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## CHAPTER I.

It was a quiet night in the Tivoli. At the bar, which ranged along one side of the large chinked log room, leaned half a dozen men, two of whom were discussing the relative merits of spruce tea and lime juice as remedies for scurvy. They argued with an air of depression and with intervals of morose silence. The other men scarcely heeded them. In a row against the opposite wall were the gambling games. The crap table was deserted. One lone man was playing at the faro table. The roulette ball was not even spinning and the game keeper stood by the roaring, red hot stove talking with the young, dark-eyed woman, comely of face and figure, who was known from Juneau to Fort Yukon as the Virgin. Three men sat in at stud poker, but they played with small chips and without enthusiasm, while there were no onlookers. On the floor of the dancing room which opened out at the rear three couples were waltzing daintily to the strains of a violin and a piano.

Circle City was not deserted nor was money tight. The miners were in from Moosehide Creek and the other diggings to the west, the summer washing had been good, and the men's pouches were heavy with dust and nuggets. The Klondike had not yet been discovered, nor had the miners of the Yukon learned the possibilities of deep digging and wood firing. No work was done in the winter and they made a practice of hibernating in the large camps like Circle City during the long Arctic night. Time was heavy on their hands, their pouches were well filled, and the only social diversion to be found was in the saloons. Yet the Tivoli was practically deserted, and the Virgin, standing by the stove, yawned with uncovered mouth and said to Charley Bates:—

"If something don't happen soon I'm goin' to bed. What's the matter with the camp, anyway? Everybody dead?"

Bates did not even trouble to reply, but went on moodily rolling a cigarette. Dan MacDonald, pioneer saloonman and gambler on the upper Yukon, owner and proprietor of the Tivoli and all its games, wandered listlessly across the great vacant space of floor and joined the two at the stove.

"Anybody dead?" the Virgin asked him.

"Looks like it," was the answer.

"Then it must be the whole camp," she said with a snarl of finality and with another yawn.

MacDonald grinned and nodded and opened his mouth to speak when the front door swung wide and a man appeared in the light. A rush of frost, turned to vapor by the heat of the room, swirled about him to his knees and poured on across the floor, growing thinner and thinner and perishing a dozen feet from the stove. Taking the newcomer from its nail inside the door the newcomer brushed the snow from his moccasins and his German socks. He would have appeared a large man had not a huge French-Canadian stepped up to him from the bar and gripped his hand.

"Hello, Daylight!" was his greeting. "By Gar, you good for some eyes!"

"Hello, Louis! When did you all blow in?" returned the newcomer. "Come up and have a drink and tell us all about Bone Creek. Why, dog-gone you all, shake again. Where's that partner of yours? I'm looking for him."

Another huge man detached himself from the bar to shake hands. Olaf Henderson and French Louis, partners together on Bone Creek, were the two largest men in the country, and though they were but half a head taller than the newcomer, between them he was dwarfed completely.

"Hello, Olaf, you're my meat, sarvee that?" said the one called Daylight. "To-morrow's my birthday and I'm going to put you all on your back—sarvee! And you, too, Louis. I can put you all on your back on my birthday—sarvee! Come up and drink, Olaf, and I'll tell you all about it."

The arrival of the newcomer seemed to send a flood of warmth through the place. "It's Burning Daylight!" the Virgin cried, the first to recognize him as he came into the light. Charley Bates' tight features relaxed at the sight, and MacDonald went over and joined the three at the bar. With the advent of Burning Daylight the whole place became suddenly brighter and cheerier. The barkeepers were active. Voices were raised. Somebody laughed. And when the fiddler, peering into the front room, remarked to the pianist, "It's Burning Daylight," the wait-time perceptibly quickened, and the dancers, catching the contagion, began to whirl about as if they really enjoyed it. It was known to them of old time that nothing languished when Burning Daylight was around.

He turned from the bar and saw the woman by the stove and the eager look of welcome she extended him.

"Hello, Virgin, old girl!" he called. "Hello, Charley! What's the matter with you all? Why wear faces like that when coffins cost only three ounces? Come up, you all, and drink. Come up, you unbred dead, an' name your poison. Come up, everybody. This is my night and I'm going to ride it. To-morrow I'm thirty, and then I'll be an old man. It's the last fling of youth. Are you all with me? Surge along, then. Surge along."

"Hold on there, Davis!" he called to the faro dealer, who had shoved his chair back from the table. "I'm going you one flutter to see whether you all drink with me or we all drink with you."

Pulling a heavy sack of gold dust from his coat pocket, he dropped it on the high card.

"Fifty," he said.

