

Percy B. St. John



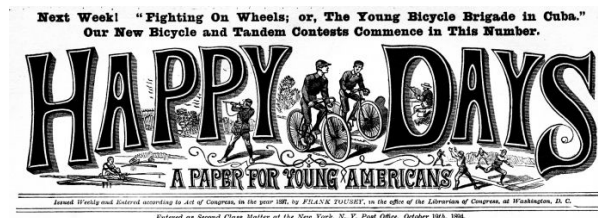
hornhj
eBook

The Klondike Boys

The Klondike Boys; or, Two Yankees on the Yukon

By
R. T. Emmet(Percy B. St. John)

Author of ›The Boy Prospectors,‹ ›Little Lariat,‹ ›The Rise of Eddy Dunn,‹ ›Steel Blade, the Boy Scout of Fort
Ridgely,‹ etc., etc., etc.



Vol VI. NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 4. 1897. No. 151 —
Vol VII. NEW YORK, OCTOBER 23. 1897. No. 158

Table of Contents

The Klondike Boys; or, Two Yakees on the Yukon

Introduction.

Chapter I. Ned.

Chapter II. The mysterious disappearance at Juneau.

Chapter III. Tied to the burning bush.

Chapter IV. On the road to Dawson.

Chapter V. Ned finds Job Travers at last.

Chapter VI. Ned and Joe start up the Klondike in a way they don't like.

Chapter VII. The fearful fight on the Belle.

Chapter VIII. The first strike.

Chapter IX. In big luck-the attack on the Belle.

Chapter X. Dayton, Steele & Cross, owners of the Lilly.

Chapter XI. Getting ready to begin.

Chapter XII. The new camp on Ottertail Creek.

Chapter XIII. Job Travers' dastardly plot foiled.

Chapter XIV. The new diggings on Duck Creek.

Chapter XV. The booming of Lillydale.

Chapter XVI. The midnight robbery on the Belle.

Chapter XVII. The chase down the Klondike.

Chapter XVIII. Lost in the storm.

Chapter XIX. The cry in the night.

Chapter XX. The frozen man.

Chapter XXI. The gold that came with the storm.

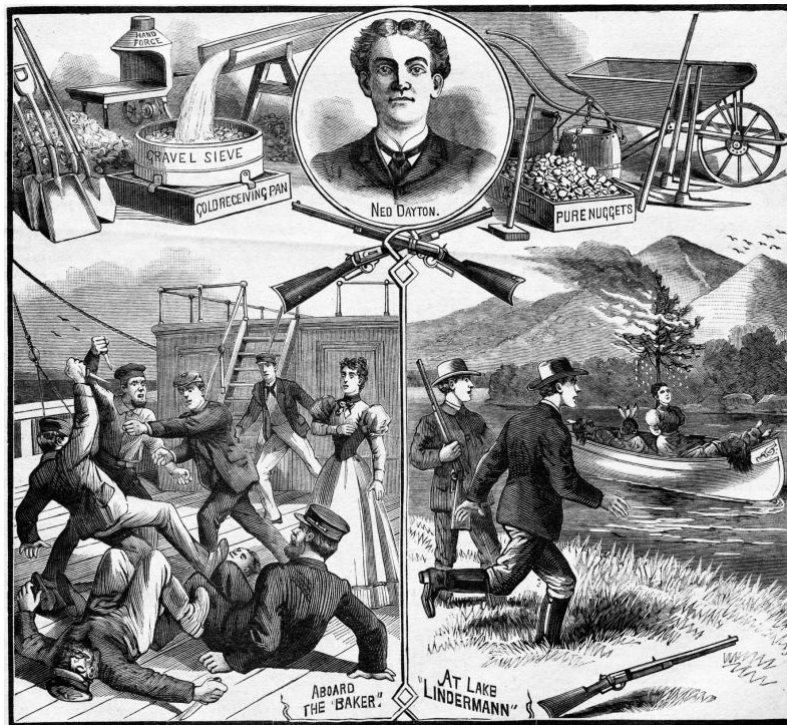
Chapter XXII. Ned and not Joe.

Chapter XXIII. Working for a dead man's dust.

Chapter XXIV. Conclusion.

Introduction.

Many of the gold finds in the Klondike region have been purely accidental, and some of them were decidedly interesting, though perhaps not more so than many accidental finds in our own West in the '40s and '50s. It was before 1850 that three men, while looking for gold in California, discovered the dead body of a man who evidently had been »prospecting.« »Poor fellow!« said one of the trio. »He has passed in his checks!« »Let's give him a decent burial,« said another. »Some wife or mother will be glad if ever she knows it.« They began to dig a grave, Three feet below the surface they discovered the signs of gold. The stranger was buried in another place, and where they located a grave they opened a gold mine. An adventurer, who had drifted into Leadville, awoke one morning without food or money. He went out and shot a deer, which, in its dying agonies, kicked up the dirt and disclosed signs of gold. The poor man staked out a »claim« and opened one of the most profitable mines ever worked in Leadville, »Dead Man's Claim,« the name given to another rich mine in Leadville, was discovered by a broken-down miner while digging a grave. A miner died when there were several feet of snow on the ground. His comrades laid his body in a snow bank and hired a man for \$20 to dig a grave. The grave digger, after three day's absence, was found digging a mine instead of a grave. While excavating he had struck gold. Forgetting the corpse and his bargain, he thought only of the fact that he had »struck it rich.«



Chapter I.

Ned.



Do you want a boy!« Mr. Sandmeyer, the druggist, whose shop is on Olympia street, above Fourth, looked up at the questioner, with a black scowl upon his face.

Not that he was particularly angry, but as everybody knows in Port Townsend, Mr. Sandmeyer is one of ae men who had rather be ugly than pleasant.

When any one he thought bis inferior made a request of him, it was always his way to scowl.

»No! Don't want any boy. Get out!« he growled.

The speaker turned sadly away from the druggist's door.

If you could, have taken off his clothes, and exhibited him in bathing costume, be would have appeared what he really was, a handsome, stalwart young American of eighteen or nineteen years.

Clothes don't make the man, perhaps, but they certainly unmake him as far as appearance goes.

It was this young man's clothes which had prejudiced Mr. Sandmeyer.

No wonder, They were old, dirty and ragged. In fact, the one good thing about them was that there was so little of them, for such clothes as he wore are not a pleasant object of contemplation to the over fastidious eye.

Just an old tattered pair trousers, a dirty, ragged shirt, and a pair of shoes with a hundred holes.

Mr. Sandmeyer put him down as a tramp—there were plenty of them in Port Townsend—and that is one reason why he scowled blackly and replied in his gruff way that he did not want a boy.

The young man made no answer. Turning away from the door with an expression of silent resignation upon his handsome, manly countenance, he trudged on down Olympia street.

As soon as he had departed Mr. Sandmeyer, was sorry.

»Pshaw! What's the use of biting off one's nose to spite one's face,« he muttered. »I don't like tramps, it is true, but I do want a boy.«

So he went to the door and shouted to the young man to come back.

»Well, what can you do?« »he demanded, when the tramp presented himself in the store again.

»Anything,« was the prompt answer.

»Which means nothing,« growled the druggist. »Did you ever work at the drug business before?«

No, sir,«

»Thought not. What's your name?«

»Ned Dayton.«

»Where are you from?«

I am from Chicago, sir.«

»Father and mother dead I suppose, and all that sort of business.«

»Mine are dead,« replied the boy, simply. »Did you want, anything of me, sir, because if you don't —«:

* Perhaps I do. Have you walked all the way from Chicago? You look as though you had.«

»Well, I've come pretty near to it, sir.«

»What brought you out here? Don't you know that there are more people in Port Townsend out of work than you can shake a stick at? There no earthly use in you Eastern fellows coming out here.«

»If you've just called me back to lecture me, I think I'll move on, said the boy. »I've got to find something to do before night, if it's only a job which will bring me in enough for a night's lodging. I can't spend my time talking here.«

Now, this reply was not made impertinently, but in a firm, manly way, which rather impressed the sour old Sandmeyer.

Give you a suit of clothes and your board and lodging, if you'll come and help me out here,« he said. »I don't want a clerk, but just a bey to help me with the rough work and tend the soda fountain.«

»No money?«

»Not a cent. You can eat at my table, and i'll give you a good bed to sleep in, but that's all.

»I'll tale it.«

And this prompt acceptance of the druggist's niggardly offer marked a turning point in the fortunes of Ned Dayton.

It took him off the »road,« and gave him honest occupation.

Mr. Sandmeyer was the gainer by it, for he never had a more faithful helper.

As the winter wore on he began to teach the boy something of the business, finding him an apt pupil—

Spring came—it was the spring of '96. The rains were all over now, and the fog was beginning to roll in through the Strait of San Juan de Fuca.

This meant hot, murky days, and it also meant soda water.

Mr. Sandmeyer did a large business in the latter commodity, and it was part of Ned's duty to tend the fountain.

If Mr. Sandmeyer had seb him to doing something else a the particular April evening, of which we are now about to speak, very likely this story would never have been told,

At eleven o'clock when the tired boy was beginning to think of shutting up, and longing for the time to come, a man who seemed to be about half drunk entered the store and asked for an orange phosphate.

Ned started to draw it from the fountain, but made a failure of it, for the big siphon which supplied it happened to be exhausted.

»Put on another siphon there!« growled Mr. Sandmeyer, s in an unusually uncomfortable humor that night. »Quick, now! Dont keep the gentleman waiting—fly round.«

The more haste the less speed—that good old copy book maxim which every boy knows.

Ned made haste and banged the full siphon against the empty one.

Just what happened then he never exactly knew.

All in an instant there was a fearful explosion, and the show window of the drug store with half its contents went flying out into the street.

Mr. Sandmeyer was deluged with soda water—so was the customer, but Ned escaped.

»You clumsy idiot! You butter-fingered tramp!« roared the druggist, making a dive for the astonished Ned with the carbonic streaming down his face.

He struck the boy a cruel blow and got as good as he sent in return.

Ned's temper was as quick and fiery as the soda in the siphon.

Sandmeyer got it under the chin and went down all in heap, while Ned, frightened at what he had done, clapped on his hat and ran out of the store, pushing his way through the knot of people who came crowding around the scene of the explosion. In a moment he was lost in the fog.

»That's the end of that chapter,« thought Ned as he hurried on my fault, and I won't be treated like a dog. »I'm just tired and sick of it, and —!

»Say, young teller? Hold on!«

A man considerably »under the influence,« suddenly caught Ned by the arm.

Looking around, Ned perceived that it was his customer at the wrecked soda fountain.

»Say,« continued the man, thickly, »you served that old snoozer just right. He's an ugly beggar, and had no right to hit you. Ha! Ha! Ha! You, gave him a good one, but I suppose it will cost you your job.«

»You bet it will,« sighed Ned. »I shan't go back there any more.«

»I guessed as much,« replied the man; »that's why I hurried after you. I want a boy. How would you like to work for me?«

»What at?« asked Ned, rather doubtfully.

Cabin boy on a small steamer. I'm captain. We sail to-night.«

»Wheres are you bound?«

»North.«

»To British Columbia?«

»No, no; nothing of the sort. Don't ask questions. Do you want to go, or don't you? If you do it's a hundred dollars for the trip and everything found. My name is Captain Boyle.

»I'll go.«

Captain Boyle had caught Ned in a reckless mood. For a hundred dollars the boy would have contracted to go to any part of known world that night.

»Settled!« said the captain. »I want just such a bold fellow as you to stand by me in case of trouble. I'll explain later just what I mean. Come on!«

Just in his present mood the mystery of the thing pleased Ned Dayton, and he followed Captain Boyle down to Bridges' Wharf, where they boarded a small boat.

Although pretty well »loaded,« the captain seemed to know how to take care of himself, and soon proved that he was entirely able to manage the boat in the fog.

»You just sit still, my son. Keep quiet and say nothing, and I'll soon have you in as snug a berth as you ever had in your life,« he said, as he took up the oars and pulled away.

Now, Ned knew next to nothing of Port Townsend Harbor. He could not tell whether they were going east, west, north or south, after they had gone a hundred yards away from the wharf.

As soon as they were well under way, Captain Boyle took to talking.

»Look here, boy,« he began, »who are you, anyhow?«

»Nobody in particular,« replied Ned. »I used to live in Chicago, and I came west to seek my fortune, I haven't found it, but as I haven't got anybody belonging to me, I'm not worrying over the situation. I'm willing to take whatever comes.«

»You'll find it if you stick to me, then,« said Captain Boyle. 'Look here, I drink too much whisky. I'm afraid of myself, and I'm afraid of my partners, for they are a hard lot. Take this packet. It contains papers of immense value to me. Hide it; swear that you never saw it—that you never heard of it, if any one asks you for it—understand?«

He put his hand into the inside pocket of his coat, and drew out a small package tied up in brown paper with a red string.

Seeing no reason why he should not take it, Ned concealed it about his person and sat looking at Captain Boyle, wondering what it all meant, as that singular individual pulled rapidly on through the fog.

For about twenty minutes they continued to advance; Ned knew that they must be now pretty well out in the bay.

The captain seemed to know pretty well where he was going, but in spite of that appeared to feel somewhat easy, for every now and then he would look behind him.

Watch for the green light, boy,« he said. »Keep your eye peeled, and sing out as soon as you catch sight of it as soon as you catch sight of it.«

»I see it now,« cried Ned, suddenly. »There it is—right, over there.«

»You're right. That's the J. C. Baker—my steamer—you understand.«

Of course Ned understood nothing about it, nor was necessary, for Captain Boyle steered straight for the light, and in at moment they found themselves alongside a small steamer with a low black hull which seemed to rise up all at once out of the fog.

»On board the Baker!« shouted Captain Boyle.

»Boat ahoy!« was the answer promptly given. »Who are you?«

»Klondike!« was the answer.

It was the first time Ned Dayton ever heard that pad name, soon destined to set the world ablaze.

»To-day Klondike means golden millions, but-it' meant nothing at all to Ned when he heard. it that night.

»Throw us a line!« cried Captain Boyle, as he brought the boat up alongside,

The line went down, and Captain Boyle went up on the deck of the steamer with more agility than Ned would have believed possible, considering his condition, which had beet considering his condition, which had been made none the better by frequent applications to a whisky flask.

Ned followed him.

Four rough-looking men crowded around them when they reached the deck.

»Have you got them?« demanded one.

Just then a strong electric light was flashed over the deck from the pilot-house. It made everything as bright as day.

It showed Ned the faces of the men who had come crowding about them.

Ned thought he had never seen four such desperate-looking customers.

»Yes got them. It's all right,« replied Captain Boyle.

»It is, hey?« said the speaker, »Well, mebbe it is and mebbe it ain't. Here, turn off that light!«

This last was shouted out to the pilothouse, but the light was not turned off just the same.

»What's this, Job Travers? exclaimed Captain Boyle, »I think I'm on my own deck just about this time. Am I master of the Baker or are you?«

»Who's this boy « snarled the man, instead of making a direct reply.

»A friend of mine.«

»What's he here for?«

»Because I want him.«

»That ain't reason enough. We don't want, no more into this thing than is in it now.«

»Who says so?«

»I say so. We all say so. Give up them papers, cap. We all want to know just where about on the Klondike these yere gold mines is located. If not—— »Ah! You're there, are you? Take that!«

Suddenly Captain Boyle drew his revolver and covered the speaker.

He ought to have fired.

He knew that now it was too late.

Instantly all four jumped on him and felled him to the deck.

»The papers! Get the papers, boys!« cried Job Travers. »We have no use for the boss. We'll go on to the Klondike without his help. Get the papers and chuck him into the drink!«

Job Travers drew a glittering knife and raised it above Captain Boyle's heart.

All at once there was a rush and a wild scream.

»Father! Father! Spare my father! Don't kill him, Job!«

It was a pretty young girl who came running across the deck.

»Back out of the way, Lilly, or we'll do you too!« Snarled Travers. »Give up the papers, man! Give up the Papers before I put this thing into your heart.

Lilly screamed and threw herself in front of Travers, who caught her roughly by the arm.

Then it was Ned!

Quick as lightning he struck out, took Travers under the chin and tumbled him over.

Another jumped on him.

It was Ned again!

Down went the the, stunned with a blow of the boy's iron fist.

For Ned was a perfect little athlete, and well trained.

The remaining two jumped on him then and tried to hold the boy.

Still again it was Ned!«

One went over backward, tripped up by a dexterous twist of the boy's 's right leg, while with his left hand he struck out with as much force as though it had been his right, taking the other between the eyes.

There were two more men on the deck in a twinklin.

It was Ned—all Ned!

Chapter II.

The mysterious disappearance at Juneau.

»Tie them up! Here, get the rope, Lilly. I'll keep them covered. Call Joe Steele, the engineer. He's the only square man on this craft. He'll stand by me to the last!«

Gare ain Boyle was on top now.

He had recovered his revolver and brought out another.

Travers still lay unconscious; as for the others, with the muzzles of the revolvers turned toward them, they never moved.

Lilly ran to the mast, and seizing a coil of rope, threw it to Ned.

Before he could use it, a pleasant faced young man, wearing a pair of blue overalls, came running up the companion way.

He seemed to grasp the situation in a moment, and flew to Ned's assistance.

»That's business,« chuckled Captain Boyle; »now my crew is reduced to two, and I'm glad of it. Boy, I thank you. I knew I could depend upon you. It was a lucky thing I picked you up as I did, for you have saved my life.«

»I wasn't going to stand by and see them murder you, sir,« replied Ned, modestly, »You asked me to stand by you in case of trouble, and I did it-that's all.«

»No, it ain't all. It's just the beginning. I'll make you rich for this.«

»I don't want anything but the money you promised me, sir.«

»Yes, you do, and you'll get it. The Baker sails, to-night, but these scoundrels don't go with it. I suspected them from the first. Fools! They sprang their trap too soon. Boy, what's your name?«

»Ned, sir, Ned Dayton!«

»Good! Ned, give me those papers. Thank you. Now let me introduce you to my daughter, Lilly, also to Joe Steele, my engineer. Now then boys, tumble these fellows into the boat and take them ashore. Dump them anywhere just as they are. I see the fog is lifting, and you'll have no trouble in getting back. Lively now! we want to pull out as soon after midnight as possible-by sunrise I expect to be at least eighty miles out to sea.«

Now Ned was no talker. He just made up his mind to stick to Captain Boyle, and so went to work.

It took a block and fall to lower the mutineers into the boat, but Ned and Joe Steele managed to unship them on the beach above Warehouse Point without help.

It was a memorable tap for the boy, for there was some tall talking done by the prisoners on the way.

Travers was the worst.

He begged, threatened, whined and bluffed.

»Don't say a word, no matter what they say to you,« had been Captain Boyle's order when they left the steamer.

It was obeyed implicitly.

But Ned listened with all his ears, you may be sure.

When they started on their return trip, after leaving the four men on the beach without attempting to untie them, Joe Steele began to talk.

»Well, young fellow, I suppose you are wondering what all this means about this time?« he said.

»No,« replied. Ned. »I think I can guess.«

»What «

»A gold mine up in Alaska.«

Joe laughed. »You've heard enough from Job Travers to tell you that,« he said. »Now, look here, the old man is all right; stick to him as I'm going to, but don't say much. He hates talk.«

»You seem to be the right sort. I'll do my talking to you now,« laughed Ned.

»All right; fire away! I suppose this business all looks very mysterious to you?«

»It does; I don't deny that.«

»Well, there ain't any mystery about it at all. Ever heard tell of the gold mines up on the Yukon River in Alaska?«

»Well, only in a general way. I've heard that: there was mining being done there, but I don't know anything more than that.

