a mighty struggling embrace. The Kid watched them, fascinated, as they struggled back and forth. Only a minute the struggle lasted, then something in the man

snapped sickeningly and he hung limply in the bear's embrace, then swaying from side to side, the bear let go his burden to the ground and slipped slowly down beside it, his paws plucking feebly at the knife sticking in his side. When the Kid reached the two, both bear and man were dead.

Bill lay where he had been flung, his evil heart stilled forever. Ike, still lying by the fire, was in a dead faint.

Silently the Kid picked up the lad and turned back for the *Rambler*.

CHAPTER XXII

SOLVING THE MYSTERY

The Kid sat up all night with the sufferers at short intervals administering to each a small portion of potato juice. Ike had recovered consciousness before they reached the cabin. He was but little injured. One foot had been burned a little, that was all. It had been the long strain and the sudden startling appearance of the bear that had caused the plucky lad to faint. A couple of cups of hot coffee put him into fair shape, but his astonishment at finding himself safe and in the warm cabin was great and his surprise at seeing the Kid greater. "Have I been dreaming and just woke up, Mr. Kid?" he demanded.

The Kid told him of what had happened, softening the horrible details as much as possible.

"It was Teddy Bear," Ike declared. "I got one look a him before everything goes black."

"Maybe, the Kid admitted. "I thought there was something familiar about him, but it was too dark to tell much."

"Those fellows tell me this place where the mountain is, is Rainbow Bend."

"It is, I bet," exclaimed the Kid. "I've been wondering for a month what it was the name suggested to me. I was sure there was no place along the river named that, but still, it suggested something familiar to me, and now it's all come back to me. I've passed it a couple of times when the sun hit it just right and made the mountain appear like a great big rainbow. It's a wonder I didn't guess the place when you asked me before. A bend in the river with a rainbow mountain on the point of the bend. Why, no other name could just describe it so well as Rainbow Bend."

"Then that settles it," said the little Jew, with tears in his eyes. "Them fel-

lows, I guess, wasn't lying all the time. They said it was Rainbow Bend and that uncle used to live there in a little log cabin against the side of the mountain. They told me uncle was dead now and they took me to the cabin to see his bones, but they were not there. They looked so frightened when they found them gone that I felt sure uncle had died there and someone had found his body and carried it away or buried it. Maybe it was the boys and they keep quiet so as not to let me worry too much. I think maybe that be it. I feel so bad over uncle, you understand, that I do not care much what them fellows do to me."

"Lay down boy, and get a bit of sleep if you can," interrupted the Kid, kindly. "Save your yarn till the boys are able to hear it. It will save a second telling of it. Just try to go to sleep now. You'll have to take my place tomorrow."

"Do you think the boys will get well?" Ike asked, anxiously.

"Sure," replied the Kid, cheerfully. "They will be up and around in a few days, but it's going to take some time for all marks of the disease to disappear."

Ike rolled over in his bunk and with a sigh of relief closed his eyes and was soon sound asleep, forgetting his troubles and sorrows and the short, anxious days and long, weary nights he had spent waiting on his stricken companions.

The Kid stood for a moment looking tenderly down on the pinched, tired, little face. "You poor, tuckered-out, little devil," he muttered. "Hanged if I don't believe you are the pluckiest one of the bunch, and that's saying a whole lot."

At the first hint of dawn, the Kid awoke Abe and set him to cooking breakfast. Ike he let sleep on until the meal was ready. As soon as it was finished, he gave instructions about administering the potato juice, and hitching up the boys' team, as his own was sadly in need of rest, he skirted the mountain's base and rounded into the cove beyond. His errand was much the same as that undertaken by Clay and Case upon another occasion. Common humanity demanded that the two men, bad though they were, should not lie exposed to the wolves. He soon reached the scene of the previous night's encounter, where the three bodies lay as he had left them. He buried the two men in much the same way as Clay and Case had buried the murdered miner. This done, he turned his attention to the bear. It was Teddy alright, but not such a Teddy as had run away from his masters. This Teddy was thin and gaunt and it was evident from the ferociousness of his face that he had completely lapsed back again into the savagery of his brutal ancestors.

