

The Fortunes of Charity

By H. Mortimer Batten

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Indian? Hicks thought he knew. The man was old and helpless, and when an old Indian sees no future in store for him, he makes a little fire in the woods, sits down beside it, and waits. Soon the fire burns low and the cold creeps in. The Indian sleeps, and when the sun again rises, he does not awaken. It is a very easy way for an old man out of his sorrows, and Hicks realized that his dog had known that the old Indian was seated there to die, for, as we have said, the dog was a marvellous judge of human character. Starlight knew good men from bad men, and the fact that he had so befriended this old fellow seemed to indicate that there must be something good about the Indian.

So they went back to Berry's cabin, and ate what there was to eat, beans without bacon, and some very hard crusts that Berry had made. The Indian ate hungrily then squatted himself behind the stove and went to sleep. Not a word passed between them.

The next day was passed in much the same way. The Indian ate liberally of Berry's slender supply of food, said nothing, and slept a good deal. On the third day he seemed to buck up a little. Uninvited he got to work, repaired Berry's snowshoes, renovated a pair of moccasins, and finally turned his attention to the canoe.

"Glad he's going to do something to earn his keep," thought Berry. "I'm hanged if he can live on here indefinitely. There isn't enough grub to keep myself and the dog, say nothing of a hungry visitor."

That night over their pipes, Berry drew the Indian into conversation. He told how he had lost all his money in city lots, and how he was almighty hard up. "No dust left," said he, "and no dollars. I'll have to hit the trail again before long."

The Indian did not seem to understand until Berry spoke of the dust. Then suddenly his face brightened. He thrust his hand under his parki. From it he drew a small buckskin bag, tied up like a sausage. His long, bony fingers unfastened the end of the bag, and on to the rough floor he emptied a little heap of yellow dust. In addition to the dust there were pips and nuggets of pure gold, indicating clearly that the metal had come from an uncommonly rich seam.

"Plenty dust," said the Indian, and scooping it up with both hands, he transferred it to Berry's palms. Berry saw at a glance that there was more than enough here to pay all his debts, but his sense of justice somehow rebelled at his taking it.

"Look here, old son," he said, "you don't owe me all this. I could do with it, goodness knows, but it isn't fair. I asked you to be my visitor, and don't want any pay."

The Indian waved him aside. "Ta-in-na-Haw is old," he said. "Him no want dust. Ta-in-na-Haw go back into the woods to-morrow maybe. Plenty dust along Malamute River."

"Good night," muttered Hicks to himself. "What on earth does this mean?" Anyway, if the Indian did not want the dust, he assuredly did. He placed it in his wallet without thanks, for an Indian hates to be thanked. Up till that moment he had not known the Indian's name, Ta-in-na-Haw. Now he held out his hand and they shook to clench the deal. "I shall call you, Tomahawk," said Berry, "because it is easier to say, and, look here, you can stay with me as long as you like, and have all the grub you can eat."

Then Berry went over to the store and paid his bill. He also paid the tailor what he owed, with befitting comments to both of them. Truly his luck was looking up a little, and assuredly this was a case of charity rewarded. On his way back to the cabin he met a friend who asked him whether he had found a gold mine yet. Hicks shook his head and the other continued, "No, my lad, and you never will. There isn't enough gold in this country to warrant the existence of a city. I tell you I've got cold feet, and I'm clearing out."

Hicks shrugged his shoulders and went on. "Not enough gold in the country to warrant the existence of a city, eh?" He wondered whether it was true. He knew that away back in the woods there was gold somewhere, for these Indians were continually drifting in with veritable fortunes in the way of yellow dust, which they handed over to the white population

in return for shoddy and worthless goods, but the Indians, Berry knew, closely guarded their secrets. They hated the coming of white settlement, and they knew well that to betray where the gold was meant the spoiling of their hunting ranges.

Hicks went to bed that night feeling happier than he had felt for many weeks, but very early in the morning he was awakened by the old Indian moving about the cabin, and when daylight came Berry found that the man had packed his own stampede pack with food, and got everything ready for the long trail. There were Berry's snowshoes properly repaired by the door, and there, too, his rifle and belt, clean and polished. For a moment he thought that the old Indian was clearing out, and taking all these articles with him, in which case, thought Hicks, "I shall not have got so much change out of his visit after all."

"Are you going, Tomahawk?" he asked, sitting up.

The Indian nodded. "You, too," he said.

That brought Hicks to his feet with a start. "But where?" he asked. "Where are we going?"

The Indian waved towards the north. "Malamute River," he said.

