Treasure Trail

By Frederick Niven

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(Continued from last issue)

t was at that moment that a whistle nded beyond them from the trees the far side of the meadow. Angus sed his head, hearkening for a repetin.

"Was that a marmot?" he asked.

But Movie Bill's saddle horse, a step two from them on that upland mead's edge, turned, ears erect.

Piccolo had initiative upon occasion. dropped his pack, and grabbing up rifle stepped quickly, but without a h that would excite it, to the doubtlhorse, caught the lines. One of the er horses, apparently a pack-horse hich Greer mediatatively considered, Angus and Piccolo might have noted d they been looking at him then, teed of at Baldy), at sound of the istle had also seemed to be interested; t on seeing the little man step toward saddle-horse and catch the lines he thought evidently passed through equine mind that all was well. It d no more heed, went on grazing. The whistle was repeated; and Baldy rted off toward the place whence sound came. But Piccolo forced him ewise in among the border of scrub ween timber and grass where only head and withers could be seen. ong that scrub Piccolo bent low; gus and Greer watching saw only horse moving away from them—or y his head and withers, the highned and cantled saddle.

'Canny, Piccolo, canny!" called An. "Hold him up. Disarm him. Don't ot unreasonably!" And then he ned to Greer. "If you let a whoop of you your name, I might remark, be Dennis. You tell me he is not in h you, but I don't believe you, Mr. er."

Greer dropped MacPherson's pack t he had been carrying, sat down on

"I ain't butting in," said he, and ckled on.

"Well, just you stay with that re-ve," Angus told him. "And your e you can either pass on, or just aside till you get home where you d send it to the comic papers and see t will win a prize. Your merriment ll-timed. Dang it, I do not want to Piccolo Thomas killed. I should be e with him if I was half a man. it is a fact I could not go. What you grinning for? Have you no els of compassion at all, as the pture phrases it?"

Greer suddenly became solemn, but through dread of MacPherson's

"You are a — fine old son of a gun. re a short man, Angus MacPher- but you are all Angus MacPherson the heels up!" he said in his sinst manner.

nd behold, it was as though Angus not heard! He could only hear his t thump. He could hear the blood a vein somewhere, an ageing vein, ing roughly. For him an infinity of ce passed, and then there came to r ears, in rapid succession, six shots, k as the patter of a machine gun. "Your partner has no six gun," reked Greer in an even low voice.

ngus, with his rifle resting on his oked right arm, stood staring in the ction that Piccolo had gone with horse.

"He was a wee man to allow to go a job like that," he muttered. "And he's a wonderful wee man too."

They waited and listened. Greer, cing at MacPherson to see how he k the uncertainty, thought he lookstanding there, grim, like the carved res on the Indian totem-poles he seen at the coast. As for himself, was resigned for whatever was to e. He was now but a blase specta-

There came to their ears, at last, the k of a horse hoof on a stone, and n a crashing of bushes. They saw, denly, the tossing up and down of pony's head—Movie Bill's pony it med. Unexpected, it looked at first some prehistoric monster come e in these queer upland solitudes, a moment in their tensity hardly ognizable.

And Movie Bill's horse it was; for n they saw two men, a lithe man of dium height and a slender one walktogether toward them. They were colo and Movie Bill. They came ectly to the edge of the forest where eer sat on Angus's pack-sack, and gus stood, rifle at the ready, beside partner's. The old man did not nble then. He stood rigid, square, ting.

With his easy swinging stride from hip, Movie Bill advanced, one band hind his back holding the lines of the horse. Piccolo walked a pace behind, the near side, his rifle pointed at his oner. Despite his grimness there something almost comic in his atti-e.

"How-do, Mr. MacPherson," said vie Bill, cheerfully.

ngus merely stood pat, staring at

Movie Bill's eyebrows elevated a ment as in astonishment; and then saw Greer.

"Ah-ha!" he said. "Hullo, Mr. er? Well, I got ahead of you all t."

Greer said not a word.

Movie Bill turned to take the bridle his horse. As he did so it opened mouth and let the bit fall out. He pped it on the neck and finished that ess with a thrusting motion of the m.