"Hum," mused the Kid as he looked down at the savage face. "Just mad, hungry, and desperate enough to want to kill anything you met up against, wasn't you, Teddy? You were just running amuck ready to kill anything and these two chaps happened to be the first you stumbled upon. Well, I reckon those boys on the *Rambler* will want to think of you as a hero rushing to the rescue at the last moment, and I reckon that it would be sorter mean to rob them of their faith and

pride in you. But that look on your face would give you dead away, so I guess I'll cover you up a bit. Anyway, you're better deserving of a grave than that fellow Bill was, so here goes."

Teddy Bear at last buried like a Christian, the Kid explored the clump of cottonwood, and as he had expected, came upon a snug log cabin with a big stone fire place. In one corner of it he came upon the stores stolen from the *Rambler*. These he loaded on the sled and turned his dogs back for the boat.

He was delighted with the improved appearance of his patients, who already were beginning to show signs of a speedy recovery. As soon as he ate the hearty dinner Ike had kept warm for him, he spread out his roll of blankets near the stove and stretched out. "Call me at dark if I don't wake up before," he directed Ike. "I am pretty well tuckered out. I've been thirty-six hours on my feet and my legs are beginning to get toothache."

Dark came, but the Kid was sleeping so soundly that Ike would not awaken him until he had prepared the evening meal, fed the dogs, and brought in the night's supply of wood for the Yukon stove. Even then it was difficult to awaken him from his slumbers.

"Gee," he exclaimed, as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "I thought I had only just got asleep, and here it is after dark. How are the sick boys coming on?"

"Fine," said Ike, happily. "Clay and Alex are not crazy in the head any more, and they try to talk some. Case, he's much better too."

"Good," said the Kid. "Now I'll take a wash in the snow outside and by the time I've tucked away some of that good supper I smell, I'll be fit as a fiddle."

As soon as supper was over and things cleaned up, the Kid ordered Ike and Abe to bed and took upon himself again the duties of nurse for the night. They were the same as the night before, excepting that the boys often awoke and tried to ply him with questions as to what had happened. But on such occasions the Kid forced upon them bowls of hot milk and firm commands to keep still, and they soon dropped off again into sound slumber unbroken by tossing or mutterings.

When Ike awoke, he found the boys all sleeping soundly and the Kid nodding in a chair beside the fire. "They'll be in pretty fair shape when they wake up," the Kid declared. "Of course they'll be too weak to get out of their beds for a couple of days, but you can let them talk all they want to. Let them sleep as long as they will, though. I am going to catch a cat nap now, but you can call me for breakfast, for I'm hungry as a wolf."

It was not until the Kid had been aroused and breakfast had been eaten, that Alex awoke and his clattering tongue soon aroused the other two.

It was a joyful morning in the *Rambler's* cozy cabin and many were the exclamations of wonder over Ike's story of the things that happened during their long illness. "Did any of you boys take my uncle out of the cabin and bury him?"

he demanded as he ended his tale.

Clay and Case glanced at each other. "We did," Clay confessed. "We hated to tell you then for we thought it was no use making things harder for you during the long, gloomy winter ahead."

"Thank you, boys," said the little Jew simply, his eyes filling slowly with tears. "Well, uncle is dead and I am free to tell about that letter now. It ain't much to tell but what I told you already, Clay, and I guess you told the other boys. My uncle tells me in it that he has found a great treasure, enough to make us rich like princes and able to do a great deal for the poor. He wants me, he says in the letter, to come and bring all the cash I got, and tells me to be sure and not tell anyone about it till we gets together, you understand. He says I'll find him at Rainbow Bend. The rest of the letter was torn off by that Jud or Bill, but I think maybe it tells how to find this Rainbow Bend, I don't know. Well, boys, uncle is dead, and that wicked Bill and his poor brother dead too, so I guess we never find out about the treasure."

The Kid, who had been an interested listener to Ike's story, fumbled in his pocket and produced a small match safe snugly done up in oiled silk.

