

THE KLONDIKER'S WOOING

Being the Story of a Woman who Trusted, and a Man who did not Fail

By EDITH TYRRELL

I HAD arranged a little lunch party one Sunday some few years ago—one of those short resting places in life's uphill road where one stops by the wayside and is refreshed by intercourse with congenial spirits.

On Saturday I was doing the necessary ordering, when the ring of the telephone interrupted me and in answering it I found my husband, lately returned from a trip to the Klondike, had called me. He said, "I had forgotten all about your little party when I met Jim Hadley and invited him to lunch with us to-morrow. He is from the Klondike and when you get over the first shock he will give you, you will be glad to have met him, for he is decidedly a type of what that country can produce in a man who has prospered there. Jim has made already over a million and two years ago did not have a cent." My heart rather sank, but I decided to make the best of it.

When my friends had all arrived on the Sunday I had only just time to give a word of explanation about our unexpected guest, when Jim Hadley arrived. He was a dark man, short and rather fat, and had evidently not been shaved for several days. His clothes were tweed of a large plaid pattern and he wore a red tie which was slightly askew. There were two buttons wanting from his vest, but in spite of these very apparent defects in his apparel, he appeared perfectly at his ease and greeted us all with the glad hand.

As we went into lunch and took our places Jim was rather quiet, but as we all began to talk he joined in and then we forgot all about his personal appearance for he was clever and talked well and soon we all grew interested in what he had to tell us. His profound belief in himself and the Golden North was marvellous. He described the glorious scenery in vivid word pictures, and his stories of life in the Klondike mining camp were so glowing with interest, that he made every one present wish to see that country.

Turning to me from one of my young friends, who especially seemed to interest him, he remarked, "If you will only promise to chaperon it, I will run an excursion to Dawson City next summer to be composed of young ladies." With a wave of his hand which included all my friends, he said, "You will all pan out gold there. I will take you for trips up the creeks, give you your grub at the Northern Cafe, and have a picnic on the Dome to witness the midnight sunset. Only say you will come, girls, and leave the rest to me." We were rather astonished by this proposition, but took it as a joke. After a great deal of merriment and real enjoyment, in which Jim joined as heartily as anyone, our little party broke up, having proved more of a success than I had hoped it could be.

Later in the afternoon, Jim Hadley met my husband on the street and stopped him, saying, "Those were fine girls I met at your house to-day, especially Miss Polly, but I did not know any of them well enough to propose to, so I have just sent a telegram to a girl I know in Nova Scotia, asking her to meet me in Toronto and marry me." Several days later Jim came to see me, and I naturally congratulated him on his approaching marriage. He seemed very glum and after a slight pause said, "Belinda isn't coming. I just came to call and thank you for your kindness, as I am off for the west to-night. I must get into Dawson over the ice." After talking to me a little while he appeared more hopeful, for I told him that probably the suddenness of the telegram had upset Belinda, and that if he wrote a letter, explaining most carefully just what he wanted her to do and where she was to meet him, that she might see things in a different light. He seemed somewhat cheered but as he shook hands with me he grew quite despondent again and said, "I hoped to meet my little girl in Toronto, but I'm afraid she isn't coming."

BELINDA Browne lived in a little village in Cape Breton. She was the village school teacher. She had always been poor and worked hard, but just at this time life was particularly dull because there had flashed across her sky a bright meteor which for the moment, had lighted everything with a truly golden light. It had been her old school friend, Jim Hadley, who, after an absence of fifteen years, had returned to his native place. How well she remembered the old days when Jim used to drag her to school on his sled and carry her dinner basket, or in the summer the boats he had made for her to sail in the ponds and inlets from the sea, and how he would always bait her hook because

she hated to handle the nasty bait, when they went smelting from the end of the wharf. Then Jim went away to college. He had written several times to her, but the letters had stopped and she had only had news of him through a mutual friend who told her that he had gone out West. Her mother and father had died, and it was necessary for her to earn her own living, so she had accepted the position of village school teacher in her own little town.

Suddenly that winter there had been a great stir in the place. Jim Hadley had come back for a visit from the Klondike. He was the same Jim only more enthusiastic, and the money flowed like water through all the village. Every one of his friends was presented with a piece of nugget jewellery. Belinda had a beautiful long chain of small nuggets that went around her neck several times. Jim had paid for repairs on the old church, and many other needed town improvements were done by him, but as suddenly as he had come he had gone, and for Belinda a great deal of joy and light had gone with him.

ONE snowy Sunday afternoon, Belinda was sitting in her room thinking sadly of the future; regretting that she could not do more with her life than pass the rest of it in this little village where she had been born. She would marry perhaps, and live in one of the little houses and have some geraniums growing in her windows, and a small monthly rose bush. The wildest flight of her imagination would then be a trip to the annual exhibition at Halifax. She thought sadly of all Jim Hadley had told her of the West and the Golden North where he had been, and she could almost imagine she had seen it herself from his vivid descriptions. But alas! It was not for her.

