

SLUMBERING GOLD

By Aubrey Boyd

AUTOCASTER, SEPA.

SYNOPSIS

Strange partners they were—Speed Malone, hardened gambler; Ed Maitland, young New Englander, son of seafaring folks. They met on their trip north to the Yukon gold fields in '97, Maitland in pursuit of lost family fortunes, Malone evading the law in the gold camps. Frenchy, the fisherman who took the two men north; Lucky Ross, the beautiful girl who gave Maitland a ring for a keepsake; Fallon, trail boss of the miners and resentful of Rose's attentions to Maitland; Brent, old-time prospector; Garnet, who gave Maitland and Speed his outfit and horses when he quit the trail; Pete and his drunken partner Owens, drowned on the beach; these were among the crowd of gold seekers. After a hard trip north, with many hazards—and Speed killed a man at Shagway, the manager of a shell game who was out to get Speed—the two partners made camp for the winter near Bennett, where the Canadian Mounties held sway. Drew, head of the Mounties there, said there was a strange legend about a ghostly Siwash who left tracks in the snow—his new man Cathcart was specially interested in it. One night the two partners were surprised to have a half-starved dog join them while they were eating steaks from a deer Speed had just shot. A little later a man came out of the storm to them—the ghostly apparition of the Mounties' legend, they decided—and took half their deer. While Speed had gone to Shagway with mail for the Mounties, Maitland found a half-frozen figure in a storm, and discovered it to be Pete, who turned out to be a girl disguised as a man.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

TWELFTH INSTALMENT

Speed waited another instant to watch the door. The foremost of the marshal's men rushed into view a thought sooner than he had counted on. Too soon for Lefty, anyway; the door was still shut.

Speed raised the gun for a shot that would draw them away from it. The revolver spat flame with a stunning roar.

For a priceless second, he stood dazed and half-blinded, stumbling to keep his balance and conscious of no more than the fact that he was alive. A numbness centered in his arm and hand. As the haze cleared he realized that the gun had blown to pieces. Probably frost in the barrel . . . he could have warned it on the lantern before he left Steiner's tent.

And in that thick of doom, the pack was on him. The last thing he knew was the writhing twist he gave his body so as to land on his shoulder, and flare of fire in his head. Then the snow went black.

He was still on his shoulder when he became conscious again, but his hands were trussed behind him with a rope, his ankles were bound, he was gagged and lying on dry ground.

Gradually a murmur of low voices in the tent became articulate. He recognized Fallon's and lay motionless.

“ . . . so we didn't find the kid through the winter till Chik Holter located a camp on the Teslin a ways above where we camped on the Lewes. An outfit was cuttin' timber there for a raft, and Pete had a job cookin' for them. Holter picked up the mare's trail headin' west, alone. Picked it up and lost it.”

“How?” another voice inquired.

“The blizzard, I reckon. But I figured the kid was making for the coast. We had to come down for some gear anyway, and we'll head Pete off here at the same time.”

Speed's ear caught sharply at some hidden implication in the man's voice.

The other voice murmured an interruption. “Seems to me like your prisoner's ears is awake.”

“I'm speakin' to him,” growled Fallon. “He likely knows plenty. It always looked to me like he had somethin' figured about Pete, and about Owens too.”

“Well, if he won't explain himself, it'll be tough. He shot and killed a man in this camp, and was charged, legal. He busted pail, stole a gun, and would have done plenty more if the gun had been good. He ain't a Canadian. We tell the 'mounties' we don't figure they would choose a man of this character to run their mail. We suspect he stole it; he was seen gamblin' in a joint with the mail in his pocket.”

Through this talk, Speed's mind had been shutting swiftly, trying to weave the full pattern of what it implied. The picture that began to emerge made him writhe at his bonds

and at the gag in his mouth.

“The Golden Pass” at Shagway, under the protection of Soapy Smith, was a lathering vortex of carnival. It had a slick and spacious floor lit by hanging lamps which depended from the cross-beams of the lumber roof. A piano, banjo and accordion were in the swing of what sounded like a musical steeplechase. But they made a spirited noise, and served to indicate that the romping riot on the dance floor was sociably intended.

In attire, the crowd was variously informal, mixing corduroy, rough flannel and heavy miners' boots with the “store clothes” of newcomers.

The bar had its own supporters, who somehow remained audible. In their rumble of talk there were echoes of a rumor that a dangerous gunman had broken jail and tried to shoot up the camp.

