

# Treasure Trail

By Frederick Niven

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Continued from last issue

A great medley of men were on the boat, and their faces, the manner of them, also woke old thrills for Angus MacPherson. He knew their type. He had lived with such men at Forty Nine Mile, at Dawson, at Wild Horse, over the seas at Calgoorie, on the Yeld. Old ecstasies of youth returned. He tapped their eagerness, their desire more for the quest than the getting. It was always like that for him. The quest was the fun. His own quest was different from theirs. They were going to Kokanee, just boomed. He had his secret. Kokanee was but a bluff.

Or was it a secret? He considered the faces on the boat to see if any of them had been on the train, and if so, how long. There were but three that he recognized as having come all the way from Eagle Bend, and these were already on the train at Eagle Bend, when he went aboard, had come from beyond.

And then he wondered. It was a trifling thing that made him wonder. He was looking at a man, and conjecturing about him—where he had first shown up in that bunch of pilgrims. The man turned, caught his gaze (Angus surmised it had doubtless been very keen) and looked away again abruptly.

"Now," thought he, "if a body is caught staring as I was caught staring at you fellow, he generally gets a wee bit of a gaze returned to him, kind of in the way old Cobbett looked at the squire." (Some literary allusion this, doubtless, from MacPherson's much reading.) "That fellow looked as if he wanted me not to remark him. It may signify nothing. It may be but temperamental to him to look away like that when observed. He may have a guilty conscience. But I certainly saw him in the depot at Spokane talking to that thirsty lad who was going to take in the Spring Fair."

He visualized the incident: the thirsty and loquacious young man at the Spokane depot, talking to that man, and how their glances drifted to him with what, looking back, seemed an exaggeration of the casual.

The steamer whistle roared and she churned off. They went down to the saloon for lunch, and when they returned to the deck she was still leisurely yet surely breathing on, her wake, along the near west shore, smashing on lonely granite cliffs, or rolling up on shingle beaches at the end of long gulches that came spreading down, with a creek in their midst.

Well on in the afternoon she suddenly turned inshore, just where the opening begins for the West Arm of Flat-Bow Lake. She headed for a sandy beach, stuck her blunt prow in; a gang-plank was thrust out, two deck hands ran down with a bundle that looked like a rolled tent. They were at once followed by two men in prospector's high boots, grey-shirts, slouch-hatted, carrying blanket rolls.

"Say," growled Angus, "this is really where we should have got off—here, before we cross the Arm. You see I never thought of it till I saw these prospectors landing. We should have outfitted in Colvally after all. But then, of course, I'm forgetting. We must go to Kokanee for to get our miners' licenses. Well, well, the new excitement up yonder seemed the most feasible reason for leaving home. And also," he lowered his voice and passed on to Piccolo what he kept as a private belief all day, "I think we are under surveillance, Pic."

The steamer chugged back with the plank being drawn in. On the beach the two landed men gathered up their belongings, and marching up the shingle disappeared among the edge of shore willows, came back again, and carried up more bundles. The steamer righted gently out, and then again headed north. The West Arm opened with a long vista to its first bend. Again the wake broke against rock fronts and backward iron-like cliffs, where precarious trees gloomed along the edge.

"No landing place here," said Angus. "We shall not be able to walk along the shore south from Kokanee, and then down the Arm to opposite the place where we begin our southern investigations."

Piccolo was lost in thought. When he spoke he enquired thinly: "What do you mean by saying we were under surveillance?"

"Oh, I thought ye had missed that remark and I wasn't going to repeat it. Never mind if you haven't seen. Maybe we can start out from Kokanee just like any other prospectors for to explore the hills. Then we'll get away over those awful peaks southwest, on to the West Arm again to right opposite where, as I say, we begin to mount south—homewards, as ye might say. I see the water is pretty high. The snow is melting quick up in the high parts. We can't walk along the beaches anyway."

"But who has got us under surveillance?"

"Never mind. If ye don't see, all right. I may be wrong."

The steamer at last turned a bend and there, before them, was a scattering of branched unpainted frame houses, and more elderly log shacks, of white tents, and a plume of steam from a small saw-mill. And that collection of human dwellings was small, insignificant, under the tremendous scaring of the firmed leagues of slopes, and the prying, behind and over, of sheer rock precipices, five, six, seven thousand feet aloft into the sky. A donkey-engine puffed and a pile-driver dropped its weight with a whack on the shore, but for the time being a jetty did not exist.

