

## THE MAN ON THE OTHER BANK.

### I.

It was before Smoke Bellew staked the farcical town-site of Tra-Lee, made the historic corner of eggs that nearly broke Swiftwater Bill's bank account, or won the dog-team race down the Yukon for an even million dollars, that he and Shorty parted company on the Upper Klondike. Shorty's task was to return down the Klondike to Dawson to record some claims they had staked.

Smoke, with the dog-team, turned south. His quest was Surprise Lake and the mythical Two Cabins. His traverse was to cut the headwaters of the Indian River and cross the unknown region over the mountains to the Stewart River. Here, somewhere, rumour persisted, was Surprise Lake, surrounded by jagged mountains and glaciers, its bottom paved with raw gold. Old-timers, it was said, whose very names were forgotten in the forests of earlier years, had dived in the ice-waters of Surprise Lake and fetched lump-gold to the surface in both hands. At different times, parties of old-timers had penetrated the forbidding fastness and sampled the lake's golden bottom. But the water was too cold. Some died in the water, being pulled up dead. Others died of consumption. And one who had gone

down never did come up. All survivors had planned to return and drain the lake, yet none had ever gone back. Disaster always happened. One man fell into an air-hole below Forty Mile; another was killed and eaten by his dogs; a third was crushed by a falling tree. And so the tale ran. Surprise Lake was a hoodoo; its location was unremembered; and the gold still paved its undrained bottom.

Two Cabins, no less mythical, was more definitely located. 'Five sleeps,' up the McQuestion River from the Stewart, stood two ancient cabins. So ancient were they that they must have been built before ever the first known gold-hunter had entered the Yukon Basin. Wandering moose-hunters, whom even Smoke had met and talked with, claimed to have found the two cabins in the old days, but to have sought vainly for the mine which those early adventurers must have worked.

"I wish you was goin' with me," Shorty said wistfully, at parting. "Just because you got the Indian bug ain't no reason for to go pokin' into trouble. They's no gettin' away from it, that's loco country you're bound for. The hoodoo's sure on it, from the first flip to the last call, judgin' from all you an' me has hearn tell about it."

"It's all right, Shorty. I'll make the round trip and be back in Dawson in six weeks. The Yukon trail is packed, and the first

hundred miles or so of the Stewart ought to be packed. Old-timers from Henderson have told me a number of outfits went up last fall after the freeze-up. When I strike their trail I ought to hit her up forty or fifty miles a day. I'm likely to be back inside a month, once I get across."

"Yes, once you get acrost. But it's the gettin' acrost that worries me. Well, so long, Smoke. Keep your eyes open for that hoodoo, that's all. An' don't be ashamed to turn back if you don't kill any meat."

II.

A week later, Smoke found himself among the jumbled ranges south of Indian River. On the divide from the Klondike he had abandoned the sled and packed his wolf-dogs. The six big huskies each carried fifty pounds, and on his own back was an equal burden. Through the soft snow he led the way, packing it down under his snow-shoes, and behind, in single file, toiled the dogs.

He loved the life, the deep arctic winter, the silent wilderness, the unending snow-surface unpressed by the foot of any man. About him towered icy peaks unnamed and uncharted. No hunter's camp-smoke, rising in the still air of the valleys, ever caught his eye.

He, alone, moved through the brooding quiet of the untravelled wastes; nor was he oppressed by the solitude. He loved it all, the day's toil, the bickering wolf-dogs, the making of the camp in the long twilight, the leaping stars overhead and the flaming pageant of the aurora borealis.

Especially he loved his camp at the end of the day, and in it he saw a picture which he ever yearned to paint and which he knew he would never forget--a beaten place in the snow, where burned his fire; his bed, a couple of rabbit-skin robes spread on fresh-chopped spruce-boughs; his shelter, a stretched strip of canvas that caught and threw back the heat of the fire; the blackened coffee-pot and pail resting on a length of log, the moccasins propped on sticks to dry, the snow-shoes up-ended in the snow; and across the fire the wolf-dogs snuggling to it for the warmth, wistful and eager, furry and frost-rimed, with bushy tails curled protectingly over their feet; and all about, pressed backward but a space, the wall of encircling darkness.

