

## THE RACE FOR NUMBER ONE.

I.

"Huh! Get on to the glad rags!"

Shorty surveyed his partner with simulated disapproval, and Smoke, vainly attempting to rub the wrinkles out of the pair of trousers he had just put on, was irritated.

"They sure fit you close for a second-hand buy," Shorty went on.

"What was the tax?"

"One hundred and fifty for the suit," Smoke answered. "The man was nearly my own size. I thought it was remarkable reasonable. What are you kicking about?"

"Who? Me? Oh, nothin'. I was just thinkin' it was goin' some for a meat-eater that hit Dawson in an ice-jam, with no grub, one suit of underclothes, a pair of mangy moccasins, an' overalls that looked like they'd ben through the wreck of the Hesperus. Pretty gay front, pardner. Pretty gay front. Say--?"

"What do you want now?" Smoke demanded testily.

"What's her name?"

"There isn't any her, my friend. I'm to have dinner at Colonel Bowie's, if you want to know. The trouble with you, Shorty, is you're envious because I'm going into high society and you're not invited."

"Ain't you some late?" Shorty queried with concern.

"What do you mean?"

"For dinner. They'll be eatin' supper when you get there."

Smoke was about to explain with elaborate sarcasm when he caught the twinkle in the others' eyes. He went on dressing, with fingers that had lost their deftness, tying a Windsor tie in a bow-knot at the throat of the soft cotton shirt.

"Wish I hadn't sent all my starched shirts to the laundry," Shorty murmured sympathetically. "I might a-fitted you out."

By this time Smoke was straining at a pair of shoes. The thick woollen socks were too thick to go into them. He looked appealingly at Shorty, who shook his head.

"Nope. If I had thin ones I wouldn't lend 'em to you. Back to the moccasins, pardner. You'd sure freeze your toes in skimpy-fangled gear like that."

"I paid fifteen dollars for them, second-hand," Smoke lamented.

"I reckon they won't be a man not in moccasins."

"But there are to be women, Shorty. I'm going to sit down and eat with real live women--Mrs Bowie, and several others, so the Colonel told me."

"Well, moccasins won't spoil their appetite none," was Shorty's comment. "Wonder what the Colonel wants with you?"

"I don't know, unless he's heard about my finding Surprise Lake. It will take a fortune to drain it, and the Guggenheims are out for investment."

"Reckon that's it. That's right, stick to the moccasins. Gee! That coat is sure wrinkled, an' it fits you a mite too swift. Just peck around at your vittles. If you eat hearty you'll bust through. And if them women-folks gets to droppin' handkerchiefs, just let 'em lay. Don't do any pickin' up. Whatever you do, don't."

## II.

As became a high-salaried expert and the representative of the great house of Guggenheim, Colonel Bowie lived in one of the most magnificent cabins in Dawson. Of squared logs, hand-hewn, it was two stories high, and of such extravagant proportions that it boasted a big living room that was used for a living room and for nothing else.

Here were big bear-skins on the rough board floor, and on the walls horns of moose and caribou. Here roared an open fireplace and a big wood-burning stove. And here Smoke met the social elect of Dawson-- not the mere pick-handle millionaires, but the ultra-cream of a mining city whose population had been recruited from all the world-- men like Warburton Jones, the explorer and writer, Captain Consadine of the Mounted Police, Haskell, Gold Commissioner of the North-West Territory, and Baron Von Schroeder, an emperor's favourite with an international duelling reputation.

And here, dazzling in evening gown, he met Joy Gastell, whom hitherto he had encountered only on trail, befurred and moccasined. At dinner he found himself beside her.

"I feel like a fish out of water," he confessed. "All you folks are so real grand you know. Besides I never dreamed such oriental luxury existed in the Klondike. Look at Von Schroeder there. He's

actually got a dinner jacket, and Consadine's got a starched shirt. I noticed he wore moccasins just the same. How do you like MY outfit?"

He moved his shoulders about as if preening himself for Joy's approval.

"It looks as if you'd grown stout since you came over the Pass," she laughed.

"Wrong. Guess again."

"It's somebody else's."

"You win. I bought it for a price from one of the clerks at the A. C. Company."

"It's a shame clerks are so narrow-shouldered," she sympathized.

"And you haven't told me what you think of MY outfit."

