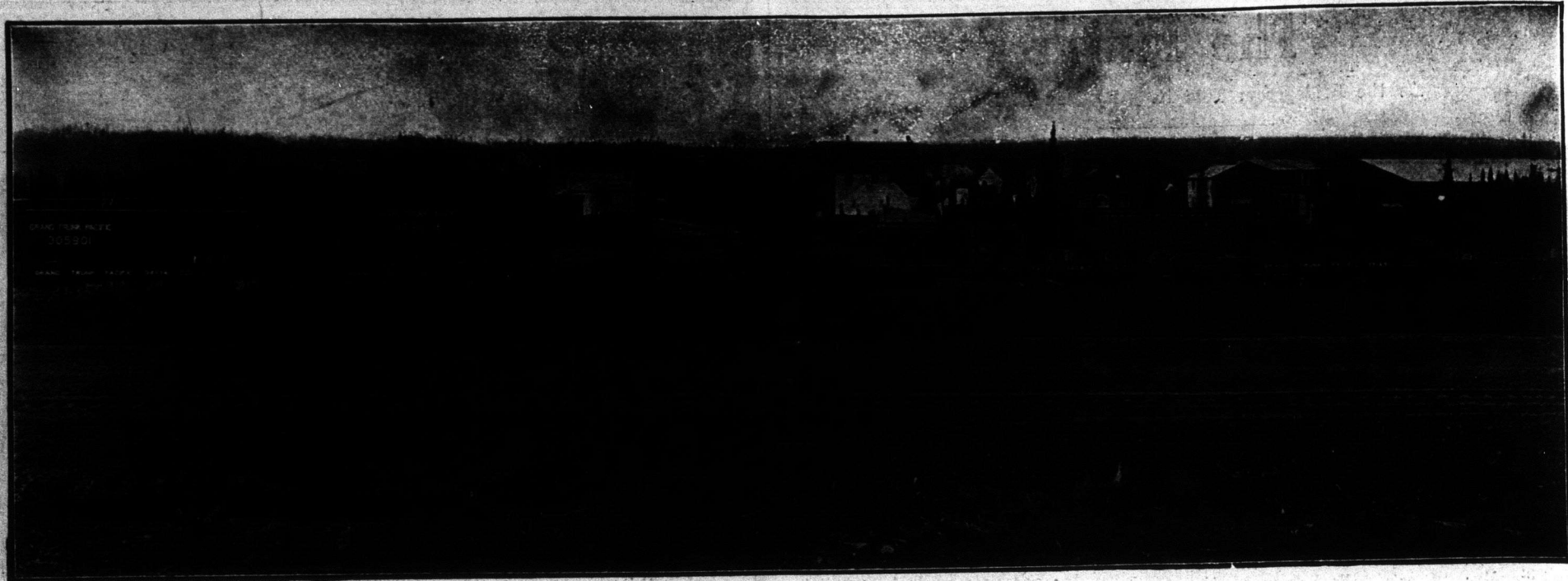




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He bore on his person the unmistakable marks of prosperity. They showed in the neatness of his open-necked flannel shirt and the splendor of his wide, wide Stetson. He displayed no wealth of fringed "chaps" and ornate spurs, as of old, for in the mud country hip-boots are ubiquitous; but his thighs were brown in corduroy, unfailing symptom of success.

"You look like a winner," I remarked.

"Ain't you heard about me? No? Well, say, I'm a Swede for luck. It was this way: You know, stowaways ain't generally overburdened with financial resource, and when I was drug out of the hold of that ship they put me to work as cabin-boy, makin' beds. Lord! me, thirty-five years young, jugglin' sheets, when all I know along them lines is beddin' down horses and the 'cowboy tuck.' Ever try the 'cow-boy tuck'?"

You and your bunkie lay flat on your backs; when you count three you lift your legs up high and lower 'em together, so the blanket folds underneath your feet.

"Well, amongst my clientele was a sad-eyed little woman that I took a shine to.

