

SLUMBERING GOLD

by Aubrey Boyd

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FOURTH INSTALLMENT
SYNOPSIS: On the old side-wheeler "George E. Starr," on its way to the Yukon gold fields in the first rush of '97, Speed Malone, experienced gold-camp follower and gambler, and young Ed Maitland, on his first trip, trying to recoup his lost family fortune, struck up a strange friendship. Maitland left Speed playing Solo with two other men and wandered forward to be sharply recalled by the report of a pistol and the news that his partner had been shot and had gone overboard. Ed jumped in after him, without second thought. But the cold waters got him, and in the end it was Speed who did the rescuing, holding Ed's head above water until they were taken aboard a little boat by a French fisherman from Seattle. Maitland, knowing the sea, took charge of the little boat when they passed Frenchy to take them to Skagway. After a hard journey they reached Skagway where they find a ship unloading miners and horses. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

"See ye ashore," laughed Speed from the water. Hauling along the rope to the broncho's head, he caught its tail with the other hand, and used this as a rudder to steer it shorewards, while he swam alongside.

Maitland had been too interested in their progress to notice the Susette's approach to the steamer, which was now close abeam. The name beneath her stern rail was the "Williamette, San Francisco." Her passengers were waiting to have their outfits landed.

Oddly, the first to observe that the Susette rode high and empty was a short, fat fellow.

"Hey, wit that boat!" he called out. "My outfit for how much you want to land it? Five dollars?"

This mention of Frenchy's favorite coin brought the fisherman out of a coma; he gave eager signs of assent. Simultaneously on the lighter, there was a general reaching for purses and bank rolls.

As Maitland ran under the ship's shadow and moored to the raft a tinkling laugh from the rail above caused him to look up. His eyes met the dancing dark ones of a very beautiful young woman who was looking down at him with an expression half-amused and half-curious. He had an oddly confused sensation, with the Susette's lift and

fall in the shadow of the immobile steamer.

A bangle on her arm struck a crystal flash from the sun, as she raised her hand from the rail and blew him a kiss mischievously from rosy finger-tips.

The gesture was noticed by a tall, heavily built man who stood on the rail directing the unloading of the horses—a man with the eagle poise of a leader and a masterful look of power under easy command. His handsome face had been burned by the sun to the color of saddle leather, and its swarthy features gave an insolent sharpness of blue to his eyes, while it dimmed the black brows that ran in a bar across his forehead. He frowned thoughtfully at the new arrival.

The men on the lighter looked like veteran prospectors, and their skillfully corded packs told the same story. One of them—a meager gray-haired but wiry old-timer, shifted a huge tobacco quid in his cheek as he took one end of a pack Maitland was swinging, and said,

"Pretty piece of herdin' you boys done out thar."

The winch roared just then, and the old-timer nodded toward the inner shadows of the lighter where a yellow-haired youth was leaning out to uncouple a horse from the slings.

"Pete, yer," he said, "figures your pardner could have rode the pinto in."

In the abrupt silence as the winch stopped, Pete heard what was said. When the horse was free, he threw back the gold hair that had fallen into his eyes and looked up casually at Maitland.

"It's been done, Mister," said Pete.

"Shucks, boy," retorted the old-timer tolerantly, "you can't tell me what's been done with a horse. I say it's too fer, and I've seen riders in my time attemp' ever'thin' the ramblin' human fancy kin invent, with and without the aid of lickin'."

The young Nevanan did not answer directly. He signalled to someone on the deck above, and a little later a black mare came down in the sling, her nose quivering at the brine below. She took it in a churn of spray, but quieted under the boy's firm touch. He unhooked her and held her for a moment by the halter, stroking her silky neck.

Then, with a move so swift that it was accomplished almost before it was seen, he left the raft for the mare's back, and they shot away into sunlit water.

A brandy-faced man in a sheep-skin coat whom Maitland had not noticed before, came suddenly to life and crossed the swaying raft in two unsteady strides.

"Come back here, Pete," he called out.

The boy paid no heed. He was drenched to the belt but riding lightly, leaning forward to even the balance and guiding the mare with a loop of the halter rope over her nose.

"Head him off with your boat," the man appealed to Maitland. "He'll drown hisself."