"I can't," he said. "I'm out of breath. I've been living on trail too long. This sort of thing comes to me with a shock, you know. I'd quite forgotten that women have arms and shoulders. To-morrow morning, like my friend Shorty, I'll wake up and know it's all a dream. Now, the last time I saw you on Squaw Creek--"

"I was just a squaw," she broke in.

"I hadn't intended to say that. I was remembering that it was on Squaw Creek that I discovered you had feet."

"And I can never forget that you saved them for me," she said.

"I've been wanting to see you ever since to thank you--" (He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly). "And that's why you are here to-night--"

"You asked the Colonel to invite me?"

"No! Mrs Bowie. And I asked her to let me have you at table. And here's my chance. Everybody's talking. Listen, and don't interrupt. You know Mono Creek?"

"Yes."

"It has turned out rich--dreadfully rich. They estimate the claims as worth a million and more apiece. It was only located the other day."

"I remember the stampede."

"Well, the whole creek was staked to the sky-line, and all the feeders, too. And yet, right now, on the main creek, Number Three

below Discovery is unrecorded. The creek was so far away from Dawson that the Commissioner allowed sixty days for recording after location. Every claim was recorded except Number Three Below. It was staked by Cyrus Johnson. And that was all. Cyrus Johnson has disappeared. Whether he died, whether he went down river or up, nobody knows. Anyway, in six days, the time for recording will be up. Then the man who stakes it, and reaches Dawson first and records it, gets it."

"A million dollars," Smoke murmured.

"Gilchrist, who has the next claim below, has got six hundred dollars in a single pan off bedrock. He's burned one hole down. And the claim on the other side is even richer. I know."

"But why doesn't everybody know?" Smoke queried skeptically.

"They're beginning to know. They kept it secret for a long time, and it is only now that it's coming out. Good dog-teams will be at a premium in another twenty-four hours. Now, you've got to get away as decently as you can as soon as dinner is over. I've arranged it. An Indian will come with a message for you. You read it, let on that you're very much put out, make your excuses, and get away."

"I--er--I fail to follow."

"Ninny!" she exclaimed in a half-whisper. "What you must do is to get out to-night and hustle dog-teams. I know of two. There's Hanson's team, seven big Hudson Bay dogs--he's holding them at four hundred each. That's top price to-night, but it won't be to-morrow. And Sitka Charley has eight Malemutes he's asking thirty-five hundred for. To-morrow he'll laugh at an offer of five thousand. Then you've got your own team of dogs. And you'll have to buy several more teams. That's your work to-night. Get the best. It's dogs as well as men that will win this race. It's a hundred and ten miles, and you'll have to relay as frequently as you can."

"Oh, I see, you want me to go in for it," Smoke drawled.

"If you haven't the money for the dogs, I'll--"

She faltered, but before she could continue, Smoke was speaking.

"I can buy the dogs. But--er--aren't you afraid this is gambling?"

"After your exploits at roulette in the Elkhorn," she retorted, "I'm not afraid that you're afraid. It's a sporting proposition, if that's what you mean. A race for a million, and with some of the stiffest dog-mushers and travellers in the country entered against you. They haven't entered yet, but by this time to-morrow they will, and dogs will be worth what the richest man can afford to pay. Big Olaf is in town. He came up from Circle City last month. He is



one of the most terrible dog-mushers in the country, and if he enters he will be your most dangerous man. Arizona Bill is another. He's been a professional freighter and mail-carrier for years. It he goes in, interest will be centred on him and Big Olaf."

"And you intend me to come along as a sort of dark horse."

"Exactly. And it will have its advantages. You will not be supposed to stand a show. After all, you know, you are still classed as a chechaquo. You haven't seen the four seasons go around. Nobody will take notice of you until you come into the home stretch in the lead."

"It's on the home stretch the dark horse is to show up its classy form, eh?"

She nodded, and continued earnestly. "Remember, I shall never forgive myself for the trick I played on the Squaw Creek Stampede until you win this Mono claim. And if any man can win this race against the old-timers, it's you."

It was the way she said it. He felt warm all over, and in his heart and head. He gave her a quick, searching look, involuntary and serious, and for the moment that her eyes met his steadily, ere they fell, it seemed to him that he read something of vaster import than the claim Cyrus Johnson had failed to record.

"I'll do it," he said. "I'll win it."

The glad light in her eyes seemed to promise a greater need than all the gold in the Mono claim. He was aware of a movement of her hand in her lap next to his. Under the screen of the tablecloth he thrust his own hand across and met a firm grip of woman's fingers that sent another wave of warmth through him.