Down the cleated gang-plank the motley crowd went with grips and camp-sacks, and blanket rolls. The deck hands, like ants on an ant hill, ran up and down their planks depositing stacks of cases, white sacks, dark sacks, on the small piece of shingle not yet covered by the freshets from the melting snows on the peaks.

On the way up to the collection of tents and houses, Angus stopped.

"Let me help you carry your load," said Piccolo.

"You have enough of your own," answered Angus. "I'm not stopping

because I'm over-burdened. I'm stopping to see what hotel is patronized by you man in the brown suit."

"You're suspicious of him? Is he the man you thought was watching us? What would he watch us for? It couldn't be in connection with our find."

"What way 'no'?"

"Why not?"

"Because they knew in Colvally that we were coming to Kokanee."

"Innocence, thy name is Piccolo," said Angus.

The man in brown passed on well beyond them, and then lowered his suitcase and mopped his brow.

"He's waiting to see where we go," said Piccolo.

"Hoots man! How do ye know? You have seen nothing, not even what I've seen, and I've had a wee bit of indication—indication of maybe nothing."

"Well, we'll wait and see where he goes; and then we can go to another hotel anyhow, now that you make me suspicious of him," said Piccolo, and bending down he employed himself readjusting the hose of his blanket roll.

"No, no," said Angus. "I want to go to the same hotel, for further observation of him."

"O—I see," said Piccolo. And then he had a thought. "Well, then," said he, "what's the matter with us going ahead and letting him follow us to our hotel?"

"How do you know that he would? It may suit him better to go elsewhere."

"I never thought of that."

"Ah, but I did! There, he's going on. Follow easily."

But when they came to where the choice presented itself of a big canvas tent with the word "hotel" painted on a card hanging upon it, and a new frame house with the words "Kokanee Hotel!" on the front, the man in brown halted again and lowered his grip.

"We'd think he was packing ore samples into Kokanee," said Angus.

"Never mind. Let him go his way. I believe he's a nothing. Come on—"

and he chose the tent hotel for the sake of days in old camps from Alaska to the southwest of Australia. "I believe he is a crook, but I believe we have no interest in him," he declared.

They had their cots slotted to them, and washed at one of the basins at a trestle table outside, and then sat down on a log to look at the scene, listen to the water lap and gurgle past. The pile-driver stopped thudding. The saws ceased their buzzing that had been rising to a scream, and ebbing to a hum, and rising again since their arrival.

It was the end of the day's work.

Other men came and washed. Some few went down to the lake and plunged in there. Then a bell rang and Angus and Piccolo went into the big tent again and passed to its far end. Outside, under a big cotton-wood, were stoves and two cooks, and waiters standing by in shirt sleeves. The tent dining-sitting was crowded. The men sat down and kept silence, as though to eat were a sacred rite. Then came the waiters with no menu cards, but to patter off, like a nursery rhyme, the culinary possibilities. Some sat rigid as in church; some sat with elbows on table; some smoothed their hair; here and there partners sitting together talked in low voices.

The man in brown was at their table, playing with his knife and fork. He toyed with these a while, waiting for his order, and then, holding the fork edge on to the table he inserted his knife blade between its prongs and played with them so.

Piccolo made a wheezing sound.

"Eh?" said Angus.

"I beg your pardon?" said Piccolo.

"I thought ye spoke," Angus explained.

"No," said Piccolo.

Then the soup was whipped down before them and the cracker bowl proffered. It was Piccolo who noticed another man, as well as the man in brown, who played with his knife and fork in the same way. He did not play long, however. He just flicked his knife blade once or twice in between the prongs of his fork making a sharp ticking, and then desisted, looking round for his soup, it seemed. And then it came.

The man in brown was by then at his second course—of steak and potatoes. Having finished that he took up a teaspoon from his saucer and, head on side, like one in a muse, toyed and tapped with it on the cup for a spell, then replaced it in the saucer, blew on the tea, and drank.

All through dinner neither Piccolo nor Angus spoke—till Angus said: "Well, Pic, we have no table conversation as they have in polite society. Our adage seems to be: 'Eat first and talk after.'"

"Oh, we have table conversation all right, you bet," murmured Piccolo; but when Piccolo murmured his voice was indeed tenuous.

"What?" said Angus.

"I'll tell you after."

"Oh!" said Angus.

Then came prunes, and thereafter the ritual of rising, bending forward to select a wooden toothpick from a small stack in a cup in the table center; and then the slow march out of the tent.

