

SLUMBERING GOLD

By AUBREY BOYD

SYNOPSIS On the old side-wheel George E. Starr, on its way to the Yukon gold fields in the first rush of '47, Speed Mallin, 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 E's head above water until they were taken aboard a little boat by a fisherman from Seattle. Maitland, knowing the sea, took charge of the little boat when they persuaded 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:

FIFTH INSTALMENT

Speed merely nodded when told of the failure of his quest.

"What happened at Steiner's?" Maitland asked.

It seemed that Frenchy and the Jew had formed a partnership, to start a hauling business from Skagway with the horses and boat for capital.

With a glance at the clouds Speed suggested that it was going to rain, and he would do a "sketch round" for some blankets while his partner was drying out.

"For an hour or so after he had gone, Maitland sat pondering over the fire. From this abstraction he was roused by a slight crunching sound in the gravel, and glanced up almost absently at the shape of a horse, used in fiery ones against the dark.

An upward glow from the fire lighted a woman's face which he seemed to remember. Then a low, musical laugh gave body to the vision.

He stood up, still half-dreaming, as she pulled her horse under the shadow of the wharf. Her dark eyes masked with a vagrant humor some caprice he could not fathom. When she seated herself on a fallen wharf timber, leaving a space beside her in wordless invitation, he obeyed, without knowing that he did so.

"Meet Lady Luck," she said, and to his complete stupefaction, turned his head toward her and kissed him lightly on the mouth. "You have a funny serious, wondering look like," she explained, "of tracing something that keeps drifting away. Luck's been passing you, too, so I've decided to give you a break—if you want it. Do you?"

He murmured, with a melting fall in her voice that drained his blood. Her lips hovered close to his, her hair almost brushed his face with a languid lure that took his breath.

Appalled at what he had almost done, he held her crushed fingers between his hands till he could win back some degree of sense. "I think it would be safer," he pleaded, "to be unlucky."

She looked at him with an odd shadowed reflective smile, as if the scruple intrigued her, or he had brushed some chord of memory. "Suppose I were to offer you and your partner an outfit, a job and a big stake in the Yukon, would you trust your luck?"

"Whether I would or not," he said, "my partner wouldn't."

He doesn't know what the stake is. Rose countered. "You're going North to look for gold. I can put it in your way in one throw. There's a fool in camp who's due to lose a gold mine—one that isn't his to lose. I can't tell you any more just how, except that the game is worth the risk. You're running some risks anyway as drifters in a camp where you've made an enemy of the range boss."

He could make little of that, except to wonder if Fallon was involved in the mysterious gold secret she spoke of. And, while their hands were tangled, she drew a ring from one of hers and slipped it mischievously on the tip of his little finger.

At that moment a thud on the wharf above them froze them both. A dark figure loomed with a bulky menace in the dusk. Maitland thought of Fallon, but a flare from the fire revealed an apparition much more disturbing to him just then. Speed's apparent size was due to a roll of blankets on his shoulder.

The outlaw came down the sand and dropped his burden near the fire, still regarding the girl. After a moment he walked over to the horse and held the stirrup for her, with a gesture that was polite but implacable.

She waited before mounting, returning his stare with a look of interest. "Lady," he said, pointing north "up there is all-Alaska and the Yukon Territory. If that ain't a big enough huntin' range for you and me and my partner to keep untrangled in, it's too damned big. But when I ask you to get the Hell out of our camp, I mean stay out."

Her laugh was a ripple of spontaneous music. She mounted easily, and looking back at Maitland touched her fingers to her lips. The horse's hooves ground softly in the sand, and she vanished.

Speed threw a fresh log on the fire, and after kicking it into flame, he drew from his pocket a new bag of Diphram, rolled a cigarette and lit it with a brand from the fire.

"Seems like this man Garnet likes to gamble," he observed at last. "What he don't know about callin' a pair of deuces gives us the ponchos and smokes."

Maitland scarcely heard him. He half-opened his hand to look at Rose's ring, and shut it again quickly, as if he were holding a witch's bond.

It was not till they turned in that Speed alluded to the subject that troubled him. "From where I set," the Westerner observed musingly, "which is lookin' at the sky—this man Fallon listens like four good axes to beat, if not five. His havin' traces of catamount and curly wolf in his pedigree, I don't question. But he's got something else that makes a bunch of hard-rock, hard-mouth miners answer his jerk line. A quick hand, a cool head, and enough ornery guts to swing a twenty-four horse span of Nevada mules through the gates of Hell, if him and Satan had a feud. Offhand, I'd reckon that crossin' that man in any game was a kind of hair-line play."

"What's his sequence with the woman I don't just get. Maybe none, you think. But it looks to me like a young buck, say from Boston, would kind of regret havin' his grave dug for him this side of the summit, tho' not suspectin' when gettin' curious about a woman means flirtin' with the muzzles of a pair of forty-fours. Which is the bore of the guns that start talkin' when you ramble into Fallon's private game, and make it

three-handed."

Maitland awakened shivering in half-darkness. The gulf was smudged in a fine rain that streamed dismally over the rifled sands left bare by the ebb tide. Speed's blankets were rolled up, and a pile of driftwood lay ready for their breakfast fire. Annoyed at himself for having slept while his partner was hunting a job, Ed washed in a tide pool, and went up to look for him.