The faro dealer slipped two cards. The high card won. He scribbled the amount on a pad and the weigher at the bar balanced fifty dollars' worth of dust in the gold scales and poured it into Burning Daylight's sack. The wait in the back room finished, the three couples, followed by the fiddler and the pianist and heading for the bar, caught Daylight's eye.

"Surge along, you all!" he cried. "Surge along and name it. This is my night and it ain't a night that comes frequent. Surge up, you Siwash and salmon eaters. It's my night, I tell you all!"

"A blame mangy night," Charley Bates interjected.

"You're right, my son," Burning Daylight went on gayly. "A mangy night, but it's my night, you see. I'm the mangy old he-wolf. Listen to me now!"

And how he did, like a lone gray timber wolf, till the Virgin thrust her pretty fingers in her ears and



Burning Daylight.

shivered. A minute later she was whirled away in his arms to the dancing floor, where along with the other three women and their partners a rollicking Virginia reel was soon in progress. Men and women danced in moccasins, and the place was soon a-roar, Burning Daylight the centre of it and the animating spark, with quip and jest and rough merriment rousing them out of the slough of despond in which he had found them.

The atmosphere of the place changed with his coming. He seemed to fill it with his tremendous vitality. Men who entered from the street felt it immediately, and in response to their queries the barkeepers nodded at the back room and said comprehensively—"Burning Daylight's on the tear." And the men who entered remained and kept the barkeepers busy. The gamblers took heart of life and soon the tables were filled, the click of chips and whirr of the roulette ball rising monotonously and imperiously above the hoarse rumble of men's voices and their oaths and heavy laughs.

Few men knew Elam Harnish by any other name than Burning Daylight, the name which had been given him in the early days in the land because of his habit of rousing his comrades out of their blankets with the complaint that daylight was burning. Of the pioneers in that far Arctic wilderness where all men were pioneers he was reckoned among the oldest. Men like Jack Mayo and Jack McQuestion antedated him, but they had entered the land by crossing the Rockies from the Hudson Bay country to the east. He, however, had been the pioneer over the Chilcot and Chilcot passes. In the spring of 1883, twelve years before, a stripling of eighteen, he had crossed over the Chilcot with five comrades. In the fall he had crossed back with one. Four had perished by mischance in the bleak, uncharted vastness. And for twelve years Elam Harnish had continued to grope for gold among the shadows of the Circle.

And no man had groined so obstinately or so enduringly. He had grown up with the land. He knew no other land. Civilization was a dream of some previous life. Camps like Forty Mile and Circle City were to him metropolises. And not alone had he grown up with the land, for raw as it was he had helped to make it. He had made history and geography, and those that followed wrote of his traverses and charted the trails his feet had broken.

Heroes are seldom given to hero worship, but among those of that young land, young as he was, he was accounted an elder hero. In point of time he was before them. In point of deed he was beyond them. In point of endurance it was acknowledged that he could kill the hardest of them. Furthermore, he was accounted a nifty man, a square man and a white man.

In all lands where life is a hazard lightly played with and lightly flung aside men turn, almost automatically, to gambling for diversion and relaxation. In the Yukon men gambled their lives for gold and those who won gold from the ground gambled for it with one another. Nor was Elam Harnish an exception. He was a man's man primarily, and the instinct in him to play the game of life was strong. Environment had determined what form that game should take. Born on an Iowa farm, his father had emigrated to Eastern Oregon, in which mining country Elam's boyhood had been lived. He had known nothing but hard knocks for big stakes. Pluck and endurance counted in the game, and the great god Chance dealt the cards. Honest work for sure but meagre returns did not count. A man played big. He risked everything for everything and anything less than everything meant that he was a loser. So, for twelve Yukon years, Elam Harnish had been a loser. True, on Moosehide Creek the last summer he had taken out

twenty thousand dollars and what was left in the ground was twenty thousand more. But, as he himself proclaimed, that was no more than getting his ante back. He had anted his life for a dozen years and forty thousand was a small pot for such a stake—the price of a drink and a dance at the Tivoli, of a winter's flutter at Circle City and a grub stake for the year to come.

The men of the Yukon reversed the old maxim till it read, Hard come, easy go. At the end of the reel Elam Harnish called the house up to drink again. Drinks were a dollar apiece, gold rated at sixteen dollars an ounce, there were thirty in the house that accepted his invitation and between every dance the house was Elam's guest. This was his night, and nobody was to be allowed to pay for anything. Not that Elam Harnish was a drinking man. Whiskey meant little to him. He was too vital and robust, too untouchable in mind and body, to incline to the slavery of alcohol. He spent months at a time on trail and river when he drank nothing stronger than coffee, while he had gone a year at a time without even coffee. But he was gregarious, and since the sole social expression of the Yukon was the saloon he expressed himself that way. When a lad in the mining camps of the West men had always done that. To him it was the proper way for a man to express himself socially. He knew no other way.