"Ah well, here's our two cots," said Angus, as they came to the dormitory portion.

There they were, each with a stool between for guests to sit upon, and every here and there along the wall was a card tacked up which read thus: "GENTS ARE REQUESTED NOT TO SET ON THE BEDS TO TAKE THEIR SHOES OFF. SET ON THE STOOLS PLEASE."

"Bad grammar," growled Angus, staring at one of these, toothpick between teeth.

"We'll set outside," said Piccolo.

"As you please."

So they went out into the open where a golden evening light was over all the

big silent sweep of mountains, and a great quiet dwell, threaded with the sound of plashing and falling streams and the ceaseless sigh of a thin wind, high aloft in the trees that did not bend.

"Did you hear me say in there I had something to tell you later?" asked Piccolo.

"I did."

"Well, Mr. MacPherson, we're watching all right."

"Oh?"

"I never told you I was once a telegraph operator."

"Ye never did. Is the time ripe for telling me?"

"Well, I was. And that man in brown tapped out a message with his knife blade in between the prongs of his fork."

Angus just turned his head and glared at Piccolo under those bushy grey brows of his.

"What he tapped out was this: 'Is there a man here called Hawke?' and then another man tapped back to him: 'He's right here.' And then the man in brown stopped."

"Ay, well, I guessed he was crooked, but he may only be a hootch carrier looking for the man to deliver to here. They have a kind of prohibition in this country now. You can send out for large quantities, but you may not buy a drink in a saloon. It's funny, but so it is, I hear. You grip of his he handled awful careful. Maybe he's in the bootlegging business."

"Oh, yes," said Piccolo, brightening up. "I should not be suspicious, and so on, I know; but then the man you suspected—you suspected—"

"Uh-hu!" said Angus, and his grey brows came down in a frown.

"Then he tapped it out with a spoon, longs and shorts: 'Come to me after supper. I've something to put you on to about that old man, and the twig beside him.' Twig, sir, he coded me! Angus's mouth gave a wry twist. He blew smoke. He took a new and thoughtful look at his partner. He said in a low rumble:

"Ye have the quality, Piccolo, of unexpectedness. You rise in my regard. Don't address me any more, despite the fact that I'm aulder than you consider, ably, Piccolo, either as sir, or Mr. MacPherson. Call me either Scotty or Angus. Scotty maybe, let us say. Here is another proof of the contention I have against the Auld Country ideas. I say the more things a man knows, the more jobs he has tackled, the better. And the West says the same. In the Auld Country—or so it was when I was a laddie—man, if you had done more than one kind of work you were suspiciously regarded. If you had done a matter of three different kinds of work you were looked upon as a vagabond, as ye might say in the nature of a bum or a hobo."

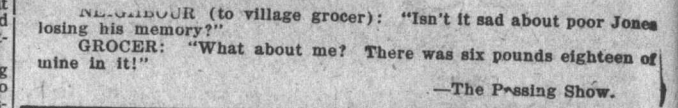
"Yes sir—I mean Scotty. But what do you think of what I've told you?"

"I'm thinking—thinking hard!" replied Angus. "Let us rise up and walk. I think better walking."

To be continued.

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## Victoria Will Say it With Flowers



When Victoria, the evergreen city of the West bids you welcome, which it will whenever you choose to visit the capital city of British Columbia, it will "say it with flowers," and at most unexpended times and places will present bouquets for your appreciation throughout your stay, whatever the season may be.

What an extraordinary city this is. Though very young compared with many other cities on the Continent it has, no doubt through the agency of its temperate climate, drawn about itself such a mellowed atmosphere as is usually associated with more ancient places. Whatever is offensively new is given a covering or a background of foliage and flowers and it soon fits into the general scheme of things Victorian. Even down in the business and shopping districts where there is much coming and going you will find your flowers, suspended, of all

places, from brackets on the street light stands.

And yet it must not be thought that this is a city of gardeners alone although one does wonder in looking over the city and its suburbs that its citizens can find time for anything other than gardening. Those who do business do it in much the same way as it is done in other up-to-date cities of its size and, unless one happens to know them, the stores of Victoria are quite a surprise. As most of the merchandise sold comes over the cheaper water routes, tourists have found it most advantageous to shop there, to the benefit of the merchants and the city generally. On this account, as much as to take care of local requirements, large stores have evolved which may be fallen back upon if ever the sights and scenery pall.

But apart from its own immediate glories and attractions, Victoria is

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Vol. XLIV

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