"What will Shorty say?" was the thought that flashed whimsically through his mind as he withdrew his hand. He glanced almost jealously at the faces of Von Schroeder and Jones, and wondered if they had not divined the remarkableness and deliciousness of this woman who sat beside him.

He was aroused by her voice, and realized that she had been speaking some moments.

"So you see, Arizona Bill is a white Indian," she was saying. "And Big Olaf is--a bear wrestler, a king of the snows, a mighty savage. He can out-travel and out-endure an Indian, and he's never known any other life but that of the wild and the frost."

"Who's that?" Captain Consadine broke in from across the table.

"Big Olaf," she answered. "I was just telling Mr Bellew what a

traveller he is."

"You're right," the Captain's voice boomed. "Big Olaf is the greatest traveller in the Yukon. I'd back him against Old Nick himself for snow-bucking and ice-travel. He brought in the government dispatches in 1895, and he did it after two couriers were frozen on Chilcoot and the third drowned in the open water of Thirty Mile."

### III.

Smoke had travelled in a leisurely fashion up to Mono Creek, fearing to tire his dogs before the big race. Also, he had familiarized himself with every mile of the trail and located his relay camps. So many men had entered the race, that the hundred and ten miles of its course was almost a continuous village. Relay camps were everywhere along the trail. Von Schroeder, who had gone in purely for the sport, had no less than eleven dog teams--a fresh one for every ten miles. Arizona Bill had been forced to content himself with eight teams. Big Olaf had seven, which was the complement of Smoke. In addition, over two-score of other men were in the running. Not every day, even in the golden north, was a million dollars the prize for a dog race. The country had been swept of dogs. No animal of speed and endurance escaped the fine-tooth comb that had raked the creeks and camps, and the prices of dogs had doubled and quadrupled in the course of the frantic speculation.

Number Three Below Discovery was ten miles up Mono Creek from its mouth. The remaining hundred miles was to be run on the frozen breast of the Yukon. On Number Three itself were fifty tents and over three hundred dogs. The old stakes, blazed and scrawled sixty days before by Cyrus Johnson, still stood, and every man had gone over the boundaries of the claim again and again, for the race with dogs was to be preceded by a foot and obstacle race. Each man had to re-locate the claim for himself, and this meant that he must

place two centre-stakes and four corner-stakes and cross the creek twice, before he could start for Dawson with his dogs.

Furthermore, there were to be no 'sooners.' Not until the stroke of midnight of Friday night was the claim open for re-location, and not until the stroke of midnight could a man plant a stake. This was the ruling of the Gold Commissioner at Dawson, and Captain Consadine had sent up a squad of mounted police to enforce it. Discussion had arisen about the difference between sun-time and police-time, but Consadine had sent forth his fiat that police time went, and, further, that it was the watch of Lieutenant Pollock that went.

The Mono trail ran along the level creek-bed, and, less than two feet in width, was like a groove, walled on either side by the snow-fall of months. The problem of how forty-odd sleds and three hundred dogs were to start in so narrow a course was in everybody's mind.

"Huh!" said Shorty. "It's goin' to be the gosh-dangdest mix-up that ever was. I can't see no way out, Smoke, except main strength an' sweat an' to plow through. If the whole creek was glare-ice they ain't room for a dozen teams abreast. I got a hunch right now they's goin' to be a heap of scrappin' before they get strung out. An' if any of it comes our way you got to let me do the punchin'."

Smoke squared his shoulders and laughed non-committally.

"No you don't!" his partner cried in alarm. "No matter what happens, you don't dast hit. You can't handle dogs a hundred miles with a busted knuckle, an' that's what'll happen if you land on somebody's jaw."

Smoke nodded his head.

"You're right, Shorty. I couldn't risk the chance."

"An' just remember," Shorty went on, "that I got to do all the shovin' for them first ten miles an' you got to take it easy as you can. I'll sure jerk you through to the Yukon. After that it's up to you an' the dogs. Say--what d'ye think Schroeder's scheme is? He's got his first team a quarter of a mile down the creek an' he'll know it by a green lantern. But we got him skinned. Me for the red flare every time."

#### IV.

The day had been clear and cold, but a blanket of cloud formed across the face of the sky and the night came on warm and dark, with the hint of snow impending. The thermometer registered fifteen below zero, and in the Klondike-winter fifteen below is esteemed very warm.

