

After Many Days

Written for The Western Home Monthly by David Langston

SMALL, and lean, and bent, with a far-away look in his eyes, and a general appearance of homesickness.

So thought Jim Saunders as he met the old prospector who was trudging wearily up the steep mountain-trail with a fifty-pound pack strapped to his shoulders.

"He must have a claim up there," mused Jim. "Think I'll track him to his lair next week, and see if he has anything of value."

Now Jim had a passion for mineralogy; in fact, a year ago he had graduated from a celebrated Edinburgh university, having passed with honors the examination on mineralogy; had been promptly interviewed and engaged by a company of capitalists to go to Canada with the view of obtaining some mineral properties in which they could profitably invest their ever-increasing dividends. Hence Jim's presence at this time in the Kootenays of British Columbia. He had inspected numerous holdings, and investigated many "South Sea Bubble" propositions, but had as yet failed to find anything exactly to his liking.

"Who was the old man who went up the trail this morning, carrying a pack?" he inquired as he dined with a pre-emptor in his lonely cabin near the foot of the mountain.

"Oh, that was Old Dick. He's got a 'hopeless' five miles up the creek; driving a tunnel into the base of Old Baldy; thinks he will strike a lead there. Of course, there's signs of mineral, but I haven't seen anything up there worth going after. Old Dick's only working for a grub-stake. He's got a rich property at Hard-pan ridge, and expects to make a sale some day."

Needless to say, this information interested Jim, and a few days later he was climbing up the trail towards Old Dick's claim, with a bundle of blankets and supplies on his shoulders, and a rifle slung over his arm. After two hours of stiff travel he heard an explosion, and surmised that Old Dick's claim wasn't very far away. This proved to be true, as, circling round the foot of a slide, and climbing a rocky declivity for some thirty rods, he suddenly found himself standing on a fairly level strip of land at the base of Old Baldy. Just to the right, in a clump of cedars, was pitched a tent. At a short distance from the entrance to the tent the old prospector was engaged in cooking his dinner over a circular fire-place of loose rocks. A crystal spring bubbled out of the rocks a few rods to the rear of the tent; while over towards the left was a pile of loose granite. The mouth of the tunnel was plainly visible, leading into the sheer wall of the old peak.

At Jim's approach the old man looked up, then stepping forward, genially extended his hand.

"How d'ye do, stranger. How did ye find yer way up here?"

"Oh, struck a trail, and followed my nose," laughed Jim. "You've got a nice spot here, at any rate."

"Well, I allow ye're hungry after that little stretch o' trail, so just toss yer load, and hev a bite o' my fare."

"Thank you," answered Jim, "I'll cheerfully sample your larder," as he noted the venison hanging from a near-by tree, also a fine brace of partridge, and a string of rainbow trout.

"My name is Saunders," said Jim as they seated themselves on a couple of blocks of wood before a slab of granite which was elevated from the ground, and so answered the purpose of a table.

"Mine's Powell," volunteered the old man. "Mostly gets Old Dick hereabouts."

During the meal the chief topic of conversation was the rugged beauty of that region, the hunting, fishing, etc., and the future prospects of the country from a mining standpoint.

"Ye'd better stay wi' me a few days, and look this part over," said Old Dick. "Just put yer pack inside, an' we'll look over the works."

A tunnel had been driven into the rock about twenty feet, and although there were deposits of silver and lead, yet there was no sign of a lead.

"I may strike one soon," said Powell. "Ye see I'm bound to go in fifty feet; a

friend o' mine has grub-staked me till I get that far. It's his claim, an' I agreed to go that far unless I struck a good lead. It only assays three per cent yet. It's slow work drillin' by hand, but I'm used to it, an' I need the cash for winter. Now just make yerself to home," said Dick taking up his tools. "If ye're not too tired, there's plenty o' game hereabouts, an' lots o' trout in the creek a mile south. Come back about six fer supper."

"Thank you," answered Jim; "think I'll look over this rock this afternoon, and see if there is anything worth while around here."

"All right, sir," replied Dick.

After eating supper and stretching themselves before the cheerful camp-fire, Jim ventured the opinion that that locality did not promise much in the mineral line.