He was a striking figure of a man, despite his garb being similar to that of all the men in the Tivoli. Soft fanned moccasins of moosehide, beaded in Indian design, covered his feet. His trousers were ordinary overalls, his coat was made from a blanket. Long gauntleted leather mittens lined with wool hung by his side, being connected, Yukon fashion, by a leather thong passed around the neck and across the shoulders. On his head was a fur cap, the earflaps raised and the tying cords dangling. His face, lean and slightly long, with the suggestion of hollows under the cheekbones, seemed almost Indian. The burnt skin and the keen dark eyes contributed to this effect, though the bronze of the skin and the eyes themselves were essentially those of a white man. He looked older than thirty, and yet, smooth-shaven and without wrinkles, he was almost boyish. This feeling the onlooker had of age was based on no tangible evidence. It came from the abstract facts of the man, from what he had endured and survived, which was far beyond that of ordinary men. He had lived naked and tenuous, and something of all this smoldered in his eyes, vibrated in his voice and seemed forever a whisper on his lips.

The lips themselves were thin and prone to close tightly over the even, white teeth. But their harshness was retrieved by the upward curl at the corners of his mouth. This curl gave to him sweetness, as the minute puckers at the corner of the eyes gave him laughter. These necessary graces saved him from a

stare. After that Kearns had fallen back on his posts at Forty Mile and Sixty Mile and changed the direction of his ventures by sending out to the States for a small sawmill and a river steamer. The former was even then being sledged across Chilcot Pass by Indians and dogs, and would come down the Yukon in the early summer after the ice run. Later in the summer, when Behring Sea and the mouth of the Yukon cleared of ice, the steamer, put together at St. Michael's, was to be expected up the river loaded to the guards with supplies.

Jack Kearns suggested poker. French Louis, Dan MacDonald and Hal Campbell, who had made a strike on Moosehide, all three of whom were not dancing because there were not enough girls to go around, inclined to the suggestion. They were looking for a fifth man when Burning Daylight emerged from the rear room, the Virgin on his arm, the train of dancers in his wake. In response to the hall of the poker players he came over to their table in the corner.

"Want you to sit in," said Campbell. "How's your luck?"

"I sure got it to-night," Burning Daylight answered with enthusiasm, and at the same time felt the Virgin press his arm warningly. She wanted him to go to the dancing. "I sure got my luck with me, but I'd sooner dance. I ain't hankerin' to take the money away from you all."

Nobody urged. They took his refusal as final, and the Virgin was pressing his arm to turn him away in pursuit of the supper seekers when he experienced a change of heart. It was not that he did not want to dance, nor that he wanted to hurt her, but that insistent pressure on his arm put his free man nature in revolt. The thought in his mind was that he did not want any woman running him. Himself a favorite with women, nevertheless they did not bulk big with him. They were toys, playthings, part of the relaxation from the bigger game of life. He met women along with the whiskey and gambling, and from observation he had found that it was far easier to break away from the drink and the cards than from a woman once the man was properly entangled.

He was a slave to himself, which was natural in a man with a healthy ego, but he rebelled in ways either murderous or panicky at being a slave to anybody else. Love's sweet servitude was a thing of which he had no comprehension. Men he had seen in love impressed him as lunatics, and lunacy was a thing he had never considered worth analyzing. But comradeship with men was different from love with women. There was no servitude in comradeship. It was a business proposition, a square deal between men who did not pursue each other, but who shared the risks of trail and river and mountain in the pursuit of life and treasure. Men and women pursued each other, and one must needs bend the other to his will or hers. Comradeship was different. There was no slavery about it, and, though he, a strong man be-

lieved, he gave not something due but in royal largess, his gifts of toll or heroic effort falling generously from his hands. To pack for days over the gale swept passes or across the mosquito ridden marshes and to pack double the weight his comrade packed did not involve unfairness or compulsion. Each did his best. That was the business essence of it. Some men were stronger than others, true; but so long as each man did his best it was fair exchange, the business spirit was observed, and the square deal obtained.