Just as her thoughts had reached this point, she was interrupted by the little boy from the post office with a telegram for her. She had never received a telegram before and could hardly open it for the trembling of her fingers. The boy said, "Pa says it is awful important and it's from Jim Hadley." She quickly tore open the envelope and read these words on the yellow form: "To Miss Belinda Browne, Arichat, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. If you will marry me, draw on me for five hundred dollars and meet me in Toronto February 14th. Answer immediately. Signed, Jim Hadley."

Belinda was dazed, though not annoyed, but after reading the telegram several times and kissing the paper as if Jim had written it, she went to consult her aunt with whom she lived, though in her heart she had already decided to go to Jim when he wanted her.

Her aunt read the telegram over to herself three times. After the third reading she carefully took off her glasses and rubbed them as if she had not been quite sure of its remarkable contents, and after reading it again, ejaculated: "Well, I never heard tell of the like. More tom foolery of that Jim Hadley. If you take my advice you will pay no attention to his nonsense. If he had wanted you why couldn't he have married you like a decent Christian when he was down here. Oh, no, he must be doing something that nobody else would think of doing, and anyway, asking you to marry him in a telegram. How do you know, Belinda Browne, he would be there to meet you if you did go?"

After more conversation with her aunt, Belinda was at last convinced that it would be most unwise for her to go on such a journey, so she sadly went to the telegraph office and sent off a pathetic little message: "I would love to come, Jim, only aunt does not think it would be right. Signed, Belinda."

About a week later, Belinda received a letter from Jim explaining matters very clearly to her, telling her that it was not possible for him to come now as he must hurry into Dawson over the winter trail to be there for the spring "clean up." He ended his letter by telling of his homeless condition and how he longed more and more for the companionship of his little school friend. If she only had love and courage enough to come, everything would be brighter for him, and he would try to make her happy.

This settled the matter with Belinda, so without consulting anyone this time, she hurried to the telegraph office and sent this telegram to the address in Toronto that Jim had given her: "I will come

to you in Toronto on February 14th, Jim. Signed, Belinda."

Jim had hurried through his Toronto business, being too restless to remain there and when Belinda's telegram reached his Toronto address, he had already left for the station, but the messenger hurried after and handed him the envelope just as the train was pulling out of the Union Station. Jim having given up all hope of Belinda's coming was leaving for the West to arrange some business before he went to the Klondike. Now her message put him in quandary, but after much thought he sent the following telegram to Belinda from North Bay:

"Miss Belinda Browne, Arichat, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Trust me more and come on to Calgary. Will meet you there February 19th. Answer Calgary. Signed, Jim Hadley."

As the train drew into Calgary after its four days' trip across the continent, Jim was the first person who jumped off. He ran into the telegraph office where a message was handed to him. He eagerly tore it open and read these words:

"Will come to Calgary, but you will be sure to meet me there, Jim, won't you?? Belinda."

After that he went about his business with a smile that his friends laughingly said could be seen for a mile. When his other business was completed, he went to the tailors and ordered a suit of clothes more striking in design than any he had yet worn. He bought a red tie with wide green stripes across it. When he was arrayed in these with a large nugget pin stuck in the tie and a watch chain made of nuggets, he considered his costume was complete.

The train that was to bring Belinda to Calgary would arrive there on Sunday morning at four a.m., so the Saturday before was a busy day. He had to procure a license, and a wedding ring. As to the size of the latter he had some difficulty in deciding, but bought one to fit his own little finger and wore it proudly for the rest of the day.

About four in the afternoon Jim went to one of the minister's houses and being shown into the study where the minister was busy preparing his Sunday sermon, Jim burst out, "Say, do you marry folks?" The minister smilingly said he did. "Well, I want to be married to-morrow morning at four o'clock on the Eastern Express. My little girl is coming on the train and I want to meet her and get married and go right along on the car. I'll make it worth your while, parson."

ON matters being more fully explained, the minister consented to go with Jim to meet the train and perform the marriage ceremony. These matters being safely attended to, Jim sent off a telegram to Belinda on the train to assure her of his presence in Calgary. The rest of the time he found difficult to fill.

Every few moments he would rush from the hotel to buy something that he thought might please Belinda. First it was a large bridal bouquet of the most expensive flowers he could get. Then it would be several boxes of candies or different kinds of fruit, or some piece of jewellery with which to deck his bride. Then again, it would be books and magazines. The time passed very slowly, but at last it was time to dress and put his things into his travelling bags. The man who came to call him and take the bags down received a tip of five dollars because Jim said as he handed it to him that he did not often have to call a chap for his wedding.

As the train drew into the station that dark stormy morning, Belinda's pale little face could be seen pressed against one of the pullman car windows, doubt, fear, and hope mingling in her expression. Jim waved his hat as he saw her, and was on board before the train stopped.

To poor, little, lonely, trusting Belinda, the sight of that face made up for everything. To her the atrocious clothes, the brilliant tie, and the nugget jewellery were quite the most beautiful things in the world for were they not part and parcel of her Jim.

All Jim said as he folded Belinda in his arms was, "You're a brick."

While the train waited in Calgary, the minister got on board and in the little stateroom, with conductor and porter as witnesses, Belinda, holding in her small travel-stained hand the bunch of pure white flowers that Jim had bought, trustingly and lovingly gave her life into the keeping, for better or for worse, of her old school-fellow.