

give me the full particulars and maybe I'll let you have a "lay" on the claim.

"They were pretty decent when they saw it was all off, and took me into a back room. I came out of there a half-hour later, my knees weak as the fold in a napkin, and my optics protrudin' like the Aunt-Annie's of a crab. It was big—so big it scared me and made me sick, sick at the spot I'd squandered the two dollars on.

"I wobbled down street and claimed sanctuary in Joe Deacon's place, leanin' agin' the bar pale and disfiggered.

"Joe," says I, "do you know a Riley Murtagh?"

"Sure! that's him now," indicatin' the sweeper, who was wettin' down the sawdust on the floor.

"Mr. Murtagh," says I, "I see a location notice of yours up on Glacier Creek the other day. I'm a tenderfoot lookin' for a place to prospect. What'll you take for your claim?"

"Thousan' dollars."

"You must be injured in the head," says I. "I'll give you five hundred."

"Take you! Cash deal, of course?"

"Why, cert., says I, fingerin' a brass key, all I had in the world. "Pay you this evenin'." Just give me an option till dark."

"Op—nothin'," says he; "money don't talk with me—it shouts. This sellin' claims on conversation money don't tickle my funnybone. If nobody else takes her first she's yours."

"Realizin' the situation offered opportunities for reflection, I took a walk. First thing I knew I'd landed at the little lady's tent. She was full of homesickness and joy at seein' me.

"I'm going to fail," she says, her lip trembling, and little rainstorms comin' into her vision. "Mr. Abramski laughs at me. He says he's forgotten what he did with his mine; thinks he must have misplaced them—now he's going to buy a town lot and build a drygoods store. I'll never get my money back. I know it." She had cold feet right.

"Don't worry; I'll take you in partners with me," says I. "You're in on all I've got, little pal." If she'd 'a' called me I'd been forced to give her half my clothes. "I'm goin' to close a big deal tonight," says I, kind of sang fraudulently, and before leavin' I'd hot-aired her spirits up considerable.

"I went back to Deacon's.

"Joe, have you got a town lot?"

"Sure! the one next door."

"Let me borrow it this afternoon, will you? There's a Jew up street with a roll that pains him like a bad tooth. I won't hurt the lot."

"Go to it," says he with animations. "Bury him deep enough so I won't be bothered, that's all."

"Well, Abramski didn't remember me, and I had no difficulty sellin' him the lot, also three thousand feet of Oregon pine, for six hundred cash. We examined the records to see everything was straight. It was—Lot thirteen, block C, Front Street, Joseph O'Donnell Deacon, locator—my name.

"I paid Murtagh at three o'clock, with a hundred to the good.

"Look a-here," said Deacon when I'd explained the lot transaction. "The Jew is legitimate prey, of course, and I don't object to lettin' him down the ground for a while to help you, but I don't want him sawin' up them boards."

"Enough said!" says I, so after dark I packs the lumber around back of Joe's saloon, and piles it up.

"Next morning, before day, I'm hitin' the trail to Glacier Creek, incumbered with a bill of sale of The Honest Injun bench claim, likewise a pick, pan and shovel. As I pass the lady's tent I yells:

"I'm off for our mine, partner. You'll find two twenties and a ten under the door—your share of the first clean-up."

"Have you ever made a strike, kid? It's a wonderful sensation, dreamy and Edmond Danteslike. I'd been so wrapped up in financiering the enterprise I hadn't rightly allowed my realizations to soak in, but as I got close to the claim my courage oozed out of me. I had to button my suspenders to my spirits to keep 'em up; I was the Heavy-Hearted Kid.

"It's a fake," I kept sayin', prepared for a disappointment. "Fortune ain't

addicted to favorin' the upright this way: some scoundrelly Swede'll get the goods while the honest miner works his hands to the bone tradin' real estate, and grows moral callouses toting lumber."

"I found the Swedes' shaft all right, and give up hope. It wasn't five foot deep, and consisted of poverty-stricken red dirt, lookin' like the ground blushed for me. Anybody that had placer mined a minute could tell that gold had more self-respect than to be incriminated in such a layout. I didn't need to pan it for a test.