At a few minutes before midnight, leaving Shorty with the dogs five hundred yards down the creek, Smoke joined the racers on Number Three. There were forty-five of them waiting the start for the thousand-thousand dollars Cyrus Johnson had left lying in the frozen gravel. Each man carried six stakes and a heavy wooden mallet, and was clad in a smock-like parka of heavy cotton drill.

Lieutenant Pollock, in a big bearskin coat, looked at his watch by the light of a fire. It lacked a minute of midnight.

"Make ready," he said, as he raised a revolver in his right hand and watched the second hand tick around.

Forty-five hoods were thrown back from the parkas. Forty-five pairs of hands unmittened, and forty-five pairs of moccasins pressed tensely into the packed snow. Also, forty-five stakes were thrust into the snow, and the same number of mallets lifted in the air.

The shots rang out, and the mallets fell. Cyrus Johnson's right to the million had expired. To prevent confusion, Lieutenant Pollock had insisted that the lower centre-stake be driven first, next the south-eastern; and so on around the four sides, including the upper centre-stake on the way.

Smoke drove in his stake and was away with the leading dozen. Fires had been lighted at the corners, and by each fire stood a policeman, list in hand, checking off the names of the runners. A man was supposed to call out his name and show his face. There was to be no staking by proxy while the real racer was off and away down the creek.

At the first corner, beside Smoke's stake, Von Schroeder placed his. The mallets struck at the same instant. As they hammered, more arrived from behind and with such impetuosity as to get in one another's way and cause jostling and shoving. Squirming through the press and calling his name to the policeman, Smoke saw the Baron, struck in collision by one of the rushers, hurled clean off his feet into the snow. But Smoke did not wait. Others were still ahead of him. By the light of the vanishing fire he was certain that he saw the back, hugely looming, of Big Olaf, and at the south-western corner Big Olaf and he drove their stakes side by side.

It was no light work, this preliminary obstacle race. The boundaries of the claim totalled nearly a mile, and most of it was



over the uneven surface of a snow-covered, niggerhead flat. All about Smoke men tripped and fell, and several times he pitched forward himself, jarringly, on hands and knees. Once, Big Olaf fell so immediately in front of him as to bring him down on top.

The upper centre-stake was driven by the edge of the bank, and down the bank the racers plunged, across the frozen creek-bed, and up the other side. Here, as Smoke clambered, a hand gripped his ankle and jerked him back. In the flickering light of a distant fire, it was impossible to see who had played the trick. But Arizona Bill, who had been treated similarly, rose to his feet and drove his fist with a crunch into the offender's face. Smoke saw and heard as he was scrambling to his feet, but before he could make another lunge for the bank a fist dropped him half-stunned into the snow. He staggered up, located the man, half-swung a hook for his jaw, then remembered Shorty's warning and refrained. The next moment, struck below the knees by a hurtling body, he went down again.

It was a foretaste of what would happen when the men reached their sleds. Men were pouring over the other bank and piling into the jam. They swarmed up the bank in bunches, and in bunches were dragged back by their impatient fellows. More blows were struck, curses rose from the panting chests of those who still had wind to spare, and Smoke, curiously visioning the face of Joy Gastell, hoped that the mallets would not be brought into play. Overthrown, trod upon, groping in the snow for his lost stakes, he at last crawled

out of the crush and attacked the bank farther along. Others were doing this, and it was his luck to have many men in advance of him in the race for the northwestern corner.

Down to the fourth corner, he tripped midway and in the long sprawling fall lost his remaining stake. For five minutes he groped in the darkness before he found it, and all the time the panting runners were passing him. From the last corner to the creek he began overtaking men for whom the mile-run had been too much. In the creek itself Bedlam had broken loose. A dozen sleds were piled up and overturned, and nearly a hundred dogs were locked in combat. Among them men struggled, tearing the tangled animals apart, or beating them apart with clubs. In the fleeting glimpse he caught of it, Smoke wondered if he had ever seen a Dore grotesquery to compare.

Leaping down the bank beyond the glutted passage, he gained the hard-footing of the sled-trail and made better time. Here, in packed harbours beside the narrow trail, sleds and men waited for runners that were still behind. From the rear came the whine and rush of dogs, and Smoke had barely time to leap aside into the deep snow. A sled tore past, and he made out the man, kneeling and shouting madly. Scarcely was it by when it stopped with a crash of battle. The excited dogs of a harboured sled, resenting the passing animals, had got out of hand and sprung upon them.