"I found this when I was looking through Bill's pockets, hunting for the name of his folks or someone else to notify of his and Jud's death," he remarked. "I looked at it but couldn't make head or tail of it. It looks like a piece off a letter, but I reckon it's a kind of cipher from the queer marks scattered over it. Maybe it might be the piece tom off your letter, Ike?"

"Hold on a minute," said Clay, as Ike took the torn scrap of paper. "If those men opened and read your uncle's letter, they had no need to go clear to Chicago to try to make you tell them what was in it, and then follow you clear up here again on the same errand when they already knew all you knew of the letter's contents—more, in fact, for they had the piece they had torn off which you had never seen."

"Put like a lawyer's question," exclaimed the Kid, admiringly.

"Very cute question, Clay," agreed Ike, "but easy to answer. My uncle does not live in America long enough to learn to read and write English. He writes to me in Hebrew. Them fellows think the same as Mr. Kid, that the letter's a kind of cipher and that I've got the key to it. That's why they keep after me all the time and try to make so much trouble. This piece, Mr. Kid finds, just tells how to find Rainbow Bend. Well, boys, that's all I know, and now I think I go out for a little walk and get some fresh air."

"That clears up some of the mystery," said Clay, thoughtfully, "but there are two things unexplained yet. Who put that strange notice of our expecting to take this Yukon trip in the Chicago paper?"

"I think, perhaps," said Case, musingly, "that Bill did that himself. He had

been listening to our talking about the trip, and he thought that notice would make a good excuse for Jud to call on us and try to arrange passage for the two of them.”

“That’s as good a guess as any,” Clay agreed. “The other mystery is, what is the treasure, where is it, and how are we to find it? What do you think about it, Mr. Yukon Kid?”

“I think the old man just dreamed it,” said the Kid, bluntly. “Likely the lonely life and the long darkness weakened him in his head and he got to imagining things. There’s not enough gold around here to gild a baby’s tooth. It isn’t likely gold ground at the best. On top of that, about every man who has gone up the Yukon has prospected here. If the snow was off the ground you could see more prospect holes than you would care to count in these two coves. There’s iron and coal in that mountain, no doubt, and, maybe, the old man got his idea of a treasure from them. But they are valueless until we get railroads into this country. The only treasure around here is these furs here in the *Rambler*. You’ve got reason to be satisfied with them.”

CHAPTER XXIII

SOLVING THE MYSTERY

Ike did not return until dinner was nearly over. He wore a brave front, but his eyes and lids were very red and the boys knew as well as if he had told them that he had found his uncle’s grave and had been grieving over the gentle old man beneath the mound of stones, but the little lad bore up under his burden of sorrow with a surface of cheerfulness that the boys marveled at.

“Well, Mr. Kid,” he said, as he took his place at the table. “How did you leave Mr. and Mrs. Morton and the Bonnie Annie Laurie?”

The red mounted to the Kid’s face as he answered enthusiastically: “Fine and dandy. Those three innocents hit the right idea after all. There was plenty of eating places in Dawson but they didn’t set out the kind of grub that mother used to make, and that’s where the old lady shined. Then the old gentleman was a pretty shrewd buyer and he laid in his supplies before prices reached clean up to the sky, although he had to pay a pretty stiff price at that.

The old lady’s cooking, and the reasonable prices, and the very sight of that little girl tripping in and out amongst the tables, caught the crowd. The chekakos

went pretty nigh broke buying grub that tasted like home, and many an old sour-dough is in a fair way of getting gout after all his years of eating just pork and beans. When the scurvy broke out they had about all the potatoes in town. They could have got anywhere from \$1.00 to \$10.00 apiece for them, but the old lady wouldn't listen to anything like that. 'They only cost us 10c apiece,' she argued, 'and it ain't Christian-like to ask more in the time of sickness and suffering, and the poor can have 'em for nothing.' So the old-timers formed a sort of bread line, as you might call it, and every day every man, woman and child in Dawson was free to march down that line and get his or her bit of potato whether they had ten cents or not. I reckon, pretty near the whole of Dawson would have been wiped out by the scurvy this winter but for the Mortons—and Dawson knows it. Those old people will make a fortune if they keep at the business." The Kid paused and the red again mounted into his face. "I might as well tell you now, because you little cusses will pry it out of me sooner or later," he said, in happy embarrassment. "That little girl and I are going to be married as soon as I make my stake, and I've got a hunch that that time is not far off."

