

# Bench Claim Dick and Eldorado Bill.

(Written for the Klondike Nugget)

(Continued from yesterday.)  
When Eldorado Bill emerged from his icy bath he was a gruesome sight. His teeth chattered like castanets behind pendant icicles that hung to his drooping mustache. His limbs shook as from palsy as his sodden garments began to freeze his body, and his features were drawn and contorted and expressed an awful fear of death. It was some time before he could clear his befuddled brain sufficiently to realize that his own precious person was now safe. By slow degrees he cleared his insensate mind sufficient to remember the cracking ice, the jerking forward of the sleigh, then a fur-wrapped bundle suddenly disappear from his side. Then came a cold rush of water, and his memory told him that he had kicked his feet and legs free from an entangling robe and with both hands he had grasped the sleigh as the current threatened to carry him on. Now, for the first time he began to think of his companion. He looked back at the crossing and saw nothing but a jumbled mass of floating cakes of ice. Then his eyes wandered down the stream and his gaze became fixed upon an object. A human head pops up from beneath a floating mass of ice and slush, then shoulders follow, and arms reach out with powerful strokes that rapidly carries a human being across the current to a floating cake beyond, and upon that cake, standing erect, is an apparently inanimate little object of fur. As the swimmer approaches this furry thing is suddenly embodied with life, and a clear, sweet voice rings out cautioning the rescuer to swim around to the opposite side, as the water is shallow there. This is done, and the swimmer finds firm footing on a pebbly bottom only waist deep in the water. Then a man reaches forth and clasps sweet Bessie in his arms and by wading lands her safe and dry.

Very carefully this man sets his precious burden down. Brown eyes then look up and penetrate the depths of gray ones, and in that glance a world of thankfulness is expressed. Then Bessie gazes at the rapids just below and so near, with the awful yawning ice-capped cavern at their feet, and tears spring from beneath her drooping lids, and tremulous rosy lips fail to frame words that the tongue tries to utter. But soft little hands steal forth and nestle in the palms of hard ones, and the unwonted pressure that the little digits give is synonymous of the words that would speak her unbounded gratitude.

"Allow me to offer my thanks, Bench Claim Dick," said Eldorado Bill, at this moment driving up. "A very unlucky mishap, Miss Rose. I would have come to your assistance sooner, but I saw that you were safe, and not even wet. Lucky I landed you on that ice cake. I am soaked through and freezing, so allow me to help you into the sleigh, as you must make the next roadhouse quickly and thaw out. And Mr. Bench Claim," this sycophant added as he cracked his whip and the grays sprang away, "just make out and send me your bill, and drop in at the roadhouse when you pass and take a drink at my expense."

"Who is that noble, handsome man?" asked Bessie, as they were speeding on their way.

"Oh, he's only a bench claim owner on Bonanza, and don't amount to much," answered this Eldorado king, and he scowled sullenly.

"Don't amount to much!" replied Miss Bessie, and her pique was expressed with a scornful curl of the lips. "Why, I thought—" But her thoughts she did not express in words, but tucked them away in the innermost recesses of her little bosom for safe keeping in memory of a man of noble form and heroic daring, with the handsomest gray eyes she had ever seen.

And what were the thoughts of Bench Claim Dick? As he hurried away to secure his team and seek some miner's cabin where a warm fire would thaw out his sodden garments and take the chill from his benumbed person, recurrent to his mind was the gleam of beautiful brown eyes, heavenly lit by tender emotion and the pathetic squeeze of little hands. And he wondered what evil circumstance had placed this angelic little being in the hands of a man like Eldorado Bill.