»Nor do many people. Those who have looked up the matter know different, though. They know that there's the biggest rush the world ever saw coming to the Klondike diggings within the next year.«

»Where is this Klondike?«

»Six hundred miles west of Juneau, just over the boundary in British America.«

»I'm sure I don't know where Juneau is.«

»It's away above Sitka on the Sound which sets in between between this Island and the mainland, right under the Eagle Glacier. You see, I've been there a dozen times. The old man owns the Baker outright, and has been trading with Alaskan ports on his own hook this three years. Job Travers was the first mate, and a bigger scoundrel never went unhung. I'm blame glad to get rid of him, I tell you.«

»I thought you were going to tell me what it's ail about,« said Ned, whose curiosity was growing.

»So I am,« replied Joe. »Last trip down we brought a miner home from the Klondike with us. We thought he was only a poor devil, and completely busted, but when we had been in Port Townsend a few days we were surprised to hear that he was cutting a big splurge; that he had deposited a million in dust in the bank, and was throwing around tones right and left.

»Next the old man knew, he was sent for to see this fellow, whose name was Pete Frazier; he was then in the hospital; it seems he got on a drunk, and had a light, and got the knife into his side. Then, just as he dying, for he died that night, he up and tells the old man that seeing as he had been kind to him, he'd make him rich by telling him just whereabouts on the Klondike he had made his big haul. It was all written out, he said, and the papers were deposited in the bank. Last thing he did was to give the old man an order for them, but the bank folks wouldn't give them up until to day. I knew there'd be trouble when he came aboard with them papers, and there was.«

»Are those the papers he gave me to keep?« asked Ned.

»Course they were. You see the old man had so much faith in the thing, that he went to work and laid in everything necessary for a trip to the Klondike. He is so blame good-hearted that he told us all about it, and it was arranged that he should sell the Baker at Juneau and we should all make a break across country for the Klondike. I warned him not to trust them, but he would do it. Do you know what would have been the result? Job Travers and the rest of them snoozers would have murdered him and seized the steamer if it hadn't been for you. This comes of doing things secret, but, of course, old man naturally felt that he wanted to keep the thing close so that everybody couldn't get onto his plans.«

»And are these mines really so rich?«

»The richest in the world. Just give the Klondike another year and you'll see. If one with us—and I take it that's what he proposes to do, don't you hold back. The old man is as square as a die, and he'll make your fortune for you, sure.«

Hold back!

Ned never thought of such a thing.

From his earliest boyhood he had always had an impression that some day he would be immensely rich.

Was his dream about to be realized now?

He began to think so, when Captain Boyle came to tell him all the details of the affair, which he did before many days had passed.

For Ned remained on board the Baker, which sailed from Port Townsend that night, short-handed as she was.

it seemed almost a crazy undertaking, for beside Joe Steele and Ned, there was only Fung Jee, the Chinese cook, and the fireman, a good-natured Irishman, named Pat Maloney.

It was Pat who had turned on the electric light the night Ned came aboard, perhaps saving the boy's life and the captain's, too.

Of course we must not forget Lilly, the captain's pretty daughter.

Life on Baker would have been nothing without the presence of the girl.

Many was the pleasant hour passed by Ned, listening to her sweet voice, as she sat singing over her work in the cabin, and many a pleasanter one when evening came and she paced the deck with him, while he stood his watch.

As Joe Steele had stated, Captain Boyle was a man of few words. He simply told Ned that he was going to the Klondike; explained the wonderful richness of the diggings, and dwelt on the dangers of the overland trip from Juneau. Then he questioned the boy about his own affairs, and, finding that he was friendless and alone, advised him by all means to accompany them; and after Ned consented, he said no more, but just attended to his duties as though he was on one of his regular trading trips.

So the days passed, and the Baker went on up the coast.

Ned soon learned to steer, and was able to relieve the captain at the wheel, and, as Pat Maloney could attend to the engine well enough under ordinary circumstances, it left Joe comparatively free, and so they got on very well, and in due time dropped anchor off Juneau under the shadow of the great Eagle Glacier.

»It's a wonderful sight to see that great mountain of ice towering above us, is it not, Ned?« remarked Lilly, when just at sunset she came on deck and stood gazing at the glittering heights.

»It's most Beautiful thing I ever saw,« replied Ned. »I think this is a wonderful country altogether.

»If you seen as much of it as I have you'd think so,« said Lilly; »but I expect we know nothing about it compared with what we will know by the time we reach the Klondike.

»Is it very cold there in the winter?« asked Ned

»Fearfully cold they say. Father has laid in provisions for a year for ten people, so there is no possible chance of our suffering for want of food, and as for shelter he will see to that, of course. He is one of the most careful men who ever lived, when- when -«

»I understand, Miss Lilly. You need say no more.«

‘He has never touched a drop since that night, Ned, and he has promised me that he never will again; and unless -«

»Here, here! You young folks mustn’t get too thick,« interrupted the captain, bluffly, happening to come up behind them at that moment.

Ned blushed and drew away, but Lilly only laughed.

»It is the one who blushes who is in love, they say and that laugh sent a pang to Dayton’s heart.

»We can’t make our landing till morning, for the tide is against us,« said the captain. »Turn in now, Ned, and get a good sleep, for I shall want to go ashore before daylight. I’ll call you at half-past three.«

Ned obeyed the order promptly.

He found Joe Steele already in the stateroom, which they shared together.

»We’ll it be right in it by this. tine to-morrow, Ned,« Joe remarked.» Great Scott! I do hope we’ll have luck. Think of being millionaires at your age and mine. Won’t we get something out of life? Well, I guess yes! Wait and see!«

»What’s the first thing you’ll do if you come back with a million, Joe?« Ned asked.

»The first thing? Well, I don’t know, but I know what I’ll do as soon as ever I’ll get the chance.«

»What?«

Joe took a photograph out of his pocket, and held it up.

»That!« he said. »Then if she says yes, there’ll be a wedding, old man.«

It was Lilly’s ’s photograph.

There was a keener pang still in Ned Dayton’s heart before he got asleep that night.

But sleep at last he did, and when he awoke it was broad daylight, and Joe was gone.

Ned sprang out of the bunk and hurriedly began dressing.

»I’ve overslept,« he thought. »Captain Boyle must have called me—I must have one to sleep again, What will he say now?«

He felt very much annoyed and not a little ashamed of himself.

Before he could get into his clothes the state-room door came open, and Joe rushed in, his face as pale asa ghost.

»What is it?« asked Ned.» What in the world is the matter?«

»Matter enough,« gasped Joe; » they’ve gone.

»Who has gone?«

»Everybody! The old man, Lilly, Pat and Fung Jee. Ned, there ain't a soul on board the Baker but ourselves, and yet every boat is in its place, and here we are anchored in the shallows a mile from shore.«

Chapter III.

Tied to the burning bush.

Here was mystery.

It was a mystery to which time offered no explanation.

Ned Joe spent two weeks in Juneau, but not the slightest trace of the missing ones could they discover.

Certainly they had not been seen in Juneau.

»Had the sea which broke at the foot of the great Eagle Glacier a tale to tell?

It seemed incredible, for the night had been perfectly calm, and there was no explanation which could account for the falling overboard of four people, and one, a Chinaman, who was supposed to be sound asleep, with no possible reason to get out of his bunk.

Of course the boys were greatly troubled. Joe, who was of a very demonstrative nature, was almost wild.

The authorities at Juneau took the matter up, and an investigation was set on foot as soon as the boys came off from the steamer and told their story, for Captain Boyle was a very popular man at Juneau.

But it all came to nothing. The Baker was brought up to her wharf the next day, and, after it became certain that Captain Boyle had permanently disappeared, the authorities took charge of the steamer and cargo.

Of course Ned and Joe had no claim on any part of the latter; indeed, it looked at one time as though the young engineer was going to find himself in serious trouble, for there were those in Juneau who hinted that he knew more about the disappearance of Captain Boyle and his daughter than he had told.

But at last it all settled down to a mystery pure and simple, and such it seemed likely to remain.

One day, about three weeks after the arrival of the Baker at Juneau, a party of six prospectors, who had come up by the regular Goodall and Perkins steamer, started for the Klondike.

This, of course, was before the time of the great gold discoveries, and there was comparatively little excitement about their leaving.

Ned only heard of the proposed journey the evening before,

He hurried up to the house where he and Joe were staying and told him about it.

»Let's go with them,« he proposed. »What's the use of hanging around here?«

At first Joe said no, but afterward he consented; so when the prospecting party rode out of Juneau the boys went with them, for Joe had money enough to buy an

outfit for both, and the leader of the band made no objection to their request.

Joe bought a splendid Winchester rifle for Ned-he had one of his own.

Besides this a good supply of provisions were laid in, and blankets and ammunition, and such other things as were necessary for the long and perilous trip.

Leaving Juneau, the little party went to Dyer by way of the Lime Canal in a small steamer.

Horses were not to be thought of in this rough country, and the next stage was a foot journey of thirty miles to Lake Lindermann.

They arrived there just at dusk, and went into camp for the night.

»Now then, gentlemen,« said Captain Tucker, the leader of the band, after supper was over, »you all want to keep very close to- night, for the guide tells me that there is a big band of Chilkat Indians on the warpath, and they have been seen within two days at the upper end of the lake.«

The advice was strictly followed, and no one ventured beyond the limits of the camp that night.

Ned was up at dawn, and attracted by the beauty of the lake, determined to try for a shot at some of the numerous flocks of ducks which flew screaming above their heads.

Joe joined him while he was cleaning his rifle.

»I wouldn't go away from the others,« he said, » Heaven only knows what would become of us if they should happen to make a start before we get back.«

»Oh, pshaw! There's no danger« replied Ned. »Come on! We won't go far. I can't see that we run any risk at all.«

Joe allowed himself to be persuaded.

Shouldering their rifles, the boys started up the lake shore, and were soon out of sight of the the camp, passing around the base of a hill.

They had now entered upon a broad stretch of meadow. The lake here was studded with small islands, and nothing could exceed the beauty of the scene.

»There's a shot!« cried Ned suddenly, as a flock of redheads came settling down at the mouth of a little creek.

He flung up his rifle and fired three times.

Two ducks were seen floating on the surface of the creek after the flock rose.

The boys ran down to the bank, but they could not get them, for they were too far out.

»What's that smoke?« exclaimed Joe suddenly pointing to a wooded island about two hundred yards out on the lake.

A faint column of smoke was curling up above the trees.

»Can it be the Chilkats?« questioned Ned.

»By gracious, if it is we want to know it! Drop down here in the moss and watch.«

Now, in Alaska the meadow moss grows to enormous size, and when the boys crouched down in it they were completely concealed.

But they were up again in an instant, for all at once a wild scream in a woman's voice rang out over the lonely lake.

Great Heavens! What was that?« cried Joe. »It sounded like —«

»What?«

»Don't think me crazy, Ned! Like Lilly's voice!«

Ned turned pale.

»See the smoke!« he exclaimed; »it's getting thicker—it's moving this way!«

»There it goes again!« cried Joe, as the scream was repeated. »It is Lilly! It - oh, Ned! Look!«

Suddenly a birch bark Canoe came into view around the point of the island.

There were four Indians seated in it, two in the bow and two astern.

Their heads were hanging down, and they lay over against the sides of the canoe—they seemed to be asleep or dead.

But this was not all.

A midships was a small, hemlock tree, such as the Indians are accustomed to fix in their canoes to serve as a sail, and seated under it they could see a young girl with her hands tied behind her, bound to the tree which had taken fire in some way and was blazing furiously.

It was Lilly, sure enough!

Her sweet face was turned upward, her eyes were closed, the burning hemlock needles were dropping all around her.

»Merciful Heaven! Look!« gasped Joe, and without another word he flung aside his Winchester and plunged into the lake.

Chapter IV.

On the road to Dawson.

Joe Steele was as brave a boy as could be found in Alaska or anywhere else, but if he had been unable to swim this would have amounted to but little, for Lake Lindermann is deep, and its water icy cold, and there would have been a poor show of reaching the burning boat.

But Joe could swim like a duck, and Ned, whose practice had been in the cold waters of Lake Michigan, was not far behind him in the art, or in promptness of action now.

He plunged into the water after Joe, and struck out boldly for the burning boat.

Before they could reach it they knew that it was certainly Lilly Boyle who was tied to the burning bush.

Lilly saw them coming, and called to Joe by name.

»Quick, Joe, quick!« she screamed.

»Save me!«

Nothing else was needed to send Joe on faster, if it was possible for him to swim faster than he was swimming then.

A moment more, and he was alongside the boat, and before he could climb in Ned was with him.

To cut Lilly from her perilous position, was the work of a moment. They seized the burning bush and tumbled it overboard; Joe's strong arms were supporting Lilly; Ned took up the oars and began pulling the boat ashore.

Meanwhile, the Indians never moved. They were sound asleep and snoring. Anybody could see with half an eye, that they were dead drunk.

Lilly seemed so much overcome, that the boys did not attempt to question her till they were safe on shore. The poor girl just sat with her head against Joe's shoulder, breathing hard; she seemed to revive as Ned pulled the boat along, and by the time they reached the shore she was quite herself again.

»Come away, Joe. Leave them where they are; let's get out of their sight as quick as possible,« she then said.

The boys caught up their rifles, and with Lilly between them made for the shelter of a piece of woods further down the lake shore.

»Now I'll talk«, said Lilly, as soon as they were out of sight of the boat. »Boys, I suppose you are off for the Klondike—is that what brought you up here?«

»Of course,« replied Joe, 'It's your story we want to hear though, Lilly. Ours is simple and soon told.«

»So is mine, Joe, but oh, it's sad. Father is dead. They killed him!«

»Lilly!«

»Yes; it was Job Travers, Oh, Joe, they got up to Juneau ahead of us, coming by the regular steamer. That dreadful night they came aboard the Baker and seized poor father and me. It was a fearful time when I woke up and found Job Travers' fingers about my throat. They had killed father then, and Fung Jee, too, who must have tried to help him. They made me a prisoner before I could even scream for help, and then when they dragged me up on deck I saw them throw father's body overboard. It was an awful thing, Joe! They tumbled: Fung Jee after him, and then they carried me away in their boat.«

»And left us asleep behind,« said Joe, »Oh, Lilly, if I had only known.«

But Ned said nothing, deeply as he was moved at the sad intelligence of Captain Boyle's untimely fate, for it seemed to him to be a sort of family affair in which he was less concerned than Joe.

»They did not seem to remember about you two,« continued Lilly; »or at least if they did, they didn't say anything, and I was gagged and couldn't have called you if I would. After we left the Baker they rowed ashore landing at the head of a cove two miles below Juneau. They had secured all father's papers and were determined to start for the Klondike, and we did start, but Travers was drunk most of the time, and they lay for a week in camp at the head of the lake, drinking and carousing. Last night I persuaded the Indian guides to desert and take me down to Juneau, but as soon as they got away, they made me a prisoner, and began drinking themselves. Their idea was to make me write to some of father's friends in Juneau for money. As we came down along the lake they grew worse and worse, until at last only that big buck you saw in the stern was able to hold himself up. He managed to keep awake till daylight, and then all at once he fell over, too. He was trying to light his pipe at the time, and somehow the match managed to set the tree afire. I thought my time had come then, when all at once I saw you jump in the water, and—and—oh, Joe, I have suffered so much, and I am so glad to be here with you!«

»We shan't part again, Lilly,« said Joe, »Ned, Lilly must go with us! You say so, old man?«

»Will she ever reach the Klondike alive?« replied Ned. »Think of the dangers before us!«

»Can we send her back?«

»I won't go,« said Lilly, »Boys, I want to say a word, I'm no child; you are going to the Klondike and I'm going with you, but I realize my position. A woman can't go where a man can. In other words—« and Lilly blushed —»I want to borrow a

suit of clothes of one of you. Ned's will fit me best and I want them. Then I am with you, and you'll never hear one complaining word out of my mouth.

»You shall have them,« said Ned, »I don't see what else you can do but go with us, Lilly.«

»I'm bound to go, Father's heart was set on this expedition, and I'm going to carry out his wishes, We may meet Job Travers on the Klondike, and then I'll get what I want—what I am going to live for now.«

»Revenge!« said Joe.

»Say rather vengeance,« replied Lilly. »Now, then, boys, we must act. Your camp is near here, I suppose—who'll go for the clothes?«

It was Ned who went, and Lilly was left with Joe.

Poor Ned! His friendship was severely tried in the days which followed, for his heart was already lost to Lilly, yet the noble fellow would never have said a word or raised a finger to wrong his friend.

Dressed in a suit of Ned's clothes, Lilly Boyle accompanied the boys back to camp.

Not a man in the party seemed to suspect her identity. The boys introduced her as »Jack« Boyle, a friend of theirs who had preceded them to Lake Lindermann. They pretended that they expected to meet their friend at the lake and told a plausible story which was believed, for in Captain Tucker's party it was much the same as with other companies of a similar character; every man was interested only in himself and his own affairs,

It was ten o'clock before the start was made down the lake, for the Chilkat Indians, who were to furnish means of Transportation, were slow in arriving with their canoes.

-Then all went aboard, and the second stage of the terrible journey was accomplished in safety.

Nothing was seen of Job Travers' party when they reached the foot of the lake, although the boys were on the lookout for them, you may be very sure.

It was five miles to the foot of the lake, Then followed a weary tramp to the head waters of Lake Bennett, the canoes being carried on the backs of Indians.

A twenty four mile sail down Lake Bennett was the next stage; then it was another land journey to the Canibor River, which furnishes transportation for four miles to Tagish Lake, w yen another ride of nineteen miles may be had.

This was followed by a weary tramp over a stretch of mountainous country to Marsh Lake, which afforded another lift of nineteen miles, thence down the creek

to White Horse Rapids, one of the most dangerous places, in the entire route, for the stream is full of sunken rocks, and the water runs like a mill race.

It taxed Captain Tucker's ingenuity severely to get his little party safely over this dangerous stretch of the journey.

But the captain was a man of pluck and energy—a thorough Yankee always wide awake. It would have been difficult to have found a better man for the purpose. The dreaded White Horse Rapids were passed in safety, and the canoes shot down the river thirty miles to Lake Labange, where there was thirty-one miles of smooth sailing to Louis River.

Here the little company enjoyed a three days' rest previous to starting upon the two hundred mile land journey to Fort Selkirk.

This was the hardest pull of all.

More than once Ned and Joe thought that Lilly was going to give out, but, the girl stood up against all the trials and hardships which she was called upon to endure most bravely.

No one ever suspected her identity, for the three kept very much to themselves.

At several points they had heard of Job Travers party, and it had now become certain that the rascally mate was ahead of them.

They were still ahead when Captain Tucker's party reached Fort Selkirk, and the boys came to the conclusion that they were not destined to meet short of Dawson.

From Fort Selkirk, where the Louis and Pelly rivers come together to Dawson is all plain sailing.

Our Klondike Boys were near their journey's end.

On the evening when our Klondike Boys, accompanied by Lilly Boyle and Captain Tucker's party, entered Dawson, the people in that far distant settlement little imagined what was in store for them.

It was now the spring of '96. They never guessed that '97 was to bring them the maddest rush of gold seekers the world ever saw.

Then comparatively few persons knew of the fabulous riches of the Klondike, although many a shrewd old miner had the secret treasured in his breast.

Just at sundown Captain Tucker's party came in sight of a little collection of low shingle root houses in the distance.

A little later the canoes entered the farfamed Youkon river, which rivals the Mississippi in size.

»That's Dawson!« said Ned, pointing, »We are almost there.«

»What next?« mused Joe. »Shall we make our stake, or are we going to begin on a fool's errand, after all?«

Lilly signed.

»We are doing what my poor father would have had us do,« she said. »If Job Travers is here, we are going to find him—we are going to recover the stolen papers, and then -«

»And then,« broke in Ned, »we are going to work old Pete Frazer's claim for all it is worth.«

Chapter V.

Ned finds Job Travers at last.

Now, we have said very little about the trials and troubles of the journey thus happily accomplished; so little that some may be disposed to think that the danger did not amount to very much after all.

Just the contrary is the truth. The journey was indeed a terrible one, but for all that our Klondike boys and Lilly stood it wonderfully well.

They had never enjoyed better health than on the night they arrived at Dawson.