At such times San Francisco, The Billow, and O'Hara seemed very far away, lost in a remote past, shadows of dreams that had never happened. He found it hard to believe that he had known any other life than this of the wild, and harder still was it for him to reconcile himself to the fact that he had once dabbled and dawdled in the Bohemian drift of city life. Alone, with no one to talk to, he thought much, and deeply, and simply. He was appalled by the

wastage of his city years, by the cheapness, now, of the philosophies of the schools and books, of the clever cynicism of the studio and editorial room, of the cant of the business men in their clubs. They knew neither food nor sleep, nor health; nor could they ever possibly know the sting of real appetite, the goodly ache of fatigue, nor the rush of mad strong blood that bit like wine through all one's body as work was done.

And all the time this fine, wise, Spartan North Land had been here, and he had never known. What puzzled him was, that, with such intrinsic fitness, he had never heard the slightest calling whisper, had not himself gone forth to seek. But this, too, he solved in time.

"Look here, Yellow-face, I've got it clear!"

The dog addressed lifted first one fore-foot and then the other with quick, appeasing movements, curled his bush of a tail about them again, and laughed across the fire.

"Herbert Spencer was nearly forty before he caught the vision of his greatest efficiency and desire. I'm none so slow. I didn't have to wait till I was thirty to catch mine. Right here is my efficiency and desire. Almost, Yellow Face, do I wish I had been born a wolf-boy and been brother all my days to you and yours."

For days he wandered through a chaos of canyons and divides which did not yield themselves to any rational topographical plan. It was as if they had been flung there by some cosmic joker. In vain he sought for a creek or feeder that flowed truly south toward the McQuestion and the Stewart. Then came a mountain storm that blew a blizzard across the riff-raff of high and shallow divides. Above timber-line, fireless, for two days, he struggled blindly to find lower levels. On the second day he came out upon the rim of an enormous palisade. So thickly drove the snow that he could not see the base of the wall, nor dared he attempt the descent. He rolled himself in his robes and huddled the dogs about him in the depths of a snow-drift, but did not permit himself to sleep.

In the morning, the storm spent, he crawled out to investigate. A quarter of a mile beneath him, beyond all mistake, lay a frozen, snow-covered lake. About it, on every side, rose jagged peaks. It answered the description. Blindly, he had found Surprise Lake.

"Well-named," he muttered, an hour later, as he came out upon its margin. A clump of aged spruce was the only woods. On his way to it, he stumbled upon three graves, snow-buried, but marked by hand-hewn head-posts and undecipherable writing. On the edge of the woods was a small ramshackle cabin. He pulled the latch and entered. In a corner, on what had once been a bed of spruce-boughs, still wrapped in mangy furs, that had rotted to fragments, lay a skeleton. The last visitor to Surprise Lake, was Smoke's

conclusion, as he picked up a lump of gold as large as his doubled fist. Beside the lump was a pepper-can filled with nuggets of the size of walnuts, rough-surfaced, showing no signs of wash.

So true had the tale run, that Smoke accepted without question that the source of the gold was the lake's bottom. Under many feet of ice and inaccessible, there was nothing to be done, and at mid-day, from the rim of the palisade, he took a farewell look back and down at his find.

"It's all right, Mr Lake," he said. "You just keep right on staying there. I'm coming back to drain you--if that hoodoo doesn't catch me. I don't know how I got here, but I'll know by the way I go out."