Smoke plunged around and by. He could see the green lantern of Von Schroeder, and, just below it, the red flare that marked his own team. Two men were guarding Schroeder's dogs, with short clubs interposed between them and the trail.

"Come on, you Smoke! Come on, you Smoke!" he could hear Shorty calling anxiously.

"Coming!" he gasped.

By the red flare he could see the snow torn up and trampled, and from the way his partner breathed he knew a battle had been fought. He staggered to the sled, and, in a moment he was falling on it, Shorty's whip snapped as he yelled: "Mush! you devils! Mush!"

The dogs sprang into the breast-bands, and the sled jerked abruptly ahead. They were big animals--Hanson's prize team of Hudson Bays--and Smoke had selected them for the first stage, which included the ten miles of Mono, the heavy-going of the cut-off across the flat at the mouth, and the first ten miles of the Yukon stretch.

"How many are ahead?" he asked.

"You shut up an' save your wind," Shorty answered. "Hi! you brutes! Hit her up! Hit her up!"

He was running behind the sled, towing on a short rope. Smoke could not see him; nor could he see the sled on which he lay at full length. The fires had been left in the rear, and they were tearing through a wall of blackness as fast as the dogs could spring into it. This blackness was almost sticky, so nearly did it take on the seeming of substance.

Smoke felt the sled heel up on one runner as it rounded an invisible curve, and from ahead came the snarls of beasts and the oaths of men. This was known afterward as the Barnes-Slocum Jam. It was the teams of these two men which first collided, and into it, at full career, piled Smoke's seven big fighters. Scarcely more than semi-domesticated wolves, the excitement of that night on Mono Creek had sent every dog fighting-mad. The Klondike dogs, driven without reins, cannot be stopped except by voice, so that there was no stopping this glut of struggle that heaped itself between the narrow rims of the creek. From behind, sled after sled hurled into the turmoil. Men who had their teams nearly extricated were overwhelmed by fresh avalanches of dogs--each animal well-fed, well-rested, and ripe for battle.

"It's knock down an' drag out an' plow through!" Shorty yelled in his partner's ear. "An' watch out for your knuckles! You drag out an' let me do the punchin'!"

What happened in the next half hour Smoke never distinctly

remembered. At the end he emerged exhausted, sobbing for breath, his jaw sore from a first-blow, his shoulder aching from the bruise of a club, the blood running warmly down one leg from the rip of a dog's fangs, and both sleeves of his parka torn to shreds. As in a dream, while the battle still raged behind, he helped Shorty reharness the dogs. One, dying, they cut from the traces, and in the darkness they felt their way to the repair of the disrupted harnesses.

"Now you lie down an' get your wind back," Shorty commanded.

And through the darkness the dogs sped, with unabated strength, down Mono Creek, across the long cut-off, and to the Yukon. Here, at the junction with the main river-trail, somebody had lighted a fire, and here Shorty said good bye. By the light of the fire, as the sled leaped behind the flying dogs, Smoke caught another of the unforgettable pictures of the North Land. It was of Shorty, swaying and sinking down limply in the snow, yelling his parting encouragement, one eye blackened and closed, knuckles bruised and broken, and one arm, ripped and fang-torn, gushing forth a steady stream of blood.

V.

"How many ahead?" Smoke asked, as he dropped his tired Hudson Bays and sprang on the waiting sled at the first relay station.

"I counted eleven," the man called after him, for he was already away behind the leaping dogs.

Fifteen miles they were to carry him on the next stage, which would fetch him to the mouth of White River. There were nine of them, but they composed his weakest team. The twenty-five miles between White River and Sixty Mile he had broken into two stages because of ice-jams, and here two of his heaviest, toughest teams were stationed.

He lay on the sled at full length, face-down, holding on with both hands. Whenever the dogs slacked from topmost speed he rose to his knees, and, yelling and urging, clinging precariously with one hand, threw his whip into them. Poor team that it was, he passed two sleds before White River was reached. Here, at the freeze-up, a jam had piled a barrier allowing the open water, that formed for half a mile below, to freeze smoothly. This smooth stretch enabled the racers to make flying exchanges of sleds, and down all the course they had placed their relays below the jams.

Over the jam and out on to the smooth, Smoke tore along, calling loudly, "Billy! Billy!"

Billy heard and answered, and by the light of the many fires on the ice, Smoke saw a sled swing in from the side and come abreast. Its dogs were fresh and overhauled his. As the sleds swerved toward each other he leaped across and Billy promptly rolled off.

"Where's Big Olaf?" Smoke cried.