Hicks quietly dressed himself. It was all very well old Tomahawk arranging everything for him, but before Hicks set out on that tremendous journey through the woods in such weather as this, he naturally wanted to know the why and wherefore of it. So judiciously he set to work questioning Tomahawk, but the Indian merely responded by a stony stare. He would not say anything at all, till finally Hicks lost his patience. "Look here, Tomahawk," he said, "it may be all right for you going off into the woods and trusting to luck whether you starve or not. You are used to it, but we white men are not. It is a long journey to Malamute River, and if I am coming with you I want to know what for."

Again the Indian stared at him, then he answered, "Plenty gold at Malamute River."

Hicks thought things over. After all there was no particular object in remaining here, and it might be worth while accompanying the old man. At the worst he would get back in the late spring, and be able to obtain a job, so that the trip would not necessitate a big waste of time. So, utterly in the dark, Hicks followed out at the red man's heels. He had no doubt whatever that there was gold in Malamute River, but the country was so far distant that it might not prove worth working even though there was a fair quantity of it. Therefore, this trip into the woods was all a speculation.

So for days Berry and Tomahawk wandered northwards, and Berry at last realized that for a skilled woodsman it was easy to travel in comfort through these regions. At night time the Indian would seek out a flat rock, light a huge fire on it, and when the rock was thoroughly dry and warm they would lie down upon it in their sleeping bags and sleep with comparative comfort. As for grub, they were never short of it, for at sundown and dusk the old Indian would wander off with his rusty rifle and always he came back with game of some sort, sometimes a couple of snowshoe rabbits, sometimes partridges, and on one occasion a deer. Then again the Indian knew the best ways through the woods, and instead of fighting through impenetrable bush and struggling for every mile, Hicks found himself, for the most part, on comparatively easy going, so that the journey was quite without the usual hardships and discomforts which accompany travelling in bush country.

One evening, long before Hicks expected it, they found themselves looking across a great, open treeless space in the snow. Hicks thought at first it was a lake, frozen over and covered with snow, as all the lakes were at this season, but the Indian said, "Malamute River."

"What, here already?" exclaimed Hicks, scarcely able to believe it, and the Indian nodded.

They crossed the river, and made their way into the mountains opposite. Here at length they came to a small creek, flowing so rapidly among the boulders that it had not frozen over. This they followed for a whole day, till they came to a huge basin among the rocks, in the centre of which the creek disappeared underground. The Indian went to the centre of the basin and removed some of the huge stones which covered the earth.

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The Secret of Saddle Gap

By Edith G. Bayne

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right-of-way through Saddle Gap comes up that he wants to slay!"

The girl nodded.

"Now I—wonder—just—why," mused Bestwood aloud, tapping the back of his chair, thoughtfully.

The girl's clear eyes clouded a moment.

"I—I think dad could make a guess only he won't come right out and say. He seems to understand Old Comox better than anyone. They were mining partners in the old days. But I guess you know all this."

"I've come primed with certain facts, yes," admitted Bestwood. "I got the lay of the land and managed to strike here on a day when the old codger was off somewhere. Otherwise I suppose he'd have taken a pot shot at me. I nosed all round the Gap and saw his shack and took soundings off the cliff. I even used an old punt of his and incidentally nearly came a cropper in the rapids."

"Why not throw your bridge across at some other point?" asked the girl curiously.

Bestwood smiled.

"Miss Menary, if you were an engineer you wouldn't propound that question."

"All the other engineers seemed stuck on that Gap, too!" said the girl, wonderingly.

"Naturally."

"But why?"

"Chiefly I think because Providence designed the spot for just this purpose. It's the only point on the Chinook River where we won't need an extra span and two extra buttments. We'll save thousands of dollars on blasting alone. The Saddle makes a splendid high-level and we're just nicely above the rapids. These are the leading points but there are others of a more technical nature. Oh, we must have the Gap!"

"You'll have to wait till Old Comox says you can. He's owned all that land over there for years and years."

"He'll come across."

"You have a lot of confidence! I suppose that's why they sent you."

"Maybe. I'm rather used to difficulties, Miss Menary. They lend zest to life. What duller existence can one imagine than a state of being where the plums fall into one's lap without effort? Here, I think, comes your dad."

Mark Menary was a spare man of middle height, a trifle stooped and very grey for one still in the fifties. He had a shrewd grey eye and a curious way of masking his thoughts or feelings by assuming an impassive expression. It was as though he had learned the Indian habit and practised it on occasion. Bestwood learned within five minutes that Menary was not a man one could get close to very readily. On Menary's side he seemed to regard the engineer with dislike and distrust, though he was civil enough outwardly.

"I s'pose you know that Dan refused a cool fifty thousand from that last company?" he insinuated as the pair went outside to talk.

"I know all about that," smiled Bestwood.

"What better luck d'you s'pose you'll have? Goin' to put up a bigger chunk than that?"