In the tumult no one, therefore immediately noticed that a group of armed men had entered, pushing before them a hatless captive whose hands were tied behind his back. The leader of the posse commanded attention by the simple means of sending a bullet into the rafters.

“Where's Soapy Smith?” Fallon demanded in a voice that made the quiet absolute.

No one answered, or seemed to know. One glance at the posse and the prisoner had sent through the crowd, drunk and sober, an electric sense of what was impending. There was a low drone and buzz of excitement. They pressed in for a closer view of the prisoner, who was looking at the rafters.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Fallon, “the character of this murderous desperado is known to ever' miner who was in the trail in the first stampede of '97. He returns with erroneous ideas of terrizin' the camp. Jailed for murder and mail robbery, he breaks jail, steals a gun, and is the cause not only of promiseous bloodshed, but of holes bein' shot in your tent roofs. We've brung him here because this roof has a strong crossbeam. With your aid I will take about three minutes.”

As the crowd looked on in dead silence, Speed was pulled across the floor to the further end of the dancing space, near the orchestra, where he was lifted to a table under one of the traverse roof beams. Standing there, his feet were quickly bound. One of the posse expertly fashioned a halter loop with nine winds around the shank of a stout pack line; the other end was thrown over the beam, and the noose fitted to the captive's neck, with the hondo against his ear.

Speed watched these preparations with apparent resignation. His roving glance came to rest on Fallon, who stood ready to send him clear.

“Still figurin' a play?” his captor taunted.

“Yes,” said Speed. “One. They say a man's last look sees clear, Fallon. I ain't never tried to figure what lies over the line, but if that's so, maybe you don't check me out, complete. If you frame a deal against the boy, my pardner, or lay hands on Pete, by God, I'll follow you—dead!”

“Damn it, Fallon,” said an old miner, “I've seen men hung before, but never in your cold-blooded style. At least they're given the offer of a last drink or a smoke. Why don't you do it regular?”

Some of the old-timers voiced approval of that.

“All right,” Fallon growled. “You can ask him. I'm damned if I will.”

The man put the question.

“If it's a choice,” said Speed, “I'd like to roll a cigarette. I've got the makin'.”

His hands were untied and the bartender told to “Bring a glass of the special, Soapy.”

Gratefully flexing his wrists, Speed rolled a cigarette and was lighting it, when the drink arrived in a well-filled tumbler.

“I take this kind, Soapy,” he said, “but I never liked to drink alone. You can use my name freely in urgin' drinks on the house. The marshal has my wad.”

This sentiment was most favorably received by a number of the revelers whose thirst had

outlasted their means. The discovery that the condemned man's credit was still good with Soapy created a generally good impression. Fallon gnawed his cheek.

Curious newcomers were jamming in through the doorway, and Speed paused with the glass halfdrained, at sight of one of them. Lefty, wearing a look of strongly mingled triumph and discomfiture answered his stare by touching one bulge in the side of his coat and another in his pocket. Speed resumed his drink with a twisted grimace. So Lefty had his guns and the mail. The money would have been safer in the marshal's office. With the deft trick of his kind in worming through crowds, the dip drew nearer. The forward press of the crowd had brought Rose nearer too. Speed met her clouded eyes again in a long study, as he emptied the glass and lowered it.

Fallon jerked it from his hand. “Any other little thing you'd like?” he inquired sardonically.

“They's one other thing,” acknowledged Speed, still looking at Rose. “I ain't heard no music for some time. If the lady will play a song while I finish this cigarette.”

Fallon wheeled, but Rose did not see his scowl.

A chord as clean and sweet as the tinkle of the wind at twilight through a desert canyon flowed from the strings under her touch, and shed an almost instant lull on the crowd. Then her voice dissolved into the music—a clear, exquisite contralto, plaintive, strong and deep, like the shore wash that sounded through it, sustaining the rhythmic lapses of the song.

In that beguiling, fluently riding spell of sound, the prisoner forgot everything apparently, but the singers magic. But his eyes drifted to Lefty's with a sidelong glance at the accordion which dangled in the hands of its owner in the orchestra. Fallon, watching Rose and waiting for the end of her song, did not notice the invisible prompting Eyes and wits less sharp than Lefty's would neither have received the look nor interpreted it; but the dip quietly detached the instrument from the listless fingers, and before he was aware of what had happened, tossed it to Speed. The pass was hardly observed before Speed had chimed the accordion with the closing bar of Rose's song.