"I agree with ye. But I know where there is something good; over at Hard-pan ridge. Ever been there? No! Well, I got a claim there; assays high in silver and lead. Ye ought to see it. I don't own the whole claim, only half; but I located an' staked it. Had some o' it assayed, an', bein' short, thought I'd

university, an' now she's teachin', but'd like powerfu' well to come out here."

"Well's I was sayin', m' partner's fishin' fer suckers, an' 'parently he's got hooked his self, so he wants me ter sacrifice the mine fer ten thousand. 'Don't worry, pard', says I to myself, 'ye've got yer neck in the noose, an' I'll let it pinch ye.' 'No,' says I, 'I won't sell.' An' ain't I right, stranger? I'm a ol' man, a little rat, an' he's a big, strong, young feller. I wants enough to keep me in comfort; an' ought ter have it, after findin' the claim, an' doin' the duties, an' I 'low't forty thousand ain't too much."

"Yes, you're right," replied Jim. "If it assays as high as you say, it's well worth that, and I wouldn't be in a hurry to sacrifice it."

"Guess we'd better turn in," said the prospector, throwing some brands on the fire.

II

Two days later, Jim bade a friendly farewell to his new friend, and after promising to visit him again, hastened down the trail. Reaching the small "landing," he took the steamer to the town of Prospect. Immediately upon his arrival, he looked up the location of Dick's claim at Hard-pan Ridge, and decided to set out for there, the following morning.

Having made a careful inspection, he concluded that the property was indeed



Refugees Leaving Steenstraate Bridge before the Big German Onslaught
It was at Steenstraate Bridge that the Germans succeeded in getting over the Yser and established a bridgehead. Later, however, the Allies drove them back across the river. The house seen in the photo was converted into a veritable fortress.

look up somebody to victual me fer a share. So I dropped into the 'Grand Union' over 't Prospect one night, an' showed the sample an' report. One feller was mighty interested, an' when I left follered me out, an' offered to furnish everythin', grub an' outfit, to do all the 'sessment work if I give him a half share. Bein' in a pinch, I took him up, an' right there made a mistake. Course he 'lowed he'd help. Bill Burton's his name, an' I soon found 't work wasn't in his line. Soon's we had the papers drawn he helped me pack out the kit, an' worked a couple o' days. Then he sort o' eased up, an' left me to do the whole thing. He had ten thousand when he lit here, but that didn't last long; so he hangs 'round the 'Union', 'tends bar an' waits tables, but mostly lays fer suckers bein's he's handy with the chips."

"Soon's the 'sessment work was done, we had a' offer o' forty thousand fer the property. I wanted to sell; but, no sir, he wouldn't budge; said we otter have a cool hundred thousand. I couldn't coax him nohow. That was five years ago, an' I've been knockin' round ever since from pillar to post, as the sayin' is. Ye see, I'm gettin' old; couldn't work like I use ter when I was in Colorady (never made a stake there, though), an' I wants ter sell, an' build me a little home, an' send fer m' niece to keep house fer me. She's all I got left now. Ye see, m' wife died 'bout thirty year ago, in the Old Land, so I couldn't settle down no more; just drifted out ter the States, then up here. We had no childer, an' m' brother Jack's girl's been like a daughter to me. She's kep' track o' me fer years—ever since her parents died. Course I writes 'casionally, an' sends her a little. Her dad left enough ter put her through the Edinburgh

valuable, also one from which the mineral might be easily transported to market. After giving the matter earnest thought, he decided that this must be the property for which he had been looking. Accordingly, he once more set out to call on Dick at Old Baldy.

"Well," said Jim Saunders, after he had heartily partaken of the evening meal (prepared by the prospector with even unusual care), and had satisfied the old man's queries regarding the happenings in and about town, "I have been out to Hard-pan Ridge and seen your property."

"An' it's good?" questioned Dick eagerly.

"It certainly is. A fine property. But why don't you buy your partner out?"

"Hain't got the nickels, stranger, or I would."

"I'll lend you five thousand, if you wish, for a year at your own interest," said Jim.

"Then you can get the property in your own hands, and do your own dealing."