Whatever Lilly's feelings about her father may have been, she kept them to herself and was bright and cheerful always. The who grew to know her among Captain Tucker's little band liked her extremely; but Lilly kept her secret well and no one ever guessed that she was a girl.

That night the party put up at the »Queen's Hotel,« along building of rough boards in which rooms were roughly partitioned off.

They remained there a week, Ned and Joe mingling with the miners in the saloons and gambling houses, although personally the boys never touched a drop of liquor or turned a card, and in this way they picked up a great deal of valuable information about the gold mines.

But on one point they entirely failed to inform themselves, Nothing whatever could be learned of Joe Travers and his party.

If the murderous mate had come to Dawson he must have promptly left it again, for no trace of him could be found.

One evening the three friends sauntered out for a stroll and to talk over affairs, for there was little or no chance for private talk in the hotel, with the living room crowded with miners and the sleeping rooms little bigger than prison cells.

The street was crowded—it was about the only street there was then in Dawson. Roughly dressed men were standing in little groups here and there, pushing their way in and out the saloons and gambling houses, for, be it understood mining for gold has been going on around Dawson for the past ten years.

But this crowd was nothing. The Dawson of to-day is a city of tents and growing growing like a weed.

»We may as well give up all thought of finding Travers here,« remarked Joe, as they walked on; »even if he has been in Dawson, which I very much doubt, he is certainly here no longer. I think the best thing we can do is to start up the Klondike River tomorrow, stake out a claim and go to work. What do you say, Ned?«

»I say, yes, decidedly,« replied Ned. »I was talking with a lot of old miners in Wickett's saloon this morning; they seemed to take a fancy to me, and 'got right in with them. The reports they give of the diggings on the Klondike are great.«

»And I suppose we are just as liable to strike Job Travers up the Klondike as we are here,« said Lilly. »I'm with you, boys, but there's one e thing I want to say.«

»What's that?« asked Joe.

»I'm tired of this disguise. I go in my proper clothes. I have made the acquaintance of Mrs. Merrit, the wife of the landlord of the Queens. She guessed my secret, and I was obliged to confess to her that she was right.«

»And she advises you to make the change, Lilly?«

»Most decidedly. Her sister, a respectable widow, is anxious to go with us as cook when we start cur camp, and I've half agreed to take her.«

»Do it, by all means, She'll be company for you, and-hello! What's going on in here?«

It was only a gambling-house row—something which was of nightly occurrence in Dawson even then.

Shots and shouts could be heard proceeding from a small gambling saloon, which opened right off the sidewalk.

The boys paused and looked in through the door. Three men were standing by the bar root their revolvers at random about the room.

»get back out of the way, Lilly!« cried Joe. »It won't do for you to be here. - Get back to the hotel as quick as you can!«

It was an exciting moment.

Men had dropped upon the floor and crawled under the tables. The toughs who were doing the firing, were shouting for someone to »come outside and fight like a man!«

»We'd better get out of this,« said Joe. »We ain't in it, and the tere is no reason why we should risk our lives.«

»Wait, « breathed Ned. ' Don' t you see?«

»What?«

»Look at that fellow, who is doing the firing—the further one.«

»Can't see his face—the light is in my eyes.«

»It's Job Travers! It's my father's murderer!« cried Lilly, who had not moved.

They had to hold her then; the excited girl would have run right into the saloon.

Al an instant the lights were extinguished, and there was a rush for the door.

The popping of the revolver, and the wild shouts of the gamblers made a tremendous din.

Joe caught Lilly's arm, and Grawing her aside, held her with an iron grip.

»Here he comes!« cried Ned.

Two men dashed past them.

They were the two who had begun the firing, and they were followed by a shower of shots from others still in the saloon.

One fell dead at Ned's feet.

The brave boy seized the other, wrenching his revolver away, just as the fellow was about to turn it upon him.

This was Travers.

He recognized Joe Steele if not Ned, and with a smothered imprecation tore himself away and ran.

»Stand where you are! I mean business!« shouted Ned, firing as he started after him.

The shot was a miss as others had been, which were fired out of the saloon.

Travers did not wait for a second, but rang over a low fence, which separated the saloon from the building next beyond.

»After him!« cried Lilly. »That man must not escape! Joe, I'll go back! »You go with Ned.«

Joe leaped the fence after Ned, but the crowd clustered about the dead man, and no one made a move to help the boys.

Ned ran like the wind.

So did Job Travers.

Passing through the yard behind the saloon, he leaped a second fence, pausing only to fire back at Ned.

Ned sprang up, caught the palings, and drew himself on top of the fence.

He could hear Joe coming across the yard full speed but he could see nothing of Travers when he looked beyond the fence.

A steep slope ran down to the Yukon.

The place was strewn with packing, boxes, empty barrels and other rubbish thrown out of the stores on the main street.

‘He's run down to the river, that's what,« thought Ned.

Then he thought of Lilly and kind Captain Boyle.

»I'll take him or know the reason why,« muttered the boy, setting his teeth.

He jumped down from the fence—jumped right into the arms of the enemy, so to speak.

For Job Travers had been hiding behind an empty packing case, and he sprang out and caught Ned by the throat.

»You son of a sea, cook! I know you now!« he hissed. »You will monkey with me, will you? I tell you it would be better if you had never been born!«

And the murderous mate choked poor Ned until he was black in the face, shaking him again and again.

Chapter VI.

Ned and Joe Start up the Klondike in a way they don't like.

Ned Dayton was a strong boy for one of his age, and his pluck was equal to his strength.

Taken off his guard at first he came very near meeting his fate at the hands of Job Travers, but with a mighty effort he managed to tear himself free and get at his revolver.

The mate took a new tack at once. He wrenched the revolver out of the boy's hand and fired point blank.

It would have been all day with Ned if he had not had the sense to drop.

Travers thought him dead, perhaps, for he turned and ran down to the river; and he can scarcely be blamed for thinking so, for Ned struck his head against a sharp stone and lay stunned, knowing nothing until a few minutes later he found Joe bending over him, trying to call him back to life.

Ned shook himself, and was on his feet in an instant.

»There's nothing the matter with me,« he cried »Where is he? Which way did he go?«

»The mate?«

»Yes, yes!«

»I saw him running down to the river, I was afraid he'd done you, Ned, and so -«

»Oh, bother! I'm all right. We must get him, Joe!«

They ran »own the hill, crouching low, and keeping as much out of sight as possible. At the river's bank there was a large pile of cord wood, behind which they paused to reconnoiter.

»I bet anything you like he's gone on board that little steamboat,« whispered Ned, after a minute. »See, she's getting ready to pull out.«

The boat in question was a small, flatbottomed affair, with a big stern wheel—the same Style as the boats which run up down the California rivers. There was a man in the wheel house, and another on deck, moving about.

»Get your lines ready! the man in the wheel house shouted, »Cap's come aboard, and we are off for the Klondike River right away, I reckon! I'll be back in five minutes. Don't you' get yourself out of sight!«

Then the man came out of the wheel house and went below.

»I'll bet you what you like Travers is on board there,« whispered Joe.

»I'm going to know,« answered Ned, »Now's our chance-see, that fellow's going forward, Joe, do you dare to follow me?«

»Aboard?«

»Yes.«

»I dare to go wherever you dare, Ned.«

»Here goes then. Keep your hand on your revolver. It will make Lilly happy if we can get Travers, and I'd dare a good deal for that.

»We can't get him, Ned. »Twouldn't do. Remember we are Americans on Canadian soil, and the laws are very peculiar, We'd only bring a lot of trouble on ourselves if we were to try, but we may be able to get onto ble, movements and so capture him later on.«

»We'll go, anyhow,« breathed Ned. »No more ti talk now, old man.«

Now, it must be admitted that it re required downright pluck to board the little steamer under such circumstances as these, but the boys did it.

They pulled themselves up on deck by aid of a rope which hung down, and paused to listen, crouching down behind some hampers of provisions. No one was to be seen; the man who had been told to stand by had vanished, but voices could be heard talking in the cabin.

Ned held up his finger for silence and stole down the companion way.

The cabin door stood partly open. Two men were seated at a table talking.

One was Travers and the other the man they had seen in the wheel house.

Spread out before the mate upon the table were several closely written papers.

Joe instantly recognized them as the ones Captain Boyle had shown him, and which had been placed in his charge.

He touched Joe, and pointed, but did not attempt to speak.

»I've got 'em again!« Travers was saying. »I caught him in Big Jake's and did him up, but poor Nick was shot by the crowd.«

»You must have had a deuce of a time of it,« said the other. »Sure they are what you want? I ain't much on the read myself, but I suppose you are and know.«

»Why of course, I know, These are Pete Frazer's papers, fast enough. They tell about his old diggings; the richest claim on the Klondike. I tell you man, people in Dawson have no idea of the riches if this region. Pete dug down to bed rock through ground that is frozen solid the year round, and found gold enough to sink a ship. It's all nuggets and coarse dust, the bed rock is strewn with it. You can dig any way and take out tall' the way from five to five hundred dollars to the pan.« What we want to do is to get right up there and stake our claims. This Klondike region is going to be the scene of the biggest gold rush the world ever witnessed before another year.«

»I know, that, « replied the other. »They are doing it away up the Klondike now, and they are doing it on Bonanza creek, and on Eldorado creeks, and up to French gulch, and on Adams creek and_ other places. It's all true just as you say, but is this claim of Pete Frazer's really an good? Does it amount to anything, after all?«

»It amounts to millions—that's what, Will you start up there or not, for by time if you won't somebody else will.«

»Oh, I'll go all right. I've made up my mind to go.«

»Then start the Belle now. They'll be after me that job I did in Big Jake's. These papers tell the whole business and they tell also where Pete Frazer hid a lot of gold nuggets. I tell you man, it's the chance of a lifetime and it must be taken. Look here, I've been up there. I'll prove my words.«

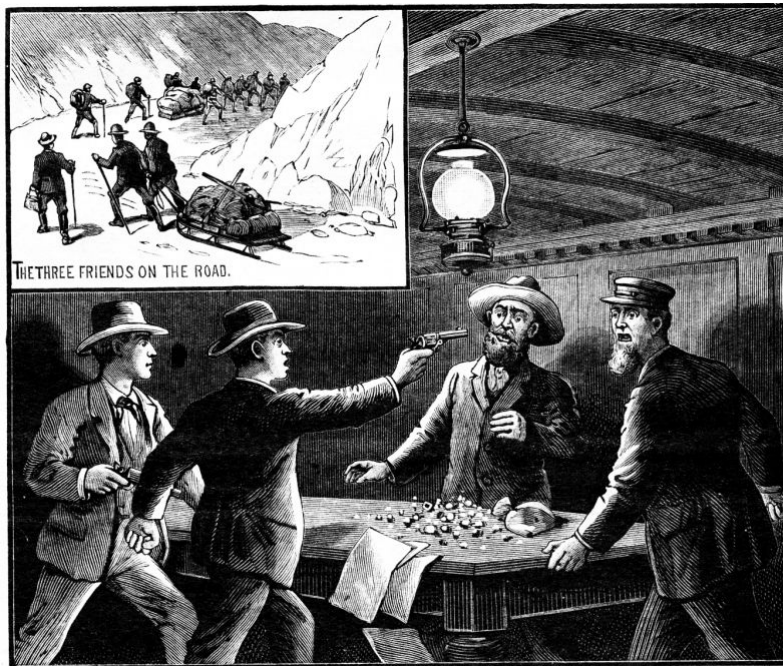
Then Job Travers tools from his pocket a little moose skin bag, and opening it, strewn its contents over the table.

Golden nuggets! hundred or shore of them! They caught the light of the hanging lamp glitteringly.

What do you say to that?« the mate cried.

There was no time to say anything. Ned had heard enough.

»I'll have those papers if die for it!« he breathed in Joe's ear. »Follow me!«



Suddenly they burst into the cabin, covering the mate and his friend with their revolvers.

The astonished men sprang to their feet.

Job Travers clutched at the nuggets, but Ned Dayton swept the papers from the table as he pushed the revolver in the villain's face.

»Not this time, Job Travers!« he cried. »Surrender, or it will be the worse for you!«

Ned was bold, but Travers was too quick for him.

He flung himself over the table and got a grip on the revolver, wrenching it away, at the same time dealing Ned a blow between the eyes which sent him to the floor like a stone.

It was a bad turn of affairs.

Joe got his share, too, for the man with the mate jumped on him before he could fire.

Ha! Ha!. We've got 'em!« chuckled Travers. »Just what I want! These two boys must never leave the Belle alive! Here, help me tie 'em up, and then start your old tub up the river. I'll tell you who they are later on.«

Ten minutes alter that the Belle was steaming out into the Yukon.

She was bound for the Klondike gold diggings.

And Ned and Joe went with her, prisoners, bound hand and foot, on the cabin floor.

Chapter VII.

The fearful fight on the Belle.

There was no denying that our Klondike Boys had got themselves into a serious fix.

Job Travers was a very desperate man, and one likely to stick at nothing to attain his ends.

Just what his end was in this instance Ned Dayton and Joe Steele found out before the steamer had proceeded many miles up the Klondike river, for the mate, who had left them at the time the Belle pulled out from Dawson, came back into the cabin after an hour or so and began to talk.

»Now, then, you young snoozers,« he began, throwing himself into a chair and putting his heels up on the cabin table, »I've got time to attend to your case. How do you feel down there on the floor? Pretty uncomfortable? I want you to be as uncomfortable as possible, I shall be suited then, Hal Ha! Ha!«

It' was scarcely necessary to put the question. The boys were seated with their backs against the side of the cabin, and their hands tied behind them. It would be hard to find a more uncomfortable situation, for the jar and shake of the flimsy old stern wheeler was tremendous, and they got it all.«

»You'd better not go too far with us, Job,« said Joe Steele, who, of course, knew the mate well. »We've got good friends in Dawson. You —«

»Bah! Hold your jaw! What's the use of giving me a bluff like that, Joe Steele? See here! you want to understand this situation, You two would have been done on the Baker that night if I hadn't had good reason to believe you had gone ashore.«

»Lucky for us,« replied Ned; »but if I'd only woke up, it wouldn't have been so lucky for you.«

»Shut your head. I don't want to spend all night talking; answer my questions, and then —«

»Then what?«

»We'll see; it depends upon how you answer. Perhaps I'll kill you, and perhaps I'll decide to let you live. Remember the night you took me ashore at Port Townsend, tied up as you are now? Tit for tat, my child. I don't forget. Say, Lilly Boyle was captured by the Indians down at Lake Lindermann. Did you see anything of her I meant to marry the girl, and I'm blame sorry that she got away from me as she did.«

»No; we have seen nothing of her,« replied Joe, steadily. »I don't believe a word you say. You killed her on the Baker when you killed her father and poor Fung

Jee!«

»It's a lie! I—but stop; I won't argue this out with you; business is business, and I'm here on business. I want the other paper Pete Frazer gave Captain Boyle. I mean the one which tells where he hid his main pile when he left the Klondike. Which of you has it; say?«

Of course neither of the boys had the paper, and they both said as much, but the mate wouldn't hear a word.

»You've got it or you know where it is,« he persisted. »I'll give you half an hour to produce it in; if you don't do it in that time, overboard you go—that is after I've searched you and found the paper as I surely shall. See?«

»You can search all you like but you'll not find the paper, because we haven't got it,« said Joe. »I tell you again, Job Travers, don't you go too far, or you'll get yourself into trouble.«

»Oh, dry up! You're only a couple of kids; who'd bother their heads about you? Why, men die every day up here at Dawson, and boys don't count. Do you know where we are going? Let me tell you and don't you interrupt. I'll give you some idea of what this country really is.«

Here the mate stopped to light a cigar, resuming:

»I'm up in this business and you ain't. I've been up the Klondike before. I tell you, you have no idea of the richness of the place. Why, there is one fellow up there—his name is Clarence J. Berry—who is digging out the nuggets by the quart. Then there's Frank Piscator and Bill Stanley, both working out hundreds a day. This is no child's play. This is a man's business. There's no room on the Klondike for boys.«

He talked on in the same vein for some time.

All that he said was true, but even the Dawson people were a good deal in the dark then about the wonderful richness of this region, which covers hundreds of square miles of Canadian territory, and is supposed to extend over the American boundary into Alaska, and eastward into the unexplored regions around the mouth of the Mackenzie River. In fact, comparatively little is known on the subject now.

But the great boom predicted by Job Travers has already come.

Less than a month ago some of these very men mentioned by the mate came down to Seattle, in Washington, each with a fortune in gold dust and nuggets.

Clarence J. Berry, one of these Klondike kings brought \$84,000 in nuggets and is said to have taken out \$130,000 more.

The Bill Stanley referred to by the mate came with him, having \$112,000 and left behind interests valued at \$2,000,000.

Others with piles averaging \$40,000, \$70,000 and \$80,000, and all tell of the fabulous richness of the region. In short there is nothing like it—never has been anything like it in the world.

But at that time the Klondikers were keeping a close mouth and sending discouraging reports down to Dawson.

The longer they could keep off the rush, the better for them.

Job Travers dwelt upon this a while longer, and then went out of the cabin, saying:

»I'll give you ten minutes to think it over, and then it will be the last call. Remember what I say, for I'm a man who always keeps his word.«

»This is a bad business, Ned,« sighed Joe, as soon as he had departed. »What in, the world are we going to do?«

»What can we do? I haven't got the paper, and wouldn't give it up if I had.«

»Don't believe Captain Boyle had it either. Don't believe there ever was any such paper.«

»I doubt it myself; but he believes it, and there you are.«

»Hush! He's coming back again, We've got to give him some sort of a bluff, or there'll trouble sure.«

But they were mistaken, It was not Job Travers who opened the cabin door.

A brown, boyish face, half hidden with long black hair, peered in upon them.

Hello! an Indian!« breathed Ned.

»Me come in?« said the boy, cautiously closing the door. »Hush! Don't make noise. Me fix you. Huh him bad man-him beat Frank so—see~me fix you, you fix him.«

The, Indian boy drew up his sleeve and showed great raw welts on his arm, where he seemed to have been struck with a whip.

»Did Job Travers do that, Frank?« asked Ned, grasping the situation with a ray of hope.

»Yes, um did. Say, you fix him.«

»We will.«

»Bully! Den me fix you.«

Little Frank's black eyes snapped, and he whipped out a knife and cut the boys free.

»Take up knife! Go for him! He up on deck,« said Frank. »Engineer be good man—he all right, Kill Cap. Batters, too.«

The boys softly opened the door and stole up on deck.

All was as still as death, except for the swash of the big stern wheel.

The stars were shining with a brightness unknown in more temperate latitudes,
On either side stretched the vast forests of cedar, pine and hemlock.

But not a sign of human habitation. The Belle had by this time run about ten miles up the Klondike river. They were in one of the wildest and most desolate regions in the known world.

»Where is he?« whispered Ned, as the boy Frank stole up to him.

»Dere!« whispered Frank, pointing to the Wheel-house. »He in dere with Capt. Batters. Oh, he bad man!«

They crept on over the deck.