### III.

In a little valley, beside a frozen stream and under beneficent spruce trees, he built a fire four days later. Somewhere in that white anarchy he left behind him, was Surprise Lake--somewhere, he knew not where; for a hundred hours of driftage and struggle through blinding driving snow, had concealed his course from him, and he knew not in what direction lay BEHIND. It was as if he had just emerged from a nightmare. He was not sure that four days or a week had passed. He had slept with the dogs, fought across a forgotten number of shallow divides, followed the windings of weird canyons that ended in pockets, and twice had managed to make a fire and thaw out frozen moose-meat. And here he was, well-fed and well-camped. The storm had passed, and it had turned clear and cold. The lay of the land had again become rational. The creek he was on was natural in appearance, and trended as it should toward the southwest. But Surprise Lake was as lost to him as it had been to all its seekers in the past.

Half a day's journey down the creek brought him to the valley of a larger stream which he decided was the McQuestion. Here he shot a moose, and once again each wolf-dog carried a full fifty-pound pack of meat. As he turned down the McQuestion, he came upon a sled-trail. The late snows had drifted over, but underneath, it was well-packed by travel. His conclusion was that two camps had been established on the McQuestion, and that this was the connecting



trail. Evidently, Two Cabins had been found and it was the lower camp, so he headed down the stream.

It was forty below zero when he camped that night, and he fell asleep wondering who were the men who had rediscovered the Two Cabins, and if he would fetch it next day. At the first hint of dawn he was under way, easily following the half-obliterated trail and packing the recent snow with his webbed shoes so that the dogs should not wallow.

And then it came, the unexpected, leaping out upon him on a bend of the river. It seemed to him that he heard and felt simultaneously. The crack of the rifle came from the right, and the bullet, tearing through and across the shoulders of his drill parka and woollen coat, pivoted him half around with the shock of its impact. He staggered on his twisted snow-shoes to recover balance, and heard a second crack of the rifle. This time it was a clean miss. He did not wait for more, but plunged across the snow for the sheltering trees of the bank a hundred feet away. Again and again the rifle cracked, and he was unpleasantly aware of a trickle of warm moisture down his back.

He climbed the bank, the dogs floundering behind, and dodged in among the trees and brush. Slipping out of his snow-shoes, he wallowed forward at full length and peered cautiously out. Nothing was to be seen. Whoever had shot at him was lying quiet among the

trees of the opposite bank.

"If something doesn't happen pretty soon," he muttered at the end of half an hour, "I'll have to sneak away and build a fire or freeze my feet. Yellow Face, what'd you do, lying in the frost with circulation getting slack and a man trying to plug you?"

He crawled back a few yards, packed down the snow, danced a jig that sent the blood back into his feet, and managed to endure another half hour. Then, from down the river, he heard the unmistakable jingle of dog-bells. Peering out, he saw a sled round the bend. Only one man was with it, straining at the gee-pole and urging the dogs along. The effect on Smoke was one of shock, for it was the first human he had seen since he parted from Shorty three weeks before. His next thought was of the potential murderer concealed on the opposite bank.

Without exposing himself, Smoke whistled warningly. The man did not hear, and came on rapidly. Again, and more sharply, Smoke whistled. The man whoa'd his dogs, stopped, and had turned and faced Smoke when the rifle cracked. The instant afterwards, Smoke fired into the wood in the direction of the sound. The man on the river had been struck by the first shot. The shock of the high velocity bullet staggered him. He stumbled awkwardly to the sled, half-falling, and pulled a rifle out from under the lashings. As he strove to raise it to his shoulder, he crumpled at the waist and

sank down slowly to a sitting posture on the sled. Then, abruptly, as the gun went off aimlessly, he pitched backward and across a corner of the sled-load, so that Smoke could see only his legs and stomach.

From below came more jingling bells. The man did not move. Around the bend swung three sleds, accompanied by half a dozen men. Smoke cried warningly, but they had seen the condition of the first sled, and they dashed on to it. No shots came from the other bank, and Smoke, calling his dogs to follow, emerged into the open. There were exclamations from the men, and two of them, flinging off the mittens of their right hands, levelled their rifles at him.

"Come on, you red-handed murderer, you," one of them, a black-bearded man, commanded, "an' jest pitch that gun of yours in the snow."

