

SLUMBERING GOLD

By Aubrey Boyd

FIFTH INSTALLMENT

Speed merely nodded when told of the failure of his quest. "What happened at Steiner's?" Maithland 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, Maithland 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, limned in fiery lines 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 he 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 I 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?" she murmured, with a melting fall

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in her voice that drained his blood. Her lips hovered close to his; her hair almost brushed his face with a tingling 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 oddly 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 now, 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 the moment a thud on the wharf above them froze them both. A dark figure loomed with a bulky menace in the dusk. Maithland 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 of the Yukon Territory. If that ain't a big enough huntin' range for you and me and my partner to keep untangled in, it's too damned hell. 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 Maithland, 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 urham, 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."

Maithland 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 aces to beat, if not five. His havin' traces of catamount and curly wolf in his pedigree, I don't question. But he's got somethin' else that makes a bunch of hard-rock, hardmouth 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, through 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."

Maithland wakened shivering in half-darkness. The gulf was smudged in a fine rain that steamed dimly over the riffled 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



An upward glow from the fire lighted a woman's face.

pool, and went up to look for him. He learned that Steiner had offered to sell Garnet his pintos. Garnet promptly closed 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 Maithland, 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 they put it in my hands, I don't need a shovel, do I? Let the saps dig for it."

"Reckon that in'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 graveled river canyon, through a drizzling rain that soaked the lashings and shoulder straps, cut flesh to the raw, changed gravel to mud, and with the churn of hundreds of hooves among the slippery wrack of cotton-woods, made footing almost impossible.

By the order of the trail, prospec-

tors moved their outfits in relays, morning sunlight. Avoiding the camp, they crossed a river bridge, and from there, by 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, though this was not a journey which anyone would be likely to undertake for pleasure or health. Two games 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 nee-

Some travelers who appeared to have lost their horses, were struggling to hand-haul their packs through a wallow not more than a mile above Liarville. It was all the progress they had been able to make since morning. Others, in-credibly plastered 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.

Plainly, 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 oldtime prospector, Brent.

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

"It would look a heap better," said Speed, 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 stampeede is a stampeede, says the trail boss."

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

(Continued Next Week)

Lives of great men all remind us We can make our lives a shining lamp

And departing leave behind us Future heads for postage stamps.

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CRESS GRANGE

Cress Grange held its regular meeting Friday night March 8 with an average attendance. Prof Brown was unable to be present to hold his weekly lesson for us which was a disappointment but we hope he will be able to be present hereafter.

Patterson and Cress school boys had their first game of baseball at Cress School house one evening last week resulting in a score of 9 to 6 in favor of Cress.

Mr. J. W. Safriet had a lot of fruit trees planted in his orchard last week.

Dick Miller had work started on his filling station just North of the Farm Life School on the Highway. Monday we hope that many of his friends will patronize him when he gets it opened up.

J. R. Cress had the misfortune to lose a mule Monday.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Petrea and Mrs. J. R. Cress went to Charlotte Monday to see Mr. Petrea's Mother, Mrs. G. A. Ketchie who is in a hospital there where she under went an operation last week. She was getting along fine at that time.

We had the heaviest rain of the winter Tuesday which will stop all farming operation for quite awhile.

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