Clay grinned. "Why, we knew that long ago," he said.

They congratulated the Kid until his face shone with happiness.

"I've got a favor to ask of you," he said, when at last they were through. "It's comin' on cold tonight or I'm no judge of Alaska weather. There's no special reason for my getting down to St. Michael's before the first steamer comes in, and it's a long trail back to Dawson, so, if you boys don't mind, I'll camp with you until it's time to start for St. Michael's."

The boys greeted this announcement with shouts of delight, for they could think of no more welcome visitor than the Yukon Kid.

It was as the Kid had prophesied, the morning showed the thermometer at 70 degrees below zero, where it hung steadily for a full week, before the end of which time the Kid had difficulty in keeping the now active invalids indoors. They wanted to be out in the open air after their long, close confinement, and with their growing strength, came the desire for activity.

"Don't try it outside yet," he advised. "If you do you'll regret it. Seventy degrees below zero isn't to be fooled with even by old timers. With kids weak as you are yet, it would mean death. That degree of cold would frost your lungs in ten minutes. Why, even the Indians rarely travel when it gets below 40 degrees. Be patient, boys, this cold weather is not going to last forever. It will get milder soon. In fact, boys, it's not going to be long before spring comes. I'll bet you boys have lost all track of the days."

"I guess we have," agreed Clay. "I can't be sure of what month it is even. We kept so busy before we were taken sick that we kept no account of days, and then we have been sick a long, long time."

"Well, it's the middle of March," the Kid enlightened him. The worst of the winter is over now. Along the last of April the ice should begin to go out."

"And as soon as it goes out, we will be bound for home," said Alex, happily.

"And all the fun and excitement of the city," sighed Clay, blissfully.

"And the news stand for me and Abe," Ike declared. "Maybe, when Abe picks up the business good, I set him up in a little stand for himself."

As for Abe, he had nothing to say. He was content to follow fadder. Never in his whole young life had he ever been so kindly treated as since when fadder had bought him from his uncle.

At last the long cold spell broke and they awoke one morning to find the thermometer at twenty degrees below—warm weather for the Yukon.

With the break of the cold spell, the days flew past with flying footsteps, for there was always something to pass the time out in the bracing cold of the gradually lengthening days. There were snow shoe races and even dog racing, in which the Yukon Kid's team was always beaten, much to Kid's disgust. But most entertaining of all was the search for the treasure which the boys all firmly believed in, though the Kid only smiled at their fruitless efforts. "Go to it," he advised them. "It keeps you busy and makes the time pass quicker," and go to it they did with all their youthful ardor. First they cleaned out the snow heaps in the lonely cabin, but found nothing to reward their search but a few pitiful battered cooking utensils and a scanty store of food. But they built a fire in the cabin and with shovels heated over it, dug up the frozen ground inside in search of concealed riches. In the center of the shore of the cove, they sank a prospect hole, keeping a fire going all the time, except when they raked it to one side to remove the thawed-out earth. In time they reached bed rock and tested thoroughly the pile of dirt they had accumulated, only to find that not a trace of color appeared in the pans.

While they had worked a change had slowly been taking place around them. The air had been growing sensibly warmer and the heat of the sun was gradually making itself felt. The snow was slowly melting from the knolls and forming tiny rivulets that trickled their way down to the river. Spring was at hand.

It was after the failure of the prospect hole they had sunk, that they all gathered together on the *Rambler's* deck one noon for a little after dinner chat.

"Well, I expect we might as well give up looking for the treasure," said Alex, disconsolately. "We have done all we can."

"Yes," agreed the Yukon Kid, "there's nothing to it but the excitement of looking and finding nothing. Well, boys, I've spent a good time with you, but I've got to be going soon. Just step out here and listen." He led the way out on the ice and motioned for them to be silent. Faintly there came to their ears the

soft murmur of running water under their feet. "That's Father Yukon waking up from his long sleep," said the Kid, gravely. "It means that I must be on my way or I will not reach St. Michael's before the ice breaks up. I guess you'll get there not many days after me for when the ice goes out in the Yukon it goes out in a hurry."