»Go Slow, Ned!« Whispered Joe. You won't kill him.«

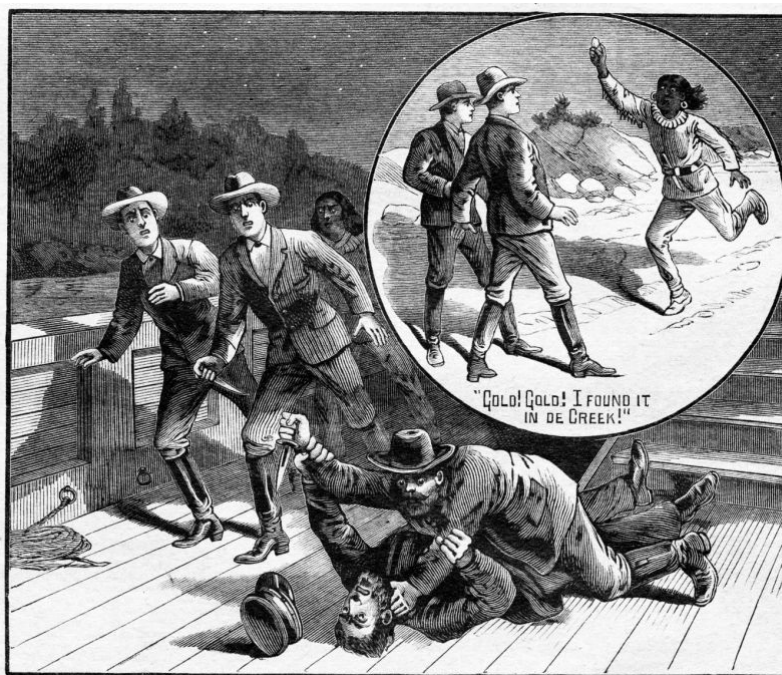
»No, no! I'll only defend myself; but I'll take no chances, Joe. Remember Lilly. Think of what would become. of her if anything happened to us—I mean to you.«

Before Joe could answer, two figures suddenly stepped in front of the light which burned in the pilot-house.

The boys recognized Job Travers and Captain Batters.

Thes had clenched and were struggling fiercely.

»Help! Murder!« yelled the captain of the Belle.



»Heavens! He is trying to kill him!« gasped Joe. It had come so suddenly upon the boys that they could only stand and stare.

»Give up that bag of nuggets! Give it up, you blame thief!« they heard Job Travers shout. Then a knife flashed—the pilot-house door flew open, and both men rolled down the steps locked in each other's arms.

Suddenly they staggered to their feet still straggling fiercely; then Travers seemed to get the best of it. He clutched Captain Batters by the waist and raised him bodily over the guards, with the evident intention of tossing him into the river.

The doomed man gave a wild yell of terror, and managing to get his arms free, threw them about Job Travers' neck.

He could not dislodge them. It was a dead weight pulling. All in a minute the boys saw him lose his balance and both went toppling over the low rail, striking the water with as splash.

And the Belle, without a hand to guide her, went steaming on up the Klondike under the stars.

Chapter VIII.

The first strike.

Startled out of all power of action, the boys bent over the rail and stared down into the icy waters of the Klondike.

But they could see nothing of the mate or Captain Batters.

Had the two men sunk to the bottom locked in that same death struggle?

The Indian boy thought so and he danced and shouted on the deck with joy.

»By gracious! that's a settler!« gasped Ned. »The papers are lost forever now.«

»I s'pose we ought to try to save them if we can,« said Joe.

»But we can't. What can we do?«

»We must do something pretty quick then. Don't you see that the steamer is running head on to the shore.«

Left without a guiding hand, the Belle had slightly changed her course, and was steaming toward a wooded point.

Joe ran to the pilot-house, and caught the wheel.

But he was not quick enough.

Joe was a good engineer but no pilot, Inside of two minutes he ran the steamer hard and fast on the sands of a little cove.

»There! Now you've done it« cried Ned. »Back water! Get her off while you can.«

»Can't do it. She's stuck fast! Where's that boy?«

»Blest if I know. He seems to have vanished. We'll have the engineer to deal with now, for the wheel has stopped.«

Joe rang the bell to back, but it was not responded to.

A moment later a young man of about their own age came hurrying toward the pilot-house followed by the boy Frank.

»Hello! called. »Who are you two fellows? By Jove! you've made a mess of it, but I can forgive you, seeing that old Batters and that scoundrel Job Travers have gone by the board. My name's Arthur Cross-shake!«

It was the same young man they had seen when they first boarded the Belle, and a bluff, hearty fellow he seemed to be.

The boys shook hands cordially.

Ned tried to explain the situation and to apologize for Joe.

»Oh, you needn't say a word. I'm only too glad to get rid of them,« said the engineer. »I've only been on the Belle two weeks and I've had enough of it.

Wouldn't have touched the job if I hadn't been busted, although engineering is my trade.«

»Where did you come from?« asked Ned.

»Frisco,« replied Cross, »I used to work in a machine shop there, but I got disgusted and started for Alaska; little by little I drifted up here, and here, you, bet your sweet life, I'm going to stay, for if there is a spot on the face of the earth where a man can make his pile, it is right here on the Klondike. Put that in your pipe and smoke it, for it's true!«

He seemed to be a real downright good fellow, this engineer.

After the boys had told something of their story, and they began to feel pretty well acquainted, another attempt was made to get the steamer off.

It proved a failure.

Her big wheel seemed to have become imbedded in the debris at the bottom of the river, and her prow had been deep in the sand.

They worked hard for more than an hour, but were unable to dislodge her.

At it was determined to lie by till morning, and Frank, who acted as cook, set a good supper on the table, and they went down into the cabin to eat, afterward lying down for a little rest.

Morning dawned bright and clear, with a blazing hot sun, which grew hotter and hotter as the day advanced.

And right here we may as well mention something of the peculiarities of the Arctic climate. In winter on the Klondike the thermometer frequently drops to 75 deg. and 80 deg. below zero. Any portion of the body exposed to it freezes instantly, and of course all work on the mines is necessarily suspended.

Not that it is always as cold as this—there are seasons of thaw as in more temperate climates—but for eight months in the year everything is frozen solid, and during the four remaining months there is not warm weather enough for the ground to thaw out, although at times the thermometer will take big jumps up into the nineties, sometimes running 100. deg., but this is only occasional; the drop to a lower temperature is sure to come soon again.

Thus the ground above bed rock is always frozen, and this is one of the greatest difficulties in mining on the Klondike.

Ned and Joe were to experience this immediately.

»We can't go back to Dawson,« said Joe, along toward noon, »so I say let's go to work and try our luck right here.«

This was the situation.

Aided by Arthur Cross, the boys worked hard all the morning to dislodge the steamer, but their efforts were all in vain.

While they were engaged in this work they took the opportunity to inspect the cargo of the Belle, for Arthur Cross had told them during their conversation the night before, that she carried in her hold every appliance necessary to start placer mining on an extended scale.

This proved to be a fact. Just what Job Travers' idea had been in purchasing such an outfit, or where he got the money to do it with; the boys could, of course, only surmise; but here it was, and Joe declared that it was money Captain Boyle had carried about him which furnishe the capital—probably he was right.

We might just as yell do it, I suppose,« replie Ned, assenting to Joe's proposition. »We can't get back to Lilly, so we owe it to her as well as ourselves to make the best of the situation here.«

»I don't think it will be long before we can run the Belle down to Dawson,« put in Arthur Cross. »The river is bound to rise with the spring freshets, which, as I understand it, are already due. I'm with you if you want to try a little digging. We are further down than the big claims, but from all I hear our chance ought to be just as good here as anywhere else.«

»We'll do it,« said Joe. »We'll go to work just as soon as we have had dinner. Here comes Frank, with his eyes as big as saucers. Hello, young fellow! What now?«

Frank had been prowling up the bed of a little creek, which here emptied into the Klondike, wading in his bare feet, throwing a line into every deep hole he came to, in the hope of catching a trout.

He now ran toward them holding up something yellow and glittering in his hand.

»Gold!« he cried. »See, boss, um gold! I found it in a creek!«

It a golden nugget of a pound weight, at least.

»The first strike, by thunder!« shouted Joe. »We begin our digging right here!«

Chapter IX.

In big luck-the attack on the Belle.

Frank's find aroused the boys to the highest pitch.

They immediately went on board the Belle and provided themselves with shovels and pans. Guided by Franks they went up to the creek and began digging the gravel at the bottom, and panning it out in the good, old-fashioned way.

The result was startling.

Before the long Arctic day ended, they had taken out more than three thousand dollars, as near as they could estimate, and as there was a pair of scales in the cabin the estimated was very close one.

It was almost enough to make them forget Lilly in their excitement, but there was better yet to come.

»What we want,« said Arthur, as they talked the situation over that night, »is to get down to bed rock; the average depth, as I understand it, is about twenty-one feet.«

»And that's where the richest digging is to, be found?« questioned Ned,

»That's what they say.«

»It agrees with all I've heard. I say, »Let's go right at it. Where's the use in wasting our time scooping up the gravel in the bed of the creek, if there's better to be had below ground?«

Next morning bringing no change in the situation of the steamer, they went work to carry out this plan.

Ned examined the ley of the land carefully. and selected-a spot bare of trees where the land sloped down to the creek.

Here he marked off a space ten feet by by twelve and built a roaring fire upon it. After it had burned an hour they cleared away the embers and began to dig with long handled spades, witch they found among, the other mining tools on board the Belle.

It was hard work and after they again struck the frozen ground still harder.

They now tried pick-axes, but this was so slow that they resorted to the fire again.

For three days this was kept up and just at evening on the third, they passed beyond the frost and the ground became soft clay and easily worked.

Bright and early next morning they were at it again.

An hour's work brought them to the black sand which on the Klondike lies above the bed rock.

Their excitement now increased to the highest pitch.

»We almost there!« cried Ned. Here's the black sand the miners down at Dawson were all talking about. Hadn't we better begin to pan?«

Perhaps we had,« said Joe. »I'll get the rocker up and we'll see where we are at.«

Now the rocker is simply a long narrow box with a wire grating at the lower end.

Into this the golden sands are thrown, and water poured on freely. The water flowing through the grating carries the sand with it; the flake gold by its weight settles on the bottom, and the nuggets, if there are any, are caught in the mesh.

Ned and Arthur were working away in the shaft, when Joe at last got the rocker set in position, but they started to come out when he called to them that all was ready.

Before leaving, Ned drove his spade down once more.

It struck rock with a harsh, ringing sound.

»Bedrock at last, by Jove!« cried Arthur, and so it was.

They waited a moment to clear away a space and found themselves on top of the slate just as they had supposed,

»We'll begin with this sand,« said Ned, »we may as well know the best we've got.«

What hat they shoveled up then was as black as your hat.

Joe banked it in the rocker and Ned and Arthur brought pail after pail of water and poured it on, while, Joe rapidly moved the box from side to side.

All three watched the operation with breathless interest.

Suddenly a wild shout rang out on the bank of that lonely creek.

»We've struck it! By jove, we've struck it! We are rich!« shouted Ned.

He could scarcely contain himself, and the excitement of the others was just as great.

It needed no microscope to tell the story.

The Klondike gold differs from all other varieties. It is in coarse flakes and small nuggets, of a brassy yellow color. Its assay value falls a little short of California gold, but there was enough here to make up for that, for the sand was just full of little nuggets, and the flakes were everywhere,

It was just such looking gold as Job Travers had exhibited in the cabin of the Belle, and when they had cleaned up the rocker, they estimated that there was at least \$700 value in the little pile which they had thrown in the old blanket, laid down upon the ground to receive it.

They then cleaned up six more rockers and quit.

Not one box full of the sand ran less than \$100, and one ran as high as a thousand.

After dinner they went at it again, and by night had a pile which was all Ned and Joe cared to carry.

It was all the same.

They weighed it up in the cabin that night, and figured out the result of their day's work at over \$10,000.

»Great heavens! We'll have a million to divide between us in ten days' time, if this thing keeps up!« cried Arthur, when announced the result of figures. »There's been no such hole as this struck on the Klondike, rich as it is.«

They stowed the gold away in big wooden chest which had been discovered in the hold, and Ned went on deck to get a breath of fresh, air.

He had scarcely gone ten steps when Frank came running toward him.

»Look, boss! Look!« he cried. »Look over dere!«

Ned's heart was in his throat when his eyes, following the direction of Frank's pointing finger, caught sight of a man standing on the shore, just outside the line of trees, for right behind him he caught the glitter of rifle barrels, and at the same instant six other men stepped out into view.

They were rough, desperate-looking fellows, all armed with rifles and revolvers, and knives stuck in their belts. »There they are!« shouted the man, who had first appeared. »Them's the fellers what*s jumped our claim! Lay 'em out, boys! We want that steamer, and we are going to have it, too.«

With one accord they flung up their rifles and fired. Then all plunged into the shadow water and made a rush for the Belle.

Chapter X.

Dayton, Steele & Cross, owners of the Lilly.

Ned sounded the alarm so vigorously that it brought Joe Steele and Arthur Cross up on deck flying.

»What's the row? » demanded Joe, not grasping the situation at first glance.

The man had ducked down close to the water.

It was hard to see them for the dark shadows thrown by the forest; evidently they understood this, for they kept their heads low.

»There's a gang of toughs after us!« breathed Ned. »They fired—they dodged down somewhere—there they are!«

Ned had his rifle all ready and he let fly.

Not that he meant to hit any one; he fired over their heads in the hope of searing the intruders off.

This was a great mistake.

The boy little knew the temper of the Klondiker.

These men stick at nothing. They were out to capture the Belle, and they meant to do it as the boys were presently to find out.

The instant Ned fired, the men rose up and returned the shots.

Instead of seven there were at least a dozen now.

Worse than that, fully twenty more appeared on shore.

We've got to pull outs it's all that will save us!« cried Arthur.

»And abandon the gold—never!« said Joe.

»Wait! We don't have to see that smoke.«

Arthur pointed to the Belle's smokestack from which a faint column of blue vapor was curling.

»Gracious! Have you fired up?« cried Ned.

»Yes; get into the pilot-house; quick! The Belle is free! I wanted to surprise you, so I never said a word!«

Ned gave an incredulous whistle. He did not more than half believe it yet, but it was no time to argue.

Crouching low to avoid the shots, he ran to the pilot-house.

»One good shove will do it, Joe, I'm off for it!« exclaimed Arthur. »I'm off for the engine-room. You stand by here with Frank in case any one attempts to board us before we can get away.«

Joe called Frank, and crouching behind the steamer's rail, they waited for the coming of the enemy, while Arthur ran down into the engine-room.

»Shall I give him the bell?« called Ned from the pilot-house.

Rifles cracked and shots went flying toward the pilot-house before Joe could answer.

»Keep down out of sight!« he shouted. Attend to your bells and we'll attend to matters here.«

At the same instant there was a scrambling heard over the rail.

»Dey are coming up, boss!« cried Frank. Regardless of his own danger, Joe jumped up and looked over the rail.

A man had caught one of the fenders, and was coming up hand over hand.

»Drop there!« shouted Joe, firing down.

He was less particular this time, and the bullet struck the man on the arm.

He dropped back into the water, and the crowd who were rushing on through the shallows, fired at Joe, who dodged down behind the rail.

»Wait till dey show dere heads over de rail and den fire, boss,« said Frank.

Meanwhile, Ned had given Arthur the bell twice, and now he rang it again.

Suddenly the big stern wheel began to move.

Just then two other heads appeared over the rail further down.

Joe and Frank both fired, and the heads disappeared again.

»We're off!« cried Joe, as he felt the steamer move.

It was so, Arthur Cross had been quietly examining the situation without saying anything. The Klondike had been steadily rising for twenty-four hours, and the young engineer, feeling sure that there would be no trouble in getting the steamer off, had started his fires going while Ned and Joe were talking over matters in the cabin.

It was the luckiest thing in the world that he did so.

The Belle swung slowly round, and a moment later struck deep water.

A shower of shots flew up at the wheelhouse, but they went for nothing, for Ned was crouching low, and kept as much out of sight as possible.

Joe sprang up and looked over the rail.

»It's all right now!« he cried. »We leaving them behind.«

Then he ran to the pilot-house and joined Ned, and a few moments later the Belle was in midstream and out of all danger.

Thoroughly chilled by the icy waters, the men made the best of their way back to shore, carrying their wounded with them.

Lookin off from the pilot-house, the boys could see that all three of those who had been shot were walking, supported by their companions.

Anyhow we don't seem to have killed any one?' said Joe. »I'm thankful for that.«

»They'd have killed us, fast enough,« replied Ned. »Look at the windows here! Hardly a whole a left. They just peppered the pilot-house with shots. However, we're well out of it. What's, to be done now?

»I know what we ought to do,« said Joe, emphatically.

»What that?«

»Make strike for Dawson City and find out what has become of Lilly.«

»I knew you'd say it,« answered Ned, »and it's my idea of the situation, too, but will Arthur Cross consent?«

»He must consent. Don't believe he'll raise any objection anyhow.«

»We must talk over with him though.«

»Of course. Let's run the steamer over on the other shore and tie up, They can't follow us there.«

»Wonder who they are?«

»Give it up! It's possible that Job Travers is at the bottom of it, think so. One thing is sure, old man, we don't give up our claim without a struggle. We'll retreat now but we'll come back again. If it's our claim I purpose to hold it, if there is any law in the land.«

They were entirely beyond the reach of bullets now, although they could see the men watching from the shore, for a fire had been started and the light made them stand out plainly,

There seemed to be quite a crowd of them-more even than there had been at first. The boys watched them as they crossed the river. Ned steered for a little cove, which he had previously located, Then making the wheel fast they went down on deck, and with Frank's help dropped anchor. They had just finished when Arthur Cross came up out of the engine room.

»Where are we now?« he called out, as he hurried toward the wheel house.

Ned and Joe came down to meet him, and they talked the situation over.

»Of course we can't fight that gang,« decidedly, »so I say best thing we can do is to run down to Dawson. There you can look up your lady friend and we can also look up the records and find out how we stand on our claim.«

This plan was carried out.

The start for Dawson was made immediately.

They could see the men by the fire watching them as they steamed down the Klondike.

»We are leaving enemies behind us, Joe,« remarked Ned; »shall we ever come back? Shall we live to down them, or shall we have to go off and seek our fortune somewhere else?«

»No! We are coming right back here,« said a voice behind them, » We'll down the last man of them and hold our claim.«

They turned and saw Arthur who had come up out of the engine-room again.

»There lies our fortune, boys,« he said. »I feel it—I, know it. We are all in it equally, I suppose?«

*Do think we'd ever go back on you?« asked Ned, warmly.

»I hope not. Still I'm only a recent acquaintance, so I thought leave Frank to look after the engine for a few moments and come up and have an understanding.«

»There's my hand on it, old man?« cried Ned. »We are partners now.«

»Mine, too,« said Joe, »Shake, Arthur. »I foresee good, hard work ahead of us with lots of trouble mixed with it, perhaps, we want to stand by each other, Let's organize our company here and now.«

Arthur Cross seemed immensely pleased at this heartiness.

»Done!« he cried, »Shall it be Dayton, Steele & Cross, or Steele, Dayton and Cross?«

»Or Cross, Steele and Dayton?« 'cried Ned.

»Let's shake for it,« said Joe. »There's dice in the cabin; the fellow who throws nearest, sixes has his name first, the next highest comes next and the lowest must be the tail of the firm.«

This was agreed to, and the boys hurried down into the cabin, Arthur first taking a look at his engine to see that all was going well.

Ned threw first and a four and a five turned up Arthur got a pair of trays and Joe threw seven.

»It's as originally put it and I'm satisfied!« cried the young engineer. »Dayton, Steele & Cross is the firm.«

»There's no kick on my part,« declared Joe, »Anyhow, Ned's the smartest of the three of us.«

»Hear! Hear!« cried Ned. »If I didn't have my hat off already I'd take it off for the occasion, but now there's another question to be settled. We are going back to that mine, what shall its name be?«

Joe said nothing.

Arthur laughed and declared that he wasn't »in it.«

»Name it yourselves,« he said. »I'll bet a dollar I can guess what the name will be.«

»I'll write. my choice oo this slip of Paper,« said Joe; »Ned, you do the same.«

»No I'm out,« said Ned, emphatically.

»Then it's the Lilly.«

»Amen to that!« cried Ned, »and long may she wave.«

Chapter XI.

Getting ready to begin.

The Belle made a good run down the Klondike, and pulled into her place at Dawson City, at a little after eight o'clock next morning.

There was the usual rush and excitement along the levee, and no one paid much attention to the steamer.

»What are we to do with her?« asked Ned of Arthur Cross, »Who owns the Belle, anyhow? Do you know I never thought to ask?«

»She belongs to the firm of Austin & Robbins,« replied Arthur, »but I say she ought to belong to the firm of Dayton, Steele & Cross.«

»Second the motion!« cried Joe. »You know those people, Arthur.

