

SLUMBERING GOLD

By Aubrey Boyd

NINTH INSTALLMENT

"We'll take the street," said Speed to Maitland, "it's more visible."

The marbled thoroughfare, with its cross stripes of light, opened a chancy course before them when they turned the bend. These alternating patches of light and darkness were an advantage as well as a menace; they exposed the entrance of each resort, while the dark spaces between shielded their approach.

When the sign of The Pack Train saloon appeared ahead, Speed's step became a little more measured. No figures loitered around this entrance; the noisy revel inside was apparently too engrossing. Light, streaming from chinks and seams in the canvas, clearly illumined the roadway, making it an unlikely spot for an ambush.

They reached the outer radius of the light, entered it, and passed the low bright beam that issued from under the swing doors. Through shadows that flickered over the road from the shuffle of dancing feet, they moved safely toward the margin of darkness.

"Which goes to show—" Speed began. But the sentence was never completed.

He stopped and wheeled with a suddenness that brought the lead bronco's chest against his leg. Maitland heard a double crash; saw a bright flame stab from Speed's gun. Something burned past his cheek. The saloon door behind them was swinging to and fro, throwing blinks of light into the road. In the luminous pool just below it, a man lay crumpled with his face upturned. The features were clearly legible. It was the shell dealer they

had seen at Liarville. They were in shadow again and had gained the darkness of the trail before the street filled, for The Pack Train was a "last chance" saloon. They joined a scattered line of prospectors who had started on the night trail into the canyon, and no one followed them.

In wary silence the two partners kept trailing till they made camp far up the river canyon.

Over the fire, the outlaw sat in a long study. "I reckon that was a case," he said at last, "of what you would call 'suggestion.' The man wouldn't believe I didn't have a gun notched for him."

"What made him think you did?" Maitland asked.

"I followed him one night in Nevada. Got a slant of him then in the light of a saloon door. It just needed one look to see he was on'y a tramp tin-horn. Seems, though, like he had other things to be nervous about; he had friends in the camp and his imagination started guns blazin' . . . When he seen me here he figured I was still after him . . . Like the girl said, the worst risk may be the one you ain't lookin' for."

"I've been figurin' slower since I made that first mistake . . . They's a heap of pretty burnette girls in the Western camps. You can see how easy it is to get mistracked from how wide my guess was about this one and the horses, thinkin' she wanted pay."

"Do you think the gold secret she spoke of was just something she'd overheard while singing through the camp? Like her tip about the shell dealer?"

Speed looked at him curiously. "Why would you guess she overheard a gold secret?"

"I don't know," Maitland hesitated. "Something she said the first time I saw her. And then Owens losing his outfit when he was on his way to join a partner in the Yukon . . . Do I imagine, or does that tie together?"

"It ties to her," Speed grunted. "Maybe nowhere else. Outfits are gambled and lost right along the trails without needin' a gold secret back of it. What you heard Owens say doesn't count for much. And if this perspector had a gold mine, why wouldn't he record it, thus endin' the secret? Another thing—I'd bank she wouldn't be that much interested even in a gold mine. She comes by gold too easy."

"Then what motive would she have?"

"Motive?" Speed's mouth tightened. "You'd better not guess. Nothin' sets a man wonderin' like gold, and the best trick a woman has is to get you wonderin' till you go round her in circles. When she talks of puttin' heads together, whose head do you figure she's interest in? Maybe Fallon and me both cramp her ideas. She baits me with a gold lure to go trailin' him, and her other argument is plausible. It would surely be a wise move to hunt Fallon down and settle that feud. But not on Canadian ground. . . . If that ain't her motive, it's just barely possible she's workin' with Fallon to nail my pelt. Or else—" he concluded, less audibly, "she's drawin' evidence for the Law. She's the most insidious woman I ever met, and I've known some bear-cats."

At the top of the pass they looked out over a new world.

Clouds billowing darkly on a chill wind, shadowed the crests of a piling sea of mountain peaks. To the east and below them, a gleam

that followed this moving darkness changed a sable wood to misty enchanted green, and glistened over the snow-dusted surface of Summit Lake—first promise of their approach to the headwaters of the Yukon. The sky turned grayer as they descended, till it melted in flakes that drifted around them like leaves, mantling their mud-stiffened clothes.

When the long strait of Windy Arm brought them into the wooded stillness of Lake Tagish, and they



"The man wouldn't believe that I didn't have a gun notched for him."

reached the lower end of this waterway, they came on an advance crew of police, setting up a barracks.

An officer walked out through the snow flicker to meet them. It was Drew, wearing a winter service uniform. He asked where they were bound.

"Just lookin' for timber and a place to camp," said Speed.

Drew's eye was on the pintos, as he filled and lit a pipe. "If you're heading toward the Lewes and you'd like to make some wages, I could give you a load of supplies to haul to Thirty Mile. One of our inspectors is camped there. He's taking Judge McGuire and the Crown Prosecutor to Dawson," Drew explained, as a pleasant conversational item. "The goods are to be delivered to him. No rush about it."

Speed looked darkly at his partner, who had a provident thought. With what lay behind them, it might be good politics to do the police a service. "We could leave our stuff here," Maitland ventured, "and prospect for a camp on the way."

