Treasure Trail

By Frederick Niven

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(Continued from last issue.)

Angus turned to Piccolo and murmured: "You stay with the horse, Pic, and don't talk at all except about the weather. That's safe."

But Piccolo did not trust himself before all these curious eyes. He knew his weakness for letting secrets out even when desirous to keep them.

"The horse won't stray," said he, "not from grass like this,"; and he followed Angus to a long, low building from which came a wire that dangled away down hill, insulated on a bottle neck stuck to a looped tree branch. Their guide opened the door and nodded toward the interior.

"There's the 'phone," said he. "Two rings for George MacBride."

He turned away and went back to rejoin his comrades. Piccolo stood in the doorway and watched those who loafed and those who came to a door, obviously of the wash-house, towelling themselves after ablutions.

"Hullo," said Angus, "That Mr. MacBride?. . .yes, yes, this is MacPherson. . . . Oh no, we're right up at the mine. . . indeed it is a trivial matter. I just thought of it when you mentioned it, but maybe it was foolish. . . . indeed ye can never tell. . . . No, we've not had supper yet." (Piccolo was interested in that!) "We can, can we? Well, I'm much obliged to ye, Mr MacBride. I just rang up because I promised. There is maybe nothing in that silly half idea I had. . . so-long. And thank ye, and luck to ye too."

As he hung up the receiver a man came from one of the buildings and beat with a stick upon an iron triangle hanging at the door. Piccolo, sniffing, could disentangle the odour of hash from that of balsam. He could whiff a T-bone steak among the scent of the spruce.

"We can eat here, it seems," said Angus. "So we will. And we can put our horse in the stable."

They returned to the meadow and the rest of the men in the string hurrying upperwards told them where the stables were. There they led their horse and unpacked in haste, then crossed to the dining-room.

"Ay, we were rightly informed," said Angus, pausing to read the legend on a card tacked upon the door whence came the appealing adours:

TRANSIENT GUESTS: Meals 75c.

They entered a long bare room where bottle-tables and forms stood in rows and waiters rushed agile at the back of the big hungry miners and muckers. They stood a moment waiting, looking for a vacant place; and a man at a side table called to one of the waiters: "Bob!" The one who was called Bob, a youth like a dancing master, in light shoes, whirled round them on receiving a nod in their direction from the boss who had called.

"How-do, gentlemen?" said he.

Angus turned and first courteously bowed to the boss who, with a twinkle, bowed in return. Then he bowed (to note his own words) to, as ye micht say, the hash-slinger and enquired: "Can we eat here?"

"You bet your life," said Bob.

"Any special table for transients?" asked Angus.

"Oh, I guess anywhere, sir. You set there. Both together?"

"Yes,"

"You set there, gentlemen, and I'll join you up."

As they followed him to their places Piccolo remarked in his thin voice:

"I don't care if every tough in America is piling up behind us. Let them come. A raft of 'em. Me for a T-bone steak."

"Did ye speak?" asked Angus.

Piccolo shook his head. The worst of his voice was that if he tried to talk high in a low voice—if you get the meaning—he talked as high as a bat, for his voice would persist in going up as well as going thin. When he was distended like a pouter pigeon he sighed, let his breath out two holes, took a toothpick, looked at Angus. Angus nodded. They rose. Each tendered his "six bits" to the waiter and strolled out.

As they walked over to the stables Angus explained that MacBride had seen no one go past uphill all day, and had continued to look out ever and again. "Well that's all right, then," said Piccolo. "We are not being followed after all by that man Hawke and the fellow in brown who coded me a twig about him."

Angus looked at him thoughtfully. "You have an interesting jack-easy and ingenuous character, Pic," he said. "I have made a study of you already. You were going to damn yon Movie Bill at a venture, as ye micht say, without proof; and now you are going to imagine that the gentleman in brown is going to have no connection with you just because we've not heard already that he is after us."

"You forget the way I beat him up," said Piccolo proudly.

Angus MacPherson's mouth twisted. He restrained the laughter that bubbled within him.

"True," said he, "he micht be afraid of getting the same again."

He said it to mollify Piccolo; but Piccolo suddenly realized there was no great weight behind that beating-up.

"You're joshing me!" he exploded, and flushed like a school-girl.