"Not on your life!" said Bestwood, sternly. "He'll accept a legitimate sum or go without and we'll have what we want, too."

"If 'twas me now I'd be mighty tickled to take anything at all," said Menary candidly. "I got a big family to do for an' not much chance t' get 'em educated. I'm a poor man, Mr. Bestwood. When I was first married I was kinda well fixed an' my oldest girl, Gail, she got a fair decent bit o' schoolin'. We was livin' at Fort George then. But I got into the minin' game an' lost all I had."

"I understand you and Dan Comox were partners."

Menary sent a sidelong look at the engineer.

"I—I had various partners," he said. "But we didn't ever strike the pay dirt."

"Well, I'll make a deal with you. Get round Old Comox for us and your share, your rake-off, will be—"

But Menary was shaking his head emphatically.

"Nope. Can't be done. I tried it. The old man he—Lord, how he screamed at me! I tried it a second time an' he—shot at me. Me—his old pal, mind you! Shot me in the arm."

"Why didn't you give him in charge?" demanded Bestwood in stern amazement. "He could have been sent up for—"

"Give Dan in charge!" and Menary looked as though the idea were new to him. Immediately then that strange, impassive look spread over his face, and his eye was doubly cautious. He wet his lips with his tongue.

"Why, of course! Why should one man be permitted to terrify a district, lock himself up fortress-like and defy the very law itself? My frank opinion is that Dan Comox is crazy."

Menary's eye lightened. A look almost as of relief came into his face.

"I—I've sometimes thought the same," he said, without glancing at the other.

"Even if he isn't, or is only partly daffy, a none too scrupulous lawyer, a ditto alienist and some gentle bribery and wire-pulling could turn the trick for us in short order if we cared to employ such means," said Bestwood lightly. "However, we don't. My company is on the level. No matter how long and hard the fight, we're going to play square. I'm to understand, then, that we can't look on you as a mediator?"

"I ain't lookin' for another charge o' buckshot," said Menary, almost sullenly.

"All right," said Bestwood, cheerfully.

"It's getting on for dark now and I must trot back on my plebeian pony and crawl into my blankets. I'll be up bright and early for my first interview with the old man. Tell Miss Gail I'll be along for dinner—if alive."

But Menary didn't join in the engineer's laugh.

Scarcely had the sun risen next morning when Old Comox emerged from his shack and walked down the river edge with an old pail. He was a tall, bent, bearded man, and his gait was slow and rheumatic. From the single pipe in his little cabin a thin wisp of smoke rose. Less than ten minutes elapsed before he returned carrying the now dripping bucket and yet as he kicked open his door it was to find a stranger within, a man who must have fallen from the sky or risen from the earth for Old Comox had seen no sign of a human being anywhere in the landscape when he had set forth. An oath broke from him and he almost dropped his pail.

The stranger was coolly frying bacon. He turned.

"Ah!" he remarked, casually. "I knew you couldn't be far away, pardner."

"What the—" spluttered Old Comox.

"Thought we might as well pal up for breakfast. No sense in two fires and two cookings when we're camped so close. Friendly land this, I understand. Here, let me fill the kettle."

The stranger was stepping briskly round as he spoke. Old Comox gaped at him, too astonished to speak. But soon he began to rumble ominously and just in time to check an outburst of blasphemy the intruder pulled from his pockets a small can of coffee and a jar of marmalade.

"Coffee!" boomed Old Comox in a grotesque kind of excitement. "I ain't tasted coffee since—"

"Tut, tut! I suppose you'll say you haven't had a slice of bacon either since Adam was a colt, eh?"

"It's the Gawd's truth! Bacon! My good gosh!" and Old Comox sniffed the air in rapturous, asthmatic breaths.

He sank on to a bench and gazed at his visitor in mingled helplessness, resentment and curiosity. From a pocket he pulled a dirty tobacco sack and began to roll the weed in the palms of his hands, glaring up ever and anon at the tall, efficient chef, as if wondering at himself for not ordering him off. The like of this had never happened to him before and possibly it was the very novelty of the thing that halted his wrath. Five minutes later the pair were breakfasting companionably enough across the narrow wooden table from each other. Under his beetling brows Old Comox's eyes had lost their ferocity and a wolf-like hunger had taken its place. He was too busy to talk for a while. But soon his natural sagacity returned and he eyed the stranger craftily, between gulps of the ambrosial brew.

"This used to be a great gold country, eh?" the stranger remarked, conversationally.

"Nope. Not round here," shaking his grizzled head.

"No?"

"A full forty mile further north."

"Oh!"

"You prospectin'?"

"Me? No, I'm fishing, etcetera. And by the way I borrowed a boat—I suppose it was a boat though it looked and acted

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