"Go feed," said he. "Now I know ere you are, all's well. Of course you e lonesome, and had to go off with pack-horse to join other members your species. Darn bad company, ugh!"

He turned from addressing his horse, oring Piccolo and his rifle, to Angus. "Say, Mr. MacPherson," said he, at's a cold welcome you give me. r rifle is not pointed at me like eaky's, but it is in your hands! Are mute with astonishment to find in these altitudes so far from home?" What's taken you, sir? This little gentleman with the .303 I expect such treatment from. He has not the imagination of a flea, though he has the freshness of a chipmunk. Alert! Oh, alert—yes! And that's all. Pray be seated, gentlemen, and somebody explain. The squeaker won't. He has no vocabulary beyond: 'Hands Up!'—and 'Now, dang you, come along with me'. When I asked for the explanation to which I felt entitled he said: 'Go on, keep on a-moving. Don't get fresh.' I was over at the end of this meadow, and with my coat off at that. Found the horses had gone. I whistled for them, and one of them came—through the bush, and with him this Welsh gentleman." He paused and looked at Piccolo from toes to crown of hat. "Easy!" he sneered. "Anybody could hold up a man in his shirt-sleeves. Oh, agile! An agile brain! He kept me covered and backed up to where my coat lay, and felt it with his foot. Very well done indeed. Felt my little automatic. Extracted it. Shot it off against a rock wall only twenty feet away. Might have got a flick of spattered lead; but no matter. What's the explanation? None forthcoming. He just said: 'And now, dang you, come along with me.' Well, I came. Can you explain Mr. MacPherson?"

Angus tried to speak. He wanted to say: "And you have eaten of my saleratus, as ye micht say, and . . ." but he said nothing. Something Movie Bill had said had revived a faint hope. He had remarked to his horse that it was in bad company.

"Are you with this fellow?" he asked, wagging his head toward Greer.

"Oh, MacPherson!" broke out Movie Bill. "Don't act like your friend. I went to him once to help him, and he treated me as if I was a darn housebreaker. I have a twist in me. We all have a twist I guess. I try to combat it; but when a man takes me for a burglar he just—well, he just can. He got my goat. Don't you go and talk so that you get my goat, Angus. Shucks, man! Have I not eaten salt with you," he smiled a wonderful smile over his lined face, "as ye micht say?"

Angus sat down on Piccolo's packsack and gazed up at his friend. His rifle he laid gently beside him, leant against the load.

"It's all very puzzling, Bill," said he. "Elucidate. Elucidate, if you please."

Movie Bill sagged slowly down to a sitting posture upon one heel. On a bent knee he rested an elbow and, chin in hand, he gazed at Angus. The ease with which he sat so—in one of the poses of the accustomed camper, a pose that may be seen in many an Indian village, and at any congeries of cow punchers where the ground is damp—had its associations for Angus. It reminded him of all their travel yarns, of his tales of the Veld and Kaffirs, of Australia, dry-blowing, black-fellows, snakes (Movie Bill was a "grand listener"); it reminded him, that pose, a confirmed camper, of fizzing and bubbling in wilderness valleys, of stories of the mesas, stories of the sage-brush, his recounting of talks he had had with Chief Young Whirlwind, or Kicking Bull's philosophizings and views—the kind of knowledge such men (for in this they were of the same order, the same type, despite their different ages) care to gather, find fascinating.

"Why elucidate?" asked Bill Allardyce, in a low voice, the even voice that is usual to men of his kind and often maintained when they are under stress of emotion. "To clear myself? That's what gets my goat! When I was a boy I was everlastingly being asked to elucidate. I had years of it among uncongenial relatives not of my choosing. It gave me a kink. I do not like to elucidate. I like to be believed in."

They were silent for some moments, and then Movie Bill said: "And yet you have reason. I certainly have a tough face. I am more than homely. I am more ugly—in the exact sense of the word—than Cyrano de Bergerac!"

"Oh, don't be flippant!" cried out Angus. "I have no doubt all is clear, Bill, but make it clear. Man, I'm not a god! I am but an ordinary man—an auld man who has been disappointed in many folks."

