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## The Blood Feud OR Love's Renunciation

CHAPTER XV.  
The Wanderer's Dream

"I see," observed Rankine, as he stretched his long legs across the well-scrubbed deck. "Then mum's the word on the other side?"

"That's so. And you must be prepared for heckling, good-natured questioning, in fact—to turn you inside out—that is the first and generally successful endeavour."

"If they turn me inside out, then the climate is going to have an extraordinary effect on me. I'm not Scotch for nothing."

"Oh, you have to give them an answer of some kind. They'll draw it out of you like a corkscrew. You can't squish them," answered Affery with a laugh. "But the Yankee is a thundering good chap when you get him at close quarters. And you'll find it pays to shake hands with him—they're awful duffers for shaking hands."

"If they keep 'em clean, I shouldn't mind though it must get a trifle monotonous after a while," said Rankine, with his easy-going laugh.

"I'm talking of the States just now—principally New York. As one gets further out, men and manners change till you get up against the big, original silence. You find that in perfection at the Yukon, where I'm going."

"What for?" asked Rankine, interestedly. "I thought the Yukon was played out as a commercial enterprise, or even as an adventure card long since."

Affery appeared to ruminate on the words. The expression of his face was entirely changed, until he appeared like a man who dreamed dreams and saw visions.

"I went over the trail in 'ninety-eight," he began slowly. "Heard of it, I suppose?"

"The trail to the Klondike, you mean? I've heard, or read of it, of course. 'The gold rush—wasn't it?'"

"Yes. There were thousands of us—no trail then, hardly a trail. Only about a third of the gold seekers ever reached the goal. It took me thirteen months."

"Thirteen months to go over one pass?" said Rankine incredulously. "What happened?"

"We had to camp for eight months in the snows, waiting for the ice to go out; and don't forget that the Yukon is fifteen hundred miles long."

"Good God! And when you got there was there any gold at all?"

"Plenty of gold," said Affery slowly, and the deepening solemnity of his face laid a strange hold on Rankine's imagination. "But it's not intended for common men—it's belong to the Titans, as it always has done. The poor humans who essay it will merely be crushed in these awful fangs!"

"What Titans, and what fangs?" asked Rankine, more and more puzzled by the strange imagery of his companion.

"The ice and the snow, of course. It's never been possible, on account of climatic conditions, to get up the necessary plant, or make working profitable. But the pay streaks are rich enough."

"But surely I've heard of some fortunes being made?"

"They sure were made, but never carried out of the Yukon. Gold! There's millions hidden on that awful river, Rankine, among the canyons! Millions, I tell you!"

"But what's the good if, as you say, it can't be got out?"

"Millions were got out—hidden by the men who got it—and it's never been retrieved. Why? Because they died in their tracks, carrying their secret with them. I know of one buried treasure. It belongs to a chap they nick-named Arizona 'Red', at Bonanza. They said he was a murderer from the States, but it was true then I only wish there were some non-murderers with a soul a piece half as white as him! We pulled together for a while. He was on the trail a month ahead of me, and he staked a claim and made good, ahead of everybody. Queer beggar!—after he had worked like a yellow slave for a month or so on end, he would suddenly set out for Dawson, paint the town red, and then come back and settle down quietly. Yet, with it all, he was a white man, and I'll never meet his like again."

"What became of him?" asked Rankine, feeling enthralled, as he had never been by the most thrilling tale of adventure he had read in his boyhood.

"He died of double pneumonia. I was with him at the end. I nursed him, and in his delirium he talked incessantly of the gold he had hidden, and which was to have taken him back to Arizona to redeem the old homestead. There were womenfolk on it who were dear to him. But I never got to know either their names or the place where they lived. I made a journey to Arizona first time I got clear—about a year after he died. But of course, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack. I hadn't the ghost of a clue."

"So he died babbling about hidden gold?" mused Rankine, feeling his pulses oddly stirred by these strange recitals. "But probably it was only the ravings of a sick man whose mind was obsessed by one idea."