Maitland left Frenchy to take in the Susette and her cargo, and cast off in the dinghy with a shove of an oar against the raft. Troubled by the tide swell, the mare was meeting every rise at an angle that brought the water to her master's shoulders, snorting and strangling in an effort to keep her nose out of the feathering crests.

Maitland pulled in nearer. The boy's head was close to the mare's wet mane and hair contrasting gold and black in the sunlight. The tension of his voice seemed to lift her. "The beach . . . on't a little way now sweetheart—over this one, Chiquita, over it . . . a good girl, over it!"

The mare labored up another foaming hill bug flagged with exhaustion at the crest. They were still some eighty yards from shore and the beach was steep.

A few strong pulls shot the boat forward till it topped the same swell. Maitland meant to run alongside and lift the rider off, but this was forgetting the thrashing for a foothold. The boat caught the impact of one hoof on the prow. It rocked crazily as Maitland spun it within reach of the boy's arm. But Pete was tugging at the halter rope, to turn the mare's head.

"Keep that damned boat out of my way," he swore, or "by—"

The words were rudely stifled by a comb that smoked over his head, rolling him and his mount completely over. The mare came up riderless. Catching the halter Maitland pulled her astern, afraid that her hooves might strike the boy's head. Seeing a gleam of gold in the green water he reached for it; tangled his finger in a mop of hair and pulled the head above water.

Pete gasped, and held the rail a moment to get his breath. Then he swung over as easily as if he were vaulting into a saddle, landing with a splash in the water that washed along the floorboards.

He raised himself to the thwart,

shaking the wet hair from his eyes, which were blazing.

"You—" he began.

"Grab that baling dipper," said Maitland shortly. He had pushed an oar into the stern groove and was holding the mare's halter with his free hand while he sculled shorewards. After a look at the rising water, Pete complied. It was slow work, but they beached in advance of other boats that were coming in from the ship. As the mare climbed the gravel and shook herself, her master jumped lightly ashore. He was draining the water from his boots when Maitland pulled up the dinghy.

The sudden landing on still ground made the sailor conscious of the effects of a week's starvation. He felt the beach reel, and had to steady himself against the boat. Then he tipped it on its side to examine the injured seam.

A pair of trimly shod feet presently appeared on the sand beside him and he looked up.

"My name's Pete," the boy volunteered. "The man with the woolly coat is my pardner, Bill Owens. The girl that throwed you a kiss's name is Rose . . . But I reckon you don't care about women? he inquired, undismayed by the silence that greeted these amenities.

"My partner," said Maitland at last, "thinks they're a hot bolt in dynamite."

"Ain't it so," Pete concurred judiciously. "It's deafenin' to think of what might happen if Rose really cared about any man. Unless maybe me. But she don't." He looked inside the boat to note the effect of this. "How'er, I don't care a hoot in hell for Rose—not me," he chanted, snapping his fingers lightly skywards. "I'm a man among men."

"You swear like one," his hearer admitted. "Why don't you cuss me out and get it off your mind?" the boy demanded. "I mean it. Say what you're thinkin', man to man."

Maitland considered him while cleaning his hands on some shreds of rope. "Well," he said, "man to man, you make a lot of noise for your size. It's a pity you squawk when you lose."

Pete winced. "That's a hard cuss," he murmured. "What else?"

"That's all," said Maitland, surprised by a glimpse of sensitiveness under the boyish swagger.

With the mare's halter rope, Pete threw a sly hitch over her nose, and mounted almost in the same movement.

"If I don't lose easy, Mister, I don't quit easy either, or forget. Maybe some day you'll know it's so." And with no visible urge from him, the mare sped down the beach.

Maitland stared after them, held by the grace of the picture they made, and by wonder at the quick moods of this amazing boy.

He was still watching him when he saw Speed coming over the beach toward him.

"We got the Jew's outfit ashore, and he's staking us to a feed. Chuck's on the fire now. Hungry, Bud?"

The banquets of Lucullur are said to waft a pleasant aroma down the river bank of time, but one exquisite collation which that gastronome never enjoyed was baked beans, bacon, soda biscuits, canned fruit and coffee, after a two week's diet of fish boiled in sea water.