Smoke hesitated, then dropped his rifle and came up to them.

"Go through him, Louis, an' take his weapons," the black-bearded man ordered.

Louis, a French-Canadian voyageur, Smoke decided, as were four of the others, obeyed. His search revealed only Smoke's hunting knife, which was appropriated.

"Now, what have you got to say for yourself, Stranger, before I shoot you dead?" the black-bearded man demanded.

"That you're making a mistake if you think I killed that man," Smoke answered.

A cry came from one of the voyageurs. He had quested along the trail and found Smoke's tracks where he had left it to take refuge on the bank. The man explained the nature of his find.

"What'd you kill Joe Kinade for?" he of the black beard asked.

"I tell you I didn't--" Smoke began.

"Aw, what's the good of talkin'. We got you red-handed. Right up there's where you left the trail when you heard him comin'. You laid among the trees an' bushwhacked him. A short shot. You couldn't a-missed. Pierre, go an' get that gun he dropped."

"You might let me tell what happened," Smoke objected.

"You shut up," the man snarled at him. "I reckon your gun'll tell the story."

All the men examined Smoke's rifle, ejecting and counting the cartridges, and examining the barrel at muzzle and breech.

"One shot," Blackbeard concluded.

Pierre, with nostrils that quivered and distended like a deer's, sniffed at the breech.

"Him one fresh shot," he said.

"The bullet entered his back," Smoke said. "He was facing me when he was shot. You see, it came from the other bank."

Blackbeard considered this proposition for a scant second, and shook his head.

"Nope. It won't do. Turn him around to face the other bank--that's how you whopped him in the back. Some of you boys run up an' down the trail and see if you can see any tracks making for the other bank."

Their report was, that on that side the snow was unbroken. Not even a snow-shoe rabbit had crossed it. Blackbeard, bending over the dead man, straightened up, with a woolly, furry wad in his hand. Shredding this, he found imbedded in the centre the bullet which had perforated the body. Its nose was spread to the size of a half-dollar, its butt-end, steel-jacketed, was undamaged. He compared it with a cartridge from Smoke's belt.

"That's plain enough evidence, Stranger, to satisfy a blind man. It's soft-nosed an' steel-jacketed; yours is soft-nosed and steel-jacketed. It's thirty-thirty; yours is thirty-thirty. It's manufactured by the J. and T. Arms Company; yours is manufactured by the J. and T. Arms Company. Now you come along an' we'll go over to the bank an' see jest how you done it."

"I was bushwhacked myself," Smoke said. "Look at the hole in my parka."

While Blackbeard examined it, one of the voyageurs threw open the breech of the dead man's gun. It was patent to all that it had been fired once. The empty cartridge was still in the chamber.

"A damn shame poor Joe didn't get you," Blackbeard said bitterly. "But he did pretty well with a hole like that in him. Come on, you."

"Search the other bank first," Smoke urged.

"You shut up an' come on, an' let the facts do the talkin'."

They left the trail at the same spot he had, and followed it on up the bank and in among the trees.

"Him dance that place keep him feet warm," Louis pointed out. "That place him crawl on belly. That place him put one elbow w'en him shoot--"

"And by God there's the empty cartridge he had done it with!" was Blackbeard's discovery. "Boys, there's only one thing to do--"

"You might ask me how I came to fire that shot," Smoke interrupted.

"An' I might knock your teeth into your gullet if you butt in again. You can answer them questions later on. Now, boys, we're decent an' law-abidin', an' we got to handle this right an' regular. How far do you reckon we've come, Pierre?"

"Twenty mile I t'ink for sure."

"All right. We'll cache the outfit an' run him an' poor Joe back to Two Cabins. I reckon we've seen an' can testify to what'll stretch his neck."