"If I wish!" exclaimed Dick, "Well I guess. Here's my hand, Jim; an' when I sell, ye'll get yer money an' ten per cent interest too; don't ye fergit it."

A week later, the two men left the steamer at Prospect for their respective hotels; Jim to the "Queen's," and Dick to the "Grand Union."

"We'd better not be seen together until I interview my pard," said Powell. "He might smell a rat."

"You're right," returned his companion.

"Why, hello Dick! Where'd you drop from?" inquired Burton lounging forward with out-stretched hand as the Old Prospector entered the waiting-room.

"Oh, nowheres in pertickler. Have a drink? No, thank ye; ain't drinkin'

ternight. Can I see ye private fer a spell?"

"Yes, come into the office. What's the game?" as the two seated themselves.

"Oh, nothin'. D'ye want ter sell yer share o' the prop'ty?"

"Well,—er,—don't know."

"Yes er no!"

"Let's see. Yes, if I can get what's fair."

"What d'ye call fair?"

"Oh," tapping the desk meditatively, "say fifteen thousand."

"Hem! Raised yer figger a trifle since I seen ye last. Nqw look here, if ye're willin' ter take five thousand, (yer own figger awhile back) ye kin have it. The offer's good till 10.30 to-morrer; so be at Sloan's office at that time if ye want the cash."

"I say, Dick, who're you dealing for?"

"Fer m'self," responded his partner, coolly walking out, and striking up a conversation with an old chum.

Burton watched him furtively all evening, but Dick ignored his presence, and at an early hour retired for the night. The following morning he ate a leisurely breakfast, chatted to some friends until ten, then strolled down town to Sloan's office. As he expected, he was soon followed by Burton.

"Say, Dick, make it eight and I'll sell."

"No!" rising and putting on his hat.

"Oh, hold on, partner. Guess I'll take the five."

"Alright. Come in, an' we'll git the papers drawn."

As soon as the deal was closed Powell hastened to the "Queen's" in search of Jim.

"Hello!" said he. "How's business?"

"Fine. He bit, but not before he tried ter soak me fer fifteen. 'Nix,' says I, 'five er nothin'.' 'Five it is,' sez he."

Bill Burton took the midnight across the line that night, and was heard of no more by his friends in Canada.

Next day, Dick, much pleased by the new turn of affairs, returned to "Baldy." Saunders remained in town attending to some business, and trying to answer the correspondence matter which had accumulated during his absence. One answer addressed to the "Scottish Colonial Investment Company" contained full information regarding Dick's claim at Hard-pan Ridge, and requested further orders.

"Buy it if you can," came back the reply. "We'll give forty thousand cash, subject to a year's test, and will supply all the machinery."

"Good," laughed Jim to himself. "It'll stand the test, and Old Dick can now have his 'little home.'"

III

Three years later Hard-pan Ridge was a veritable hive of industry. The Old Prospector's claim had given a highly satisfactory return from the year's test. Accordingly, the deal had been closed, a smelter erected, numerous miners' houses built, also a company store.

To Dick Powell the change appeared marvellous, after the long years of hope-deferred waiting.

One beautiful Spring evening he stepped from the door of his comfortable, new freshly-painted bungalow, and strolled down to the post-office in company with his friend, Jim Saunders.

"I'm mailin' a letter to the little girl, with a check fer her passage. Expect she'll be here afore snow flies. Hope ye'll like her, Jim."

"Hope so, too," laughed Jim, dropping a letter, bearing the same address as the one Dick had just parted with, into the box.

Dick's letter began, "My Dear Niece" and went on to describe in detail the bungalow, the site upon which it was built, the gradual slope to the lake-shore, the splendid view of the lake and mountains, the snow-clad peaks of the latter, the whispering pine-trees, the wild-flowers, the birds, the winding mountain trails, the boating and fishing, with lastly an invitation that she should come and be mistress of the little home.

The heading of Jim's letter was, "My Dear Sweetheart." It contained the good news that he had been appointed manager for the company, also that they had built a home for him; how he was impatiently awaiting the closing of the school term when she, his queen, would be free to come and meet him in Winnipeg where they would be married; then the journey westward over the broad prairies, and