Richard Raymond, bench claim owner, member of a dog team and, in Yukon parlance at this date, of little account generally, sat alone in a little log cabin he had built on his bench claim on Bonanza. He was a man a

trifle over 30 years of age, with athletic frame and strong constitution; his eyes were gray, handsome and expressive, of a noble character, which, set off by wavy blonde hair and a golden mustache made him very pleasing to look upon, at least in feminine eyes. He had come to the Klondike too late to secure a drop of the cream in a creek claim, therefore, necessity compelled him to climb the hillsides, several hundred feet, to the benches above the present creek beds if he desired to become a claim owner. Through a course of study in the Colorado school of mines he had gained much knowledge in mineralogy and was well read in geologic matters, and in following his occupation as a civil and mining engineer much personal experience had been added to his studies.

While prospecting this aid he relied upon as the beckoning hand that would lead him to hidden golden wealth. At a point opposite the junction of Eldorado and Bonanza creeks he found the formation of the country such as to point to the existence there of an older channel of Eldorado. That such old deposits were alluvial there was no question of a doubt, for the wash from the old creek bed above was the means that had enriched the newer channel below. There he built his cabin and

unaided commenced to sink. The scuffings of creek claim owners did not deter him, and with the indifference of one to the manor born he had accepted his local sobriquet of Bench Claim Dick. Sinking to bedrock alone kept him busy during the day and at night a theoretic mind absorbed in nature's study brightened the lonely hours. In the bits of plants and huge tusks and bones of animals that the frozen earth revealed he read a queer life existence on the Yukon in prehistoric times, and in these bone-yard deposits he saw an end of the mammoth life corval with the change in the course of the stream. But when had this stream commenced to flow? Down deeper in the clay and gravel that rest upon bedrock there were no signs of animal life and no vegetable colorings to show a plant existence, and surely its birth must date back to the time when ice first began to meet and water to flow, for is not the silicious wash of Bonanza's great white channel as pure and white as the virgin rock?

This night it is evident that something unusual has happened from the general course of Bench Claim Dick's affairs. He sits upon a stool and his two long legs nearly encircle a tub filled with water and in it he shakes a gold pan vigorously. On the floor near him are sacks filled with snow white gravel, and on the table is an oyster can nearly filled with yellow dust. Dick's last fire had said too deep and bedrock, and now added to the list is a Gold Hill king—a bench claim millionaire.

But how fares it with Eldorado Bill, and has he succeeded in his base and low born scheme?

In a large, two-story cabin on Eldorado, in an elegantly furnished room that is carpeted and well stoved, sits the Eldorado king. Standing before him is a little California girl, who at this moment presents a perfect picture of mingled wrath and beauty.

"I will not marry you, Eldorado Bill, neither will I be your mistress," were the words that issued from trembling ruby lips in answer to an ungentlemanly address made by this assuming millionaire.

"You may be an Eldorado king," added Miss Bessie, "but you certainly are no gentleman, and you are a coward, too, for only a brave man will jump into a cold river and rescue a lady from a floating ice-cake. And now I hope you know what I really think of you."

"I would infer by your remarks that you are thinking more of that bench claim fellow than of me just at present," answered Bill, with an angry scowl, and then he added: "Come now, little spitfire, will your choice be an Eldorado creek claim, with diamonds, furs and cutter and span, and me, or a bench claim with its dog and sled? I will wait patiently 12 long hours for your answer."

"Bill, something is wrong at the mine. But come and see for yourself." Bill, accompanied his man in charge to a new shaft that was being sunk on the upper half of the claim to open it up for winter drifting, as the lower half had been worked out the winter before. He descended, and by a dim light that came down from above he was quick to note that there was no wall to the up stream side of the shaft. He stepped in under the archway and reached his hand out in the darkness beyond and still there was no wall. Lighting a candle he proceeded farther, and in the far dim distance he saw a streak of daylight coming down through some opening from above. For a moment Bill could hardly grasp the true situation, then, of a sudden, the appalling truth struck him. During the past summer a gang of Italian laymen had worked the lower half of the claim above, and at the same time they had drifted down onto him—his wealth, the pay streak in Eldorado was a thing no more.