»Perfectly. They hire we.«

»Then go up and tell your story, and see if you can't buy her. You can meet us at the hotel later on.

»How high will you go?«

»Let's see—we've got thirteen thousand dollars between us, and we know where there's lots more; but all the same, we must keep something back for provisions and mining tools.«

»The tools and provisions on the Belle belong to Travers. Perhaps we can hold them subject to his order.

»All right. Let's go five thousand dollars on the Belle, and you can promise a few thousand more in six months if necessary.«

»Don't believe it will be. She's a rotten old tub, and I believe five thousand dollars will buy her. Anyhow, I'll do the very best I can.«

Leaving the steamer in Frank's charge, the new firm now went ashore.

Ned and Joe hurried to the hotel, where they found Lilly all safe, and rejoiced to see them.

»I knew you'd come back!« she exclaimed. »I never worried one bit. But where have you been? And what has happened? I know you must have a lot to tell.«

»And the boys found an interested listener in Lilly when they came to tell it.

»I'm going with you up to the Lilly!« she promptly exclaimed, »Mrs. Grandon, the woman I spoke to you about, will go with us—she is ready to go anywhere, and we are all ready to start right now.«

»That's the talk!« cried Joe. »Lilly, you are a girl after my own heart!«

Lilly blushed and Ned turned away.

»I'll give them a chance to talk,« he thought half bitterly. »Of course they want to be alone together and I've got lots to do.«

He was gone before they missed him, and when he came back again he found Arthur Cross with Lilly and Joe.

»Where in the world have you been?« asked the latter.

»Working, for Dayton, Steele & Cross,« laughed Ned, »and I've found plenty to do, too.«

»But what in thunder have you been about? We were looking everywhere for you.«

»Arthur's story first; I won't talk till he's said his say.«

»Well, for the matter of that I've said it once already,« replied Arthur, »but I don't mind felling it again for your benefit, Ned. I've bought the Belle.«

The deuce you have! How much?«

»I got her for \$7,500, half down and half a in ninety days. It was the very best I could do.«

»Good enough! And her cargo?«

»We shall take it back with us, subject to Job Travers' order.

»He hasn't turned up?«

No, nor Captain Betters, either; there ain't much doubt but what they are both dead.«

»Well, here's a big step ahead, you see,« remarked Joe; »now, the next thing is to get down to the register's office and see what claim we really have to the Lilly.«

»We've got every claim in the world,« laughed Ned. »The Lilly is ours and the land along the creek is ours, too.!

»Hello! Is this your work for Dayton, Steele and Cross?«

»It is! I've been up to the registry office. There's never been a foot of land located on Ottertail creek.«

»Is that our creek?«

»Yes, It's ours now.«

»You've located our claim?«

»I've located a tract of five miles along the creek, and one mile back. It's claim No. 62 and is duly recorded and the fee paid down in pure Klondike dust.«

»Then our fortune's made,« said Arthur, »All we've got to do is to organize a band and go back and claim our own.«

There was no trouble in this, for even then Dawson City was full of adventurers; men eager for a chance to try their fortunes in the diggings, but too ignorant, or too unenterprising to know just how to go about it.

The boys went right to work, and before night had sold out claims to six sturdy fellows on their new location.

This was Ned's scheme,

*We'll interest them all with us,« he declared. »It's only way to hold them.«

So Ned drew up a regular agreement, and made at least twenty copies of it.

The plan was for each signer to take up a hundred feet on the creek by a mile in depth—that is the full depth of the claim.

No cash was required the stipulations were that the claim should be actually worked inside of thirty days, and the purchase price was to be one half the output of gold for sixty days after bed rock was struck.

This was a highly original plan, and met with great favor.

Ned's first customers were young men about the hotel, but they told others, and by noon on the third day he had disposed of the twenty claims.

On the fourth day there was a big rush, and twenty-five more were disposed of.

To each purchaser the firm made a small advance for provisions and tools.

On the fifth day the room in the hotel which the boys occupied in common was fairly besieged by applicants for »claim bonds,« as Ned's slips of paper began to be called, for the Dawson newspaper had come with the whole story the night before, and everybody was talking about the wonderful strike on Ottertail Creek.

»Shall we sell any more?« asked Ned, putting the question to his partners.

»Not another foot,« said Joe, decidedly »We've got our gang now and that's all we want, I say, let's hold the rest for a rise.«

It was so agreed.

The disappointed ones were turned away by dozens.

The boys were fairly pestered to death before they could get off on the Belle, which they did at nine o'clock next day.

Big money was offered for quit claim deeds of a portion of their interest, but they adhered to their determination and would not dispose of another foot.

»In sixty days, gentlemen,« was Ned's invariable answer. »Come to Ottertail in sixty days and we'll take business, but until then we don't make a move.«

There was an immense crowd on the levee when the Belle pulled out that morning.

Joe was in the wheel house and Arthur at the engine, but Ned acted as captain and paced the deck.

The passenger list numbered twenty-three without counting Lilly and Mrs. Grandon.

And the Belle swept up the Klondike amid the cheers of the crowd.

Chapter XII.

The new camp on Ottertail Creek.

»We are almost there, Ned!«

»You are sure you'll know Ottertail when you see it, Joe?« laughed Ned, who had just joined his partner in the Wheel house of the Belle.

»Well, rather; I'm not likely to forget, although we were there such a short time. I tell you another turn in the river will bring us in sight of the mouth of the creek.«

The run up the Klondike had been made without crowding the steamer; and, indeed, Joe had tied up alongside the bank for the last two hours before daylight, for fear that they might pass the mouth of the creek in the dark.

It was now about six in the morning and broad daylight, of course, for nights are short within the Arctic Circle at that season and correspondingly long in the winter months, of course.

The passengers were crowded at the rail as the Belle swung in toward the mouth of the creek, for Captain Ned was now down among them, and they knew they were almost at their journey's end.

All were armed with rifles and long knives and held themselves ready for any emergency, but as yet not a soul could be seen on the shore.

»I believe them fellers have all quit,« said one of the prospectors, whose name was Bob Andrus.

»Don't you be too sure,« replied Ned. »Because you can't see any one now it don't follow there's no one there; besides the diggings are up the creek and can't be seen from here; they may not have spotted us yet.

»It seems to me,« remarked Lilly, who stood right behind Ned, »that the main thing is to get ashore before ey find out we are here.«

»Which we can do I think,« replied Ned. »See, Joe is stopping now. We can't go any further without getting aground again.«

Joe called down to have the anchor dropped just then; the passengers acted also as crew and lost no time in obeying.

The steamer had now proceeded as far as it was safe to go, and the men arming themselves dropped over the side and waded through the shallows, Ned leading the way.

In a few moments they were all safe ashore, Joe a Frank remaining with Lilly and and Mrs. Grandon on the Belle,

We may as well strike straight for the diggings.« declared Ned. »Now, then, gentlemen, I say if there's any fighting to be done, let's get right down to it.«

They pushed ahead up the creek, and were soon in sight of the shaft.

Nothing had changed since Ned last saw it but the pile of earth thrown out, which was considerably larger. There was no one to be seen as yet, but as they advanced still nearer a man's head suddenly came up out of the shaft.

He gave a sharp cry and scrambled out, seizing a rifle which lay on the dump.

»Job Travers!« gasped Ned. »Great Heavens! I thought we had seen the last of that man!«

»Keep back!« shouted the mate. "Keep back! You have no business here!«

Up out of the shaft another man came scrambling.

Travers fired three shots in quick succession, and then made a break for the woods, followed by his partner, who seemed too much frightened to discharge the rifle which he hastily picked up on the dump.

»Follow them! Capture that man! Don't let him escape! He's a murderer!« cried Ned, greatly excited.

Then a chase begun, which lasted on the part of Ned and half a dozen others, for nearly three-quarters of an hour, but it was entirely unsuccessful, for they saw no more of the mate and his man.

When Ned got back, he found that Joe and Arthur had come ashore with Lilly and Mrs. Grandon.

They were Superintending the landing of the tents and provisions.

»Was it really Job Travers, Ned?« demanded Lilly, eagerly.

»It really was,« replied Ned, »and I can't tell you how sorry I am that we didn't capture him. Has any one else been seen?«

No one had, and nothing seemed to break the harmony of Ottertail camp for a good fortnight.

Meanwhile lots of work was accomplished.

A mushroom city of some fifteen tents had suddenly sprung into existence on the bank of the creek.

The prospectors were all enthusiasm, for at least five thousand dollars in dust lay heaped up near the rocker where Travers and his men had been working.

The prospectors had measured off their claims, and several shafts had been started.

Bed rock seemed to take a dip beyond the Lilly, and although there had been a good deal of dust and many small nuggets taken out, no great strike had been made as yet.

On the Lilly the boys sunk a new shaft, intending to drift between the two.

They passed through sixteen feet of gravel which paid about two dollars per pan, then through four feet of coarser gravel, which ran from two dollars to five dollars per pan, then a foot and a half of fine gravel averaging \$1.25 per pan, and the same distance of fine black sand where the yield dropped to fifty cents per pan.

This was discouraging, but bed rock lay right beneath, and they were the first to strike it after all.

The strike an made just at dusk, and all hands went down into the shaft to have a look.

A few pans were washed out, and the yield was fair, being as much as three hundred dollar:

Everybody sat down to supper greatly encouraged.

»It will be all right. The yield will hold and increase with every panful,« declared Ned, hopefully, and everyone caught his cheerful spirit, and great things were hoped for the next day.

That night Ned and Joe turned in on the mattress together in their tent which was directly in front of that occupied by Lilly and Mrs. Grandon.

Bob Andrus and little Frank were on the watch, for the camp was never without a guard night or day.

It was hard work for Ned to sleep, for his mind would run on his business, but toward midnight he dropped off into a doze from which he was awakened by a hand roughly shaking his shoulder.

He sprang up, to see Bob Andrus bending over him.

»Get up!« breathed the prospector. »Get up, boss, but don't say nothing; them fellers is down on us fifty strong, but we want to see fast what their game is before we make a move.

Chapter XIII.

Job Travers' dastardly plot foiled.

When Ned Dayton got out of the tent, he started to speak, but Bob Andrus clapped his hand over his mouth.

»Don't you breathe, a word yet,« he whispered. »Follow me.«

Ned felt the greatest confidence in Bob Andrus, whose age and long experience in mining in the far Northwest, entitled him to every respect, so he followed him unhesitatingly.

Bob crouched down and ran as close to the ground as he could get, without actually going on all fours.

Following his lead, Ned found himself in a few minutes, lying behind one of the hammocks further down the creek, grasping his rifle and ready for business.

»Now we are safe,« whispered Bob, »and can talk a little; Ned Dayton, do you see those men?«

»Don't see a soul, nor hear a sound,« replied Ned. »So far I only have your word for it that they are here.«

»Right! Scouting has got to be learned like any other business. Now let you that your enemy, Job Travers, and fifty men are close to us at this present moment, laying pipe to wipe out the new settlement on Ottertail Creek forever.«

»But how—where?«

»Wait, I tell you! I want to turn the tables on them if I can, and I think I can; they think there is no guard to-night. They've been all around the camp—they were even in your tent—that is, Travers was. If he had made a move to hurt you, he would have got a ball in his back instanter. But enough of this, Don't you see them yet?«

»No; I'll be blest if I do!«

»Strange; and they are so plain! But you've got lots to learn about Injun warfare yet, and most of the men with Travers are Injuns; but before I say a word to show you where they are, let me ask you how far back does your claim extend?«

»A mile. Why do you want to know?«

»That's enough. Now let me tell you something, for I've been listening for ten minutes to Job Travers' talk; he and them what's with him have no more notion of working the Ottertail mines than they have of flying. It's to drive you off your claim that they are going to trouble; and the reason they want to drive you is because they've found diggings ten times richer on yourn.«

»Can it be so?«

»Yes, sir; it is so, and don't you forget it. Now, we want to do is to annihilate them—to kill every mother's son of them. Then we'll have peace, and we won't have it before.«

Ned shuddered.

»I don't like that kind of talk—it sounds too much like butchery,« he said.

»You think so? Well, let me tell you that's just what they are figuring upon doing for you.«

»Even so, I won't do it.«

»Too tender hearted, just as I supposed. Mind you, I know Job Travers of old; he's a conscienceless scoundrel and will stick at nothing; but I've said my last word; now look at them—there they are.«

Bob Andrus pointed to a rocky ledge which rose some forty feet, above the level, a hundred yards or so away.

To Ned's surprise he saw a number of men crouching upon the rock—he wondered why it was he had not seen them before, for several times he had looked that way.

They seemed to be working at something; in spite of the moonlight it was hard to make out their faces for the overhanging trees threw a shadow upon them. Bob silently handed Ned a powerful night glass which brought out the faces with great distinctness; it showed him Job Travers, and there were some Indians and some half breeds. Altogether they were a hard-looking gang.

»We want to call up the boys at once,« he breathed, »Why do you hesitate? First thing you know they'll be down on us, and then it will be too late.!

»I say wait. Don't you see what they are doing?«

»Look closer.«

»They seem to be tastening something on to a long plank; looks like candles.«

»Pshaw! You ain't half sharp! Them's redrock cartridges! Boss, I tell you their plan, they are going to put that plank right down between our tents, and touch off the fuse' from a safe distance. Well, I don't have to tell you what the result would be! You might take up what there was left of us in pails, I don't believe one man would survive the shock.«

»So much the more reason why they should be driven off. Are we to wait for them to carry out their diabolical scheme?«

Not much! I want to head them off at the right moment, though, and I want to turn the tables on them, if I can.«

»Boss, I can cut one of them cartridges in two with my Winchester, and I believe if I did it the whole kit and kerboodle of them would explode.«

But to this Ned would not consent. In spite of what he knew of the desperate character of these men, he could not entertain the thought. of slaughtering them wholesale.

»I'll make a fair fight,« he declared. »I'm going back to camp to wake up the boys.«

»Very good; do as you like,« replied Bob, shortly. »I'll stay here.«

Of course Ned knew that he could not control him, so he did not try. Hurrying back to camp, he went silently from one tent to another, and roused all the men of his little party, beginning with Joe Steele.

Of course they were greatly excited, and it was all Ned could do to keep them from showing themselves.

»Lay low, lay low!« he whispered. » What we want to do is to divide into two parties and come down on their flank. We can it if we are careful, and—ah! they are coming now!«

All hands were crouching among the fringe of bushes back of the tents at this time, and there was no difficulty in seeing the two villainous-looking Indians who had taken up the plank between them and were coming down the slope toward the camp.

Job Travers and the others stood among the trees on. top of the ledge watching them.

»This won't do,« breathed Joe. »Ned, we must make move.«

»Wait till they get a little nearer,« replied Ned. »We want to make sure of them. See the fuse trailing out behind there! By gracious, Bob Andrus was dead right that their, idea is to blow us all to Kingdom Come.

He had no more than spoken the last word when a rifle suddenly cracked.

All in an instant there was a flash of light above the plank and a fearful explosion followed.

It was something terrific.

The ground trembled as though shaken by an earthquake.

The two Indians who carried the plank were instantly killed, and those on the ledge thrown down of their faces.

»After them!« yelled Bob Andrus, running out from behind the hill and waving his rifle. »Now's the time to put the kybosh on them fellers forever! Don't let a single man of them escape!«

OF course such enthusiasm was catching. It hardly needed Ned's rallying cry to send his little band dashing up the ledge.

The Indians, appalled by the outcome of their dastardly plot, scattered in every direction, Job Travers being one of the first to go.

»We want the mate!« cried Ned, »there'll be no peace for us, Joe, till we get him—follow me!«

They ran up the ledge and dashed into the woods regardless of danger. Bob Andrus and several others followed them.

»Don't go too fast, boys!« called the old prospector. »We want to track him to his hold out. Depend upon it, the little work they did on the Ottertail was only a blind; we want to know why they are so anxious to drive us off our claim.

Chapter XIV.

The new diggings on Duck Creek.

The chase continued for more than half a mile, but there was nothing noisy about it, as there might have been if the shrewd old prospector had not been along.

While the rest of the party went off after the Indians and half-breeds, Ned, Joe and Bob Andrus had started on the trail of Job Travers.

Bob proved himself a veritable sleuthhound; he took the lead before they had gone a hundred yards, and winding in and out among the trees and bushes, managed to keep the mate within hearing.

It was darker here, of course; not a glimpse of the man was had from the moment he left the ledge, and yet they could hear him; Bob Andrus in the most confident manner assured them that it was the mate.

»He doesn't know we are after him. He's walking now,« he declared, after a little. »I tell you he'll go right' back to his camp, and it will surprise me if it ain't a better one than ours.«

They had not long to wait before Bob Andrus' words: proved true.

Suddenly they saw the moon, shining on water ahead of them. Creeping cautiously on to the open, they came upon a broad creek running at the foot of a hill and emptying into the Klondike just, beyond.

»There he goes!« cried Joe. »I'll have him now if I die for it!«

»Better shoot the beggar,« said Andrus, raising his rifle.

»No, no! Don't kill him! We take him alive,« declared Ned, and then the chase down the hill began.

The mate saw them coming and ran for his life.

Twice he fired back at them, Andrus could stand it no longer and let fly.

They saw the mate clap his hand to his shoulder—saw the blood streaming down over his arm; but that was the last they did see of him, for he plunged in among the bushes and disappeared. A good half hour's search failing to bring him to light.

But it brought other things to light which were destined to prove of far more interest than the rascally mate and his concerns.

Just as Bob Andrus had predicted, there was a mining shaft here on Duck Creek—such they afterward learned was the name of the stream.

That shaft changed the whole tide of affairs.

»Anxious to know what it amounted to, Ned, Joe and Arthur with Bob Andrus as helper went to work there next day.

There were a lot of primitive tools on the ground, and atent in which Travers had evidently slept.

The first thing was to explore the shaft, which proved to have been already sunk to bedrock.

The young Klondikers worked three hours on the ground with the most astonishing results.

It will scarcely be credited, but they took over \$20,000 out of that shaft in a single day, mostly in small nuggets, although there was a good deal of flake gold.

Of course the news created the wildest excitement in Ottertail camp, and the following morning all hands came flocking over to see the new diggings, bringing their tools with them.

This day resulted in a haul of \$16,000, which settled the fate of Ottertail forever.

»What rights have we on Duck Creek under our arrangement?« was the question in everybody's mouth.

Ned and Joe got out their map and studied it up.

It was discovered that Duck Creek formed the easterly boundary of their claim. Thus the new find was on their land, and as the claims sold ran through from creek to creek, everybody was equally interested.

A meeting was held Ned oresided, and new claims were staked off for each man.

Within twenty-four hours everyone was at work on Duck Creek.

Nothing more was seen of Job Travers and his Indians, and for six weeks work continued uninterruptedly.

During this time Ned, Joe, Arthur and Lilly lived on board the Belle with Mrs. Grandon to keep house for them, for there was deep water here and they were able to bring the steamer right he foot of the little hill in the side of which the shaft had been sunk.

The results of those six weeks' work were astonishing to the last degree.

Every man who succeeded in getting his shaft down to bed rock—and most of them did it—was made rich.

None of the diggings in the Klondike—not even the famous Eldorado Creek camp, paid anything to equal Duck Creek.

Ned, Joe and Arthur, who worked the old shaft on shares, had taken out over \$350,000-\$362,856 were the actual figures—by the end of the sixth week.

Others were equally fortunate.

Bob Andrus got over \$100,000, other amounts ran from \$20,000 to \$80,000.

Even little Frank, the Indian boy washed over \$12,000 out of the »toilings« on the dumps, and from the sand along the bank of Duck Creek.

The season was now far advanced, and the long Arctic winter close at hand.

Of course not much mining could be done during the cold months, although there would be ways on which the claims could be worked, providing a proper »roasting« plant could be provided to thaw out the frozen gravel sand.