#### IV.

It was three hours after dark when the dead man, Smoke, and his captors arrived at Two Cabins. By the starlight, Smoke could make

out a dozen or more recently built cabins snuggling about a larger and older cabin on a flat by the river bank. Thrust inside this older cabin, he found it tenanted by a young giant of a man, his wife, and an old blind man. The woman, whom her husband called 'Lucy,' was herself a strapping creature of the frontier type. The old man, as Smoke learned afterwards, had been a trapper on the Stewart for years, and had gone finally blind the winter before. The camp of Two Cabins, he was also to learn, had been made the previous fall by a dozen men who arrived in half as many poling-boats loaded with provisions. Here they had found the blind trapper, on the site of Two Cabins, and about his cabin they had built their own. Later arrivals, mushing up the ice with dog-teams, had tripled the population. There was plenty of meat in camp, and good low-pay dirt had been discovered and was being worked.

In five minutes, all the men of Two cabins were jammed into the room. Smoke, shoved off into a corner, ignored and scowled at, his hands and feet tied with thongs of moosehide, looked on. Thirty-eight men he counted, a wild and husky crew, all frontiersmen of the States or voyageurs from Upper Canada. His captors told the tale over and over, each the centre of an excited and wrathful group. There were mutterings of "Lynch him now--why wait?" And, once, a big Irishman was restrained only by force from rushing upon the helpless prisoner and giving him a beating.

It was while counting the men that Smoke caught sight of a familiar



face. It was Breck, the man whose boat Smoke had run through the rapids. He wondered why the other did not come and speak to him, but himself gave no sign of recognition. Later, when with shielded face Breck passed him a significant wink, Smoke understood.

Blackbeard, whom Smoke heard called Eli Harding, ended the discussion as to whether or not the prisoner should be immediately lynched.

"Hold on," Harding roared. "Keep your shirts on. That man belongs to me. I caught him an' I brought him here. D'ye think I brought him all the way here to be lynched? Not on your life. I could a-done that myself when I found him. I brought him here for a fair an' impartial trial, an' by God, a fair an' impartial trial he's goin' to get. He's tied up safe an' sound. Chuck him in a bunk till morning, an' we'll hold the trial right here."

V.

Smoke woke up. A draught, that possessed all the rigidity of an icicle, was boring into the front of his shoulder as he lay on his side facing the wall. When he had been tied into the bunk there had been no such draught, and now the outside air, driving into the heated atmosphere of the cabin with the pressure of fifty below zero, was sufficient advertizement that some one from without had pulled away the moss-chinking between the logs. He squirmed as far as his bonds would permit, then craned his neck forward until his lips just managed to reach the crack.

"Who is it?" he whispered.

"Breck," came the answer. "Be careful you don't make a noise. I'm going to pass a knife in to you."

"No good," Smoke said. "I couldn't use it. My hands are tied behind me and made fast to the leg of the bunk. Besides, you couldn't get a knife through that crack. But something must be done. Those fellows are of a temper to hang me, and, of course, you know I didn't kill that man."

"It wasn't necessary to mention it, Smoke. And if you did you had your reasons. Which isn't the point at all. I want to get you out of this. It's a tough bunch of men here. You've seen them.

They're shut off from the world, and they make and enforce their own law--by miner's meeting, you know. They handled two men already--both grub-thieves. One they hiked from camp without an ounce of grub and no matches. He made about forty miles and lasted a couple of days before he froze stiff. Two weeks ago they hiked the second man. They gave him his choice: no grub, or ten lashes for each day's ration. He stood for forty lashes before he fainted. And now they've got you, and every last one is convinced you killed Kinade."

"The man who killed Kinade, shot at me, too. His bullet broke the skin on my shoulder. Get them to delay the trial till some one goes up and searches the bank where the murderer hid."

"No use. They take the evidence of Harding and the five Frenchmen with him. Besides, they haven't had a hanging yet, and they're keen for it. You see, things have been pretty monotonous. They haven't located anything big, and they got tired of hunting for Surprise Lake. They did some stampeding the first part of the winter, but they've got over that now. Scurvy is beginning to show up amongst them, too, and they're just ripe for excitement."