"Mr. Kid," said Ike, who had been chosen spokesman for the boys in what was to follow. "Mr. Kid, you have been very good to us and more than once you have saved the life, maybe, of some of us, and so we want to give you a little gift, not to repay you for the good things you have done for us, you understand, but just a little gift to show that we don't forget them good deeds. We want you to kindly accept Buck and his family. We want to feel that we have left Buck with a good, kind master too. That Buck is a good dog, almost as good as Captain Joe."

The Kid's eyes shone with delight at the thought of being possessor of such a glorious team, but he protested earnestly. "I have not done anything to merit such a gift. Maybe I helped you out a mite that first day at Nome, but it wasn't any trouble to me. Sizes up to me that each of you has done his part nobly and loyally just like links in a chain. You or the most of you, would have pulled through all right even if I hadn't happened to come across you when I did." He hastened a second before he went on. "It seems to me if there's any link that shows up a little larger than the rest, it's this little chap here," patting Ike's shoulder. "He was willing to give himself up to torture that the rest of you might live. I reckon, though, that any one of you would have done the same in his place."

Alex was twisting and shuffling in embarrassment over this display of sentiment.

"There's one thing we must do before we leave," he interrupted. "We must climb that mountain. We haven't climbed a mountain on this whole trip. I'll dare the lot of you to climb it clear to the top with me."

Clay looked up at the great mountain wet and slippery from the melting snows of its summit. "None of it in mine," he said decidedly.

Ike regarded the monster thoughtfully. "I'm a family man," he declared. "What would become of Abe if he loses his fadder?"

"It's all right to take risks when one has to," growled Case, "but it's blamed foolishness to do so just on a dare."

"All right, you babies," jeered Alex. "If you're 'fraid to come. I'll climb up alone."

"I'll go with you," shouted the Yukon Kid, "just wait a minute will you?" for Alex was already moving for the mountain's base. "He won't get up fifty feet," he confided to the others. "I will take a rope from the sled here and try to keep him from a nasty fall."

"He can climb like a monkey," said Clay, doubtfully, "and for all he acts so

reckless sometimes he's got a pretty cool head when he really gets into a tight place. If you don't want a long climb, don't try to follow him, for he will not stop at a hundred feet unless that mountain's so slippery that a fly can't cling to the side of it."

"Then he'll find me right beside him," said the Kid confidently, as he wound the rope around his waist and hastened after Alex, who was already at the mountain's base.

Alex was going about his undertaking cautiously, for he knew he would be subjected to ridicule by his companions if he failed at the very start. He skirted the mountain's base watching for a likely place to make a start, but finding only bare, smooth, almost perpendicular walls extending upward some fifty or seventy-five feet. Up beyond this smooth base he could see many knobs and little ledges sticking out which promised fair climbing once the intervening space was overcome. It was not until he had nearly reached the little cabin in the cove, that he came upon that for which he was searching, a place where the smooth wall had crumbled down into the sea, leaving in its wake an incline that seemed to offer a chance to reach the easier climbing above. Up the slight incline Alex scrambled like a monkey with the Kid close at his heels. When about five hundred feet up he stopped and sat down to blow and rest a bit.

"Say, don't this look like queer mountain climbing to you?" he demanded of the Kid, resting beside him.

"How so, in what way?" the Kid inquired.

"It's just like going upstairs," explained Alex. "There's holes just in the very spots where you want to put your hands or feet. Funny, isn't it?"

The Kid stood up on the ledge and peered up at the holes above him. "Whew," he whistled. "They haven't just happened there; why, boy, most of them have been made by a pick axe."

"I know it," said Alex, his face aglow. "Kid, I believe we're on the trail of that treasure."

CHAPTER XXIV

GOOD-BYE

There was no more thought of resting for the excited two. Up they climbed for another seven hundred feet to where the pick holes suddenly ended and they

stood upon a ledge of rock which seemed to extend clear across the front of the mountain. The two looked about them with some disappointment. They did not know just what they had expected to find, but here there was nothing in sight but the ledge and the mountain towering above their heads.