»There's got to be money spent here now,« said Arthur Cross one morning. »I vote we call a meeting and talk matters over. We've got to live in the winter if we can't work the gravel, and now is our time to begin.

This allied with Ned's ideas perfectly; indeed he had been about to propose the same thing.

That evening a meeting was called in the cabin of the Belle, and, of course, everyone attended.

Ned was chosen chairman, and he made the following address:

Gentlemen:—Fortune has favored us far beyond our most sanguine expectations; your claims have all proved very valuable, and as the percentages due Dayton, Steele & Cross have been duly paid, I propose to-night to give every man a quit claim deed to his holding and waive further payments providing you agree to the plan I have now to propose.«

»Hear! Hear!« cried Bob Andrus.

»Out with your plan,« said another,

»Go on! Go on!« called several voices. Evidently some felt that Dayton Steele and Cross might be trying to get the best of them.

But they were soon undeceived, for Ned went on to say:

My plan is that we now strike work and go to building. Tents will soon be of no use to us and houses we must have. Let us get up a surveyor from Dawson, and lay out our town in lots. Let's give it a name and elect a mayor and other officers. Let's build a roasting plant and get everything ready for winter. Of course we have to lay in provisions, too, and that can best be done now, for after the reports of this summer's work reach the States there's going to be a rush and a rush means a rise in prices all along the line. In short let us swear off gold digging for a while and make ourselves comfortable so that when spring opens we shall all be above ground and ready for business. All in favor of my plan say aye!«

The roar of ayes was deafening—there were no nays—for most fortunately there was not a contrary-minded individual in the little band.

»Now then, for a name!« cried Ned, looking toward Lilly. »I think all will say aye to this. I propose Lillydale!«

»Aye! Aye! Hear! Hear!« the Klondikers shouted. »Three cheers for Lillydale!«

»I suppose I ought to get up, and make a speech after this compliment,« said Lilly, blushing, »but really, gentlemen, although you are all my friends I can't do it. All I can say is I wish the new town every success, and if it was possible for the first mayor to be a woman, I'd claim that privilege, but as it isn't, I do claim the right to nominate the mayor, and -«

She paused.

Everyone thought it was Joe Steele's name which was about to follow.

»And I propose Ned Dayton, to whose energy and pluck we are indebted for our great good fortune!« Lilly went on to say.

»Hear! Hear!« cried Joe.

»Three cheers for Mayor Dayton!« shouted Arthur Cross.

But it was not necessary to »whoop it up« for Ned.

The cheers were deafening,

»A standing vote, gentlemen!« cried Bob Andrus, springing to his feet. »A standing vote for our first mayor!«

And only one person in the cabin of the Belle remained seated.

It was Ned.

Chapter XV.

The booming of Lillydale.

Two days after the meeting in the cabin in the Belle sailed for Dawson.

Ned, Arthur Cross, and Bob Andrus went with her with Lilly and Mrs, Grandon and enough men to work the steamer down the Klondike.

When they reached the thriving little mining town on the Yukon, they found it swarming with prospectors from all along the Klondike and the tributary streams.

Everybody was in great luck.

It was gold—gold—gold! On the street, on the levee, in the hotel, in the stores—everywhere you went you could hear nothing talked of but gold.

The mining boom was fairly on in Dawson, and it only needed to have some of these men get down to the States with their plies to start the flame which was to spread all over the civilized world.

A few put it through to Juneau in the fall of '96, but the majority of the miners wintered in there camps or at Dawson City or Fort Cudahy.

They were a brave lot of fellows and equal to every hardship.

Some of those who spent last winter in Alaska increased their holdings before spring.

Hier is a list of a few of the men who Ned met in Dawson, and the amount of their »piles« taken to the States in the spring of '97:

Name	\$	Name	\$
Anton Santer	37,000	Neil McArtur	50,000
Ben Wall	50,000	Chas Anderson	25,000
William Carlson	50,000	Joe Morris	12,000
William Sloan	50,000	Hank Peterson	50,000
John Wilkerson	50,000	J. S, Lippy	65,000
Jim Clemens	50,000	Clarens Berry	130,000
Frank Keller	35,000	Frank Phiscater	94,000
Sam Collej	25,000	Louis Rhodes	40,000
Stuard & Hollenshead	45,000	James McLanie	11,000
Chas, Mayers and Partner	22,000	William Stanley	112,000
Johnny Marks	10,000	Henry Anderson	55,000
Alex Orr	10,000	T. J. Kelly	33,000
Fred Price	15,000	M. Murcier	16,000

Fred Latisceura	10,000	Thomas Moran	20,000
Tim Bell	31,000	Victor Lord	10,000
William Hayes	35,000	Joseph Caslais	18,000
Dick McNulty	20,000	J. E. Boucher	12,000
Jake Halterman	14,000	John Wilkinson	50,000
Johnson & Olson	20,000	Joe Bergeoin	14,000
W. E. Ricotte	23,000	C. Worden	17,000

By this list it will be seen that Ned, Joe and Arthur Cross each ran ahead of every man on the Klondike excepting the famous Clarence Berry.

That was the way matters stood in the fall of '96, by spring even Berry was left in the shade by our Klondike boys, as will soon be seen.

But Ned wasted little time in talking to his brother prospectors.

Although he was accorded such a reception in Dawson as a price might envy, he cut it all short and went right to work.

His first move was to engage a surveyor to go back to Lillydale and lay out new claims.

Then he advertised these claims for sale subject to the surveyor's lines, with the understanding that the shaft was to be located midway between the boundaries of the claim as the resented showed on the crude map which he had been able to make himself, the real lines to be decided later on.

The result was a repetition of his experience of two months before.

New prospectors he been crowding into Dawson and they came flocking around Ned next morning in such numbers that he had to order them to form a line and receive them one by one in the little office he hired, over the door of which be placed the sign, »Dayton, Steele & Cross.

The terms upon which these claims were offered were substantially the, same as those previously sold, but the same as price was \$25,000; the down be paid was \$1,000, the balance to be paid in installments running for two years. If at the end of that time the account remained unsettled, the contract permitted Dayton, Steele & Cross to take back the claim, all payments being forfeited.

The arrangement took with everyone—there were no » kickers.«

Those prospectors who put themselves on the line knew exactly what they had to expect; all heard of the wonderful diggings on Duck Creek, and all were only too anxious to buy.

The result was that the thousand dollar payments came dropping into Ned's dust bag in lively style, for every man had his dust ready.

Seventy-five claims had been marked off on the map, and these were disposed of in less than two hours.

It could have been done in a third of that times if there had not been the papers to prepare and double the number of claims could have been sold in addition, for at least two hundred persons were turned away.

This was making seventy-five thousand dollars easy.

Ned now set to work to spend it, not for the benefit of the firm alone, but for the new town of Lillydale.

Tools and hardware were his first purchases, then such good horses as could be had. Horses were scarce in Dawson, and all he could get were four, but these would prove of the greatest service, if they could be successfully wintered on Duck Creek.

Then it was provisions, and Ned about broke the market, for he paid good prices and bought up about everything there was in sight.

In less than four days the Belle was ready to go back up the Klondike.

She carried with her about forty of the new claim owners. The others were old hands at the business, and desired to clean up on their present holdings before starting in at Lillydale.

When the Belle steamed up to her landing place on Duck Creek, the whole town turned out, and the silence of the Alaskan forest was broken by the lively cheers.

Great things had been accomplished by Joe and the miners during Ned's absence; trees had been felled, and several substantial log cabins were already under way.

The new-comers went right to work at the building operations, for the agreement was that not a pick should be struck into the ground until winter quarters were fully prepared,

The result was truly amazing.

Within three weeks between twenty and thirty cabins rose on the hillside taking the place of the tents.

Lillydale was now an established fact, and its mayor a man of importance.

On the day the last of the cabins was completed there was a big dinner given in the cabin of the Belle.

Speeches were made, and toasts drank and everyone had a jolly time.

After the dinner three young Klondikers who could play brought out their banjos and gave an impromptu concert, after which there was dancing on the deck in the moonlight, with Lilly and Mrs. Grandon in great demand, of course, for they were still the only woman in the camp.

Everything went as »merry as a marriage bell,« and the evening's entertainment closed at last and the boys turned into their bunks between one and two in the morning.

Ned was asleep in no time and was dreaming that Lillydale had become a great city, and that he had just been elected mayor for the third time, when all a once the dream changed and he thought he was in the tent in Ottertail Creek and that Job Travers, looking dark and menacing, was just coming in upon him, carrying a rifle in his hand.

»Get up, Ned Dayton!« I want you!« he thought the mate said. »This is my claim and I'm going to kill you for jumping it. Get, up and defend yourself if you are a man!«

Ned sprang up wide awake, bathed in a cold perspiration.

It was pitch dark in the, state-room: he could hear a stealthy footstep crossing the floor.

»Who's there?« he cried. »Speak, or I fire.«

It was a foolish threat for he had left his revolver in the pocket of his trousers which hung against the wall, out of reach.

A chuckling laugh was the answer.

Then with a sudden rush a man's form sprang through the darkness.

»Joe!«

»Help!«

»Murder!«

Ned Dayton was struggling for his life now!

Iron hands had seized his throat.

»Hold your jaw!« hissed a hollow voice. »I want your dust, young feller, and if you don't give it up quietly I'll have your life!«

Chapter XVI.

The midnight robbery on the Belle.

It is an awful thing to awake suddenly in the dark and find oneself in the grip of an unknown foe.

Trials and trouble beset every gold hunter on the Klondike, and this particular trial was Ned Dayton's fate now.

The grip on his throat was terrible.

Ned struck out blindly, fought and struggled all he knew, but the enemy was too much for him.

He went down all in a heap and for a moment lost consciousness.

When he came to himself he was lying on the floor gagged and bound.

Two men, one carrying a dark lantern, were rummaging about the state-room.

Ned stared at them stupidly. His brain reeled. It seemed to him as though his head would burst.

But after a moment the mist which was before his eyes cleared away, and he recognized in the man who carried the lantern, his old enemy Job Travers.

He knew then into what desperately bad hands he had fallen, and he realized that his life depended upon keeping cool.

»Confound it, where does he keep his dust? growled the mate. »I cannot find it, but I'll never leave the steamer till I do!«

»You will if you have to,« replied the other, »As I told you in the first place, I don't propose to run too big a risk; if we hear any one coming we light out.«

»Come now, that's always the way with you, Buck Hyland. Why don't you show a little pluck?«

»Why don't I say that I'll stand up against the whole crowd here? No, thank you, I make no such promises.«

»I tell you that this claim belongs by rights to me, and I propose to get toll out of it at least.«

»Yes, and to satisfy your grudge against this boy into the bargain, I understand, but I'm working for Hyland every time.«

»Hush! He's come to.«

It would have been wiser if Ned had kept his eyes shut and shammed dead, but he didn't.

Instantly Job Travers drew a revolver and covered him.

»Ned Dayton, I want your dust!« he hissed. »Where is it? Speak out, or —«

»Stop!« breathed Hyland, »I've got it. You don't have to shoot and bring his friends down upon us. We can get along without that.«

He pulled up the carpet in one corner of the state-room and raised a small trap in the floor.

he had discovered the hiding place which Ned had constructed for his gold.

The dust was here, sure enough.

There were several bags of it.

But it was only Ned's.

Joe and Arthur Cross! had concealed their own.

»Is that all there is of it?« demanded the mate flourishing the revolver as he removed the gag.

»Yes,« replied Ned, quietly. »That is all.«

»I believe you are lying.«

»Believe what you like. I leave lying, stealing and murdering to you.«

»Hold on there, now! Don't you get sassy,« snarled Travers. »I'll make you sup sorrow with a big spoon if you do.«

»As though I could say anything that would make you use me worse than will anyhow, Job Travers,« replied Ned.

»No matter. Something tells me that I will get the best of you yet.«

»Then something lies to you. Ned Dayton, I hate you. To rob you is only a part of my programme, if you call it robbing to take me own.«

»Indeed! That's stale news to know that you hate me. What is the next thing on your programme, may I ask?«

»You go with us when we leave here—as for the rest, we shall see.«

»Do you propose to kill me?«

»In the end, yes, but first I shall make you the sickest boy on the Klondike. I could kill you now, as far as that goes, but such a fate would only half accomplish my revenge.

»Come, come! We want to act and not talk,« growled Hyland. »Will you stand guard here, Travers, while I take this gold to the boat?«

»Yes,« said Travers. »Hurry up. I've got to have help taking this boy out—I can't carry him alone.«

»Humph! Better leave him where he is a blame sight.«

»No; I won't do it.«

»Very good, then; have your way, only keep that tongue of yours still till I can take care of the gold.«

Now all this passed in the lowest whispers. It would not have been possible for any one to have heard it outside the stateroom, even if one had been listening at the door which Buck Hyland now threw wide open.

He listened attentively for a few moments, and then sneaked out, carrying a bag of gold in each hand.

The instant he had departed the mate bent down over Ned.

»Say,« he whispered, »here's one sweet morsel for you to chew on, I was dead wrong about that paper. I found it in the lining of my coat—I had it all along.«

Ned gazed at him in silence. To call for help would have been madness; he was resolved to display no fear and equally so not to give the mate the satisfaction of being surprised at anything he might say.

Evidently Travers was rather disappointed. »Do you know what that means?« he demanded. 'I've seen Pete Frazer's hurried gold.«

Still no answer. Ned never moved a muscle of his face.

»It amounts to over half a million,« continued Travers. »It's all mine! I'll spend every penny of it to break up this town of yours. I'm going to file a claim on Lillydale. I'll go to law with your people here after I've killed you, and I'll oust every mother's son of them. These diggings, are mine, and I mean to have them, I—«

»Chinning again! Chinning again!« growled Buck Hyland, suddenly entering the state-room. »I thought I told you to hold your tongue.«

»Can't a man speak if he wants to?« grumbled the mate.

»No; he can't under such circumstances as these. Keep still now if you can until I carry out these other bags. Here, you'll have to lend me a hand for I can't take them alone and I'll be blest if I make another trip.«

»But the boy may give the alarm.«

»Gag him. He never ought to have been ungagged nohow. Gag him again.«

It was done and they departed with the bags.

It was Ned's only chance.

Although his legs were firmly tied together he was able to move them a little—and he managed to raise them from the hips and pound them on the floor.

His hope was that Joe might hear him before Travers could return, but the mate was back again in a moment and there had been no response.

Probably they had heard the noise, for they seemed in a great hurry.

They seized the helpless boy between them, and made for the stairs.

Before they could reach them, the door of the state-room on the opposite side of the cabin was flung open, and Joe sprang out.

»What's that?« he cried, then he seemed to catch sight of them, for he instantly fired.

There was a smothered cry.

Ned dropped to the floor, Travers and his companion rushing off up the stairs.

Joe was at Ned's side in no time.

»For Heaven sake what's this?«, he gasped.

To remove the gag and cut Ned free, was the work of an instant.

»It's Job Travers! He's robbed me of my dust!« stammered Ned. »After them, Joe! They must not escape!«

This starting announcement was all that was needed to spur Joe on to instant action.

Having retired late the boys had both lain down in their clothes, so there was nothing to wait for now.

They rushed on deck.

Arthur Cross came running up after them, having been awakened by the noise.

»There they go!« cried Ned, pointing to a small boat which was being pulled down the creek by one man, while the other lay back in the stern as though wounded or dead.

Chapter XVII.

The chase down the Klondike.

»There they are! I see them again!«

»You're right! Steady, Ned. We are outrowing them. We'll have them yet.

Joe Steele pulled at the oars with all his strength, and Ned was just as active.

Arthur sat in the stern and steered, and the boat, which had been hastily launched, was in the main stream of the Klondike now.

Not a moment had been lost in beginning the chase.

Arthur heard the details of the attack after they were in the boat—

»Can you make out which one it is that's doing the rowing?« he demanded, straining his eyes at the boat ahead. «

»It's Travers, that's who it is,« replied Ned. »I can see him plain enough.«

»Then a I the more reason why we should overhaul him.

»It's reason enough that he's got the last ounce of my dust,« replied Ned.

»We'll have to shoot him or he'll shoot us,« said Arthur. »Of course he ain't going to let us overhaul him if he can help it.«

Ned was silent.

He did not like the idea of killing Job Travers, bad as the man was.

Fortunately for his scruples he did not have to do it.

For about half an hour the chase continued.

The 'mate managed to hold his own for a while, and then his strength began to flag.

The boys gained rapidly now.

In a few moments more they were within easy range of a pistol shot.

»Sheer off there!« shouted Travers. »Sheer off, or I'll blow your brains out!«

He suddenly shipped his oars, whipped out a revolver, and fired.

The ball whizzed over the boys heads harmlessly.

Then it was Arthur Cross who took his innings.

He fired before the echo of the shot died away.

»By Jove, that fixes him!« he cried. »Ned Dayton, it don't do, to wait for a fellow so squeamish as you.

Travers' pistol had dropped into the river his hand falling helplessly to his side.

»We've got 'em now!« cried Joe. »Pull, Ned! Pull! His wings are clipped.«

But they reckoned without their host.

The mate's boat was close upon a wooded point when this occurred, and the force of the current carried it up against the shore.

They saw Travers leap out, and the other man crawl after him.

He shook his fist at the boys, shouting:

»Never mind, Ned Dayton! You've bested me now, but my time will come!«

Then turning he plunged into the woods and disappeared.

It was too dark to see what became of Buck Hyland; neither of the men were visible when the boys reached the boat.

»Look out for shots,« said Joe, warningly.

But the caution was unnecessary, for none came, and in a few minutes the boats were together.

The bags were soon transferred, and the boys returned to the Belle.

This ended the startling adventure of that memorable night, and you may be very certain that the boys hid their dust where neither Job Travers nor any one else was likely to find it after that.

Days flew by and weeks lengthened into months.

The terrible winter of the Klondike was on.

Not that it was any worse than winters usually are in Alaska, but it was cold enough to make an impression on our young miners never to be forgotten.

The week before Christmas was as mild as it had been in November, and although the weather previous to that had been cold, it was no worse than the boys had often experienced in the States.

But on the night of the twenty-third of December there came a change.

Ned woke up to find himself almost frozen, in spite of the fact that he was buried beneath a mass of blankets, and had all his clothes on.

When he went upon deck—for the boys still lived on the Belle with Lilly and Mrs. Grandon, he looked at the thermometer and saw that it had dropped out of sight, although the lowest register was 70 degrees below zero.

In such a temperature as this no one could expose themselves for an instant without danger of freezing one's nose, or some other part of the face.

If any one had seen Lillydale then they might have mistaken it for a deserted village.

For two days no one ventured out unless under urgent necessity, but it moderated on Christmas afternoon, the thermometer rising to ten below.

This was quite summerlike in comparison, and the different members of the camp exchanged visits, and in the evening there was a merry Christmas party held on board the Belle.

New Year's day '97, was another cold one, the thermometer falling to sixty degrees below, but after that it moderated greatly, for the January thaw had set in.

During the early part of November and December, a great deal of snow had fallen. It lay piled up Lillydale, but now that the thaw came it softened, and with the next cold snap, which came a few days later, a crust formed so that one could travel over the drifts as easily as on a level road.

»What a splendid time for a moose hunt,« said Arthur Cross in the morning, meeting the boys on deck.

There had been more than one moose shot in the neighborhood of the camp, and as fresh meat was highly desirable as a preventive against the scurvy, Ned jumped at the idea.

»What the matter with our trying our luck?« he said.

»Nothing in the world that I know of,« replied Arthur. »Jerry Turner killed a bouncer over on Ottertall creek last week. I say if we are going to do it let's go there, for I think our presence has scared them away from here.«

»Will you join us, Joe?« asked Ned.

»Certainly I will,« replied Joe, »What's the matter with Lilly coming too? She is a splendid shot and can travel over the snow as well as any man in the camp.«

To this Ned and Arthur made no objection, of course, but Lilly, upon being consulted, declared that she was not feeling well and did not care to go.