"Says I, 'By diggin' two feet more off of one end it'll be big enough to bury 'em both. If I ain't a successful miner I'm a terrible hit as a grave-digger,' and I commenced the visible indications of a double Swede funeral.

"I was pickin' away close to the bed-rock when something gleamed in the dirt. It's a sensation you don't get but once in a lifetime, and I knew I was indeed a rich man before I had grabbed the dirt up. The colors lay in the clay like currants in a pudding. After I'd jabbed the pick in my foot to see I wasn't somnambulin' I stood shoulder deep in that hole and swore, while the sweat dreined off of me in little freshets.

"My excitements had sort of coa-

gulated when I got back to town, and I was ready for business when I see Abramski make a run at me with a weapon in his hand. He'd found out about the lot, and run amuck. It was a shiny little popgun he'd borrowed, and bein' a hammerless it didn't discommode his epiglottis like a real gun would when I rammed it down his throat.

"I pinned him agin' a door, mellerin' up his Adam's apple, and inserted my knee amongst his dyspepsia kind of casual. At the same time I explained I was Miss Walling's attorney in fact and fiction, and had took a change of venue with her investments, liquidatin' her stock in The Promised Land Placer and Prospecting Company, investin' it for a half interest in The Honest Injun bench claim instead. I said that if he wanted to make trouble I'd get her permission to nail his hide up on the wall and let the sun dry it. Strange how domesticated he got; due in part, perhaps, to a diet of Smith and Wesson.

"That's how the play come up," said Kink. "The Honest Injun, as you see, is workin' night and day, a livin' example of merited success and the application of modern methods." He indicated the rows of laboring men beneath us.

As he ceased speaking he consulted a huge silver watch.

"I'm goin' to meet the little lady in town at three o'clock; then we're goin' to select a diamond the size of a mud-turtle. If you're here Saturday I'd like you to stand up with me and give me away. First time I was ever married, and I get took with gooseflesh horrible every time I think of it."

I squeezed his brown hand, and he added with a strain of anxiety:

"You needn't mind tellin' her the biography of this deal, nor anything about the old days on the range. She's from Boston, you know—back where my mother come from—and she thinks decent. Somehow I feel different about rat-trapping the American farmer and such things now. I ain't proud of myself, and if she ever found it out— His big face burned redly under its tan.

"She's romantic, too; she's changed the name of The Honest Injun to The White Knight in my honor. Do you s'pose anybody could have told her about my old habit of turning night into daytime? She's got a sign nailed over the bunk-house yonder, too, with this motto: Sans pere and sans reproche, which I gather means without father or mother—you see, we're both orphans."

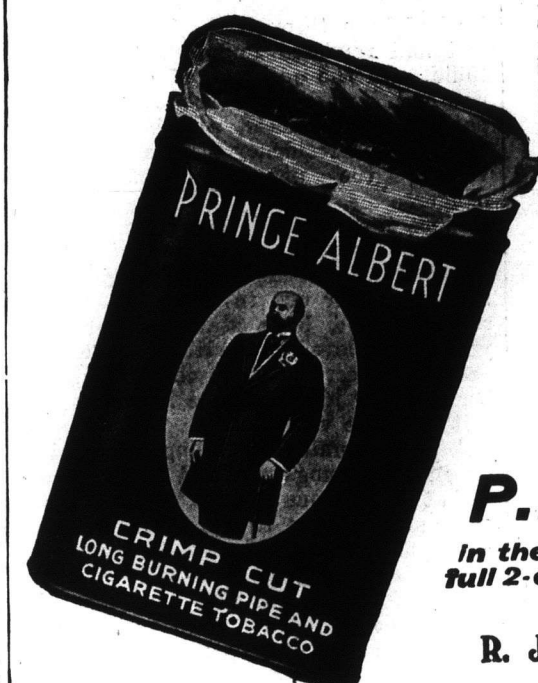
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