

room and the general room, which also included the offices, had been hung with evergreens; while the dusty, dingy interiors and floors had been brightened by a "fix-up." But it was the unusually large—really extravagant number of candles which had been lighted that more than anything else indicated the festive occasion.

Old Henry Freeland sat by the fire apart from the others, quietly smoking his pipe and watching the blue clouds eddying into the chimney or the flames twisting in golden forms and faces around the logs. Sometimes he aroused himself to the point of appearing interested in the events and conversation around him, but soon lapsed back to follow the train of his own thoughts and dreams. He was a strange old man, a hermit by choice. There was not a miner in the Caribou that did not respect the quiet, unobtrusive "old Harry Freeland" though none pretended to understand him. He was a good neighbor even there where every man was to a certain extent dependent upon his fellows amidst the broad, communistic spirit of the frontier. He was always ready to do a favor though he seldom asked one from anyone. When Tom, the Missouri tenderfoot, went out prospecting along the upper Skookum with a week's grub, and did not turn up within two weeks, it was Harry Freeland who went out in search for him, brought him in, and tenderly nursed him with his broken leg. Later he staked the unfortunate tenderfoot liberally from his own hard-earned though well-filled poke. The old man had been in at the first; had done well; and could now sell out and be rich any day. Thus why it was that the strange recluse refused to go "outside" and be comfortable, preferring to remain in his shack away up on Huckleberry Creek was something no one could understand. All knew, however, that behind that rugged exterior beat a heart that was warm and true, bearing in silence its own great sorrow.

A wild animal when wounded in the chase or when afflicted by sickness will limp away into a thicket to heal its wound or to die in majestic, heroic silence. In men there seems to be the same instinct, and away out in the solitary, lonely outposts of the fringe of settlement, in the wild foothills or the canyons, will be found noble men of character and refinement who have somehow been wounded in the chase of life or have sickened of it and have limped away off into the wilderness to find healing or death.

It was in some such way as this that the miners explained the course of action of brave old Harry Freeland even before they learned his sad story definitely from one who had known him on Poverty Flat in '49. It was a story neither new nor rare, but one which in its main details might be told by many a silent old man in many a camp on the frontier.

It began away back on an Iowan homestead which he likely never would have left had not a great and consuming sorrow overtaken him in the death of his wife, which made the place and its hallowed associations almost unbearable to him. It was then that the remarkable tide of humanity was pouring into the California gold-fields. Freeland was caught in the vortex of that migration, impelled not by the love of gold, but by the overwhelming desire to drown sorrow in the toils and excitement of a new life. With his only child, a daughter of twelve years, he joined a party of gold seekers. Naturally silent and self-dependent, his bereavement had made him morose. His one master passion was his love, almost absorbing in its intensity, for his daughter Daisy. This love deepened, if it were possible, in the days of hardship and poverty that they were called upon to face in California; for he was not one of the fortunate ones there. Then Daisy was his little housekeeper, always looking on the bright side of things, seeing a silver lining in every cloud in her father's life, always blithe as

a lark and always contriving something to make ends meet.

But years passed, and when Daisy had grown to womanhood she fell in love with a dashing young Argonaut; and when she could not marry him with her father's blessing, in a rash moment, which she regretted as long as she lived, she was persuaded to run away and to wed without it. That was a more cruel blow to old Freeland than even the first great sorrow; for it was not a Heaven-decreed bereavement; it was rebellion in a daughter that he loved better than his own life. All that life hell for him had vanished with the elopement of his cherished child; but he did not complain aloud—he was too broken in spirit for any outburst of passion. He simply withdrew to the wilderness.

That was why Harry Freeland—"old Freeland" as they called him—lived alone on Huckleberry Creek; and that was why he sat unhappy by the fire in a public house that Christmas Eve. It was nearly six years since Daisy had deserted his home for her lover, yet in all that time he had never heard of her, neither had he inquired as to what had befallen her. But Daisy had sought constantly though in vain for tidings of her father in hope of reconciliation; and as time flitted on she mourned him as dead.

But this is a digression from the scenes of revelry at Twenty-Mile. If old Freeland sat silent, his companions certainly did not. It was a night of wild, hilarious, rough festivity. Jake le Sear, mounted on a box, sawed his old squeaky violin until it fairly screeched in agony, while the dance and the feast ran high. Heavy makinaws were shed, and the miners in their shirt sleeves, a score at a time, danced the jigs and break-downs which only a hewn floor could have sustained. Those who could not secure "pardners" from among the limited female population of Twenty-Mile had to "stag" it in mirthful glee. And there were games, of course, for those who did not worship at the shrine of Terpsichore. These brought their stacks of chips and sat around the rough gaming tables playing "draw," or "seven-up," or "rolling the bones" according to their personal desires. But the general sentiment was that Christmas Eve should be a social occa-



"Saw a tiny Angel in white robe and fuzzy, golden hair"