It was therefore decided to go without her, and the three boys providing themselves with snow shoes and rifles, started away from Lillydale about half-past ten o'clock.

This in Alaska in the month of January means just after dawn.

»Look out, Mr. Mayor,« said Bob Andrus coming out of the door of his hut as they passed; »you'd better not get too far away from the camp; there's going to be a storm.«

Ned looked incredulous, for there was not a cloud in the sky.

The sun shone down upon the snow, making the crust glitter as though it was studded with diamonds.

»Never you fear! It won't snow before night.« Joe called back.

»Won't, eh? You'll find that it will,« replied Andrus: »still you've got two good hours ahead of you don't overstay it though, or you may never get back, and I for one wouldn't like to see Lillydale lose its mayor.«

»Come along, and take care of us,« laughed Ned; »if you think we are children come, and see that we don't get into any harm.«

»I would, only I've got a lame foot.«

»Walking on snow shoes will cure it.«

»Two's company, and three's a crowd. Only remember what I say, that's all.«

Thus saying, Bob Andrus turned and went back into his hut, leaving the boys to go on their way.

But the old prospector was no croaker. He had given his advice sincerely.

That our Klondike boys had good cause to remember it, will presently be shown.

Chapter XVIII.

Lost in the storm.

The three boys crossed the ridge, and in about three quarters of an hour reached the old diggings on Ottertail Creek,

It was not hard walking on the crust, which was as firm as a rock, and they began to think that it was not going to be necessary to unstrap their snowshoes from their backs, for the sky still remained cloudless, and to their inexperienced eyes there was not the slightest sign of a storm.

»Things don't look very lively on the Ottertail so they?« remarked Ned, gazing around.

»And yet it narrowly escaped being the site of a city, and you its mayor, »said Joe. Strange how things come about.«

»We owe that to Job Travers,« added Arthur.

»That's right,« replied Ned, »and we owe a lot more to him too. I wonder what's become of the scoundrel?«

It was a question unanswerable, for nothing had been heard of the rascally mate since the night they had chased him down the Klondike in the boat.

»I suppose way lies up the creek,« said Joe. »We can hardly expect to strike moose here.«

»Not likely,« said Arthur. »The places to look for them are around the air holes; they come there to drink.«

It seems hardly credible that there should be air holes in such a temperature as the Alaskan rivers have to contend with, but yet such is the case.

Plodding on up the creek, the boys came toe one before they had gone half a mile.

Here they found the remains of a camp-fire and other signs which went to show that some one had preceded them there.

»This must be the place where Jerry Turner shot his moose,« said Ned. »What do you say to waiting here?«

Joe seemed to think that it was as good a place as any, but after half an hour's halt among the bushes they all voted that if they never found a moose they did not want to remain any longer on the watch.

A disagreeable chill had come over the air.

Not that the thermometer had fallen; on the contrary it was several degrees above zero, which was quite temperature for Alaska at that season of the year.

But the atmosphere had grown raw, and a gray mist was creeping over the sky, through which the sun had hard work to penetrate.

»Looks nasty,« said Joe, 'I wouldn't wonder if Andrus was right after all. What do you say, boys, shall we go back?«

»Not without a moose,« declared Ned, decidedly. »Let's push on a little further anyhow. I hate to be skunked.«

They started up the creek again and plodded on for about a mile, striking no air-hole and seeing nothing of their expected game until they came to a point where the creek took a sharp turn.

Rounding this, Joe, who was in advance, suddenly stopped.

»Hist! Softly! Softly!« he whispered. »Here's one now!«

Sure enough!

Right ahead, standing near an air hole, was a big buck moose, as fat as butter, just the sort of game needed in the camp.

His back was turned toward the boys, and as they were to the windward of him, he had not yet discovered them.

Their chance had come, ever expected to bag a moose, now was their time.

It had been agreed that Ned should have first shot, and he leveled his rifle and fired.

The shot took the big animal in the side just beyond the hip.

But it was not fatal.

With an enraged snort it threw up its head and scrambled up the bank, plunging in among the stunted trees.

Joe fired a second shot, but that was a miss.

»After him!« cried Ned.» He's our game! We mustn't lose him now!«

They ran up the bank and started on the trail.

It was plain enough, for the hoofs of the moose just cut the crust, and there was a trail of blood besides.

Still they could not come up with him.

The boys had a lot to learn about moose hunting yet.

They could not even get a sight of the wounded animal, yet there was the trail to show them that they were going right.

For fully two miles they kept on so. It was growing monotonous; moreover, it was growing more and more chilly and uncomfortable, and at last the wind sprang up suddenly from the northwest, and it began to snow.

»By gracious, Bob Andrus was right. This »won't do!« exclaimed Ned. 'We must get right back!«

No one disputed him, for both Joe and Arthur realized the seriousness of their situation.

They abandoned the chase immediately, and started to retrace their steps to the creek.

»It was all plain sailing at first, for there as their own trail to follow, and the moose's into the bargain.

But as they continued to advance, the snow »all faster and faster until at last it came in a perfect whirl.

All in a moment, it seemed, the trail vanished, e wind swept through the forest dismally, and the whirling flakes blinded the boys in the most confusing way.

»This is_a bad job,« said Arthur. »I hope, you know where you are going, Ned.«

»Indeed, I don't,« replied Ned, hollowly. »IT don't know any more about it than you do.«

»And that's nothing at all. If we don't make the creek soon we shall be in a sweet fix.«

»I guess we'd better put on the snow shoes,« said Joe; 'we haven't a moment to lose. It's growing awful dark.«

They hurriedly unstrapped their snow shoes and fastened them upon their feet.

This made walking a little easier, but it did not help a bit in the matter of the trail.

It had vanished, 'and it was safe to say that it would never appear again.

Darkness shut down u on the forest; the long January night had begun.

It found the boys still, plodding on wearily with no sign of the creek.

For some time no one had spoken; their progress had been slower and slower.

»It's no use, boys,« gasped Joe, pausing suddenly and pressing his hand against his heart; »I'm winded—clean gone—I can't go any further.«

He staggered back against a tree as he spoke, slid round it and sank down in the snow.

»Great heavens! What shall we do?« cried Ned. »It will never answer for him to stop here, Arthur, he'd die.«

But what could the do?

Joe had apparently fainted; night was upon them and they were lost in the storm.

Chapter XIX.

The cry in the night.

»Joe! Joe! Wake up, Joe! Rouse yourself! You can't lie here!«

Ned Dayton kneeled. down in the snow, raised Joe in his arms, and shaking him violently, called his name again and again.

It was no use.

Joe would rouse for the moment and then sink back again.

»Oh, I'm sleepy—so sleepy,« he kept saying. »Just let me alone, will you? I want to go to sleep.«

»You can't, sleep here! You'll die!« cried Arthur, »Give him a drink of whisky, Ned. He's got to take it! It's matter of life or death!«.

Arthur always carried his pocket pistol, although he seldom made any use of it. As for Ned and Joe they never touched liquor, and had often given their friends at the Lillydale diggings to understand this.

But this case was certainly exceptional, and not to be argued.

Ned seized the flask, and forced Joe to take a swallow or two.

The liquor ran through the boy's veins like fire, and did its work.

In a minute Joe brightened up and staggered to his feet of his own accord.

»I feel better now,« he exclaimed. »Let's get on. There ain't any use of stopping here.«

But where to go was the question.

The snow was whirling about the unfortunate boys with blinding fury; night had now settled down upon them; it was so scarcely see a foot ahead.

Ned threw his arm around Joe, and Arthur leading, they started on through the drifting snow.

There was nothing said; there was nothing to say. The Situation was just as serious as this: If they failed to reach some place of shelter within a very short time all three must perish.

And how could shelter be hoped for there in the wilderness, where, with the exception of the roving Indian, the foot of man had never trod.

Ned hoped still, but Arthur had no hope.

He knew only too well that the chances were dead against them.

Yet he was wrong.

Relief was close at hand, although they did not know it.

Instead of returning by the direction which they had come, they had been going round in a circle, as persons bewildered in the woods invariably do.

A few steps further and they came out suddenly upon a frozen creek.

The snow whirled about, then more furiously than ever, fairly blinding them, and yet they were able to discern right ahead a small log cabin, which they knew at once they had never seen before.

»Gracious! What's this? A house!« cried Ned.

»That's what it is,« replied Arthur. »We are saved! Look to Joe there! He's going down again.«

It was another case of collapse with Joe, but they got him into the hut all right.

The door stood partially open and there was no one inside.

The hut was a typical miner's cabin with its big fireplace and, bunks against the wall. There was also a table and several chairs, and a good stock of firewood.

In short it was as comfortable a place as any hut in Lillydale.

With a sigh of relief Ned laid Joe down upon the floor while Arthur closed the door.

»We must have a fire at once,« said Arthur. »Give him another drink of whisky, Joe and I'll have a blaze going in no time.«

It was the fire that saved the half frozen boy.

Soon it was blazing on the hearth, and in a few minutes more the interior of the hut was warm and comfortable.

They rubbed Joe's hands and feet, removing his snow boots and stockings for the purpose.

It was hard work to bring him back to his natural warmth, but at last he declared that he felt ever so much better and needed nothing but sleep, so they lifted him into one of the bunks and let him doze off drawing up close to the fire themselves, preparing for their lonely watch.

»It won't do for us to sleep, Ned,« said Arthur, at least not at present until Joe wakes again. We've got to keep an eye on him, for although I don't anticipate any further trouble, there's no telling how his case may turn.«

»Oh, he'll be all right; I'm sure of it,« said Ned. »Don't you fret, Arthur! Joe has been, working pretty hard lately, and was really in no condition to stand anything like this.

»I think myself that there is no danger,« replied Arthur, »still we ain't taking any chances. Say, Ned, this hut has been recently occupied. I wonder who in the world it can belong to?«

»Give it up. Never dreamed there was any hut up here.

»Nor I either. Is it on our land?«

»Must be. Our line must extend two miles beyond here.«

»Of course; this is Ottertail Creek?«

»It can't be anything else; we ought to have explored up here before the winter set in. I meant to do it a dozen times, but somehow I never got round to it. Heavens! ow the wind howls! I'm afraid this storm is going to be a long one. What will they think down at the camp?«

»They'll have us down, for dead, sure—that's what they think.«

»I suppose they will; of course they can't do a thing to help us, and all we can do is to wait till it lets up.«

»Which won't be to-morrow in my way of thinking. Hark! Wasn't that a cry outside?«

»Sounded like a call for help, by gracious! yet it can't be!«

Ned sprang to his feet.

»And why not!« he exclaimed. »We were out in the storm only a few moments ago—why ot, someone else?«

»But who?«

»Mightn't Bob Andrus have followed us? He acted very much as though he meant to. There it goes again.«

»Help! Help! Help!«

Borne toward then so on the wind the cry in the night was very distinct now.

It was the cry of some poor wretched lost in the storm.

Ned flung the door wide open and peered out.

The wind sent the sparks whirling up the chimney, and the lamp which had been lighted and placed upon the table was immediately extinguishes.

Then once more the cry was heard.

»Help! Help! Help!'

Chapter XX.

The frozen man.

»Help! Help! Help"!«

»It was the cry again!«

It came ringing out above the storm before Arthur Cross could. join Ned at the door.

»It's right up the creek a little way, ain't it?« said Ned. »Sounds so tome and yet I can't see a thing.«

»Not to be expected under the circumstances; we must act quick. Got your snow shoes on, old man? I've got matches and will light the lantern, and —«

»Coming! Coming! Hold on there! We'll give you a lift in a minute. Don't give up!«

Breaking off in the midst of his sentence 'Arthur shouted these encouraging words to the poor wretch out in the storm.

Ned was just as quick to act.

He hurried back, threw an extra blanket stripped from the other bunk over Joe and raking the coals up further on the hearth, put on his snow shoes and. was ready for the start.

Meanwhile Arthur had lighted a lantern and put on his own snow shoes.

»I'm all ready!« he exclaimed. »We'll get right out now and see what can be done.«

»I suppose it's safe to leave Joe here alone?«

»Why not? What can happen to him?«

»Nothing, I suppose, but —«

»Oh pshaw! Don't you worry unnecessarily. We've got a life to save.«

There had been no repetition of the cry since Arthur gave the call.

As they plodded on through the fluffy snow up the creek, it seemed to the boys that the storm was breaking away to some extent.

Suddenly there was a flash of light, and every article seemed stand out with startling distinctness.

In the northern sky there was a ruddy glow, which spread with great rapidity, lighting up the entire heavens, and making each individual snowflake stand out as did the bushes, rocks and trees.

It was a scene at once so beautiful and so startling that the boys could not help stopping to gaze upon it.

»What in the world does it mean? Are the woods on fire?« exclaimed Ned.

»It's the aurora, borealis behind the storm,« replied Arthur.

»Impossible!«

»Oh, but it is! That shows that we are on the very edge of the storm and it may pass away any time. If the sky was unclouded you'd see it even more brilliant than it was on Christmas night.«

»There had been several brilliant displays of the wonderful Arctic aurora! previous to this, but always in a clear sky, and Ned was still disposed to dispute Arthur's statement.

While they were discussing it the cry for help came again, this time more faintly, but at no great distance away.

The boys gave an answering shout and hurried on through the snow.

After a moment they rounded a point where the banks of the creek almost met.

»Hello!, Hello!« shouted Ned. » Where are you, friend?«

The answer was an inarticulate cry close to them.

Arthur flashed the lantern in among the bushes, and they both saw the outlines of man's form half buried in the snow.

They pulled him out and lifted him to his feet, neither uttering a word.

The man himself seemed to be frozen stiff.

Yet he was able to mutter incoherently, and beg that they would take him to the hut which they did, almost carrying him the last part of way.

When they got into the hut they laid him down before the fire, and while Arthur hurried to close the door Ned bent over the man and began pulling away the heavy fur wraps in which he was enveloped.

Arthur came and lent a hand, and they got his coat off and his boots and stockings.

His head which was enveloped in a heavy woolen comfortable, coming up around his and over his eyes, with a woolen cap drawn down over it, they left. till the last; when. they finally removed these coverings Ned jumped up with a startled cry.

»Job Travers!« exclaimed Arthur.

»Well, well, well!«

»Hanged, if it isn't.«

»You see for yourself.«

»I never guessed it. This must be his hangout! We might have known.«

Certainly they might have guessed for the mate and his partner, Buck Hyland, were the only persons they had reason to believe were hanging about the

neighborhood, outside of Lillydale.

The man was more than half frozen, and seemed past recognizing Ned.

He was pale and emaciated also, and looked as though he had not enjoyed a square meal in a month.

as he lay there staring at Ned through half closed eyelids, he did not seem to recognize him, but just kept muttering: »Much oblige, pard. Do as much for you some time. Got any whisky? Give me a drink—for goodness sake give me a drink!«

»He's full now,« said Arthur, »but I s'pose, we may as well give him another horn.«

They did so, and Travers went off to sleep and began snoring lustily.

Arthur lit up the lamp and bent down to examine him more closely.

»His face is all frozen, and so are his ears and his nose!« he exclaimed.

»His hands are just as bad,« said Ned. »See, they are beginning to swell already.«

It was the same with his feet and legs.

Fact was they had to deal with a man who was frozen pretty much all over and like two Christians they did the best they could.

Undressing the mate they rolled him in blankets and applied snow to the frozen parts.

During the operation Travers never once roused but just lay there breathing heavily, and so it continued after they got him in the bunk.

Indeed, after Joe woke up declaring that he felt all right, which was along toward three o'clock, Joe Travers still lay in the same condition.

By this time the boys had become used to it and they came to the conclusion that morning would see him all right again and as ugly and treacherous as ever.

Of course Joe was greatly astonished to find him there; and for that matter, astonished to find himself in the hut, for he could remember nothing of what had occurred after he sank fainting in the snow.

Ned explained, and after a a little Arthur turned into the bunk for a sleep, leaving Ned and Joe seated by the fire talking.

This was about four o'clock, and the storm was raging outside more furiously than ever, with no visible chance of its abating.

»Let it snow,« Joe said, »we are comfortable here. If it wasn't for Lilly I wouldn't mind if it kept up all day to-morrow. It's got to snow up here on the Klondike, and we are just as comfortable in this hut as we would be in the cabin of the Belle.«

»Lilly will be terribly worried, I'm afraid,« said Ned.« »We must make every possible effort to work our way back as soon as it's light.«

»Can't done,« said Joe. »No use thinking of such a thing until the storm is all over. I've heard enough about these storms from Captain Boyle, to -«

»Bill!. Bill Boyle! Go way! Don't stand there looking at me with those terrible eyes! I didn't do it! I didn't kill you! You ain't dead and I'm glad of it! G'way! G'way!«

It was the frozen man.

He had suddenly risen bolt upright in the berth, and was shaking his fist at the form his fevered imagination pictured to his excited brain.

»G'way, cap!« he cried again. »Go back to Tophet where you belong! What's that? I did kill' you? I'm a liar, am I? Well, I am! I'll own up! I did do it! G'way and leave me alone and I'll give up Pete Frazer's dust. It mounts to more than a hundred thousand dollars, cap. I'll give it up I say! Lilly shall have every once!«

He sprang out of the bunk and shook the blankets, standing naked between the blazing fire and the astonished boys.

Chapter XXI.

The gold that came with the storm.

For an instant the boys were tongue-tied—they could not speak.

Job Travers was silent too.

The effort of rising seemed to have dazed him.

»He stood there staring over into one corner; his frozen limbs trembled; he moved his hands, which had already swollen to twice their natural size, feebly before him.

»Let's get him back to bed again,« whispered Joe; »he'll die if he stands here like this.«

»No, no! For Lilly's sake! Something is going to come of this, Joe.«

»Upon my word, I believe you care more about Lilly than I do, Ned, and I know one thing—she cares more about you than she does about me.«

Ned flushed scarlet.

»What in the world do you mean by that, Joe Steele?« he demanded, fiercely.

»Oh, I mean what I say«, replied Joe, »and I've been meaning to say it this long time, but it's no time to talk about it now. What's the scoundrel up to? Is he going to sleep there on his feet?«

They might have kept right on talking, so far as the mate was concerned, for he was utterly oblivious to their presence, and yet perhaps. their voices had some effect upon him, for when they stopped talking he began again.

»Don't blame me too much, Bill Boyle,« he muttered. »I've suffered—I've suffered, too. After Buck Highland died, I was laid up here for a month with the scurvy—you know it. You know that for ten days I haven't tasted food! You know that I was just about ready to go down to the town those blame boys built and throw myself upon their mercy; you know all that, Bill, and you know that all that time I've had a hundred thousand dollars in dust right here in this house that Pete Frazer built.«

He stopped again and looked wildly around.

Then he staggered toward the corner into which he had been staring, bent down and pulled up a small square of boarding in the floor, hardly to be termed a trap door, for it was scarcely a foot either way.

Here while the boys were eagerly watching him he drew out bag after bag, all heavy and all evidently containing gold dust.

»Here it is, Bill!« he muttered, »Take it, cap! Give it to Lilly. As for me I'm as good as dead. There ain't a bite to eat in the house and it's snowing again. If I'd a-

got that moose I might have lived, but I didn't and now-oh heavens! Help me! It's coming! The rheumatism is around my heart again! Oh! Oh! Oh!«

He staggered to his feet and clapped his hand upon his heart, an expression of intense agony passing over his face.

»Come back to the bunk, Mr. Travers,« said Joe, pityingly.

»I won't,« muttered the mate. »I won't move a step until Bill Boyle picks up the gold. Why don't you take it, cap? It's for Lilly. Why -«

They, were the last words the mate ever uttered.

Right in the midst of his sentence he paused, reeled, and fell headlong.

Arthur Cross, awakened by the noise of the fall, sprang out of the bunk to find a dead man lying on the floor.

It was a terrible thing to have to remain housed with a corpse all through the next day, with the snow banking up against the hut and not a bite to eat not a drop of water to quench their thirst.