He learned that Steiner had offered to sell Garnet his pinto, Garnet having agreed with him at the price of four hundred dollars for the team, and engaged the two partners to haul for him at the wages Speed had first named.

This swift adjustment had all the effect of a miracle to Maitland, but the Westerner accepted it as a simple caprice of the goddess who presides over mining camps. Nor was Steiner visibly troubled by the change in his plans.

"Gold is where you find it, ain't it? If you put it in my hands, I don't need a shovel, do I? Let the saps dig for it."

"Reckon that ain't so foolish, neither," Speed concurred.

The pack train had been tugging, cursing, halting and sliding for hours in a disjointed snake-line up the gravelled river canyon, through a strizzling rain that soaked the lashings and shoulder straps, cut flesh to the raw, changed gravel to mud, and with the chain of hundreds of hooves among the slippery wrack of cotton-woods, made footing almost impossible.

By the order of the trail, prospectors moved their outfits in relays. In due time, traveling as far upriver as they could between midnight and one in the afternoon, there to cache their packs and return, during the remaining hours, for other loads.

Garnet's outfit was an odd one, unencumbered by mining tools or instruments, or by any special equipment that might give a clue to his purpose in the North. It was rather like the outfit a rich man might have chosen for a long camping tour, thought this was not a journey which anyone would be likely to undertake for pleasure or health. Two game rifles and rods, however, showed that he hoped for some diversion by the way.

At last a ring of axes, pans and voices floated up from a mountain hollow through the rain. The trail dipped down toward a camp, which was pleasantly announced by the aroma of coffee and of wet pine burning.

Tethering the horses under some dripping boughs, where the needles spread a carpet free from mud, Speed unmade the packs. "Belly up to the bar for some close harmony, cow hands," he sang out cheerily. "We've hit the camp of Liarsville."

Garnet stood bowed under his load and asked in a spent voice how far they had come.

Speed swallowed his chuckles. The distance was said to be five miles. "Maybe," he added as an encouragement, "they call it 'Liarsville' in memory of whoever said it was just five miles."

Garnet showed so little interest in continuing his travels after lunch that they left him in camp to rest, and brought up another load on the night trail from Skagway, for the moral effect of getting the outfit well started.

Garnet was in his blankets when they returned. "I'm going to sleep till noon, boys," he said, next morning. "If you feel so energetic, have a look at the trail above here. I've been hearing some bad rumors about it."

His misgivings did not weigh on their minds at first. They set out on this excursion in the light-hearted mood conferred by a scrubbing, a shave, a good breakfast and morning sunlight.

Avoiding the camp, they crossed a river bridge, and from there, by a steep and broken track which the pack animals of earlier comers had scarred out, climbed into some mountain ravines that began to reek with a mephitic odor of death. The sham-

CHERRY QUEEN

Mary Bell Bennett Reigns at Northwest Festival.



LEWISTON, IDAHO—Mary Bell Bennett, beautiful college coed (pictured above) is this week ruling as Queen of the Annual Cherry Blossom Festival, a colorful May event in Idaho and Washington.

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POULTRY QUESTION

What can I do to stop my chickens from picking out their feathers?

Answer: This trouble is most often caused by a tiny parasite called the mite which can be controlled by dipping the birds in a sulphur-soap solution made by mixing two ounces of flowers of sulphur and six ounces of kerosene with five gallons of water. Hold the wings over the back and submerge the birds' feet. Do this only the head is out of the solution. With the free hand, ruffle the feathers to insure penetration. The head should be dunked two or three times during the operation. Dip the birds only in the day so as to allow them to become thoroughly dry before going to roost.

They became more glibly as they climbed.

The clips of the so-called "trail" in series of gangways had been engaged to small mud lakes by the feet of successive hooves around the rim. The swollen carcasses of dead horses lay floating or half-buried in muck and sloughs. On sheer mountain sides the trail dwindled in places to a cattle track and its hazards to burdened horses and men were grimly proved by the relics that lay scattered in the canyon troughs.

Some travelers who appeared to have lost their horses were struggling to hand-haul their packs thru a wallow not more than a mile above Leesville. It was all the progress they had been able to make since morning. Others, incredibly plustered with mud and bearing the wan stamp of defeat in their faces, were backtrailing toward camp. These were trail veterans who took ordinary hardship with a smile.

Hairily one look at it would be enough for Garnet.

As they stood considering the dismal prospect, they were joined by a man whom they recognized through disguising mud smears as the old-time prospector, Brent.

"Pretty ain't it?" Brent commented, spitting tobacco juice into the slough.

"It would look a heap better," said Stough, thoughtfully, "if the camp got together and graded a trail. A few days' work would corduroy these muskegs."

"Just what I told 'em," Brent nodded.

"Who's against it?" Fallon's outfit he claims we can't reach Bennett before the freeze-up if we stop to make a trail. It's tough on the boys who're short of horses. The way he sees it, it's their hard luck. A stampede is a stampede, says the trail boss."

"Fallon's got plenty of guts, but I don't seem to like 'em, someway," said Speed.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

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