"You don't think my name should be Skin-Game Bill, then?" asked Movie. "You believe in me, then?" and he seemed to wait a response as though all depended upon it.

Slowly staring at him, Angus replied: "I—do!"

"Oh, well, that's fine!" said Movie Bill. "Because I've staked your claim."

"You've staked it!" exclaimed Angus.

"You've staked it!" exclaimed Piccolo.

The voice of each rose shrill, but with a leap up of an octave that signified in each a different understanding of the remark. As Piccolo shrilled: "You've staked it!" he flung up his rifle, and Angus was afraid he would shoot Movie Bill in the moment's rage.

"Put down that rifle, Piccolo!" he roared.

Piccolo did lower it, horrified at his own nearness to being a murderer.

"Oh, well," he said, and his voice sounded thin and poignant as the note of a junko in the hills, "if you've staked it, you've staked it."

Movie Bill ignored him.

"I've staked it on behalf of you both. I did not know the number of your miner's license," he said to Angus, "but I've bluffed whoever—if any one—might come along before I found you, or you got here. I just happened to know that the B.C's miners' licenses are all in five figures. I've invented one to bluff anybody who might come along before you did. I've made 18976 on the note I left on the discovery post; and I've made your partner's 18977 as I guessed you'd take out licenses together. It looks good on the paper I left. I did not know how the law was up here, and if you could take one out for Tremaine by proxy or not; and I did not know if he was in your venture at all. That is up to you."

"Tremaine was to be shareholder all right," said Piccolo. "He watched the horses while I went after the fool-hens."

"Well, I guess you fix that between yourselves. Anyhow I have staked your two claims. As well as I could pace it out I've got a base line just twice fifteen hundred feet in length where there is a sign of mineral. That's your two claims; and they take up all the space wherever the mineral shows according to the meaning of the act. I've written both your names and give you, as I say," and he laughed, "temproary license numbers. All you have to do is to rub out these numbers and put in the right ones—unless I was telepathic and got the right ones."

"I've a bad memory for figures," said Angus absently, doing what he did to fill a gap of dum-founded silence. He drew forth his pocket-book and looked at his miner's license. "No, no, man. You are wonderful, but you are not as wonderful as that. The number is not what you wrote."

But at the same time he knew the number was not essential on the scene of discovery. He did not, however, tell Movie Bill that. Perhaps, he thought, in some staes of the Union where Movie Bill had pospected with an old prospector (he recalled stories of that adventure aftr ore) such was the regulation.

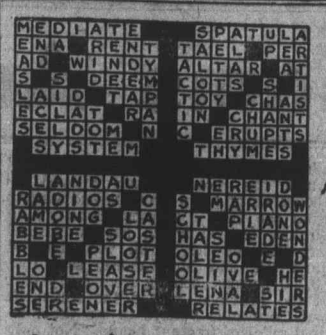
At that moment Angus was more engrossed in other considerations. He turned to liccolo.

"Pic," he said, "you may have thought you were the hero of this journey when you listend-in on yon telegraph talk at Kokane, or when you beat up, as ye micht say, Grafter; and I may have thought I was the hero when my agile brain sent me on my pack-sack, as if it was a toboggan, kicking sidewise away from yon snowslide. But here's the real Don Quixote of Washington State!" He drew a trembling sigh and murmuerd: "Man, it's a great relief to the heart!"

To be continued.

Little Lawrence had just seen a bumble bee for the first time in his short life. "Oh, quick, mummy!" he cried excitedly. "Here's a great big fly wiv his overcoat on!"

Laughter has the approval of the world. It is the sign of a merry heart, and according to an ancient authority, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine."



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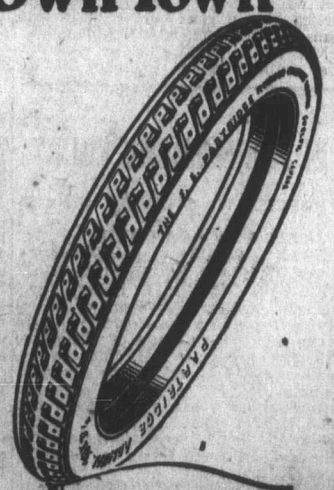

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