"Leading!" Billy's voice answered; and the fires were left behind and Smoke was again flying through the wall of blackness.

In the jams of that relay, where the way led across a chaos of up-ended ice-cakes, and where Smoke slipped off the forward end of the sled and with a haul-rope toiled behind the wheel-dog, he passed three sleds. Accidents had happened, and he could hear the men cutting out dogs and mending harnesses.

Among the jams of the next short relay into Sixty Mile, he passed two more teams. And that he might know adequately what had happened to them, one of his own dogs wrenched a shoulder, was unable to keep up, and was dragged in the harness. Its team-mates, angered, fell upon it with their fangs, and Smoke was forced to club them off with the heavy butt of his whip. As he cut the injured animal out, he heard the whining cries of dogs behind him and the voice of a man that was familiar. It was Von Schroeder. Smoke called a warning to prevent a rear-end collision, and the Baron, hawing his animals and

swinging on the gee-pole, went by a dozen feet to the side. Yet so impenetrable was the blackness that Smoke heard him pass but never saw him.

On the smooth stretch of ice beside the trading post at Sixty Mile, Smoke overtook two more sleds. All had just changed teams, and for five minutes they ran abreast, each man on his knees and pouring whip and voice into the maddened dogs. But Smoke had studied out that portion of the trail, and now marked the tall pine on the bank that showed faintly in the light of the many fires. Below that pine was not merely darkness, but an abrupt cessation of the smooth stretch. There the trail, he knew, narrowed to a single sled-width. Leaning out ahead, he caught the haul-rope and drew his leaping sled up to the wheel-dog. He caught the animal by the hind-legs and threw it. With a snarl of rage it tried to slash him with its fangs, but was dragged on by the rest of the team. Its body proved an efficient brake, and the two other teams, still abreast, dashed ahead into the darkness for the narrow way.

Smoke heard the crash and uproar of their collision, released his wheeler, sprang to the gee-pole, and urged his team to the right into the soft snow where the straining animals wallowed to their necks. It was exhausting work, but he won by the tangled teams and gained the hard-packed trail beyond.



## VI.

On the relay out of Sixty Mile, Smoke had next to his poorest team, and though the going was good, he had set it a short fifteen miles. Two more teams would bring him in to Dawson and to the Gold-Recorder's office, and Smoke had selected his best animals for the last two stretches. Sitka Charley himself waited with the eight Malemutes that would jerk Smoke along for twenty miles, and for the finish, with a fifteen-mile run, was his own team--the team he had had all winter and which had been with him in the search for Surprise Lake.

The two men he had left entangled at Sixty Mile failed to overtake him, and, on the other hand, his team failed to overtake any of the three that still led. His animals were willing, though they lacked stamina and speed, and little urging was needed to keep them jumping into it at their best. There was nothing for Smoke to do but to lie face-downward and hold on. Now and again he would plunge out of the darkness into the circle of light about a blazing fire, catch a glimpse of furred men standing by harnessed and waiting dogs, and plunge into the darkness again. Mile after mile, with only the grind and jar of the runners in his ears, he sped on. Almost automatically he kept his place as the sled bumped ahead or half-lifted and heeled on the swings and swerves of the bends. First one, and then another, without apparent rhyme or reason, three faces limned themselves on his consciousness: Joy Gastell's, laughing and

audacious; Shorty's, battered and exhausted by the struggle down Mono Creek; and John Bellew's, seamed and rigid, as if cast in iron, so unrelenting was its severity. And sometimes Smoke wanted to shout aloud, to chant a paean of savage exultation, as he remembered the office of the Billow and the serial story of San Francisco which he had left unfinished, along with the other fripperies of those empty days.

The grey twilight of morning was breaking as he exchanged his weary dogs for the eight fresh Malemutes. Lighter animals than Hudson Bays, they were capable of greater speed, and they ran with the supple tirelessness of true wolves. Sitka Charley called out the order of the teams ahead. Big Olaf led, Arizona Bill was second, and Von Schroeder third. These were the three best men in the country. In fact, ere Smoke had left Dawson, the popular betting had placed them in that order. While they were racing for a million, at least half a million had been staked by others on the outcome of the race. No one had bet on Smoke, who, despite his several known exploits, was still accounted a chechaquo with much to learn.