"That's an idea," said the inspector. "If you make your camp between here and Leberge, you'll be in the line of Cathcart's patrol. Corporal Cathcart's a new man. It'll be an event for him to meet anyone along that lonely beat."

"Does he use dogs?" Maitland asked curiously.

"No. Our dogs haven't arrived yet. Speaking of that, though, Cathcart's very interested in the sled track of a mysterious Siwash he's seen down that way. If you should get a glimpse of this lone Indian, you'll have exciting news for him."

"What makes the track a mystery?" Maitland inquired.

"The fact that no one has ever had a clear view of the Siwash or his team. This sounds odd, but it dates back to a time before our men entered the territory—when a miner from the Pelly brought in some gold he claimed to have got from an Indian in a storm. The snow, he said, was driving thick, and the native, whose face was muffled in a parka hood, spoke in Chinook, offering a potlatch of furs and nuggets in exchange for supplies. A gold legend grew from it, and whenever a cache was robbed, or ribbed by wolves, the vanishing In-

dian was blamed.

"Interesting case," Drew concluded, tapping out his pipe. . . . But I'll be getting your sled-load ready."

Speed listened in silence, his mind apparently less occupied with the inspector's story than with the peculiar circumstances of their making a haul for the police.

The snowfall continued in flurries as they sledged on toward Lake Leberge. Between the canyon rapids and the Takhim they passed a creek that cut into the left bank of the river. It appealed to Speed as a site for a winter camp. The timber around it was good enough for cabin logs, and they could haul in the finer-grained wood they needed for the boat.

The solitude of the region remained unbroken. Feathering snow had erased the track of a patrolman's mount, which they had noted occasionally. So, when they were returning to the horses after a side excursion to examine timber, Maitland was surprised to see his partner stop suddenly and look down, as if he had detected some mark on a blank rise of snow.

The shape of these marks was not that of bootprints but of some moccasin-like foot covering. There were other phantom dots and lines that suggested a sled track—unaccountably to him.

Speed studied them with an absent intentness, from which he was recalled by a question from the other.

"Must be the track of the lone Siwash Drew's patrolman was curious about," he said. "Mysterious, too, because there ain't any native settlements in this region, and nothin' much to bring a wanderin' Siwash in."

They made an uneventful trip down the strch of Lake Leberge to the Lewes and delivered their consignment to the inspector in charge, without meeting the other official personages. Nor did Speed show any desire to do so. He lost no time in getting rid of the order, and putting miles of lake ice between them and the Lewes.

Retracing their lonely route with the empty sleds, they loaded up with logs they felled along the way. Prospecting for timber sometimes led them far apart. They had been separated in this way for some hours when Maitland became aware

that it was turning dark. A wolf howl, weird in the distance, deepened it still more.

Some minutes later his ears were stung to alertness by the muffled double crack of a rifle.

Wondering what game Speed would consider worth that number of shells, he pulled the horses into a faster gait.

Presently, through the snow drizzle, he discerned a dark lifeless bulk on the snow-blanketed ice. He found it to be a stray woodland caribou—the first he had ever seen. It had been dropped by a clean head shot, and its blood, still warm, stained the snow. Speed's bullet had stolen a feast from the timber wolves.

In answer to his shout, his partner came toward him out of the shadow of a clump of cottonwoods.

"What were you looking for?" Maitland asked.

The other had an oddly abstracted look and was still scanning the shore line. "I must be gettin' mental," he said. "I got a dim sight of this caribou crossing the river mouth, and had to shoot twice to stop it. Then it seemed like I—like somethin' else was moving in the timber."

"Maybe a wolf was trailing the deer you shot?"

They put the deer on the sled and kept trailing till they camped in the shelter of some timber above the river mouth. When they had skinned the game and cleaned up, darkness had closed around them with a bitter night cold. Maitland broke limbs from a fallen tree for the camp fire, while Speed was cooking caribou steaks on some wood coals. Releasing the axe for a moment to blow on his fingers, Maitland happened to glance across the river, and was arrested by a yellow gleam from a dark, slinking shape of fur.

"There's your wolf," he called to his partner.

Speed gave another turn to the steak he was browning.

"That's no wolf," he muttered. "It's a Siwash dog. And lame, Must of strayed from the team that disappearin' Indian. Or the Siwash cut it loose."

The cruelty of leaving a lamed dog to starve seemed extreme to Maitland. But while the steaks were cooking, Speed mentioned some harsher examples of the law

of survival in the snow country. The topic did not dull their appetite. Having appeased it, they rolled in the fire's warmth.

Speed took a deep drag at a waning cigarette and tossed the stub in the fire. Then he got up and sleepily stretched his arms. As he did so, his eyes came suddenly and sharply awake.

(Continued next week.)

Now that the lespedeza has been planted, Union County farmers are devoting considerable attention to their orchards with the idea of producing sufficient fruit for home use.

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5.50-19	8.48	9.65	11.78	6.00-20	6	12.79	14.61
6.00-16 Air Wheel	10.27	12.17	16.50	6.00-20	6	16.55	18.91
6.00-17 Air Wheel	10.42	12.32	16.50	6.00-20	8		22.09
6.00-18 Air Wheel	10.70	12.67	17.00	6.00-20	8	21.98	25.07
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