"The body of Eldorado Bill reeked with the cold sweat of despair, his palsied limbs refused to bear their weight and he fell prone upon the ground. Then the frenzy of a madman seized him, and in the darkness he crawled upon his knees and reached forth his hands in search of a solid wall, but they encountered only empty space. Then this millionaire, now with an empty purse; this Eldorado king, shorn of his golden crown, lay down and moaned and uttered deep and terrible oaths as he groveled in the dust.

"Fool! idiot! that I am." While I reveled in wine and women those cursed dagos robbed me of my gold. A thousand curses on them."

No sleep closed the eyes of Eldorado Bill that night, no bright thoughts entered his mind and no loving hands consoled him. Debts, small and great grimly stared him in the face, and he knew that creditors would soon be upon his trail. He cursed the law of Canada that would put a man in jail for debt, and thought of the mounted police, and how to escape them all and reach the boundary line ahead of a capias was the subject that most engrossed his mind. Two days later Eldorado Bill successfully stepped over the line into pastures new, and the Klondike knows him now only as a "has been."

"Mr. Bench Claim Dick, will you give me a ride? I see that you are on your way to Dawson, and that's where I'm going, too," asked our little heroine as she encountered Mr. Richard Raymond, Gold Hill king and millionaire, and thorough gentleman, with his dog team at the Forks just after her leave taking from Eldorado Bill.

"With the greatest of pleasure," answered Dick, and he helped her into his sleigh. As he tucked her away, warm and comfortable, his heart again went throbbing as those brown eyes as beautiful as a dream looked up demurely into his, and again he felt the thrilling presence of those little hands.

"Now, Mr. Dick," remarked Miss Bessie, as they proceeded along, "I am just going to introduce myself to you, for I do so want to thank you for jumping into that cold river and saving me from being swept down into that awful icy cavern. My name is Miss Bessie Rose, chechako, as you people say, from California. I came to the Klondike with my aunt, who is now in Dawson. We are poor and I hired out to Eldorado Bill as an accountant. He might be an Eldorado king, but he certainly is no gentleman, and I have left my position and am going back to my auntie today. I am going to take you with me to her, and you can introduce yourself to us both. Now, I think you know pretty well who I am, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart and will always remember you as a noble man."

By this time deep emotions were getting the mastery over little Bessie, which begun to show in tears and sobs, but with her hand she brushed away the tell-tale dewdrops, then raising her lids she glanced coyly up and with the sweetest little smile she asked:

"Now, Mr. Dick, how can I ever repay you?"  
Dick's gray eyes bravely met her coyish glances, and with his heart throbbing with joy, he answered:  
"You can pay me in full by saying you will be my Gold Hill queen next Christmas."

**Arctic Brothers Meet.**  
At a regular meeting of the Arctic Brotherhood Tuesday night an exceptionally fine entertainment was arranged and rendered by the members.

The A. E. quartette composed of Brothers Thomas, Sheridan, Rettig and Clayton, made their initial appearance before the camp and were heartily enjoyed. Rudy Kalenborn followed with his inimitable songs. M. A. Harding delighted all present with his masterful

execution on the sither, he playing classical pieces on that instrument most delightfully. Arthur Bolye and Frank Clayton followed with vocal solos and Messrs. Turkey and Germain with original stories. J. S. Cowan spoke most feelingly on the recent bereavement suffered by the British people and at his suggestion "God Save the King" was sung, probably for the first time in the Yukon by an organization. The camp meets again next Tuesday night at McDonald hall.

**Missing Persons.**  
Inquiries have been received by the N. W. M. P. for the following persons. Any information regarding any of them if left at the town station will be conveyed to the inquiring friends: John McMullen, Vancouver, B. C.; Mrs. Catherine Mair, Pittsburg, Pa.; John Nicholson, Pittsburg, Pa.; Joe Kane, inquired for by his mother, of Port Bragg, Colo., and supposed to have come here last spring.

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