That was the situation of our Klondike Boys, however, for the storm held until sundown, and then the clouds cleared away and the stars came out, and the wonderful Arctic aurora lit up the heavens so brilliantly that it was hard to realize that the sun had gone.

»Let's start now,« proposed Ned. »Another day like this would kill me. I can't bear to think of that thing under the blankets there in the bunk.«

»I can then,« said Arthur, stoutly. »He was a great scoundrel, and he would have put at you where he is now, if I hadn't interfered.«

»I say go by all, means,« said Joe. »We've 'got this dust to carry though; it will never do to leave it here.«

»It will weigh us down terribly,« said Ned. »What do you say to putting it back under the floor?«

»Oh, think if we divide it among us we can manage.«

But they couldn't. The weight of the dust was entirely too great to be handled on snowshoes, with snow as light as it was then.

They climbed out through the scuttle in the roof, for the hut was so banked in that there was no other way of doing it.

But the weight of the gold took them deep down into the snow, and they were glad to scramble back again and unload.

»I'll stay and keep guard if you say so,« said Arthur.

But the boys wouldn't hear to it.

»No, no, we'll stick together!« declared Ned. »We can make Lillydale in two hours if we travel light.«

»If we don't freeze to death,« said Joe.

»It's only ten below zero,« replied Ned, who had taken his pocket thermometer up on the roof with him. Cold, of course, but nothing for Alaska, and I think we can stand it. Come, let's get the gold back into its place again, and then make a fresh start.«

Before they had time to do it loud voices were heard outside.

»Here's the hut!« they heard someone shout. »This is the place he told me about. Come on, boys! - He can't hold out against us! We've as good as got the dust in our fists now.

»Who in the World can that be?« breathed Ned.

Before anyone could answer they heard a scrambling on the roof and a loud pounding was set up against the scuttle.

Open up here, Job Travers! Open up!« shouted a hoarse voice. »We want Pete Frazer's dust and we mean to have it. Open the trap or we'll break it in!«

There was a space of about two inches above the snow which was banked up against the hut.

Ned peered out and saw three men wrapped in furs coming over the drift.

There were several Indians behind them.

All were heavily armed and they formed a forbidding gang.

Meanwhile the blows on the scuttle continued.

»Open up!« shouted the voice again. »Open up, Travers! I'm Buck Hyland, the than you thought was dead!«

Chapter XXII.

Ned and not Joe.

»Have you seen anything—have you heard anything, Mr. Andrus?«

»Not a thing, Miss Lilly,« replied old Bob Andrus. »I've been as far as I dared over the ridge, and it's a blame good job that I'm back again. Upon my soul, I believe if I'd ventured half a mile farther I wouldn't be here to tell the story now.«

And old Bob Andrus shook the snow from his bearskin coat and then threw off the coat itself, for there was a roaring fire in the hut where Lilly and Mrs. Grandon had taken refuge when the storm began, for the miners did not consider it safe for them to remain alone on board the Belle.

Lilly wrung her hands in despair.

»Oh, they are lost! I know they are lost!« she moaned. »I begged Ned not to go!« Bob Andrus stared.

»I thought it was Joe,« he began, and then checked himself, saying: »Anyhow I put in my little protest, too. Told them it was going to snow, and told them to look out for themselves, but they wouldn't listen. Now they are in for the worst of it, but the mayor is a smart one, and Joe and Arthur are no fools. I don't give up hope. Not by no means. I say it will come out right yet.

»That's what I keep telling her,« put in Mrs. Grandon, »I've been two years on the Yukon, and bad as it is to be caught out in the woods in a snow storm, I never knew a single person to perish, although I've known as many as six to have that disagreeable experience. You want to hope for the best. Don't cross your bridge till you have to. I tell you child, they'll come back again all right.«

Now Grandon was a very encouraging person always, and it goes without saying that she was just the sort of person Lilly must needed to have about her now.

Night had settled down upon Lillydale—the night of the big snow storm which was destined to be ever remembered in the annals of the little town.

Bob Andrus said what comforting words he could and left the hut, wallowing through the snow from house to house to render his report, for every one in the settlement was fearfully anxious about our Klondike Boys, not only because it was a matter of business interest with them, but because Ned, and Arthur, by their square dealing and, courteous ways, had made themselves beloved by all.

If it had been of the slightest use, the whole settlement would have turned out to the rescue, but it wasn't.

Lives would have been endangered—uselessly sacrificed, for it would have been simply impossible even to have crossed the ridge in the teeth of the storm.

Meanwhile, as the evening advanced the fury of the storm kept on increasing.

Bob Andrus returned to Lilly's hut, and stretched himself out before the fire to watch through the night.

To sleep with one eye open, that was old Bob Andrus' way of watching, and it was effective, for no one could possibly have entered the hut without bringing him to his feet in an instant, ready for whatever emergency, might occur.

Lilly and Mrs. Grandon were supposed to be sleeping in the room adjoining, although as a matter of fact, poor Lilly never closed her eyes until away along toward morning.

How long she slept then she never knew, but it could not have been very long for Bob Andrus heard her stirring as late as four o'clock, and at half past four she suddenly flung open the intervening door, bringing the watcher to his feet by her startled cry.

»Save them! Oh, save them! Oh, those men will kill them! Oh, Mr. Andrus! Help!«

»There! There! You're dreaming my dear!« said the old, man, kindly. Wake up! It's all right?«

»Dreaming? Was I? I suppose I must have been,« gasped Lilly, staring about the room.

»What was it? Tell me! There, sit down here by the fire and try to calm yourself. It was all right—take the old man's word for it. Things are no worse than they were.

By this time Lilly was wide awake.

»Of course it was a dream,« she said; »but, oh, it was so vivid. It seemed to me that I had started out after Ned and the others, that I had already crossed the ridge and was working my way up Ottertail creek.«

»Yes, yes,« breathed old Bob, who was very superstitious and a great believer in dreams. »Go on! What happened then?«

»Why I kept on plowing through the snow until I had gone several miles up the creek,« continued Lilly, »when all at once I saw a dead moose lying half buried in the snow. I thought to myself that perhaps Ned had shot it and I fell to wondering whether the boys were not somewhere about.«

»And did you see them?« questioned old Bob, eagerly. »Did you see them in your dream?«

»No, I saw nothing of them, but what I did see was the trail of the moose in the freshly fallen snow and I immediately began to follow it. I went so fast that it seemed as if I had wings and was flying until at last had crossed another ridge and came to another creek where there the nie hut standing on the side of the hill.«

»Old Pete Frazer's hut, by gum!« cried Bob, slapping his thigh. »That's on Duck Creek. I hain't been there in two years, but I know it well. Were the boys in there?«

»Yes, they were. I saw them with bags of gold dust all over the floor about them, and while I was looking—it seemed to me that I could look right through the wall of the hut—I saw men and Indians come out of the woods. They were armed with rifles and looked wild and desperate. 'Give us the gold or we'll kill you!' their leader called out, and then they commenced to pull the hut to pieces so that they could get at the boys. I ran to warn them and woke up suddenly and found myself here with you calling to me. Ob, Mr. Andrus, what can it mean?«

»It means trouble, miss. We must go to that hut.«

»We must! I'll go, too. We must go now. I can never rest unless I'm doing something. I'd father brave any danger than to remain idly here.«

»Not now; we can't go now—not till the storm let's up,« said old Bob, pointing to the window,

The snow was whirling wildly against the panes.

»We must—we must go!« moaned Lilly. »My dream means something—I feel it—now it! Oh, Ned—Ned! If I could only go to you now!«

»Ned! I thought it was Joe!« said Bob Andrus again.

But Lilly said Ned and not Joe,

Chapter XXIII.

Working for a dead man's dust.

»This is serious business, Ned,« said Arthur Cross. »There's a big gang of them out there.«

»Yes, and a desperate gang. They know what we've got in here, and they mean to have it, too.«

»What can we do?« questioned Joe; »anything besides staying idle here an waiting for them to break in? By gracious, I'd rather run any risk than to do that.

»There's nothing else to do,« said Arthur. »What can we do when we are all blocked with snow? They can get in, but we can't get get out to save ourselves except by the roof.«

There was no denying that the situation was more than desperate.

The pounding on the roof went straight on, and they could hear the shouts of the gang outside.

They had ceased to call to Job Travers, but Kept on talking to each other. It seemed as if they were trying to beat in the scuttle with the butts of their rifles; others were attempting to tear the slabs off the roof, the boys judged from the sounds, but thanks to old Pete Frazer's skill as a builder the hut was strongly constructed, and but little headway was made.

For a few moments the boys stood listening to them, wondering what was best to do.

Sooner or later they would succeed in forcing an entrance—that seemed certain.

That they could hope to stand up against such a gang, they knew well enough was simply impossible, and yet there seemed no sway of beating a retreat.

»Hold on,« whispered Ned, suddenly. »I've got an idea; we can't fight them fellows, but we can trick them if we are sharp.«

»How?« asked Joe, eagerly.

»Suppose they find Job Travers dead in the bunk and can't find the gold—what then?«

»Why, then they'll go away, I suppose.«

»Exactly. Well, we'll give them that chance.«

»But I will you manage it?«

»We'll go out into the snow.«

Without stopping to answer Joe's eager question, Ned flung open the door.

The snow was banked up so heavily against it that little or none fell inside—it formed a perfect wall before them.

»We'll cut our way through,« breathed Ned. »While they are working we'll work too. Remember we are on the side of a hill and the creek lies before us; it drifted here, but if I know anything the wind has swept the creek clear. If we are sharp, we can dig out while they are breaking in and bank up the snow behind us.«

»But when we get through they'll see us sure,« objected Joe.

»We'll take our chances! To work, boys. To work!«

»And the gold?« said Joe.

»Goes with us, We'll hide it in the snow.«

There were several spades in the hut; the boys seized them and went to work on the snow wall with a will.

The lights had been extinguished and they worked in the dark, but that made no difference for all they had to do was to dig straight ahead, throwing the snow into the hut as they went, but taking care to leave the door free so that they could lock it behind them when they came to make their final retreat.

As soon as they had cleared a space big enough for all three to stand in, Ned removed the bags of gold dust and sunk them deep in the snow outside.

All this time the hammering on the roof continued, but there seemed to be but little headway made until all at once there came a snapping and a cracking, and they knew that something had yielded at last.

But this was some little time after the dead man's dust had been removed, and the boys had dug a tunnel fully ten feet in length.

»Shut the door! they are in!« cried Ned.

Joe rushed for the door and pulled it shut, turning the key in the lock.

He was not a moment too soon.

The scuttle had been forced, and a man with a rifle in his hand peered down through the opening—

»Great guns! The place is full of snow!« he called back, »There don't seem to be no one here.«

»Just what I thought,« replied another on the roof. »Drop down there, Buck! It's safe enough! We've got the roost all to ourselves.«

»It's Buck Hyland!« whispered Ned. »Boys, this drift can't be such a very big one or we couldn't hear them as we do.«

»Here's the end!« called Arthur, who was still digging a way.

His shovel had suddenly struck through the snow bank into the open, and there was the light of the stars ahead.

»Work! Work!« cried Ned. »Keep it up, boys! We are working for our lives and for a dead man's dust. We'll win both or know the reason why.«

There's nothing like being cheerful under adverse circumstances, and it looked as though it might be all right for the boys, but it was certainly anything but right or for Buck Hyland and his Gang.

The four white men dropped down into the but.

There they discovered Job Travers' corpse in the bunk.

But the dead man's dust they did not discover—it, was gone!

»He's dead by gum! and the hole where he kept his dust is empty!« cried Hyland. »There's been someone here before us—they've dug out through the drift.«

Aloud shout from the Indians outside told them that something new had been discovered.

»Big Moore sees them!« cried Hyland. »Who can it be? Some of them fellers from 'Lillydale? By gum, I'll soon know!«

He flew to the door and tried to open it, but it was locked.

Hyland managed to kick it open.

All he saw then was a narrow tunnel through the drift with the starlight shining at the other end.

»Dey cut out troo the snow, boss!« shouted Big Moose through the scuttle, »Shall me shoot?«

»Yes, yes! Shoot 'em down, every mother's son of them!« bawled Buck.

Then the rifles began cracking outside, while Buck and his followers rushed into the tunnel.

They were at the end in a minute.

Down on Duck Creek three boys on snow shoes were hurrying away under the stars.

»It's that infernal Ned Dayton and his friends, just as I suspected!« cried Buck. »If he's got the dead man's dust he'll drop it sudden. Here goes!«

He flung up his rifle and fired.

With a sharp cry, Ned threw up his hands and pitched headlong into the snow.

Chapter XXIV.

Conclusion.

A race on snowshoes is an exciting thing when undertaken for sport. How more so must it be when it is a matter of life and death.

This was the next event which happened on Duck Creek.

Ned was not dead, though badly wounded. The shot fired by Big Moose lodged in the boy's left shoulder. He stumbled from the shock, lost his balance, and went down in the snow, only to scramble up again still perfectly able to take care of himself, and fight for his friends if it had to be.

»Ned, are you hurt? What is it, old man?« cried Joe.

»Nothing-nothing! Don't say a word! Run for your life! If we can gain the woods our chance is as good as theirs,«

But it was not to be.

Duck Creek is wide--wide enough to be called a river--and the bank on the opposite side was steep and high.

Running down from the hut, Big Moose and the Indians flew over the snow with surprising speed.

They were used to snowshoe traveling--our Klondike Boys were only amateurs at it. Alongside of the Indians they appeared only to crawl.

»Don't shoot 'em! Run 'em down and capture them, Big Moose!« yelled Buck Hyland from the bank. »We want to know, what they've done with Pete Frazer's dust.!

These men were »not in it« any more than our young Klondikers, and they did not attempt to follow, but only to cheer the Indians on.

»They are picking up on us! It's no go!« panted Arthur. »Oh, if we only had our rifles now!«

But they hadn't, The rifles had been left in the hut and forgotten, just when they ought to have been remembered.

Worse still it was impossible to climb the bank here, and they could see no place where it was any less abrupt as they ran on down the creek.

Silently and rapidly the Indians gained on them. Ned was beginning to suffer terribly; he felt that his strength could not hold out much longer.

»Leave me, boys, and save yourselves!« he gasped. »I'm getting faint, I can't keep, it up--it's no use!«

»I'll never leave you, Ned,« panted Joe. »Hold on to me! It will help you! There so! That's better. Listen, Ned, to what I am going to say; Lilly loves you and not

me. It was all a mistake between us; we both know it now, Live for her sake, old man! Go in and win her for—Heavens! There she is now!«

Round a wooded point, right ahead of them, a crowd of men on snow shoes suddenly began to come into view, with a young woman in the lead.

It was Lilly, and all Lillydale behind her.

They set up a loud shout as they caught sight of the boys, and grasping the situation immediately, opened fire on the Indians.—

Big Moose dropped first shot; two others went down in the snow before you could count three.

The rest ran for their lives, and Buck Hyland and his men followed suit.

»Let them go!« cried Joe. »Don't bother with them; they can do us no harm into the now. Look to Ned! He's wounded, and—Heavens! It is worse than I thought!«

Ned had fainted and would have fallen into the snow again if Lilly had not caught him in her arms.

* *

*

A wound in the Arctic regions is sometimes a very serious thing, and in Ned Dayton's case it proved to be very serious indeed.

»When they got the boy back to Lillydale—and they had to almost carry him—he was ready for bed, and a fever setting in before morning, poor Ned never left it for several weeks.

During those weeks a great change came over him.

Ned Dayton was in love, and his love was returned; he rose from that sick bed with Lilly's promise to be his wife, and in spite of all he had passed through it is safe to say there was no happier man in the camp.

Spring came at last—the ever to be remembered spring of '97.

When the Belle thawed out our Klondike Boys went down to Dawson, and Ned and Lilly were quietly married.

Joe acted as best man and Mrs. Grandon gave away the bride.

This was in June; Dawson was in a fever of excitement, as was Forty Mile, Fort Cudahy and all the settlements in the Yukon valley, for the miners were beginning to come in with their cleanups of the past season, and now was generally known that the Klondike was the greatest gold field in the world.

Many started for the States, and in the month of July the secret got into the newspapers and the great rush began; a rush which will doubtless carry many a poor fellow to his death and many another to fortune and: subsequent fame, for the riches of the Klondike are real—the gold is there.

And while all this was going on Lillydale was booming, and the young lady for whom the town was named is as rich in her own right as the best.

Old Pete Frazer's gold—that's what did it.

Joe and Arthur, with Bob Andrus' help, soon revisited the hut and recovered the precious dust.

It weighed out a hundred and thirty-three thousand dollars at Dawson when they went down in June.

It was Captain Boyle's legacy to his daughter, and the Daytons are reckoned the richest couple in Alaska to-day.

For Lillydale has boomed all Summer and the mines have boomed with it.

Old Pete Frazer's diggings were found in the spring, and proving to be on the land our Klondike oys pre-empted, has been worked too.

It is a rich placer, but no richer than those about Lillydale.

Shortly after Ned's marriage the boys sold further claims until now Duck Creek, Ottertail Creek and Lillydale are swarming with miners.

Ned is Mayor of a town of over two thousand inhabitants to-day, and there can be no doubt that there will be a big rush in the spring.

Ned says let it come; he is prepared to meet it. There are plenty of good claims still, and he is prepared to dispose of them to any honest, hard working young man on the same favorable terms as before.

If cash is wanted for a start, Dayton, Steele & Cross is the firm to furnish it.

They are rich—very rich. Their profits during the summer just past have immense.

Rumor places their united wealth at a million, but they are probably worth more.

Much of their dust went down to San Francisco in August and we personally know that the firm have a credit of half a million in the bank of California to-day.

Only last week we received a letter from Ned Dayton in which he says:

»Tell everybody to keep away from the Klondike this year unless they want to die. The winter here is terrible and food is very scarce. Let no one come opens and not then unless they are willing to brave every hardship and are possessed of robust health and unlimited endurance. This is no place for the weak ones, or the lazy ones. They will get no gold and they will surely sacrifice their lives.

This, is undoubtedly sound advice, for Ned knows what he is talking about.

Being on the spot and having unlimited means at their command, Ned and his friends will undoubtedly survive the coming winter and largely increase their wealth during the year '98.

It is our Yankee Boys who are destined to transform the Yukon wilderness into a great and prosperous country.

But it is best to make haste slowly for the Alaskan winter knows no mercy.

Those who go to the Klondike next spring stand a chance of succeeding in proportion to their health, strength and energy. It will be wit! them a question of juck and pluck as it was to our **KLONDIKE BOYS**.

[THE END.]

Table of Contents

[The Klondike Boys; or, Two Yakees on the Yukon](#)

[Introduction.](#)

[Chapter I. Ned.](#)

[Chapter II. The mysterious disappearance at Juneau.](#)

[Chapter III. Tied to the burning bush.](#)

[Chapter IV. On the road to Dawson.](#)

[Chapter V. Ned finds Job Travers at last.](#)

[Chapter VI. Ned and Joe Start up the Klondike in a way they don't like.](#)

[Chapter VII. The fearful fight on the Belle.](#)

[Chapter VIII. The first strike.](#)

[Chapter IX. In big luck-the attack on the Belle.](#)

[Chapter X. Dayton, Steele & Cross, owners of the Lilly.](#)

[Chapter XI. Getting ready to begin.](#)

[Chapter XII. The new camp on Ottertail Creek.](#)

[Chapter XIII. Job Travers' dastardly plot foiled.](#)

[Chapter XIV. The new diggings on Duck Creek.](#)

[Chapter XV. The booming of Lillydale.](#)

[Chapter XVI. The midnight robbery on the Belle.](#)

[Chapter XVII. The chase down the Klondike.](#)

[Chapter XVIII. Lost in the storm.](#)

[Chapter XIX. The cry in the night.](#)

[Chapter XX. The frozen man.](#)

[Chapter XXI. The gold that came with the storm.](#)

[Chapter XXII. Ned and not Joe.](#)

[Chapter XXIII. Working for a dead man's dust.](#)

[Chapter XXIV. Conclusion.](#)