But with women—no. Women gave little and wanted all. Women had apron strings and were prone to tie them about any man who looked twice in their direction. There was the Virgin, yawning her head off when he came in and mightily pleased that he asked her to dance. One dance was all very well, but because he danced twice and thrice with her, and several times more, she squeezed his arm when they asked him to sit in at poker. It was the obnoxious apron string, the first of the many compulsions she would exert upon him if he gave in. Not that she was not a nice bit of a woman, healthy and strapping and good to look upon, also a very excellent dancer, but that she was a woman with all a woman's desire to rope him with her apron strings and tie him hand and foot for the branding. Better poker. Besides, he liked poker as well as he did dancing.

He resisted the pull on his arm by the mere negative mass of him, and said:—

"I sort of feel a hankerin' to give you all a flutter."

Again came the pull on his arm. She was trying to pass the apron string around him. For the fraction of an instant he was a savage, dominated by the wave of fear and murder that rose up in him. For that infinitesimal space of time he was to all purposes a frightened tiger filled with rage and terror at the apprehension of the trap. Had he been no more than a savage he would have leaped wildly from the place or else sprung upon her and destroyed her. But in that same instant there stirred in him the generations of discipline by which man has become an inadequate social animal. Tact and sympathy strove with him, and he smiled with his eyes into the Virgin's eyes as he said:—

"You all go and get some grub. I ain't hungry. And we'll dance some more by and by. The night's young yet. Go to it, old girl."

He released his arm and thrust her playfully on the shoulder, at the same time turning to the poker players.

"Take off the limit and I'll go you all."

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The players glanced at one another and Kearns announced, "The roof's off."

Elam Harnish dropped into the waiting chair, started to pull out his gold sack and changed his mind. The Virgin pouted a moment, then followed in the wake of the other dancers.

"I'll bring you a sandwich, Daylight," she called back over her shoulder.

He nodded. She was smiling her forgiveness. He had escaped the apron string and without hurting her feelings too severely.

"Let's play markers," he suggested. "Chips do everlastingly clutter up the table. If it's agreeable to you all."

"I'm willing," answered Hal Campbell. "Let mine run at five hundred."

"Mine, too," answered Harnish, while the others stated the values they put on their own markers. French Louis, the most modest, issuing his at a hundred dollars each.

In Alaska at that time there were no rascols and no tinhorn gamblers. Games were conducted honestly and men trusted one another. A man's word was as good as his gold in the blower. A marker was a flat, oblong composition chip, worth perhaps a cent. But when a man bet a marker in a game and said it was worth five hundred dollars it was accepted as worth five hundred dollars. Whoever won it knew that the man who issued it would redeem it with five hundred dollars' worth of dust weighed out on the scales. The markers being of different colors, there was no difficulty in identifying the owners. Also, in that early Yukon day, no one dreamed of playing table stakes. A man was good for all that he possessed, no matter where his possessions were or what was their nature.

Harnish cut and got the deal. At this good angry, and while shuffling the deck, he called to the barkeepers to set up the drinks for the house. As he dealt the first card to Dan MacDonald, on his left, he called out:—

"Get down to the ground, you all Malemites, buskies and Siwash pups! Get down and dig in! Tighten up them traces! Put your weight into the harness and bust the breast-bands! Whoop! Yow! We're off and bound for Helen Breakfast! And I tell you all clear and plain there's gold to be stiff grades and fast gold to-night before we win to that same lady. And somebody's going to bump—hard."

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CHAPTER II.

It was two in the morning when the dancers, bent on getting something to eat, adjourned the dancing for half an hour. And it was at this moment that Jack Kearns suggested poker. Jack Kearns was a big, bluff featured man, who, along with Bertles, had made the disastrous attempt to found a post on the head reaches of the Koyukuk, far inside the Arctic

Circle. After that Kearns had fallen back on his posts at Forty Mile and Sixty Mile and changed the direction of his ventures by sending out to the States for a small sawmill and a river steamer. The former was even then being sledged across Chilcot Pass by Indians and dogs, and would come down the Yukon in the early summer after the ice run. Later in the summer, when Behring Sea and the mouth of the Yukon cleared of ice, the steamer, put together at St. Michael's, was to be expected up the river loaded to the guards with supplies.

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"Take off the roof!"

The players glanced at one another and Kearns announced, "The roof's off."

Elam Harnish dropped into the waiting chair, started to pull out his gold sack and changed his mind. The Virgin pouted a moment, then followed in the wake of the other dancers.

"I'll bring you a sandwich, Daylight," she called back over her shoulder.

He nodded. She was smiling her forgiveness. He had escaped the apron string and without hurting her feelings too severely.

"Let's play markers," he suggested. "Chips do everlastingly clutter up the table. If it's agreeable to you all."

"I'm willing," answered Hal Campbell. "Let mine run at five hundred."