She looked up in wonder, but continued playing an accompaniment as the accordion repeated her melody. The sudden unexpectedness of the gesture took the crowd's breath no less than the perfect chording of the two instruments. He lured Rose's song into a lighter, brisker measure which she instinctively matched with the guitar until the melody itself was subtly changed.

Here was dance music such as few camps have heard, played by two artists who had music in their hearts and fingers. And as Speed swayed slightly with the playing, his eyes evading the smoke that curled up from the shortening cigarette butt, his feet were just visibly weaving too—as it seemed, to the infection of his own music, but with a crafty, studied strain against the rope. “Come on boys,” he chanted suddenly. “Take your pardners!”

The crowd was almost swept off its feet. In another moment the miracle might have been done. Lefty, with a gaze of awed admiration, caught the meaning of Speed's strategy.

But Fallon came alive with a roaring curse.

“I'll make you dance, you jiggin'—!”

He made a stride for the table to kick it over.

The kick, however, was not completed. The crowd had buckled and swayed inward from the door, cleaved apart by a powerful pair of shoulders, and by a dark, youthful battling head which Speed had never hoped to see again. It was Maitland.

There was a sharp crack of fist against bone, and Fallon was stiffened to his toes by a terrific driving smash to the jaw.

He rocked and went backwards but saved himself from

falling by lurching into the piano keys with a loud disaccord.

To the crowd it was like a gong. A lynching was one thing; this was something more; the challenge laced their blood with a strong intoxicant. The night had a head of steam.

Fallon shook his head groggily. A movement of one hand to his belt brought a roar of protest from the crowd on their own account no less than that of fair play. But Fallon had no intention of shooting. He pushed the gun tight in the holster, and bracing himself against the piano, leaped for his antagonist.

The crash when they met sounded like an impact of bulls. Both men were magnificently strong, and toughened by the snow trails, though weight and matured experience were in Fallon's favor. He drove in a pounding barrage of body punches. Maitland closed in, trying to smother the assault, but taking meanwhile a thrashing rain of jackhammer blows to the head and body. The instinctive balance which a sailor learns on heaving decks must have steadied him now; he thrust back of a sudden, and Fallon's foot, less sure of the glassy floor, slipped a little. The boy lashed up with a short left that cut the other's upper lip, and then drove home a full-shouldered right, as Fallon's head snapped back. He came back with a spring that tore through Maitland's guard by sheer weight and fury. They slipped and came up in a swaying grapple.

(Continued Next Week)

MAGNOLIA NEWS
By MISS MACY COX

Mrs. Jamie Carlton of Warsaw and her son, Mr. Elmore Carlton and wife of Raleigh called on friends and relatives here Sunday afternoon.

Mrs. Luther West of New Hope Community spent Sunday afternoon with her daughter, Mrs. O. M. Wilkins. Mr. Jamie and Miss Letha Blanchard came with her and visited their uncle, Mr. Dave Blanchard.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Tremain and Miss Dorothy King of Wilmington attended the High School play Wednesday night and were the guests of Miss King's parents, Mr. and Mrs. G. B. King.

Mrs. Catherine Gaylor and son, Sam, of Wilmington were guests in the home of Mr. J. P. Tucker Friday till Tuesday.

Mr. Alsa Gavin of Pineland College spent the week-end with his mother, Mrs. Clara Gavin. His guest was his friend, Mr. Ivey Horne of Salernburg.

Misses Elizabeth Gavin and Alma Baker, with their friends Messrs. Hawes of Rose Hill

Canada's First Lady



OTTAWA, Canada . . . Above is a most recent photo of Mrs. John Buchan, wife of John Buchan, English novelist and member of Parliament, and newly appointed Governor General of Canada to succeed the Earl of Bessborough.

motored to Fort Bragg Sunday afternoon and were dinner guests of Miss Baker's sister, Mrs. Tom Wilson.

Mrs. J. H. Weeks and Raymond Joyner of Faison spent Sunday with their parents, Mr. and Mrs. C. C. Joyner. Their sister, Miss Minnie returned with them.

Mr. J. P. Tucker has bought the Theo. Middleton Store stock and will continue to carry about the same line of general merchandise. With his twenty-three years of experience in that store, his business ability and kind courtesy to customers we predict for him a successful business career.