"Madam," says I one day, speakin' through the environment of a nude feather pillow I had between my teeth, "I'm only a working girl, but in spite of the difference in our stations I want to say that if you're in trouble and need a friend just push that button once and you'll have two hundred-weight of gristle and cow-puncher at your service. Don't ring twice; that means ice water."

"Say! she broke down and told me a pitiful story, how she'd put all her money in a minin' scheme of one Abramski. The thief claimed he had a lot of rich ground at Nome and had organized The Promised Land Placer and Prospecting Company, gettin' her in on the ground floor, or through the basement window. At the last minute she decided to come along on her own account for fear she'd be buncoed, and she'd just begun to see indications that her aspirations was goin' to be realized. I'd have copped her investment myself, because I was sure Abramski hadn't ever been as close to Alaska as he was at that minute.

"I was sure of it, too, when we landed, but I helped her pitch her tent and get settled. Then I took a pasear out into the hills prospecting. I was gone a week, and when I got back I was handicapped with two dollars in currency and the kind of an appetite you remember as a boy: one that makes brass filings taste like a breakfast food. I investigated the odors emanatin' from the North Star restaurant till I decided to get rid of all this money so as to start fresh and unhampered. I took a private box, and ordered a double sirloin, with fittings complete, ready for installation.

"As I was diminishin' my last visible means of support, under a pressure of about three pounds to the square mouthful, two Swedes come into the next box and ordered supper. From their talk I knew there was something big in the

air. One of them was too excited to pronounce; just gummed his language up and snowballed his partner with it.

"I gathered that they'd been out prospecting and struck it rich, on located ground. They'd looked up the records, and found the claim belonged to a Riley Murtagh, so now they were scourin' the camp to hand him a mess of potash for his birthright, if you choose to look at it scripturally. Neither one knew him by sight.

"I recalled the poet's words, 'There is a knot tied in the affairs of men which taken in time saves nine,' and I thinks: 'Kink, you're a blamed idiot to go bustin' over the hills for gold when kind Swedes bring it to you at meals.' After I'd got my two dollars loaded F.O.B. I stepped out and accosts the cashier. He was a little Irishman with pugnacities enrolled amongst his facial habiliments:

"Those Laplanders in the next box have been castin' aspersions at me, not knowing I could hear," says I. "In the interest of Ireland and the Marquis of Queensberry rules would you mind introducin' me when they come out? My name is Riley Murtagh."

"Sure not," says he. "'Tis a grand name. You take your choice, leavin' me the little one.' He began appropriatin' munitions of war in the nature of cups and crockery. 'Put some in your pockets,' says he; 'they'll come handy.'

"When they appeared he remarks, full of insults:

"Hey, Riley Murtagh, it's the fine job for an Irishman I have, takin' money away from Swedes."

"Is your name Murtagh?" says one of 'em in the disembowled dialects of Sweden.

"It is," says the cashier; 'Riley Murtagh, me old friend.'

"Then come with us," and out we went, leavin' my sponsor burdened with bile and balasted with dishes.

"After considerable elocution on weather and prospects one of 'em says: 'Have you got any mining claims?'

"Sure! lots of 'em."

"Where'bouts?"

"I named over several creeks."

"Got anything on Glacier Creek you'd like to sell?"

"Aha," thinks I; 'it's on Glacier, eh?'

"Yes, I'll sell."

"How much do you want?"

"Hundred," says I.

"I thought he'd tear his pants gettin' the money. After he'd counted out ten banknotes I says:

"Where's the balance: the other ninety-nine thousand nine hundred?"

"What d' you mean?" They got excited, and their language began to sour on 'em again like clabber.

"Why, a hundred thousand dollars, of course," I says.

"They went up in the air so that I had to stand on a chair and hook 'em down with the poker."

"See here, gents," says I, 'you can't flim-flam Riley Murtagh. I was in the next box to you in the restaurant tonight, and heard all you said. Now,



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