"And it looks like I'll furnish it," was Smoke's comment. "Say, Breck, how did you ever fall in with such a God-forsaken bunch?"

"After I got the claims at Squaw Creek opened up and some men to working, I came up here by way of the Stewart, hunting for Two

Cabins. They'd beaten me to it, so I've been higher up the Stewart. Just got back yesterday out of grub."

"Find anything?"

"Nothing much. But I think I've got a hydraulic proposition that'll work big when the country's opened up. It's that, or a gold-dredger."

"Hold on," Smoke interrupted. "Wait a minute. Let me think."

He was very much aware of the snores of the sleepers as he pursued the idea that had flashed into his mind.

"Say, Breck, have they opened up the meat-packs my dogs carried?"

"A couple. I was watching. They put them in Harding's cache."

"Did they find anything?"

"Meat."

"Good. You've got to get into the brown canvas pack that's patched with moosehide. You'll find a few pounds of lumpy gold. You've never seen gold like it in the country, nor has anybody else.

Here's what you've got to do. Listen."

A quarter of an hour later, fully instructed and complaining that his toes were freezing, Breck went away. Smoke, his own nose and one cheek frosted by proximity to the chink, rubbed them against the blankets for half an hour before the blaze and bite of the returning blood assured him of the safety of his flesh.

VI.

"My mind's made up right now. There ain't no doubt but what he killed Kinade. We heard the whole thing last night. What's the good of goin' over it again? I vote guilty."

In such fashion, Smoke's trial began. The speaker, a loose-jointed, hard-rock man from Colorado, manifested irritation and disgust when Harding set his suggestion aside, demanded the proceedings should be regular, and nominated one, Shunk Wilson, for judge and chairman of the meeting. The population of Two Cabins constituted the jury, though, after some discussion, the woman, Lucy, was denied the right to vote on Smoke's guilt or innocence.

While this was going on, Smoke, jammed into a corner on a bunk, overheard a whispered conversation between Breck and a miner.

"You haven't fifty pounds of flour you'll sell?" Breck queried.

"You ain't got the dust to pay the price I'm askin'," was the reply.

"I'll give you two hundred."

The man shook his head.

"Three hundred. Three-fifty."

At four hundred, the man nodded, and said: "Come on over to my cabin an' weigh out the dust."

The two squeezed their way to the door, and slipped out. After a few minutes Breck returned alone.

Harding was testifying, when Smoke saw the door shoved open slightly, and in the crack appear the face of the man who had sold the flour. He was grimacing and beckoning emphatically to one inside, who arose from near the stove and started to work toward the door.

"Where are you goin', Sam?" Shunk Wilson demanded.

"I'll be back in a jiffy," Sam explained. "I jes' got to go."

Smoke was permitted to question the witnesses, and he was in the middle of the cross-examination of Harding, when from without came the whining of dogs in harness, and the grind and churn of sled-runners. Somebody near the door peeped out.

"It's Sam an' his pardner an' a dog-team hell-bent down the trail for Stewart River," the man reported.

Nobody spoke for a long half-minute, but men glanced significantly at one another, and a general restlessness pervaded the packed room. Out of the corner of his eye, Smoke caught a glimpse of Breck, Lucy, and her husband whispering together.

"Come on, you," Shunk Wilson said gruffly to Smoke. "Cut this questionin' short. We know what you're tryin' to prove--that the other bank wasn't searched. The witness admits it. We admit it. It wasn't necessary. No tracks led to that bank. The snow wasn't broke."

"There was a man on the other bank just the same," Smoke insisted.

"That's too thin for skatin', young man. There ain't many of us on the McQuestion, an' we got every man accounted for."

"Who was the man you hiked out of camp two weeks ago?" Smoke asked.

"Alonzo Miramar. He was a Mexican. What's that grub-thief got to do with it?"

"Nothing, except that you haven't accounted for HIM, Mr Judge."