A great Easter day for Mrs. Lessie Powell Sunday. Her three out-of-town sons and daughter with their families came to gladden her heart and have a happy day together. Mr. and Mrs. John Glenn Powell and baby, Jacob Ray, wife and baby and Arthur of Charlotte, Mrs. Ellis Herring, her husband and three children of Wilson, her resident daughter,

Mrs. Laura Merritt and family her resident son, Claude Powell and family, other relatives in town and from Wilmington and Turkey gathered at the home Sunday afternoon, and when this writer called, it looked as though they were having children's Day, mothers' Day and Father's Day. Her daughter, Mrs. Lula Spell and 2 children live with her and together they gave every one a hearty welcome.

Misses Elizabeth Sanderson of Flora MacDonald College, Red Springs, and Louise of E. C. T. C., Greenville, spent the Easter Holidays with their parents Mr. and Mrs. L. M. Sanderson.

Miss Mildred Hamilton of E. C. T. C., was the Easter guest of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. E. Hamilton.

Ekholm - Wood
A marriage of much interest to Magnolia took place Friday at 7 p. m., in Thomasville, when Miss Lucy Ekholm of Magnolia became the bride of Mr. Vaughn Wood of Thomasville. The bride is a niece of Miss Ella Hall and they came to her home that night and remained until Tuesday. Mrs. Wood has had a position near Burlington

about two years. She has lived here with Miss Hall since early childhood and her friends extend best wishes. Mr. Wood holds a position with the Thomasville chair factory. Mr. and Mrs. Wood and Miss Hall motored to Beulaville Sunday afternoon to see Mrs. E. L. Quinn.

Commencement Notes
Our commencement exercises were unusually good. The high school play Wednesday night, “Here Comes Charlie” was one of the best ever presented and reflects great credit on Miss Slaughter who coached them and on every one taking part. The seventh grade presented a good play “An Indian Festival”, Thursday night, coached by their teacher, Miss Helen Hunt. Friday night the seniors gave fine entertainment, their play, “A Bargain's a Bargain”. Thirty seventh grade pupils were presented promotion certificates. The fourteen graduates were Misses Alline Wilson, Margaret Gaylor, Eva Marable Smith, Julia C. Wilson, Hazel Jones, Myrtle Pope, Dorothy Register, Ophelia Wilson and J. P. Tucker, Jr., Law-son Mattis, George Kelly, Jr.

(Continued on Page 4)

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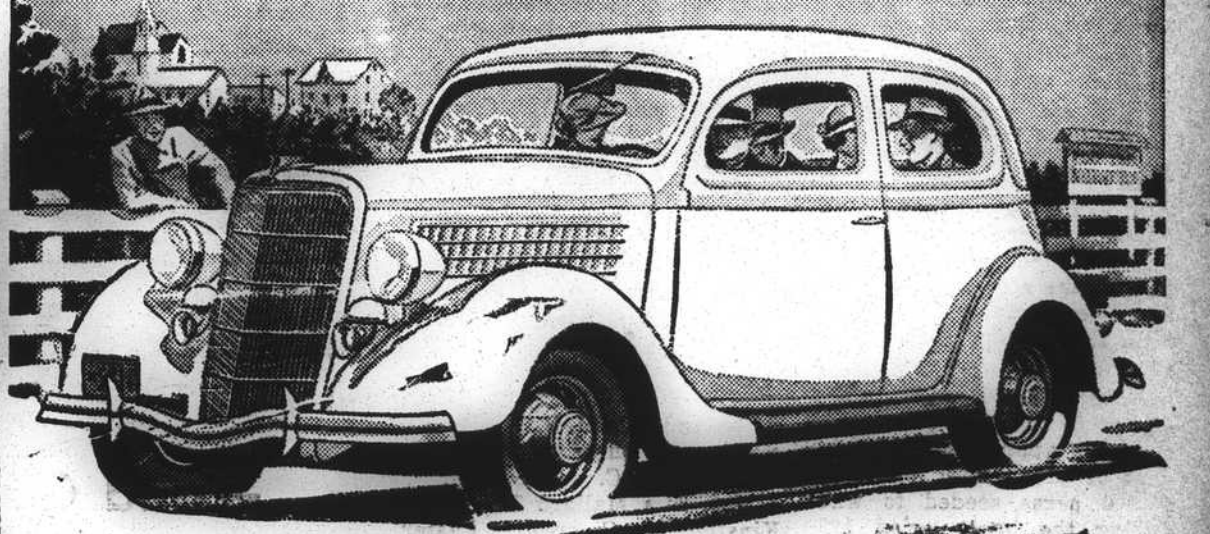
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