It was nearly sunset and the season, like the hour, seemed to condense the freshness and glory of the closing day. The air had a crisp tang that tingled in the nostrils of the hungry travelers like a dry champagne, giving a good deal more poignancy to the savor of broiling meat.

Shivering over the camp fire Steiner thoughtfully appraised the appetites of his guests.

"I could use you boys, maybe," he said, referring to some point he had discussed with Speed, "but ten dollars a day each and grub . . . I ain't king of the Klondike."

"This isn't Seattle," said Speed. "It's a gold camp. You'll see wages go to twice that and more."

The Jew's look was one of sincere unbelief. "A man would be crazy to pay it."

"The scenery is covered with crazy men," Speed observed impassively.

Steiner dropped the subject and said to Maitland. "I notice how Lucky Rose has a mash on you. Seen her throwin' you kisses from the ship?"

Speed had been about to lower a nicely browned slice of bacon into his mouth in one piece. He paused now with this viand suspended.

There had always been a vague hope in Maitland's mind of tracing the outfit he had left on the George E. Starr. Since this seemed an opportune time to look for it, he asked

the fisherman's permission to use the Susette for a short turn to the Dyea beach a few miles up the gulf. Frenchy, in a better humor than he had been for a week, absently mumbled his consent.

He stepped out to the Susette over some boats and a scow that rocked in the wharf's vague shadow, and made sail. It was only six miles or so from Skagway to the camp of Dyea. When he arrived there the camp was empty, because of an interval between steamers. He was therefore able to learn with discouraging promptness that there was no trace of an unclaimed outfit on the beach.

Coming back to Skagway the fires on the flats had died to their embers, but as he tacked in to the Susette's mooring, he noticed a small

fire in the lee of the wharf, just above the surf. Here he found his partner nursing some driftwood in to flame.

Continued Next Week

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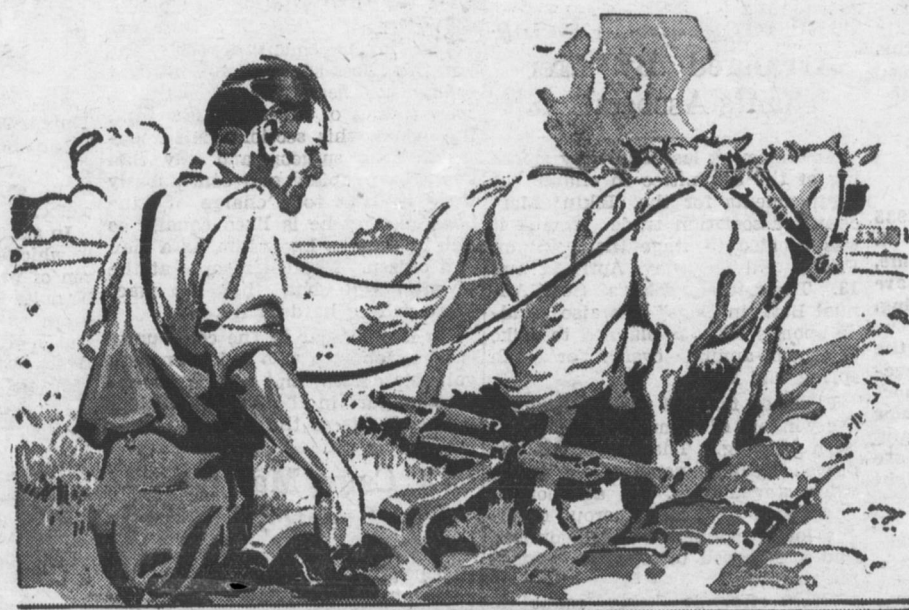
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Beginning on an iron stake on the East side of State Road, A. B. Woodruff's corner; running in an Easterly direction with said Woodruff's line 150 feet to a stake; thence extending in a Southerly direction at right angle to the above mentioned line 100 feet to a stake; thence extending in a Westerly direction parallel to the first mentioned line 150 feet to the said State Road; thence in a Northerly direction with said State Road 100 feet to the beginning. The same being a part of lot No. 2 as shown on the Map of State Road, North of Huntsville.

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