"He went down the river, not up."

"How do you know where he went?"

"Saw him start."

"And that's all you know of what became of him?"

"No, it ain't, young man. I know, we all know, he had four day's grub an' no gun to shoot meat with. If he didn't make the settlement on the Yukon he'd croaked long before this."

"I suppose you've got all the guns in this part of the country accounted for, too," Smoke observed pointedly.

Shunk Wilson was angry.

"You'd think I was the prisoner the way you slam questions into me. Come on with the next witness. Where's French Louis?"

While French Louis was shoving forward, Lucy opened the door.



"Where you goin'?" Shunk Wilson shouted.

"I reckon I don't have to stay," she answered defiantly. "I ain't got no vote, an' besides my cabin's so jammed up I can't breathe."

In a few minutes her husband followed. The closing of the door was the first warning the judge received of it.

"Who was that?" he interrupted Pierre's narrative to ask.

"Bill Peabody," somebody spoke up. "Said he wanted to ask his wife something and was coming right back."

Instead of Bill, it was Lucy who re-entered, took off her furs, and resumed her place by the stove.

"I reckon we don't need to hear the rest of the witnesses," was Shunk Wilson's decision, when Pierre had finished. "We know they only can testify to the same facts we've already heard. Say, Sorensen, you go an' bring Bill Peabody back. We'll be votin' a verdict pretty short. Now, Stranger, you can get up an' say your say concernin' what happened. In the meantime we'll just be savin' delay by passin' around the two rifles, the ammunition, an' the bullets that done the killin'."

Midway in his story of how he had arrived in that part of the country, and at the point in his narrative where he described his own ambush and how he had fled to the bank, Smoke was interrupted by the indignant Shunk Wilson.

"Young man, what sense is there in you testifyin' that way? You're just takin' up valuable time. Of course you got the right to lie to save your neck, but we ain't goin' to stand for such foolishness. The rifle, the ammunition, the bullet that killed Joe Kinade is against you--What's that? Open the door, somebody!"

The frost rushed in, taking form and substance in the heat of the room, while through the open door came the whining of dogs that decreased rapidly with distance.

"It's Sorensen an' Peabody," some one cried, "a-throwin' the whip into the dawgs an' headin' down river!"

"Now, what the hell--!" Shunk Wilson paused, with dropped jaw, and glared at Lucy. "I reckon you can explain, Mrs Peabody."

She tossed her head and compressed her lips, and Shunk Wilson's wrathful and suspicious gaze passed on and rested on Breck.

"An' I reckon that new-comer you've ben chinning with could explain if HE had a mind to."

Breck, now very uncomfortable, found all eyes centred on him.

"Sam was chewing the rag with him, too, before he hit out," some one said.

"Look here, Mr Breck," Shunk Wilson continued. "You've ben interruptin' proceedings, and you got to explain the meanin' of it. What was you chinnin' about?"

Breck cleared his throat timidly and replied. "I was just trying to buy some grub."

"What with?"

"Dust, of course."

"Where'd you get it?"

Breck did not answer.

"He's ben snoopin' around up the Stewart," a man volunteered. "I run across his camp a week ago when I was huntin'. An' I want to tell you he was almighty secretious about it."

"The dust didn't come from there," Breck said. "That's only a low-

grade hydraulic proposition."

"Bring your poke here an' let's see your dust," Wilson commanded.

"I tell you it didn't come from there."

"Let's see it just the same."

Breck made as if to refuse, but all about him were menacing faces. Reluctantly, he fumbled in his coat pocket. In the act of drawing forth a pepper can, it rattled against what was evidently a hard object.

"Fetch it all out!" Shunk Wilson thundered.

And out came the big nugget, first-size, yellow as no gold any onlooker had ever seen. Shunk Wilson gasped. Half a dozen, catching one glimpse, made a break for the door. They reached it at the same moment, and, with cursing and scuffling, jammed and pivoted through. The judge emptied the contents of the pepper can on the table, and the sight of the rough lump-gold sent half a dozen more toward the door.

