

The Widow Briggs' Fire.

By Irene M. MacColl.

LYING between two long, ragged ridges, five thousand feet above sea-level, is Phoenix—the bustling mining camp of the Boundary country. Surrounded by mountains of solid copper, five generations may delve there, without wresting one-millionth part of the inexhaustible ore body from the grasp of ages.

In Phoenix, there are many homes of sorts, and also many men, and my tale deals with the dwellers in Hogan's Alley—a settlement of divers people, with divers aims, temperaments and troubles such as we have ourselves. For in this queer old world life is, in essentials, at least, the same in a mining camp as in any other centre where human beings, good, bad and indifferent, are gathered together.

Let me introduce you, then, to Hogan's Alley—a row of some twenty shacks, some built of lumber, others of logs—all placed at the precise distance from the street allowance that the owners pleased.

At the head of the Alley and highest up of the shacks, lived Billy Barnes—a fair-haired, quick-tempered Canadian, and Billy Bakke, Junior, as fair, but of Irish-Swede extraction, thereby possessing a brogue rich in its odd mingling of accent. Both young, and prone to look on the bright side of life, the combination was a happy-go-lucky partnership in housekeeping, occasional differences never preventing their being the best of friendly enemies.

Tonight the swift mountain darkness fell on Hogan's Alley in velvety waves, blotting out the scars that by day divided the ridges in every direction.

The stars were flung in golden profusion across the arching sky, and the little river rippled down the gorge among the pine trees.

Over in the Alley, all was quiet. The tired chums, after the day's work, had long ago "turned in," and were sleeping

the dreamless sleep of the just, when from the outer world there came a shriek of terror, then another and another. Barnes, at length sufficiently aroused to growl anathemas on the disturber of his slumbers, lay for a moment listening. Then, shaking his sleeping chum, he remarked, savagely, "Some fool woman's yelling to beat the band out there—I'm going to see what's up."

Sleepily feeling his way to the window he glanced out, then wheeling sharply brought his shin in violent contact with the rocking chair.

"Whin yez are all troo telling that chair phat yez think av it"—Bakke managed to gasp through his mirth "yez moight state phat yez saw out there."

"Mrs. Briggs' shack's afire," snapped Barnes. "It'll go like chips if something ain't applied sudden,—the roof's caught now."

"Chase yerself, thin, an we'll hike ofer," and Bakke, jumping out of bed, started to hunt for his clothes—which he was certain someone must have moved in the night.

At the other end of the Alley lived Mrs. Briggs, a widow of uncertain age, possessed of all the wiles which widows have practised since the Flood—and a voice which she of all the Alley considered priceless—the average critic placing its value at some thirty cents, and dear at that—for the shacks near the widow's were oftener empty than occupied.

Two years had Mrs. Briggs been a resident of the Alley, and for two years had she charmed and warbled and remained in the widowed state. Somehow, when it came to the scratch, and Barnes or Jones was given a "final" opportunity and every advantage the widow could give, each kept curiously silent. For, after all, widows are risky propositions, and apt to have well-tried recipes for curing husbands of pet faults. So the