"No, no, man," said Angus. "But I can't think that word would be passed up by yon thirsty lad from Eagle Bend to Spokane, and the man in brown play telegraph operator for to find an agent of his crook-society in Kokanee, and all for nothing, as ye micht say—nothing happen, nothing happen. It is neither like life nor like books. But maybe so. I wonder why it is that I am fair haunted by that redeeculous rime:

'Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail o' water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling after.'

Man, Piccolo, have you ever noticed that the rimes of the people as they call them, are unco' bad? After doesn't rime inordinately well with water."

Piccolo perked up his head.

"I've been studying your make-up sir—Scotty," said he, "and I've noticed one thing: and that is that when you start up talk like this here about nothing to the purpose you are thinking away deep below."

Angus wagged his head sideways at him, elevated his bushy brows.

"We'll know one another real well afore we get through this trip," said he, and then sat murmuring:

"Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail o' water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown
And Jill came tumbling oughter!"

but his eyes had an absent and considering expression.

"Well, said he, "if you've shaken down your seventy-five cent transient meal I think we might as well push on a wee bit before nightfall."

CHAPTER XI

The Snow Slide

Tips of a million trees below. Just above, acre after acre of that little low inches-high growth like heath, called bryanthus. Fanning rock slides lying in great wdeges, butt ends down into the topmost timber, aneve sunshine, rand of the summit range. Sunshine, and a cold wind blowing down from the glaciers, glaciers draped between protruding bastions of rock. Pinnacles of rock like pumice-stone or coral in the light stabbing up through the high snows, dizzying to look at, like windowless Woolworth buildings.

The horse, very lively in the keen rare air of that altitude, his packs taken off, rolled in the last grass. They had made the end of the timber after the night camp not far from the mine, made it about noon of the succeeding day. Here was the Olsak range in all its grandeur—and with its dangers—before them. Now and then a ptarmigan scurried over the fields of false heath, visible there, against that background, and flew on over the snow, hardly to be picked out against its white unless noticed when flying over the darker tracts and keenly followed by the eyes.

"What worries me," said Angus, "is that we have heard no single whistle of a marmot. They are the great weather prophets and none of them are out and about yet! Not even for a peep to see how the year is coming on."

"No matter. We're not marmots; we're men," said Piccolo. He had been musing on how he discomfited the man in brown, forgetting the laughter of the spectators and considering that, rightly recalling that joust, he had really "beaten him up", punished him for the aspersive description: twig.

"Ay, we're men," said Angus. He looked around him. "And we are awful small against all this immensity. Yonder's a smoke away north. That will be about the head of Tea Creek. Some lone prospector pottering there after floats, I expect. They say there are a lot of prospectors up here already this year."

He unslung his binocular-glasses and carefully focused them.

"Ay, I can see another smoke below. Another prospector, I should say. Now for us the question is: should we make a camp here aad send the horse home, or should we keep him to pack round the edges of these peaks? We're surely high enough here to see the West Arm of the lake, but it is hidden from us by that long scaur of ice and snow. Think you we could get the horse round?"

Piccolo surveyed the unheeding range and had no answer except, after long scrutiny: "Search me!"

"Well, we'll make lunch and then just see how yon wedge of bare hill looks," Angus decided.

Lunch over they picketted the horse lest they might require it, and then set off south to find if there was any feasible way to coast the range between timber and glacier.

"To go through the woods below would be the work of months," said Angus, looking down at them. Thick! Man, they're a fair jungle, as ye micht say."

On they tramped over alternating areas of rubble, of snow, of byranthus. Then they came to what was not just a field of snow but ice, and Angus shook his head.

"If it extends far round the horse might not make it," he said. "He's not rough-shod. It was summer almost where we got him down below there. Leave this to me, Pic. I've done it before."

Then abruptly he turned to his partner, brows raised in enquir .

"But maybe so have you," he said. "Telegraph operator you spring on me. Then prize-fighter. Maybe you are an ex-member of the Alpine Club?" he smiled.

"No," said he.

"All right. I'll go on a wee bit anyand see how it goes."

To be continued.

Fish and Potatoes

Cut potatoes into squares or balls and fry in deep fat until brown and tender. Cut up three onions into very thin slices and fry until done in four tablespoons of butter. Add these to two cups of flaked freshened fish. Toss all together until heated through. Sprinkle with paprika and add a few drops of lemon juice. Serve the fish on a platter surrounded with the potato balls.

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