"This is what I took for grass from the ground," said Alex, pointing to the green belt that girdled the mountain side close to where they stood.

"Don't look as pretty and fresh as it did from below," commented the Kid. "Let's mark the spot here where we came up so that we will not miss the place when we go down. Then let's mosey along this ledge and see what we can find. Surely no man would be crazy enough to cut all those holes for nothing."

They piled up a loose heap of stones where they had ascended, then they followed up the ledge, closely examining the mountain's face and the rocks and quartz at their feet.

"Great cats," cried the Kid suddenly. He had stopped in front of some curious markings on the green-hued mountain wall, and stood staring at them with amazement on his face.

"What is it?" demanded Alex, excitedly.

"Location notices of mining claims on the face of a mountain," said the Kid, bewildered. "Two of them." Reckon Ike's uncle took up one of the claims for Ike and the other for himself. The old gentleman sure was queer in the head just as I thought Why, he could have claimed the whole mountain if he had wanted to. I don't believe any one would have objected. "Well, let's scratch our names up to just keep the old man's company." He dug into the rock with his sheaf knife and a bit came off in his hands. The Kid gazed on it with frank amazement. He moved along further and pried out another chunk. He repeated this operation a dozen times, heedless of Alex's questions, the look of amazement on his face constantly growing. The last lump he picked out was as big as a man's fist and he held it up silently for Alex to see. Under its outside coating of green it showed a dull reddish brown.

"What is it?" Alex demanded, impressed by his companion's manner.

"Son," said the Kid solemnly. "Just cast your eye along that broad green belt and you'll see something unknown in the whole history of mining—an outcrop of copper, pure copper, millions upon millions of dollars' worth of it standing out in plain sight. I have got to think it over. Let's mark up a claim for each of our party and get back to camp. I've got to get alone for a while and think this over."

In a few minutes the claims were marked and the two clambered down the mountain to find their companions getting anxious over their long absence.

While Alex was telling his excited chums of the wonderful discovery, the Kid walked off by himself buried in thought, nor did he return until dark. Over the supper table he laid his conclusion before them.

“It’s big—the biggest thing that has ever happened on the Yukon. It’s too big for us to handle. It needs wharfs, staging, elevators, ships and a whole lot of other things. Likely a million dollars will have to be spent before the first load of copper can be got out of that mountain. Now our claims will not cover one-tenth of that copper belt, and my plan would be to get down to Nome as quick as I could and file our claims on the records. Then, pick out a few old timers I could trust and have them file claims on the balance of the belt, and then all combine to sell out to some big concern that has got the money to get out the goods. I’m sorry,” he said, regretfully, “but you boys will not get your money at once. You can take up a claim at eighteen years of age but you can’t sell until you’re twenty-one. If you care to trust me, however, I’ll see that your assessment work is kept up and your claims fully protected. Three years is not a long time to wait and you’ll all be rich men before you know it.”

It was a little disappointing to the boys to find that they were not to get the money for their claims immediately, but Clay’s reply gave them food for thought.

“I like that idea of not getting our money until we are twenty-one,” he said. “We are too young yet for wealth. It would likely turn our heads and make fools of us.”

Next morning the Yukon Kid started before day, with the two teams of dogs, for Nome, and a week later the river, clear of ice, the *Rambler* drove down to St. Michael’s to be hoisted aboard the self-same vessel the boys had come upon.

Did they get back home all right? Of course they did; *Rambler*, Captain Joe, Abe and all the rest.

And say, wasn’t it fine that Ike sold that cargo of furs in Seattle for \$12,000, \$2,000 more than they hoped to get, you’ll remember.

I believe, boys, if you could just stroll out on the little pier in the South Branch some evening and listen softly at the *Rambler’s* window, you’d hear those boys—yes, those self-same boys—planning another long trip.

We hope they won’t forget to send us an account of the trip if they so decide. Until that time arrives we will say good-bye.

THE END

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RIVER MOTOR
BOAT BOYS ON THE YUKON ***

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