As daylight strengthened, Smoke caught sight of a sled ahead, and, in half an hour, his own lead-dog was leaping at its tail. Not until the man turned his head to exchange greetings, did Smoke recognize him as Arizona Bill. Von Schroeder had evidently passed him. The trail, hard-packed, ran too narrowly through the soft

snow, and for another half-hour Smoke was forced to stay in the rear. Then they topped an ice-jam and struck a smooth stretch below, where were a number of relay camps and where the snow was packed widely. On his knees, swinging his whip and yelling, Smoke drew abreast. He noted that Arizona Bill's right arm hung dead at his side, and that he was compelled to pour leather with his left hand. Awkward as it was, he had no hand left with which to hold on, and frequently he had to cease from the whip and clutch to save himself from falling off. Smoke remembered the scrimmage in the creek bed at Three Below Discovery, and understood. Shorty's advice had been sound.

"What's happened?" Smoke asked, as he began to pull ahead.

"I don't know," Arizona Bill answered. "I think I threw my shoulder out in the scrapping."

He dropped behind very slowly, though when the last relay station was in sight he was fully half a mile in the rear. Ahead, bunched together, Smoke could see Big Olaf and Von Schroeder. Again Smoke arose to his knees, and he lifted his jaded dogs into a burst of speed such as a man only can who has the proper instinct for dog-driving. He drew up close to the tail of Von Schroeder's sled, and in this order the three sleds dashed out on the smooth going, below a jam, where many men and many dogs waited. Dawson was fifteen miles away.

Von Schroeder, with his ten-mile relays, had changed five miles back, and would change five miles ahead. So he held on, keeping his dogs at full leap. Big Olaf and Smoke made flying changes, and their fresh teams immediately regained what had been lost to the Baron. Big Olaf led past, and Smoke followed into the narrow trail beyond.

"Still good, but not so good," Smoke paraphrased Spencer to himself.

Of Von Schroeder, now behind, he had no fear; but ahead was the greatest dog-driver in the country. To pass him seemed impossible. Again and again, many times, Smoke forced his leader to the other's sled-trail, and each time Big Olaf let out another link and drew away. Smoke contented himself with taking the pace, and hung on grimly. The race was not lost until one or the other won, and in fifteen miles many things could happen.

Three miles from Dawson something did happen. To Smoke's surprise, Big Olaf rose up and with oaths and leather proceeded to fetch out the last ounce of effort in his animals. It was a spurt that should have been reserved for the last hundred yards instead of being begun three miles from the finish. Sheer dog-killing that it was, Smoke followed. His own team was superb. No dogs on the Yukon had had harder work or were in better condition. Besides, Smoke had toiled with them, and eaten and bedded with them, and he knew each dog as

an individual, and how best to win in to the animal's intelligence and extract its last least shred of willingness.

They topped a small jam and struck the smooth-going below. Big Olaf was barely fifty feet ahead. A sled shot out from the side and drew in toward him, and Smoke understood Big Olaf's terrific spurt. He had tried to gain a lead for the change. This fresh team that waited to jerk him down the home stretch had been a private surprise of his. Even the men who had backed him to win had had no knowledge of it.

Smoke strove desperately to pass during the exchange of sleds. Lifting his dogs to the effort, he ate up the intervening fifty feet. With urging and pouring of leather, he went to the side and on until his lead-dog was jumping abreast of Big Olaf's wheeler. On the other side, abreast, was the relay sled. At the speed they were going, Big Olaf did not dare the flying leap. If he missed and fell off, Smoke would be in the lead and the race would be lost.

Big Olaf tried to spurt ahead, and he lifted his dogs magnificently, but Smoke's leader still continued to jump beside Big Olaf's wheeler. For half a mile the three sleds tore and bounced along side by side. The smooth stretch was nearing its end when Big Olaf took the chance. As the flying sleds swerved toward each other, he leaped, and the instant he struck he was on his knees, with whip and voice spurting the fresh team. The smooth pinched out into the

narrow trail, and he jumped his dogs ahead and into it with a lead of barely a yard.

A man was not beaten until he was beaten, was Smoke's conclusion, and drive no matter how, Big Olaf failed to shake him off. No team Smoke had driven that night could have stood such a killing pace and kept up with fresh dogs--no team save this one. Nevertheless, the pace WAS killing it, and as they began to round the bluff at Klondike City, he could feel the pitch of strength going out of his animals. Almost imperceptibly they lagged, and foot by foot Big Olaf drew away until he led by a score of yards.