"Not altogether. There was gold, for Arizona 'Red' had talked of it often in his normal moments. He was beginning to trust me—well, as one man trusts another he has proven in these hellish wastes. Towards the end, when we both knew that there wasn't a chance, he tried to give a clue—but it was no use."

"But didn't you have a look for yourself?"

Affery smiled.

"It wasn't tied up in a stocking-foot, or hidden under the floor, or on the roof of the shack, my son! These things aren't done in the Yukon. Arizona trusted the mother-earth from which he took it. But no human intelligence will ever locate, much less strike, the lucky spot!"

"That seems rather hard, doesn't it, after your poor pal's superhuman effort to get it?"

"Sure thing. But that's the law of the Yukon," answered Affery. "There is a kind of sacrifice in man's efforts to wrest her treasures from that great white world. I'm always conscious of it! I've known men wrench themselves free with frightful oaths and vows, and they were back before the snows melted on the trail another spring! I'm going back now."

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"But what for?" repeated Rankine stupidly.

Affery shrugged his shoulders.

"I've been out of it for two years. I bought a place in Donegal, near my father's birth place, and tried to locate; but it's no good. The thing's in my blood I suppose. I'll go back, and back, and finally lay my bones beside Arizona's among the snows. A man might easily have a worse finale!"

"You have no home ties, then? You are not married?"

"No, a man with the Yukon passion in his veins doesn't incline that way. I'm a lone man, and, as a rule, I don't make friends easily. Now, you—"

"I have made them," admitted Rankine, modestly because I have found most folks very decent."

"Well, it is, and it isn't. I want to make good, to set about making money as fast as I can. You talked of Arizona's redeeming his homestead, poor chap. That's what I'm out after. I've left a place at home mortgaged to the hilt. I've sworn to clear it in five years."

"A fairly steep proposition with your present equipment," said Affery with rather ruthless candour, which was yet, somehow, entirely void of offence. "Any women-folk left behind?" he ventured to ask.

"Yes, two."

"Those I saw on the boat?"

"The same," answered Rankine, and once more his face was turned away and Affery was made fully conscious of the closed door.

But he did not resent it. He had sufficient knowledge of men to respect one who could lock the door of his heart and lose the key.

"You haven't any idea of what sort of work you intend, or want to take up, I think you said?"

"None. Beggers can't be choosers. I've been well educated at a public school. I know a little about the land. I'm a good judge of horse-flesh. I suppose I shall drift out West and get some ranch, but from what you say, it doesn't offer much prospect."

"None at all to the man who has no money. What Canada is suffering from at the present moment, is lack of capital. She has had too many poverty-stricken people dumped upon her. They are good people, mind you, but you can figure it out for yourself—when two-thirds of the population are in the position of needing work, what are the prospects likely to be? There are golden opportunities everywhere out West, just as there are in the Yukon, but none

of them can be exploited without money. And you can't afford to waste your time."

"I can't," assented Rankine, a despondent note creeping into his voice. I've wanted to have this talk ever since we met. But I was funk-ing it for reasons you can very easily grasp. Then you think I've made a mistake, and that probably the best thing I could do would be to take the first boat back to the other side."

"I wouldn't go so far as that; but honestly, from what I know of the West—and you bet, I know a considerable deal—I've sampled all the berths there are—I've been a cowboy up beyond Calgary, I spent nine months in a lumber camp on the Prairies, I've worked in a canning factory in B. C., and been down in the mines in the Kootenay district, and—yes, from what I know of the West, there's a living wage, of course, but nothing worth while for the likes of you."

"Then what?—then what?" said Rankine, and turning full face on Affery, he met his eyes in a gaze of steady scrutiny.

"Well, what would you say to going to Dawson with me, and giving the Yukon first chance?"

The blood hammered in Rankine's veins and reddened in his cheek.

"You really mean that, Affery?"

"I do—no kidding. I like you. I think you're a straight man—not one that would go back on a pal. I know your class. I've sampled them out West, and in their own lairs, and you've less side than any I've struck yet. Besides, I can respect a man

who can hold his tongue. There are not many of them on this terrestrial ball. That's why I think you would like the Yukon. It has no use for jawers. It's law is silence."

(To be continued)

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