"Where are you goin'?" Eli Harding asked, as Shunk started to follow.

"For my dogs, of course."

"Ain't you goin' to hang him?"

"It'd take too much time right now. He'll keep till we get back, so I reckon this court is adjourned. This ain't no place for lingerin'."

Harding hesitated. He glanced savagely at Smoke, saw Pierre beckoning to Louis from the doorway, took one last look at the lump-gold on the table, and decided.

"No use you tryin' to get away," he flung back over his shoulder.

"Besides, I'm goin' to borrow your dogs."

"What is it--another one of them blamed stampedes?" the old blind trapper asked in a queer and petulant falsetto, as the cries of men and dogs and the grind of the sleds swept the silence of the room.

"It sure is," Lucy answered. "An' I never seen gold like it. Feel that, old man."

She put the big nugget in his hand. He was but slightly interested.

"It was a good fur-country," he complained, "before them danged miners come in an' scared back the game."

The door opened, and Breck entered.

"Well," he said, "we four are all that are left in camp. It's forty miles to the Stewart by the cut-off I broke, and the fastest of them can't make the round trip in less than five or six days. But it's time you pulled out, Smoke, just the same."

Breck drew his hunting knife across the other's bonds, and glanced at the woman.

"I hope you don't object?" he said, with significant politeness.

"If there's goin' to be any shootin'," the blind man broke out, "I wish somebody'd take me to another cabin first."

"Go on, an' don't mind me," Lucy answered. "If I ain't good enough to hang a man, I ain't good enough to hold him."

Smoke stood up, rubbing his wrists where the thongs had impeded the circulation.

"I've got a pack all ready for you," Breck said. "Ten days' grub, blankets, matches, tobacco, an axe, and a rifle."

"Go to it," Lucy encouraged. "Hit the high places, Stranger. Beat

it as fast as God'll let you."

"I'm going to have a square meal before I start," Smoke said. "And when I start it will be up the McQuestion, not down. I want you to go along with me, Breck. We're going to search that other bank for the man that really did the killing."

"If you'll listen to me, you'll head down for the Stewart and the Yukon," Breck objected. "When this gang gets back from my low-grade hydraulic proposition, it will be seeing red."

Smoke laughed and shook his head.

"I can't jump this country, Breck. I've got interests here. I've got to stay and make good. I don't care whether you believe me or not, but I've found Surprise Lake. That's where that gold came from. Besides, they took my dogs, and I've got to wait to get them back. Also, I know what I'm about. There was a man hidden on that bank. He came pretty close to emptying his magazine at me."

Half an hour afterward, with a big plate of moose-steak before him and a big mug of coffee at his lips, Smoke half-started up from his seat. He had heard the sounds first. Lucy threw open the door.

"Hello, Spike; hello, Methody," she greeted the two frost-rimed men who were bending over the burden on their sled.

"We just come down from Upper Camp," one said, as the pair staggered into the room with a fur-wrapped object which they handled with exceeding gentleness. "An' this is what we found by the way. He's all in, I guess."

"Put him in the near bunk there," Lucy said. She bent over and pulled back the furs, disclosing a face composed principally of large, staring, black eyes, and of skin, dark and scabbed by repeated frost-bite, tightly stretched across the bones.

"If it ain't Alonzo!" she cried. "You pore, starved devil!"

"That's the man on the other bank," Smoke said in an undertone to Breck.

"We found it raidin' a cache that Harding must a-made," one of the men was explaining. "He was eatin' raw flour an' frozen bacon, an' when we got 'm he was cryin' an' squealin' like a hawk. Look at him! He's all starved, an' most of him frozen. He'll kick at any moment."

. . . . .

Half an hour later, when the furs had been drawn over the face of the still form in the bunk, Smoke turned to Lucy.



"If you don't mind, Mrs Peabody, I'll have another whack at that steak. Make it thick and not so well done."