A great cheer went up from the population of Klondike City assembled on the ice. Here the Klondike entered the Yukon, and half a mile away, across the Klondike, on the north bank, stood Dawson. An outburst of madder cheering arose, and Smoke caught a glimpse of a sled shooting out to him. He recognized the splendid animals that drew it. They were Joy Gastell's. And Joy Gastell drove them. The hood of her squirrel-skin parka was tossed back, revealing the cameo-like oval of her face outlined against her heavily-massed hair. Mittens had been discarded, and with bare hands she clung to whip and sled.

"Jump!" she cried, as her leader snarled at Smoke's.

Smoke struck the sled behind her. It rocked violently from the

impact of his body, but she was full up on her knees and swinging the whip.

"Hi! You! Mush on! Chook! Chook!" she was crying, and the dogs whined and yelped in eagerness of desire and effort to overtake Big Olaf.

And then, as the lead-dog caught the tail of Big Olaf's sled, and yard by yard drew up abreast, the great crowd on the Dawson bank went mad. It WAS a great crowd, for the men had dropped their tools on all the creeks and come down to see the outcome of the race, and a dead heat at the end of a hundred and ten miles justified any madness.

"When you're in the lead I'm going to drop off!" Joy cried out over her shoulder.

Smoke tried to protest.

"And watch out for the dip curve half way up the bank," she warned.

Dog by dog, separated by half a dozen feet, the two teams were running abreast. Big Olaf, with whip and voice, held his own for a minute. Then, slowly, an inch at a time, Joy's leader began to forge past.

"Get ready!" she cried to Smoke. "I'm going to leave you in a minute. Get the whip."

And as he shifted his hand to clutch the whip, they heard Big Olaf roar a warning, but too late. His lead-dog, incensed at being passed, swerved in to the attack. His fangs struck Joy's leader on the flank. The rival teams flew at one another's throats. The sleds overran the fighting brutes and capsized. Smoke struggled to his feet and tried to lift Joy up. But she thrust him from her, crying: "Go!"

On foot, already fifty feet in advance, was Big Olaf, still intent on finishing the race. Smoke obeyed, and when the two men reached the foot of the Dawson bank, he was at the others heels. But up the bank Big Olaf lifted his body hugely, regaining a dozen feet.

Five blocks down the main street was the Gold Recorder's office. The street was packed as for the witnessing of a parade. Not so easily this time did Smoke gain to his giant rival, and when he did he was unable to pass. Side by side they ran along the narrow aisle between the solid walls of fur-clad, cheering men. Now one, now the other, with great convulsive jerks, gained an inch or so only to lose it immediately after.

If the pace had been a killing one for their dogs, the one they now set themselves was no less so. But they were racing for a million



dollars and great honour in Yukon Country. The only outside impression that came to Smoke on that last mad stretch was one of astonishment that there should be so many people in the Klondike. He had never seen them all at once before.

He felt himself involuntarily lag, and Big Olaf sprang a full stride in the lead. To Smoke it seemed that his heart would burst, while he had lost all consciousness of his legs. He knew they were flying under him, but he did not know how he continued to make them fly, nor how he put even greater pressure of will upon them and compelled them again to carry him to his giant competitor's side.

The open door of the Recorder's office appeared ahead of them. Both men made a final, futile spurt. Neither could draw away from the other, and side by side they hit the doorway, collided violently, and fell headlong on the office floor.

They sat up, but were too exhausted to rise. Big Olaf, the sweat pouring from him, breathing with tremendous, painful gasps, pawed the air and vainly tried to speak. Then he reached out his hand with unmistakable meaning; Smoke extended his, and they shook.

"It's a dead heat," Smoke could hear the Recorder saying, but it was as if in a dream, and the voice was very thin and very far away.

"And all I can say is that you both win. You'll have to divide the claim between you. You're partners."

Their two arms pumped up and down as they ratified the decision. Big Olaf nodded his head with great emphasis, and spluttered. At last he got it out.

"You damn chechaquo," was what he said, but in the saying of it was admiration. "I don't know how you done it, but you did."

Outside the great crowd was noisily massed, while the office was packing and jamming. Smoke and Big Olaf essayed to rise, and each helped the other to his feet. Smoke found his legs weak under him, and staggered drunkenly. Big Olaf tottered toward him.

"I'm sorry my dogs jumped yours."

"It couldn't be helped," Smoke panted back. "I heard you yell."

"Say," Big Olaf went on with shining eyes. "That girl--one damn fine girl, eh?"

"One damn fine girl," Smoke agreed.